Bureaucratisation and the Rise of Office Literature: 1810-1900

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Thesis Summary
Over the nineteenth century, Britain and France underwent an ongoing process of bureaucratisation, whereby informal, customary, or patrimonial social structures were progressively transformed into impersonal administrative systems typified by delineated hierarchies and standardised procedures. Bureaucratic organisation clustered around an emergent workplace, the office, its tasks were fulfilled by an ever-growing clerical workforce, and, in turn, these phenomena gained a newfound position in French and British culture. The clerk in particular figured in nineteenth-century literature as an archetype of social ambiguity and often mind-numbing, inconsequential work, epitomised by Charles Dickens as 'no variety of days' – and critical analysis of this literature has since continued to focus on the clerk as a rather tragicomic social enigma.

While I do not dispute the conclusions derived from this approach, in this thesis I shift critical attention from social issues pertaining to the clerk toward the broader aesthetic implications and context of nineteenth-century bureaucratisation – represented here through the history of a genre that I call 'office literature'. Through a comparative analysis of French and British office literature (texts that give substantial attention to the portrayal of office life) I argue that this genre offers an insight into the material and conceptual development of office work and bureaucratic structures over the nineteenth century, but that this genre was also subject to its own logic of development, one determined by changing aesthetic and cultural preoccupations as much as by social factors. As such, office literature cannot simply function as a window onto historical bureaucratisation, but neither is it wholly detached from the realities of its subject-matter: rather, it represents a bundle of influences and preoccupations – historical, social, epistemic, aesthetic, and generic – whose predominance and interaction shift over time, and which therefore need outlining and examining before the historical pertinence of this genre can become apparent.

Key words and phrases: Bureaucracy, white-collar, nineteenth-century, English literature, French literature

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Thanks also for the support of my partner Flo, and my family.

Translations

Unless otherwise indicated, all of the translations from French into English are my own – the original text to these translations can be found in the footnotes.

Contents

Introduction – Bureaucratisation and Office Literature

1. Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe's 1840 story, 'The Man of the Crowd' opens with its narrator seated in the window of a coffee shop, observing the 'tumultuous sea of human heads' in the thoroughfare beyond.[1] Soon enough, crowd-watching turns into social taxonomy: the narrator identifies various subclasses of 'that order which is pointedly termed the decent', and his classifications thereafter start 'descending in the scale of what is termed gentility'.[2] Halfway 'down' this social order lies 'the tribe of clerks' – an 'obvious' group, the narrator remarks, made up of 'two remarkable divisions', the first of which was

> the junior clerks of flash houses—young gentlemen with tight coats, bright boots, well-oiled hair, and supercilious lips. Setting aside a certain dapperness of carriage, which may be termed *deskism* for want of a better word, the manner of these persons seemed to me an exact facsimile of what had been the perfection of *bon ton* about twelve or eighteen months before. They wore the cast-off graces of the gentry;–and this, I believe, involves the best definition of the class.[3]

And secondly,

> The division of the upper clerks of staunch firms, or of the "steady old fellows," it was not possible to mistake. These were known by their coats and pantaloons of black or brown, made to sit comfortably, with white cravats and waistcoats, broad solid-looking shoes and thick hose or gaiters. –They had all slightly bald heads, from which the right ears, long used to pen-holding, had an odd habit of standing off on end. I observed that they always removed or settled their hats with both hands, and wore watches, with short gold chains of a substantial and ancient pattern. Theirs was the affectation of respectability;–if indeed there be an affectation so honourable.[4]

These passages are the longest and most thorough devoted to any single named occupation in Poe's crowd: the clerks readily fall into two categories, each unified by mannerisms and aspects of dress, and distinguished from the other by age and seniority. Both categories are alike, however, insofar as they unify the clerks' middling social status and the character of their labour. The 'steady old fellows' appear to be actually moulded to the structures of office life (they dress for their sedentary labour, and their ears even anticipate pens) while the junior clerks, as 'facsimiles' of fashions now deemed *passé*, unite status and occupation (they are copyists in form as well as function). Moreover, although they may spend all day cataloguing and pigeonholing, the clerks are ironically oblivious to the terms of their own manifest classifiability, even if they themselves recognise (and try to imitate) the markers of their superiors. The junior clerks' '*deskism'* in particular constitutes an ineffable will to 'dapperness'

[1] Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840), *The Portable Poe,* ed. Philip Van Doren Stern (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), pp. 107-118 (p. 108).
[2] Ibid., pp. 109-110.
[3] Ibid., p. 109.
[4] Ibid.

and individuality that is eternally frustrated insofar as it groups them together, and, as the coinage suggests, thereby inadvertently *heightens* their connection to their workplace.

It is in part thanks to their close working relationship with entrepreneurs, professionals, and governments, thanks to the social connotations of literacy, and to a longstanding cultural privileging of (in this case, ostensibly) non-manual labour, that the 'tribe of clerks' enjoys the artificially heightened social stature that Poe's narrator identifies.[5] The ambiguous status of clerks is a recurrent trope in nineteenth-century literature, one reflected in a distinct tradition of literary criticism: John Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992), Arlene Young's *Culture, Class, and Gender in the Victorian Novel* (1999), Jonathan Wild's *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture 1880-1939* (2006), and Nicola Bishop's *Lower-Middle-Class Nation* (2021), among others, all deal with the riddle of the emergent lower middle class, of which the clerk is an archetype.[6] However, as we see with Poe's story, the status attributed to clerks on the street is also linked to the character of their employment in the office: their emulative sense of prestige mirrors their replicatory labour, just as their 'obviousness' to the narrator, and the extent of their description, reflects their own similar practices of schematising, cataloguing, and regulating (while so too does their clear failure to ape their superiors suggest the limitations of this analytical perspective). Because the office overshadows these commuters' appearance despite their having temporarily escaped its confines, I argue that the ambivalent class representation explored by prior critics – while in itself, as they rightly identify, a

[5] On 'manual' versus 'intellectual' labour, see Aristotle's *Politics* (c.350 BCE): 'the best state will not make the mechanic a citizen. […] It would, for example, be impossible in any constitution called aristocratic or any other in which honours depend on merit and virtue; for it is quite impossible, while living the life of mechanic or hireling, to occupy oneself as virtue demands.' *Politics,* tr. T. A. Sinclair, revised and re-presented by Trevor J. Saunders (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 184; Chris Smith, David Knights, and Hugh Willmott, by contrast, stress that this mental-manual division is in fact a 'broad and ill-defined [..] continuum', in Smith, Knights, Willmott (eds.), *White-Collar Work: The Non-Manual Labour Process* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 4.

[6] John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London: Faber, 1992); Arlene Young, *Culture, Class, and Gender in the Victorian Novel – Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999); Jonathan Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture – 1880-1939* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008); Nicola Bishop, *Lower-Middle-Class Nation – The White-Collar Worker in British Popular Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021). For more class readings of clerks, see Christopher Keep, 'The Cultural Work of the Type-Writer Girl', *Victorian Studies*, 40(3) (1997), pp. 401-426; Peter Bailey, 'White Collars, Gray Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited', *Journal of British Studies*, 38:3 (1999), pp. 273-290; Matthew Titolo, 'The Clerks' Tale: Liberalism, Accountability, and Mimesis in "David Copperfield"' *ELH*, 70:1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 171-195; Ian Wilkinson, 'Performance and Control: The Carnivalesque City and Its People in Charles Dickens's "Sketches by Boz"', *Dickens Studies Annual* Vol. 35 (2005), pp. 1-19; Richard Higgins, 'Feeling like a Clerk in H. G. Wells', *Victorian Studies*, 50:3, Victorian Emotions (Spring, 2008), pp. 457-475; Scott Banville, '"Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday": The Geography of Class in Late-Victorian Britain', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 41:2 (2008), pp. 150-173; Owen Heathcote, 'Le bureau comme sociotope balzacien : du « Colonel Chabert » aux « Employés »', *L'Année balzacienne*, 14:1 (2013), pp. 309-325; Ged Pope, *Reading London's Suburbs – From Charles Dickens to Zadie Smith* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Anne O'Neil-Henry, '"[Le] Besoin de définir" and "le danger de s'embrouiller": Balzac's Les Employés and the *physiologies*,' *Dix-Neuf*, 20:2 (2016), pp. 162-175; for a pre-nineteenth-century example see Brandon Christopher, '"Associate of our labours": Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* and the Limits of Master-Secretary Friendship', *Ben Jonson Journal*, 19:1 (May, 2012), pp. 105-126.

representative fault in the broader system of nineteenth-century social hierarchy – is also a projection of deeper structural ambiguities in the nineteenth-century conception of bureaucratic labour and organisation, and of bureaucracy's relation in turn to society more broadly.

Indeed, the narrator's identification of the 'tribe of clerks' does not solely give rise to questions of status and affectation, it also explores the relationship between the epistemic and the social. If the clerks are painfully obvious, the eponymous 'man of the crowd' himself, a sinister figure whom the narrator later spots and attempts to follow, is an impenetrable mystery: the metropolis is thus shown to be only varyingly intelligible. Leading us toward this 'moral', the story therefore compels us to consider the *quality* and *process* of observing the crowd as much as it invites us to consider the crowd itself – as does Poe's narrator, who remarks that

> At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance.[7]

By paralleling metacommentary with commentary, especially insofar as this 'descent' through analytical orders mirrors the 'descent' of the narrator's eye down the social scale, Poe invites us to query the relationship between observation and its object. 'The Man of the Crowd' therefore represents as much the portrayal of a nineteenth-century *episteme* as it is one of nineteenth-century urban life. Indeed, these two aspects of the story are intertwined: the fact of the crowd's relative acquiescence to the narrator's eye suggests not so much the unique perceptiveness of the narrator himself, but rather that his method of understanding is also immanent to nineteenth-century society, both reflecting and informing its character. Moreover, just as the clerks are to be typified by a *social* liminality (merely affecting gentility and respectability, while not really being such) their particular resonance with the narrator's exercise also situates them strangely between subject and object: in Poe's story, the clerks' appearance and behaviour (however inadvertently) *anticipate* or *reflect* the narrator's taxonomical exercise, rather than merely vindicating it.

Poe's story is therefore an artefact of a range of issues underlying nineteenth-century society, as well as its literature. These issues relate to the growing complexity of society and its increasing unknowability, to the development and relative utility of different means of attaining social knowledge and of effecting social control, and to the effects of these two processes in turn – blending sophistication and atomisation – upon the individual. The general response of nineteenth-century society to the first two of these problems was bureaucratisation: the outsourcing of organisation and management in various spheres to specific bodies of workers who all operated in accordance with

[7] Poe, pp. 107-108.

pre-established procedures. This meant setting up offices, improving communications infrastructure, and hiring thousands of literate and numerate workers who would fulfil a proliferating variety of bureaucratic subtasks.

However effective it was at solving these first two problems, bureaucratisation definitely accentuated the third: the growing 'tribe of clerks' appeared to be the epitome of modern alienation – condemned to a life of mind-numbing tertiary tasks, or, in Charles Dickens's words, 'no variety of days'.[8] But whether the alienation of those intended to ensure social coherence was merely an ironic trade-off, or a contradiction that indicated the general misguidedness of the bureaucratic project, remained a topic of nineteenth-century debate – and literature became the major site in which these issues played out. Poe's story also suggests that the problem of representing an increasingly complex society was not merely social but aesthetic, and the notion that bureaucratic schemas and clerical armies could surpass the imaginative power and compassion of the artist seemed to become a point of contention amongst authors. With these issues in mind do we see a tendency in nineteenth-century literature to follow Poe's tribe back to their workplace, to focus on the office itself: exploring the amenability of its structures to narrative, contrasting these structures with the experience of office life itself, and displaying the quirks of this otherwise obscure space to the reading public. As the site of rarefied, symbolic labour, but labour whose business is to link together society at large, the office quickly became a sphere in which both aesthetic and social issues could be married together – developing a body of highly reflexive generic conventions that I refer to collectively (and will describe more fully in Section 3 below) as 'office literature'.

Over the course of this thesis I provide a history and analysis of office literature, exploring its emergence and development in aesthetic terms, and in those of its context in a broader history of nineteenth-century bureaucratisation. This approach thereby provides new context regarding the various ambiguities that underlie the clerk in literature, while also supplying a culturally historical vantage onto bureaucracy and its development – both dominant themes in twentieth-century social science (and a trend reflected in this thesis by the prevalence of secondary sources that cover this subject from that period). In order to illustrate the wide-ranging terms of this literary history, I take a comparative approach, looking at both French and British texts, as well as the two distinct processes of French and British bureaucratisation that lie behind these two literary traditions (I will explain this decision further in Section 4.2. below). Although I only look at prose works (clerks and office life did not appear as the main focus in much poetry or dramatic works) these prose texts are heterogeneous in form: over the thesis I cover semi-autobiographical essays, satirical pamphlets, 'social problem'

[8] Charles Dickens, 'Thoughts about people', *Sketches by Boz* (1839) (London: Mandarin, 1991), pp. 253-254 (p. 258).

novels, and episodes in more multifarious works (among others) – as if the character of office life represented an aesthetic opportunity (or challenge) to those inclined to portray it. But the history of office literature is also a history of ideas: my exploration of this genre not only provides a reassessment of nineteenth-century literary aesthetics, so too do these texts together represent a force in the changing conceptualisation of bureaucracy, office work, clerks, and the society from which they emerged, over the course of the century. Accordingly, I will spend Section 2 of this introductory chapter exploring the social phenomena that my texts portray (as well as the conceptual and historical issues that underlie them). In Section 3, I outline my conception of 'office literature' and its relationship with these complex social phenomena. Finally, in Section 4, I delineate the criteria that determine my choice of texts, illustrating both how these serve to contain my argument, but also exploring some of the issues to which they give rise.

2. Bureaucracy, Office, and Clerk: Two Perspectives

Having introduced the general terms of my investigation, I now outline the three principal categories and social phenomena whose literary portrayal underpins my analyses: bureaucracy, the office, and the clerk. In simple terms these can be conceived of as a system, a workplace, and a worker; but their scope, and the relationship among the three, tend toward ambiguity in theory, practice, and therefore also in literature. In order to account for this ambiguity, I outline these phenomena in two different ways: formally and historically. My formal definitions reflect the sociological tradition regarding bureaucracy that in large part solidified with Max Weber in *Economy and Society* (1921): these structures and phenomena are to be conceived of as 'ideal types' – abstract constructions against which their real-life incarnations are more or less faithful.[9] By contrast, my historical definition, stressing the fact that these categories and phenomena were emergent and subject to change, amounts almost to a 'genealogy' of bureaucracy, insofar as it reflects Michel Foucault's observation that 'what is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.'[10] However much the bureaucratic structures of the 1890s may have reflected Weber's 'ideal type' more than those of the 1810s, the 'ideal type' is itself

[9] On the 'ideal type' see H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 'Introduction' to *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Gerth and Mills, 2nd Edition (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1991), pp. 3-76 (p. 59). For an alternative means of conceiving of this formalised understanding of bureaucracy, see George Simmel's notion of the 'societal form', which contrasts with Weber's ideal type insofar as it is less an intellectual tool than a means of articulating structural or abstract phenomena in society – Simmel, 'Fundamental Problems of Sociology' [1917], *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, tr. ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 21-23.

[10] Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice – Selected Essays and Interviews,* ed. Donald F. Bouchard, tr. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), pp. 139-164 (p. 142).

subject to historical contingencies – it cannot serve as a pure *telos* toward which all bureaucratic institutions were necessarily headed.[11]

My analysis of office literature over the course of this thesis shows that it would be a mistake to construe either the formal or the historical as the more pertinent analytical tool when conceptualising bureaucracy, office, and clerk – either as categories or as social phenomena. Bureaucracy entails the use of abstract concepts to organise and plan a real-life object, and, accordingly, it represents the imposition of formal structures (themselves historically contingent) upon historical reality (itself already conceived in abstract terms). The richest portrayals of office life therefore frame the workplace as a site of contestation between these conceptualisations – the clerks, its hapless victims (or corrupt beneficiaries). This formal-historical dynamic also informs my conceptualisation of office literature as a genre, which I will outline in a later section.

2.1. Formal perspectives

In this thesis I use the term 'bureaucracy' to refer to the virtual body of procedures, tasks, and roles that entail standardised methods for collecting and managing information from a particular jurisdiction, allowing in turn for this jurisdiction's continuous organisation in accordance with preconceived norms.[12] Because bureaucratic organisation is predicated upon continuous procedures, and because these together form a 'rational', mechanistic system, the norms it upholds are themselves similarly routine, thereby precluding dynamic change in a jurisdiction unless forced by some external agent.[13] The virtual and 'rational' character of bureaucratic procedures and structures means that they can be applied in different spheres of society: allowing for the synchronisation of industrial labour, the monitoring of commercial transactions, informing and enforcing public policy,

[11] In a similar vein, Michael Mann uses the term 'crystallization' as a means of stressing the emergent, contingent character of such social forms. Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power – Vol. 2 The rise of classes and nation-states,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 75-81.

[12] See Max Weber's 'classic' study of bureaucracy in *Economy and Society* (1921): 'There is the principle of fixed and official jurisdictional areas, which are generally ordered by rules, that is by laws or administrative regulations. […] The regular activities required for the purposes of the bureaucratically governed structure are distributed in a fixed way as official duties. […] Methodical provision is made for the regular and continuous fulfilment of these duties'. Max Weber, 'Bureaucracy', *From Max Weber, Essays in Sociology*, tr. Gerth and Mills, pp. 196-244 (p. 196). For a more information-focussed approach, see neoclassical economist Rowena A. Pecchenino's 'The Behavior of Corporate Bureaucrats', *Bureaucracy: Three Paradigms,* ed. Neil Garston (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993), pp. 25-37.

[13] For a history of the metaphor of the bureaucratic 'machine', or of bureaucracy *as* 'machine' see Geraint Parry, 'Enlightened Government and its Critics in Eighteenth-Century Germany', *Historical Journal,* 6:2 (1963), pp. 178-192; See also Martin Krygier, 'State and Bureaucracy in Europe: the growth of a concept', from Eugene Kamenka & Krygier (eds.), *Bureaucracy – The Career of a Concept* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), pp. 1-33 (p. 17); and Mann, pp. 447-448.

and promulgating and implementing impersonal rules for engagement between private individuals.[14] Equally, the widespread applicability of this administrative method means that the norms that bureaucratic structures enforce can be those of monarchs, governments, entrepreneurs, and professionals alike – but so too does these executive figures' relinquishment of administrative tasks to a highly specialised and mechanistic body effect a qualitative shift in the character of their fulfilment, thereby concentrating the means of exercising power within the bureaucratic structure itself.[15] Bureaucratic power is impersonal, however: this virtually autonomous structure mediates the relationship between those who undertake its procedures and its particular jurisdiction. Just as factory workers do not own the commodities they produce, neither, at least in principle, do the employees of a bureaucratic institution exhibit any privileged, proprietorial, or patrimonial relationship toward the object administrated via their collective fulfilment of administrative tasks.[16]

Bureaucracy implies the separation of the tasks underlying the organisation of a jurisdiction from the jurisdiction itself, and it therefore also implies a *designated sphere* to which the fulfilment of these tasks can be relocated.[17] If the technical preconditions of information storage and management entail physical documents, bureaucratic tasks must be located in a particular workplace: the office.[18] Because offices more generally figure as a site in which 'intellectual labour' can be translated into material documents (including the production of literature) it is an ideal location for the convergence and fulfilment of many similarly information-based bureaucratic tasks.[19] The office is where information is standardised, consolidated, stored, and made readily comprehensible, producing what Karl Marx calls a 'symbolic reflection' of an otherwise complex or disaggregated object.[20] So too does

[14] The anthropologist, David Graeber frames the argument for bureaucracies as 'a way of creating fair, impersonal mechanisms in fields previously dominated by insider knowledge and social connections' – although he adds that 'the effect is often the opposite'. Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules – On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2016), p. 23.

[15] Weber typifies this dynamic in terms of 'The Concentration of the Means of Administration' (p. 221) and 'The Permanent Character of the Bureaucratic Machine'; Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 228.

[16] This sense of impersonality and alienation is integral to most definitions of bureaucracy. As well as Weber, see also H. Hall, 'The Concept of Bureaucracy: An Empirical Assessment', *American Journal of Sociology*, 69 (1963-64), pp. 32-40; Mann, pp. 444-445; Neil Garston, 'The Study of Bureaucracy', *Bureaucracy: Three Paradigms,* p. 1-22 (p. 5). The nineteenth-century utopian socialist, Henri de Saint-Simon, framed bureaucracy as the translation of 'the action of governing' to 'scientific demonstrations, absolutely independent of all human will' – 'politics, in other words, gives way to technique', Martin Krygier writes. From Henri de Saint-Simon, 'L'Organisateur' (1819-20), *Œuvres de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin*, 47 vols. (Paris : E. Dentu, 1865-78), XX (1869), pp. 6-241 (pp. 198-199); and Krygier, 'Saint-Simon, Marx and the non-governed society', *Bureaucracy: The Career of a Concept*, pp. 34-60 (p. 40).

[17] For an outline of office tasks, see Michel Crozier's *Le Monde des employés de bureau* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), pp. 82-90.

[18] Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 197.

[19] For an insight into pre-bureaucratic literate information management, see Alberto Cevolini (ed.), *Forgetting Machines: Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

[20] Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume II* (1885), tr. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 211. See also Don Handelman, who writes that 'while taxonomic organization classified the phenomenal world in order to know

management therefore often take place from the vantage of the office.[21] The larger the bureaucratic institution, the more offices it has – which together may form a network of varying specialisms, or a hierarchical tree with different levels of accountability and jurisdictional scope.[22]

If bureaucracy requires offices, offices require clerks. This is because the separation of administrative tasks from the judgement of an individual worker, professional, or governor confers certain advantages, but it also entails certain costs.[23] In terms of advantages, by distilling informal and potentially inconsistent mental processes into a body of procedures enacted by a coordinated workforce, bureaucracy enables the efficiency and economies of scale brought about by any similarly standardised division of labour.[24] Equally, the cognitive scope of a bureaucratic institution far exceeds that of an equivalent body of isolated individuals: aggregate data collection and processing provides a sophisticated image of an extensive and otherwise potentially unknowable object.[25] However, in order for this image to be at all functional it must ignore all those nuances and particularities that may inform personal judgement – the almost mechanistic character of bureaucracies predisposes them toward schematised structures of knowledge and to accordingly 'hard and fast', procrustean terms of enforcement.[26] Importantly, the premise of bureaucracy – sharing formerly individualised mental processes between a suprapersonal organisation – entails the cost of having to translate the

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it, systemic organization [i.e. bureaucracy] could both know and manipulate the world by modelling, and by operating on such analogues'. Don Handelman, 'Introduction: The Idea of Bureaucratic Organization', *Social Analyses,* 9 (December 1981), pp. 5-23 (p. 10).

[21] For a formal insight into the development and role of managerial personnel, see Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, 'The Emergence and Functions of Managerial and Clerical Personnel in Marx's Capital', tr. Mark Glick, *Bureaucracy: Three Paradigms*, pp. 61-81.

[22] Handelman points out that bureaucratic classification of its object is also reflected in its own 'hierarchy of levels of abstraction and subsumation'. Handelman, p. 9. Simmel stresses the paradoxical character of this relationship, in 'Superordination and Subordination and Degrees of Domination and Freedom', *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 268-303 (p. 290).

[23] See pp. 44-48 of James R. Beniger's *The Control Revolution* for an explicitly physical account of organisation and management. Beniger uses the solution to James Clerk Maxwell's famous 'demon' problem in thermodynamics to underlie the fact that 'information does not exist independent of matter and energy and therefore must incur costs in terms of increased entropy'. *The Control Revolution – Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 48.

[24] Martin J. Beckmann, 'A Model of Corporate Organizational Structure', *Bureaucracy: Three Paradigms*, pp. 103-112; Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations, Books I-III* (1776) ed. Andrew Skinner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986), p. 108-117, and Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I* (1867), tr. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 439-454.

[25] James Beniger frames nineteenth-century bureaucratisation in particular as a response to a 'crisis of control' resulting from industrialisation, pp. 278-280. See also, Beckmann, p. 108.

[26] Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules,* p. 75. Handelman speaks of bureaucracy's 'cognitive-framing' quality, by which one is 'exposed to concentrated configurations of information, which may be known in more muted, leavened, or idiosyncratic fashion outside such loci', Handelman, p. 12. See also Friedrich Hayek's argument against the effectuality of such procrustean structures in 'The Use of Knowledge in Society', *The American Economic Review,* 35:4 (September, 1945), pp. 519-530.

intellectual into the material. That is, bureaucracy produces a whole collection of tasks that involve having to turn observations and judgements into documents, having to communicate this material information between areas of an institution, and having to convert this material between a variety of forms appropriate to different specialisms. This degree of complexity also means that bureaucratic institutions must devote some of their efforts toward assuring *their own* organisational coherence, alongside that of some external jurisdiction.[27] Accordingly, many bureaucratic employees are less occupied with the administration of an external object, than with those secondary tasks that allow for the smooth functioning of this administrative process. Whereas 'the work of directing, superintending, and adjusting' may be subdivided amongst a specifically managerial workforce (if it is not still in the hands of the executive figures mentioned above) the material tasks of collecting, processing, and conveying information entails paperwork – and paperwork, especially that confined to the office, entails clerks.[28] Clerical work thus emerges from the material costs incurred by the delegation of hitherto seemingly intangible mental processes to specialist structures.[29]

2.2. Historical perspectives

If the above section was an abstract conceptualisation of bureaucracy, offices, and clerks, in this section I outline some of the messier, but more concrete, issues that underlie the origins and development of these phenomena.[30] The above formal understanding of bureaucracy obscures the fact that many of its defining qualities as a category are in large part based in the material world in which it operates. For example, bureaucracy is regularly typified by (and attacked for) its tendency to centralise power (or at least the technical ability to enforce power); but, rather than being an inherent quality of bureaucracy as a form, this can conversely be seen as a result of the technological constraints of storing and communicating information, which, until very recently, predisposed the

[27] Thomas T. DeGregori and Randal J. Thompson, assisted by Deborah Shepherd, 'An Institutionalist Theory of Bureaucracy: Organizations and Technology', *Bureaucracy: Three Paradigms*, pp. 83-99 (p. 91).
[28] Marx, *Capital, Volume I,* p. 449. On management, see also Marx's analogy that 'a musical conductor need in no way be the owner of the instruments in his orchestra' in *Capital, Volume III* (1894)*,* tr. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 511. On clerks as 'communication-processors', see also Robert Brown, 'Bureaucracy: the utility of a concept', *Bureaucracy – Career of a Concept*, pp. 135-155 (p. 139); and Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, 'The Economic Functions of Clerical and Managerial Personnel: A Historical Perspective', tr. Mark Glick, *Bureaucracy: Three Paradigms,* pp. 155-187 (p. 174).
[29] Duménil and Lévy, 'The Economic Functions of Clerical and Managerial Personnel: A Historical Perspective', p. 158 – Duménil and Lévy make a similar point in more explicitly economic terms. See also Marx, *Capital, Volume II*, pp. 207-214.
[30] For literalised readings of the strangely 'ideal' character of bureaucracy, see Handelman, pp. 13-14, and Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules,* pp. 166-174.

consignment of administrative tasks to a particular building, room, or article of furniture.[31] The *bureau* in this light therefore informs the character of *bureau*cracy rather than *vice versa*.

The extent to which clerks and offices are the earthly shadows of theoretical systems, or, alternatively, together form the sum total of bureaucracy as it really exists, becomes a key tension in the literary portrayal of office life. Indeed, the trope of the bureaucratic paradox can be seen as a particular reflection of this tension. Of course, to re-historicise bureaucracy merely summons up other formal conceptualisations elsewhere, hence the importance of analysing these social phenomena from more than one perspective: for example, the sociologist, James Beniger regards bureaucracy as an anticipatory form of information technology.[32] Indeed, Beniger's perspective is substantiated by a recent theoretical shift from bureaucratic structures to the more disembodied phenomena of data and communications networks, and reflected in the primarily twentieth-century provenance of secondary material on the subject of bureaucracy in the present work.[33]

The character of this historical-formal tension is well illustrated in etymological terms. The words 'office' and 'clerk' predate 'bureaucracy' by several centuries: with 'office' referring to a specific duty or function (secular or religious alike), and later to the room in which that duty might be carried out; while 'clerk' (a doublet of 'cleric') described a premodern literate professional with a shifting range of generalised responsibilities – ecclesiastical, academic, and administrative (although it is with the lawyers' clerks at the Early Modern Inns of Court that we see figures who start to more closely resemble their nineteenth-century descendants).[34] In French too, *bureau* ('desk', or 'office', but solely

[31] For a history of the criticism of bureaucracy along these lines, see Krygier, 'State and Bureaucracy in Europe: the growth of a concept', p. 27. For a more recent conceptualisation of bureaucracy that accounts for *non*-centralised forms, see Derek S. Pugh and David J. Hickson, *Writers on Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, London, and New Dehli: Sage, 2007), p. 11.

[32] Beniger, p. 9.

[33] Anti-bureaucratic sentiment *per se* is of course a longstanding tendency, but Johan P. Olsen, in 'Maybe it is Time to Rediscover Bureaucracy', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory,* 16:1 (January, 2006), pp. 1-24, frames a shift in interest from bureaucracy to either 'competitive markets or cooperative, power-sharing (interorganizational) networks' as a growing trend in public policy as well as in theory (p. 5). For exemplars of this trend in nineteenth-century literary studies specifically see, Ned Schantz, *Gossip, Letters, Phones – The Scandal of Female Networks in Film and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2008); Karin Koehler, *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication – Letters, Telegrams, and Postal Systems* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Maurice S. Lee, *Overwhelmed: Literature, Aesthetics, and the Nineteenth-Century Information Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 2019); or David Trotter, *The Literature of Connection – Signal, Medium, Interface, 1850-1950* (Oxford: OUP, 2020).

[34] The OED traces 'office' as a rite or duty back to 'officium' in second-century Rome. 'Office' as workplace goes back to the thirteenth century. 'Counting house' is another term often used for office up to and including the nineteenth century. 'office, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2020) <www.oed.com/view/Entry/130640> [Accessed 29 September 2020]. 'clerk, n.', *OED Online* <www.oed.com/view/Entry/34212> [Accessed 29 September 2020]. On the heterogeneous character of the lawyers' clerk in Early Modern England, see Wilfrid Prest, 'Lawyers', *The Professions in Early Modern England*, ed. Prest (London, New York, Sidney: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 64-89 (p. 69) and Rosemary O'Day, 'The Clergy of the Church of England' *The Professions in Early Modern England*, pp. 25-63 (pp. 30-31).

in the sense of the workplace) by necessity precedes the hybrid term *bureaucratie*, and so too does *clerc* share a similar history to its English cognate (albeit coming to refer primarily to lawyers' clerks by the nineteenth century).[35] By contrast to these ancient terms, the word 'bureaucracy', although a facetious addition to the modes of government in Aristotle's *Politics* (c.350 BCE), only originated in the eighteenth-century: Vincent de Gournay, French official and early economist, allegedly coined the term to satirise the regulatory systems of the *Ancien Régime* and to advocate a more *laissez-faire* economic policy (a term he also supposedly devised).[36]

Because 'office' and 'clerk', and their French equivalents, precede the coinage of 'bureaucracy', one might well frame bureaucracy as simply the rise to power of pre-existing phenomena – literally 'rule-by-the-desk' (or '-by-the-office') and of those who sit behind it: the coining of the term 'bureaucrat' in the 1790s reflects this very interpretation.[37] However, the years surrounding and following the coinage of 'bureaucracy' also see the terms 'clerk' and *clerc* start to lose their prior multivalence: increasingly referring only to those who carried out mechanically literate and numerate tasks for their employers.[38] Moreover, the newfound significance of the other two principal terms used for office workers in nineteenth-century France, *employé* and *commis* (terms that speak more to office workers' salaried or subaltern position than to the precise content of their duties) similarly evokes a need to articulate a glut of routine service roles that had fragmented off from, and

[35] The Académie française cites 'bureau' as a twelfth-century word originally meaning a wool cloth, by the fourteenth century this was a cloth, and then the table beneath, upon which one made up one's accounts, and by the fifteenth the room itself. 'Bureau, nom masculin', *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française*, 9th ed. (Paris: 2019-) <https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9B2447> [accessed 29 September 2020]; and 'Clerc, nom masculin', *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française*, 9th ed. <https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/A9C2575> [accessed 29 September 2020]. Roughly comparable to the clerks of the Inns of Court in France is the 'Basoche' – the guilds of lawyers' clerks who also put on comic plays. For an introduction to the 'Basoche' see Nicole R. Rice 'Law, Farce, and Counter-Kingship in the Semur Fall of Lucifer', *Comparative Drama*, 49:2 (2015), pp. 163–189, or Adolphe Fabre, *Les Clercs du Palais, Recherches historiques sur les Bazoches des Parlements & les Sociétés dramatiques des Bazochiens & les Enfants-sans-Souci*, 2nd ed. (N. Scheuring: Lyon, 1875).

[36] 'Bureaucracy' is attributed to de Gournay by the *encyclopédist,* Friedrich Melchior Von Grimm, in a 1764 letter advocating free trade. Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, 1er Juillet, 1764, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique de Grimm et de Diderot,* 15 vols (Paris: Furne, 1829-31), IV (1829), pp. 2-14 (p. 11).

[37] *Bureaucrate* first appeared in the French Revolutionary journal, *Le Père Duchesne,* according to Ralph Kingston in *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society – Office Politics and Individual Credit in France 1789-1848* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 1.

[38] This change in definition is explicitly stated in some of the texts covered in Chapter Two of the present study: in *Punch*, a 'guide to the clerk' begins that 'The word Clerk, which was formerly synonymous with clergyman, included all who had taken orders, and the clerk to this takes the orders of the customer, or follows the orders of his principle.' 'Punch's Guide to Servants – the Clerk', *Punch, Or the London Charivari*, 9 (London: 1841-1992), p. 29. Equally, in 'The Parish Clerk', a comic article in Douglas Jerrold's collection of 'types', *Heads of the People* (1841-41), Paul Prendergast writes that 'it is as implying an occupation more or less literary, that [clerk] is now appropriated by persons who transact business, keep accounts, and the like, for others; but the sense in which it belongs to our parochial friend, is not quite so plainly apparent.' Paul Prendergast, 'The Parish Clerk', *Heads of the People*, ed. Douglas Jerrold, 2 vols (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1864), II, pp. 256-264 (p. 257).

were dependent upon, more rounded professions.[39] This shift in these terms' meaning around the time at which 'bureaucracy' was coined thus suggests a major qualitative change in the administrative structures of British and French society: as if, although the form of bureaucracy is determined in part by material constraints and conditions, this form also comes to predominate over its content.[40]

Since its coinage, sociologists and historians have used the term 'bureaucracy' in terms decontextualised from de Gournay, using it as a formal label for a range of information-managing administrative structures stretching as far back as Ancient Sumer, and as far afield as Imperial China.[41] However useful this wide-ranging formal application of the term may be, it is insofar as the term itself originates in eighteenth-century France, and was eventually canonised as a sociological concept by Weber, that bureaucracy's formal conceptualisation exhibits many of the hallmarks of Western modernity.[42] Because bureaucracy as it is formally conceived abjures customary or traditional organisational methods in favour of conscientiously applied 'rational' precepts, because it severs any

[39] *Commis* (from *commettre*, 'to commit' – in this sense, something to someone, or someone to something), appears in the very first 1694 edition of the *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française* as a noun with a definition that stresses the subaltern or dependent character of this role, but it is only in the 1835 edition that its office-based connotations are explicitly articulated in the definition. *Employé* (from *employe*r, 'to employ') first appears as a noun in the 1762 edition of the dictionary, but, like *commis,* it is only principally defined as 'un homme employé dans une administration, un bureau etc.' in the 1835 edition. 'Commis', *Dictionnaire de L'Académie françoise*, 1st ed., 2 vols (Paris: 1694), II, p. 59; 'Employé', *Dictionnaire de L'Académie françoise,* 4th ed., 2 vols (Paris: 1762), I, p. 612; 'Commis', 'Employé', *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française,* 6th ed., 2 vols (Paris: 1835), I, p. 350, p. 629.

[40] On the 'structural' character of bureaucratic power, see Hannah Arendt's conception of bureaucracy as the 'rule of Nobody'. Arendt, *On Violence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1970), p. 81.

[41] Weber does this in 'Bureaucracy', p. 204 for example, as well as in *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilizations* (1896, 1909)*,* tr. R. I. Frank (London, New York: Verso, 2013). See also Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (1997) (London: Vintage, 2005), pp. 233-236; David Graeber in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2011) (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014), pp. 38-39; S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (1963) (New Brunswick: Transactions Publishers, 1993); Valentin Groebner, *Who Are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe,* tr. Mark Kyburz and John Peck (New York: Zone Books, 2007); Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974) (London: Verso, 2013). H. G. Creel makes a compelling case for the Chinese contribution to state administration (including, but far beyond, the development of paper) and cites examples of European states directly borrowing from Chinese models in 'The Beginnings of Bureaucracy in China: The Origin of the Hsien', *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 23:2 (February, 1964), pp. 155-184.

[42] In fairness, Weber stresses that modern European states and corporations perpetuate bureaucracy in 'ever purer forms', 'Bureaucracy', p. 204. Similarly, Beniger writes that 'although bureaucracy had developed several times independently in ancient civilisations, Weber was the first to see it as the critical machinery – new, at least, in its generality and pervasiveness – for control of the societal forces unleashed by the Industrial Revolution', Beniger, p. 6. For similar distinctions between premodern and modern bureaucracies in terms of scale and sophistication, see Fred W. Riggs, 'Modernity and Bureaucracy', *Public Administration Review,* 57:4 (July-August, 1997), pp. 347-353; and Dragan Stanisevski, 'Economy and Bureaucracy: Handmaidens of Modern Capitalism', *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 26:1 (March, 2004), pp. 119-127. And, while L. J. Hume, in *Bentham and Bureaucracy* (1981), finds a ready-made *model* for a Weberian administration in Jeremy Bentham's *Constitutional Code* (1822-32) and traces its origins in Early Modern and Enlightenment thought, it was not formally instituted anywhere (paralleling the failure of Bentham's 'Panopticon' project). *Bentham and Bureaucracy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981). By contrast, Mohamad G. Alkadry argues in favour of bureaucracy's ancient pedigree, in 'Bureaucracy: Weber's or Hammurabi's? Ideal or Ancient?', *Public Administration Quarterly,* 26:3/4 (Fall 2002, Winter 2003), pp. 317-345.

privileged or proprietorial relationship between service and service provider, and because it (by implication) capitalises upon a labour market in which specialisms can freely subdivide *ad infinitum,* it reflects the tenets and conditions of Eric Hobsbawm's 'long' nineteenth century, or 'bourgeois-liberal era', roughly bookended by the careers of de Gournay and Weber.[43]

The various qualities that bureaucracy accrued between its origin as an eighteenth-century witticism and its early twentieth-century crystallisation as the canonical sociological concept outlined in the previous section reflect its fundamentally hybrid character, as well as reflecting many of the paradoxes of the nineteenth-century society in which this hybrid congealed. The structure that de Gournay personally was ridiculing was a hodgepodge of customs officers, tax-farmers, and holders of venal offices appointed over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth century by the French monarchy – a centralised body of 'new men' that served to weaken the regional power of feudal grandees.[44] This 'bureaucracy' is not a carbon copy of Weber's 'ideal type', which it would only start to more closely resemble, in France, with the onset of a 'rationally' minded Revolutionary regime after 1789; but nevertheless, in centralising power, and separating administrative functions from customary or patrimonial power (even if these functions were instead often purchasable), it anticipates bureaucracy as outlined in the above section.[45]

The development of this absolutist administrative system and its cognates in other European polities forms part of the broader emergence of the modern unitary state during this period.[46] Indeed, as well as focussing on tax revenue, these proto-bureaucratic structures also emerged in tandem with the development of modern military organisation – either European standing armies, or, in the UK, a navy with global ambitions.[47] However, these emergent state bureaucracies had an ambivalent ideological reception: just as the feudal character of aristocratic power could not fully align with bureaucratic focus on efficiency and replicability, and its tendency to reward those who reflected these values, so too was an ascendant bourgeoisie often uncomfortable with the fixity and deference

[43] Cf. Stanisevski, p. 120.
[44] Krygier, 'State and Bureaucracy in Europe: the growth of a concept', pp. 3-4; Mann, pp. 452-453.
[45] Guy Thuillier and Jean Tulard, *Histoire de l'administration française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), p. 9. See also Krygier: 'to say the least, [France's administration] deviated considerably from Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy, in structure and performance', in 'State and Bureaucracy in Europe: the growth of a concept', p. 4.
[46] Mann, p. 447.
[47] Ibid., p. 457, p. 455. Of course, the financial and militaristic imperatives toward bureaucratisation were not mutually exclusive: C. A. Bayly writes that 'lawyers and bureaucrats' were the 'longer-term beneficiaries of the era of the world wars [i.e. the period around the Napoleonic Wars]. They thrived and prospered under all forms of government because all governments needed to increase taxation'. C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World – 1780-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 144.

of bureaucratic hierarchies and the rarefaction of the bureaucratic working life.[48] Alexis de Tocqueville frames emergent bureaucracy as a world apart: writing that eighteenth-century proto-bureaucrats, despite coming out of the bourgeoisie, formed 'a class with its own spirit, its own traditions, virtues, honour, and pride. The aristocracy of a new society, live and ready-formed'.[49]

The distant ancestors of office work are no doubt to be found amongst ancient scribes and in medieval *scriptoria,* as well as in the information-managing techniques that allowed the older type of 'clerk' to engage in the 'more abstract – that is, context-detached – [mental] operations' that led up to new classificatory systems and data presentation methods during the Enlightenment.[50] However, the nineteenth-century office's immediate predecessors in large part emerge out of the relative standardisation of tasks relating to record-keeping and correspondence that came with market integration. During the Early Modern period, improved transport and communication, as well as the rise of proprietorial over patrimonial power, meant that economic units within large-scale industries (agriculture, commerce, and finance) were increasingly beholden to the pressures of competition with one another.[51] The development of joint-stock companies and other larger private organisations enabled risks to be shared, and for large concentrations of capital to develop, but this also spelled

[48] See Joshua Gooch on this social ambivalence in the UK in *The Novel, Service Work, and the Victorian Economy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 28-37. See also Harold Perkin's outline of 'entrepreneurial' and 'professional ideals' in nineteenth-century England in *The Origins of Modern English Society* 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 271. On this ambivalence in pre-nineteenth century France, see Franklin L. Ford, *Robe and Sword: The Regrouping of the French Aristocracy after Louis XIV* (New York, 1965). For social perspectives on bureaucracy after the revolution, see Clive H. Church, *Revolution and Red Tape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 48, and, Jonathan Sperber, *Revolutionary Europe– 1780-1850,* 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), p. 268.

[49] Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et le Révolution* (1856)*,* ed. J.-P. Mayer (Paris: Gallimard, 1967)*,* p. 136 – 'Les fonctionnaires administratifs, presque tous bourgeois, forment déjà une classe qui a son esprit particulier, ses traditions, ses vertus, son honneur, son orgueil propre. C'est l'aristocratie de la société nouvelle, qui est déjà formée et vivante'.

[50] Alberto Cevolini, 'Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe: An Introduction', *Forgetting Machines: Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe,* pp. 1-33 (p. 1). See also Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things – An archaeology of the human sciences* (1966) [translator not provided] (London: Routledge, 2002); Handelman, 'Introduction: The Idea of Bureaucratic Organization'; and Daniel R. Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution 1700-1850* (Oxford: OUP, 2000). On the translation of these methods to standardised paperwork practices specifically, see David R. Olson, *The World on Paper – The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (Cambridge University Press: 1994), pp. 195-196.

[51] For two distinct historical perspectives on the development of integrated, competitive, capitalist social relations see Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century – The Perspective of the World* (1979), tr. Siân Reynolds (London: Fontana, 1985) who presents a more traditionally urban-centric and financial narrative, pp. 239-248. And Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism – A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002) who, stressing the difference between 'market imperatives' and the 'market *opportunities*' exploited by precapitalist commerce, focusses on property relations in English agriculture, pp. 95-121 (p. 102). Both arguments, however, reflect the development of abstract systems of exchange and the demand for the efficiency of economic units – both factors conducive to the use of bureaucratic methods.

greater complexity.[52] In order to improve the coherence and efficiency of an individual concern (including by streamlining the administrative workflow itself) firms adopted and developed standardised methods of accounting, and of collecting, storing, and presenting data.[53] These disciplines' subdivision in turn into increasingly rote tasks reflected a desire for consistency and efficiency on a material as well as intellectual plane.[54]

It is precisely because of the abstract, 'context-detached', universal character of these standardised administrative practices that they could initially be met by an informal jumble of figures: landowners' stewards, merchants' wives and daughters, and they were even farmed out to independent professionals (largely lawyers).[55] And similarly, these tasks' apparent material dependence solely on a desk, pen, and paper seemed to mean that they could be undertaken virtually anywhere: in the workshop itself, or a domestic setting, at the quayside, or even on the move (this spatial ambiguity speaks to the self-metonymy of the term *bureau*), a sense of heteromorphism that persists well into the nineteenth century.[56] However, beside the physical constraints presupposed by those spare rooms or old townhouses that were actually available for office work, the modern office consolidated through the conflicting political, managerial, and operational demands made of this labour.[57] These conflicting demands encompassed the need for privacy, efficiency, transparency, and accountability, and they bred networks of corridors, partitions, and anterooms, and new devices for the speedier execution of specific tasks, by specific people.[58]

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[52] Gooch describes these companies as 'those creations of finance and miniature versions of social interdependence shot through with bureaucratic services', p. 36; cf. Beniger, p. 130.

[53] For a concerted study of the development of standardised administrative methods across the UK economy in particular, see Sidney Pollard, *The Genesis of Modern Management* (1965) (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968). For different perspectives on bureaucracy and law, see Stanievski, p. 122, Bayly, p. 145, and Tamar Herzog, *A Short History of European Law – The last two and a half millennia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 207-217.

[54] Rote tasks were considered more reliable than more sophisticated procedures because, as Adam Ferguson writes, 'reflection and fancy are subject to err; but a habit of moving the hand or the foot is independent of either', in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh, 1767), p. 280.

[55] On clerical tasks as feminised domestic labour, see Martine Sonnet, 'Comment devient-on « épouse-secrétaire » à Paris au XVIIIe siècle', *Pénélope*, 10: Femmes au bureau (1984), pp. 75-77. On stewards and lawyers see Pollard, pp. 38-40.

[56] See Marx, in *Capital, Volume II* (pp. 211-212), on abstract-material tension in office work. On office heteromorphism see Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester: MUP, 1976), pp. 9-10, and David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker – A Study in Class Consciousness,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 19.

[57] Anderson writes that these demands also differed between different industries, with banking producing the most secure and impressive offices, in *Victorian Clerks,* p. 9. Because office work is predicated in part upon monitoring, but also requires that clerks themselves be monitored, see Foucault's *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 202.

[58] See Ralph Kingston's 'The Bricks and Mortar of Revolutionary Administration,' *French History*, 20:4 (December, 2006), pp. 405–423 for an account of how the operational desires of managers, and *employés* themselves, with regard to the structure and composition of their *bureaux*, was often undercut by the political expectations French Revolutionaries had of their new bureaucracy. See also Roger Luckhurst's *Corridors:*

Over the course of the nineteenth century the crystallisation of the office and of bureaucratic tasks would effect a boom in clerical populations: where the still-protean category of 'clerk' means clerical numbers are hard to gauge in 1800 (a lack of clear figures is also indicative of under-bureaucratisation), by the mid-century, clerks are recorded as amounting to 0.8% of the UK labour force and 4.5% of that of France, growing by 1901 to 4% and 10% respectively (the 'heterogeneity and imprecision of statistical categories' relating to these workers should be borne in mind with these numbers).[59] This expansion correlates with the clerk's shift ever further from being a skilled labourer, with an often intimate relationship with their employer, into, especially after the 1870s, a 'white-collar proletarian' working in highly standardised, almost factory-like conditions with mechanical equipment (typewriters and telegraphs, for example).[60] Equally, however, because they partook in the administrative functions hitherto associated with proprietorship, professionalism, and governance, clerks throughout the century often retained enough cachet to be considered distinct from the emergent labouring classes of modern nineteenth-century society, at least in the public sphere.[61]

This tension between the public conception of the clerk and the hidden realities of the office, is indicative of modern bureaucracy's more generally hybrid character: bureaucracy exhibits an ambivalence comparable to that historian Michael Mann calls the 'tension between diffused and authoritative aspects of capitalism'.[62] In larger organisations, and increasingly generally as the century progressed, office life was governed by strong chains of command and divisions of labour: some clerks were endowed with minor, usually internally-directed, managerial responsibilities, while others performed the same routine activities – such as copying documents or filing – for their whole career.[63] It is in this light that the French term *employé* explicitly accounts for everyone from middle manager

Passages of Modernity (London: Reaktion, 2019) on the transition from an office space governed by 'older, more exotic, courtly' paradigms to the more schematic, p. 236. On the specialised individuals, Mann writes simply that 'states, commerce, and corporations generated *clerks*', p. 559.

[59] Lockwood, p. 36 – 0.8% in 1851, Delphine Gardey in *La dactylographe et l'expéditionnaire : Histoire des employés de bureau 1890-1930* (Paris: Belin, 2001), p. 44 – 4.5% in 1866. Gardey also stresses (p. 42) that 'working out the long-term growth of office workers is a delicate matter due to the heterogeneity and imprecision of statistical categories', ['La croissance des employés sur la longue durée est délicate à cerner du fait de l'hétérogénéité et de l'imprécision des catégories statistiques.']

[60] I cover this process in more detail at the beginning of Chapter Four. Mann identifies the 'proletarianisation' of clerks over this same period, pp. 560-561. See also Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century,* 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), pp. 203-248.

[61] See Mann, p. 562, on the generally ambiguous social character of clerks, and Perkin, on its increasing attenuation, in *The Rise of Professional Society – England Since 1880,* 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 96. See Chapters Three and Four of Ralph Kingston's *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society* for a sense of the changing mechanisms for determining clerical status in the French civil service. See Young, pp. 58-69 for an impression of literature's role in fostering these figures' social ambiguity in public life.

[62] Mann, p. 512.

[63] Lockwood, pp. 25-27; Mann, p. 559. This division is aggravated as the century progresses. The prestige and role of clerks was often also attached to the purpose and reputation of the firm they worked for.

down to *commis* [clerk] and *expéditionnaire* [copyist] – reserving the deliberation over and execution of actual policy to *hauts fonctionnaires* [high functionaries].[64] The fact that bureaucratisation was consonant with developments in the modern state, and the modern military, as much as in the modern market, speaks to this ambivalent character – and the vying forces of rank and competition become a recurrent literary trope. The unevenness and contingency of the process of bureaucratisation, its consolidation between different social spheres, and different conceptual perspectives, is strongly reflected in nineteenth-century literature. This in turn both informs the portrayals of office life in 'office literature', while it also characterises the development of this genre itself.

3. Towards an 'office literature'

Having established some of the conceptual issues that underlie the social phenomena that my chosen texts portray, I now outline how these issues also underlie their literary portrayal. The formal-historical dynamic that I identify in the above section stresses that bureaucracy, offices, and clerks together represent an epistemic tension that informs the way these phenomena are to be conceived: bureaucracy itself evidently functions according to formal schemas, but, as we have seen, the various spaces, objects, and people out of which it is composed (and even the abstract perspective it deploys) are products of more muddled historical processes. Both perspectives are clearly pertinent but, in practice, one perspective often impinges itself upon the other. As historians François Monnier and Guy Thuillier write, bureaucracy's own highly formalised self-presentation leaves 'shadowy zones, zones of incertitude' within its physical structures: these being, for example, 'a bureaucrat's secret ambitions, power games […] or the little dramas that mar office life.'[65] And so too, conversely, does the immediate particularity of the office often appear to obscure the rational structures it serves – a recurrent device in the texts that I cover.

This tension between the abstract and the concrete within our conception of these phenomena is a problem that governs their literary portrayal, with each author implicitly conveying a slightly different model or interpretation of their relationship. Despite the instability of such portrayals, historians often give recourse to literature to impart a sense of the particularities of

[64] In the nineteenth century, Church writes, a '*fonctionnaire* meant someone exercising a political role, authority, and responsibility in his own right. Such officials, elected or nominated, were very clearly distinguished from *employés,* the subaltern officials who worked for them' (p. 10). (The nomination of *fonctionnaires* is obviously the more 'classically bureaucratic' of employment methods). Church cites the anonymous pamphlet, *Le Cri des employés du gouvernement* (1828) which describes *employés* as 'espèce de rouages inaperçues qui font mouvoir la machine administrative' [a species of unnoticed gear that makes the administrative machine move.] (p. 319). See also, J. R. Suratteau, 'Fonctionnaires et employés', *AHRF,* 152 (1958), pp. 71-72.

[65] François Monnier and Guy Thuillier, *Histoire de la Bureaucratie – Vérités et Fictions* (Paris: Economica, 2010), p. 15 – 'Il y a nécessairement des zones d'ombre, d'incertitude, […] des ambitions secrètes d'un bureaucrate, des jeux de pouvoirs […] ou des petits drames qui émaillent la vie de bureau….'

nineteenth-century offices, and to convey a sense of those informal '*codes* of the offices [that] generally leave few traces', but which may have strongly informed the manner in which an institution functioned.[66] So too did the nineteenth-century layman turn to literature to gain a sense of the clerk's lot rather than offer an eyewitness description: a Manchester magazine from the 1860s describes clerks '[disappearing] mysteriously down passages or into doorways that lead to narrow staircases, some doubtless to little tanks like that in which poor Bob Cratchit toiled under Scrooge's uncharitable eye'.[67]

Literary critic Anne-Marie Baron is quick to correct any assumptions regarding the naïve fidelity of nineteenth-century literature, observing that authors (even those who were themselves sometime office workers) gave 'systematic recourse to certain stereotypes' in their portrayals of office life that served to mask its socio-historical realities.[68] Baron's argument, that these tropes together form a 'veritable bureaucratic "mythology" (in the sense given to this word by Roland Barthes), that is to say a code for producing/re-producing clichés', not only undermines the utility of literature for providing non-bureaucratic impressions of bureaucracy's historical character, it actually suggests that the routinised, prescriptive character of this literature's conventions often *emulate* bureaucratic forms more than qualify or contextualise them.[69] As Caroline Levine stresses, 'form has never belonged only to the discourse of aesthetics', but rather evokes 'patterns of sociopolitical experience' that may in turn resonate with artistic technique.[70]

However, and as with bureaucratic forms, these conventions themselves needed to be invented: what I call 'office literature' not only, as Baron suggests, offers an unreliable, changeable, and often normative perspective onto the phenomena it describes – moreover, I argue that the history

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[66] Guy Thuillier, 'Les Gestes des Fonctionnaires', *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates en France au XIX^e^ Siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1980), pp. 539-564 (p. 542) – 'ces *codes* des bureaux laissent généralement peu de traces.' Thuillier makes use of literary sources especially in *La Vie quotidienne dans les ministères au XIX^e^ siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1976); see also Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution – 1789-1848* (1962) (London: Abacus, 2010), p. 236; Gardey, p. 53; Lucy Kellaway, *History of Office Life*, BBC Radio 4 (22 July to 2 August, 2013); and throughout Nikil Saval, *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015).

[67] *The Free Lance,* 4 April 1868, cited in, Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, p. 9.

[68] Anne-Marie Baron, 'La bureaucratie flaubertienne, du Garçon aux deux cloportes', *L'Esprit Créateur,* 34 :1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 31-41 (p. 31) – 'il [existait] une littérature bureaucratique, qui se caractérise par le recours systématique à certains stéréotypes. Plus qu'une réalité socio-historique, la bureaucratie est déjà devenue, dans la conscience populaire, un ensemble de représentations collectives, qui masque les réels problèmes de fonctionnement du système.'

[69] Anne-Marie Bijaoui-Baron, 'Le thème bureaucratique chez Flaubert et Maupassant', *Flaubert et Maupassant - Écrivains normands,* eds. Jean Pierrot, Joseph-Marc Bailbé (Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre: 1981), pp. 53-67 (p. 53) – 'Ainsi se crée peu à peu une véritable « mythologie » bureaucratique (au sens donné à ce mot par Roland Barthes), c'est-à-dire un code producteur/re-producteur de clichés et ce système, diluant les problèmes réels de fonctionnement dans l'humour et la caricature, diffuse une image réductrice de la bureaucratie.'

[70] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton and Oxford: PUP, 2015), p. 2.

and development of this 'genre' is itself governed by a similar shifting dynamic of formal prescription and historical contingency to that which underlies the process of bureaucratisation. While not an unblemished window onto nineteenth-century office life, therefore, office literature instead represents an aesthetic refraction of complex historical processes, one whose own logic of development needs elucidating if it is to provide more pertinent insights into the society that produced it. In the next section I outline my conception of office literature as a literary genre focussed on the portrayal of office life, whose conventions and development together synthesise a broad range of issues centred around the context of nineteenth-century bureaucratisation. In the final part of this chapter, I outline the specific criteria that determine my choice of texts, and give an outline of the thesis chapters.

3.1. Office literature as a genre

This thesis traces the formation of seemingly disparate texts into a coherent genre: office literature. In brief, office literature, like the term 'bureaucracy', is a categorical device – one that allows me to stress the parallels between literary works, as well as to highlight the changing character of the various conventions they share in the context of bureaucratisation. However, just as we have seen that 'bureaucracy' is not merely the sum of its parts, so too, as Baron suggests, do the conventions honed by individual exemplars of office literature weigh on their successors: the concept of a genre therefore allows me to illustrate this dynamic relationship between text, aesthetic, and historical process. In short, I define office literature (while often heterogeneous in its form, themes, and style) as a genre explicitly preoccupied with the tensions and competing conceptualisations of bureaucracy, offices, and clerks that I outlined in Section 2. Further, and more significantly, office literature *embeds* these tensions in the character and form of the literary works themselves.

In simple terms, to use Ludwig Wittgenstein's metaphor, generic categorisation allows me to unify theoretically the various 'family resemblances' to be identified between otherwise potentially disparate texts.[71] This conceptualisation accounts for shared features which may in practice form 'complicated networks of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' between texts, and which may 'crop up and disappear' over time.[72] By way of just a few small examples, motifs which converge in the genre range from a preoccupation with itemising articles of office furniture, via that of listing office *workers* themselves according to temperament (a motif that ironically recapitulates an emergent bureaucratic discourse), to a recurrent tendency to query whether office life affects the clerical

[71] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), tr. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), §§66-67, pp. 31-32.
[72] Ibid., §§66, p. 32.

temperament, or whether clerical temperament informs office mechanisms (a motif that reflects analytical issues regarding the formal-historical character of bureaucracy, outlined above).

However, as Wittgenstein also observes, an analysed form 'readily seduces us into thinking that [it] is the more fundamental' whereas in fact 'an aspect of the matter is lost' with this form as much as new insights are gained.[73] In this respect, generic categorisation could be seen to resemble the symbolic practices of bureaucracy itself: it ignores the nuances of individual instances, subsuming a complex history into an intelligible body of procedures. To avoid a similar degree of reductionism, I employ 'office literature' in conjunction with my close readings of individual texts, rather than as a supplement to them, and I acknowledge that these texts cannot simply be pigeonholed: they necessarily 'participate' in other genres, as Jacques Derrida argues.[74] Office literature is therefore an abstract literary construction against which concrete texts are more or less faithful; but it is not a hypostasised 'form' – rather, its features are dependent on those changes evident in the history of the texts it describes.

Although not an objective 'form', office literature should not simply be seen as an umbrella term for conventions exhibited between a range of texts: the historical relationships that it articulates in its capacity as a 'genre' are very real. Franco Moretti stresses that the concept of genre in general 'presupposes that literary production takes place in obedience to a prevailing system of laws', and, as we have already seen, Anne-Marie Baron corroborates that this is all-too ironically the case in portrayals of office life, insofar as such 'laws' mar our impression of a subject that is itself in turn similarly beholden to abstract prescriptions.[75] It is, Moretti continues, the 'task of criticism […] to show the extent of [these laws'] coercive, regulating power', and to do so therefore necessitates the articulation of a generic convention hitherto largely disregarded – even by Baron, who dubs French portrayals of the office a 'bureaucratic para-literature.'[76] In this respect, to outline the characteristics and development of 'office literature' (as with outlining those of bureaucracy, offices, and clerks as real-life social phenomena) is a process of demystification.

Ultimately, therefore, the specific value of generic concepts, as Fredric Jameson writes, is their 'mediatory function', allowing for 'the coordination of immanent formal analysis of the individual text

[73] Ibid., §63, pp. 30-31.
[74] Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre' (1980), *Acts of Literature*, tr. Avital Ronell, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 221-252 (p. 230).
[75] Franco Moretti, 'The Soul and the Harpy', tr. David Forgacs, *Signs Taken for Wonders – On the Sociology of Literary Forms* (1983) (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 1-41 (p. 12).
[76] Moretti, 'The Soul and the Harpy', p. 12; Bijaoui-Baron, 'Le thème bureaucratique chez Flaubert et Maupassant', p. 54 – 'la para-littérature bureaucratique.'

with the twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life'.[77] In other words, 'genre', in the manner in which I am using it, refers to a means of categorisation that tethers the qualities of individual artworks to the dual influences of literary tradition and broader historical development. I therefore conceive of 'genre' in dynamic terms, not as a 'simplistically taxonomic, rule-governed, and prescriptive formalism', as Carolyn Williams argues the term has been wrongly labelled, but rather as a heuristic device allowing for, Williams continues, the 'powerful fusion of formal and historical assumptions.'[78]

4. Choice of texts

There are four criteria significant to my choice of texts, each explained in its own section below: my texts are all from the nineteenth century (they specifically encompass the years 1811-1898), they are all from either France or the UK, they are all prose works, and they all focus, in whole or in part, on office life. These criteria of course stem from the terms of my broader argument – that the literary portrayal of office life reflects issues underlying the process of nineteenth-century bureaucratisation – and I therefore use the following sections to outline how these criteria illustrate specific aspects of this argument. I account for my decisions behind the specific texts I explore in each chapter at the beginning of my chapters.

4.1. Periodisation

All of the texts that I cover are from the nineteenth century – the period in which, as we have seen, bureaucratic structures crystallised, and the phenomena of the office and clerk solidified. The first two authors I cover in this thesis (the British essayist Charles Lamb and the French satirist Jean-Gilbert Ymbert, writing in the 1810s-20s) are the first two authors to write in the genre I have designated office literature. As I have indicated above, while early bureaucratic structures were found sporadically throughout Europe in the eighteenth century and were being conceptualised theoretically, bureaucracy was not portrayed *artistically* in the eighteenth century – at least not at any length or with sufficient depth. That Lamb and Ymbert, generations after the first practical and theoretical conceptualisations of bureaucracy appeared, should have been the first to portray office life for the

[77] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious – Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 105.
[78] Carolyn Williams, '"Genre" and "Discourse" in Victorian Studies', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 27:2 (1999), pp. 517-520 (pp. 518-519). See also, Carolyn Williams, 'Response [to Kurnick, Bodenheimer, Hack, and Fluhr]', *Victorian Studies*, 48:2, Papers and Responses from the Third Annual Conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association (Winter, 2006), pp. 295-304, and Melissa Valiska Gregory, 'Genre,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 46 (2018), pp. 715–719.

purposes of literature invites investigation, making them both a logical and intriguing starting point for my thesis.

By contrast, the cut-off at the other end of the century may appear more arbitrary. Indeed, there is a clear sense of continuity between the final texts I cover and those from following decades. This continuity reflects the degree to which, between the 1870s and the First World War, office work underwent major qualitative changes, including increasing standardisation, the mechanisation of certain office tasks, and the introduction of female staff, reflecting in turn an explosion in clerical roles and the widespread application of bureaucratic organisation. Reflecting these changes, the office and clerks were correspondingly portrayed more frequently in the literature of this period (although not in proportion to their ever-growing number in the population at large, Jonathan Wild asserts in his coverage of the turn-of-the-century period).[79] However, it is because I am focussing on the *emergence* of this literature in conjunction with the muddled processes of bureaucratisation in France and Britain, rather than the more established character of those texts that were written as bureaucratic structures crystallised in the years leading up to the First World War and bureaucracy's ultimate canonisation by Max Weber, that I am confining my study to the nineteenth century proper. While my study's fourth and final chapter focuses on the changes to office life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, this is undertaken with prior decades and the conventions of prior texts explicitly in mind.[80]

4.2. France and Britain

The scope of bureaucratisation, generally, during the nineteenth century is reflected in its literature worldwide. A study of every author from this period to include major clerical characters, office-based narratives, or bureaucratically-focussed themes in their work would have to account for such canonical names as Nikolai Gogol and Fyodor Dostoyevsky from Russia, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Poe from the United States, Pedro Antonio de Alarcón and Benito Pérez Galdós from Spain, E.T.A. Hoffmann from Prussia, Eça de Queiroz from Portugal, Machado de Assis from Brazil, Henrik Ibsen from Norway, Rabindranath Tagore from Bengal, and so on – a formidable list even without the slew of more obscure figures behind them. While a comparative analysis of these figures and their works would certainly illustrate the *breadth* of nineteenth-century bureaucratisation, its influence on the global economy, and its interrelation with, or imposition upon, pre-existing or proto-bureaucratic structures (as in Russian, Latin American, or Indian literature), it would also be a rather

[79] Wild, p. 1.

[80] Although nineteenth-century works can certainly appear to anticipate this twentieth-century world: notably Charles Dickens's mid-period 'institutional satires', which I explore in Chapter Three. See Jonathan Greenberg, *The Cambridge Introduction to Satire* (Cambridge: CUP, 2019), p. 214.

shallow study. This shallowness would not only be due to the diminished focus that would result from analysing the literature of all of these societies; equally, the above figures' largely mid-to-late nineteenth-century provenance is indicative of the relatively limited bureaucratic 'saturation' in these societies during my chosen period.

British and French society by contrast offer up early examples of bureaucratic structures whose character in large part anticipates Weber's later conceptualisation, as well as exhibiting these structures on a more expansive and highly public scale – hence their early portrayal in literature. It is in this latter respect that early nineteenth-century France and Britain are to be differentiated from their closest contemporary in terms of bureaucratisation, the German states, whose bureaucratic structures, and longstanding tradition of bureaucratic theorisation, exhibited an equivalently *qualitative* precocity, but without a similar degree of widespread application or scale (and consequently a relative lack of office literature).[81] Moreover, while French and British literature over the nineteenth century each provide enough portrayals of office life to fill a thesis of their own, it is advantageous to conduct a comparative analysis of these traditions to illustrate the effects of different processes of bureaucratisation, and different literary traditions, on the emergence and development of this genre.

Although a full history of French and British bureaucratisation over the nineteenth century is far too expansive to include here, necessary historical and theoretical detail will be laced through each chapter where appropriate to provide context. In brief, though, while I have above stressed bureaucratisation and the emergence of office work as multivalent processes – touching upon state formation, commerce, industrialisation, and the emergence of civil society alike – in practice, we see that the emphasis and character of bureaucratisation in these sectors differs between different societies. In simple terms, as historian Delphine Gardey writes, bureaucratisation in the UK, and eventually in the English-speaking world more broadly, was largely centred around industry and commerce (including a legal sector that could mediate market concerns), and on the continent, and France in particular, around the state – a process catalysed in particular by way of the French Revolution.[82] British and French processes of bureaucratisation in this respect recall Eric Hobsbawm's

[81] See Mann, pp. 450-451, and pp. 467-466 on reasons behind this qualitative precocity but limited scale of German bureaucratisation.

[82] Gardey, p. 50 – 'It is important to underline that, in England as in the United States, industrialisation effectively preceded the establishment of an effective bureaucracy, and that it is more in the sphere of non-public activities that large-scale administrative bodies were born and developed. Closer in this to France, Germany is to be characterised as the inverse to the Anglo-Saxon world by the fact that an important and relatively organised state bureaucracy pre-exists the take-off of private bureaucracies.' – [Il est important de souligner qu'en Angleterre comme aux États-Unis l'industrialisation a effectivement précédé la constitution d'une bureaucratie efficace et que c'est plutôt dans le cadre des activités non publiques que sont nées et se sont développées les grandes administrations. […] Proche en cela de la France, l'Allemagne se caractérise à

broader 'Dual Revolution' thesis – that late-eighteenth century Britain and France were the respective centres of economic (industrial) and political revolutions that jointly set the terms of 'bourgeois-liberal' society thereafter.[83] This relative disparity between the sectoral 'epicentres' of French and British bureaucratisation does not belie the historically paradoxical character of bureaucracy outlined above, however, rather it *contributes* to the categorical ambiguity that underlies these structures and this kind of work. That is, the respectively more political and more economic connotations of these structures between France and Britain only heightens the dubiousness of those features of office life that seem to contradict these connotations. Equally, as the century progressed, both societies saw the application of bureaucratic mechanisms to a wider range of structures and social spheres – a process reflected in the increased categorical autonomy of these mechanisms.

While differences between French and British bureaucracy, at least at its early stages, are fairly clear, differences between their literary traditions are harder to qualify without slipping into cliché. Jorge Luis Borges's rather stereotyped joke that French literature is marked by a 'system of premeditation' (beholden either to 'classical rigour' or experimental 'extravagances'), while 'the Englishman writes in good faith', is based on a long pedigree, stretching back, via Thomas Carlyle, to Voltaire.[84] Although these stereotypes do not directly inform the terms of my argument, the more general observation that these stereotypes present – that there are meta-discourses that underlie literary composition (however tethered these may be to national identity) – is certainly mirrored in issues relating to the literary portrayal of bureaucratisation. Whether literary forms reflect or can even emulate bureaucratic apriorism, or whether composition should follow the author's own individualised creative spirit, and whether either approach is the more expository of bureaucracy-related themes, becomes a definite tension in the development of office literature.

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l'inverse du monde anglo-saxon par le fait qu'une bureaucratie d'État importante et relativement organisée préexiste à l'essor des bureaucraties privées.]

[83] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution,* p. 13 – 'it was the triumph not of "industry" as such, but of capitalist industry; not of liberty and equality in general but of middle class or "bourgeois" liberal society; not of "the modern economy" or "the modern state", but of the economies and states in a particular geographical region of the world […] whose centre was the neighbouring and rival states of Great Britain and France.' See also Ellen Meiksins Wood's comparison of 'absolutist' French political and administrative structures against more marketised British society in *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism – A Historical Essay on Old Regimes and Nation States* (1991) (London and New York: Verso, 2015). Of course, one can qualify the limpidly 'political' and 'economic' character of these two 'revolutions', see for example Alexia Yates and Erika Vause, 'Beyond the dual revolution: revisiting capitalism in modern France', *French History*, 34:3 (September 2020), pp. 281-293 and subsequent articles in that issue.

[84] Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Paradox of Apollinaire', tr. Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Total Library – Non-Fiction 1922-1986,* ed. Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 311-313 (p. 311). See also Voltaire, 'Dix-Hutième Lettre, Sur la tragédie', *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), pp. 68-72, and Thomas Carlyle, 'Voltaire' (1829)*, Selected Writings,* ed. Alan Shelston (London: Penguin, 2015), pp. 15-19.

Where French and British literature *do* exhibit some divergence is in the development of office literature between these two societies. While there are clear parallels between these two traditions in their portrayals of office life, and in how these traditions develop, these similar patterns of change manifest themselves slightly differently on either side of the Channel. Just as differences in the early stages of bureaucratisation between the two countries inform different *conceptions* of these structures in literature (statist and political vs. firm-based and economic, or legalistic, for example) so too does the distinct character of these conceptions inform the two literary traditions' character as they develop. Because bureaucratic structures primarily emerge out of the state in France, the genre's development itself is also ironically 'centralised' around the Paris ministries: I of course account for French portrayals of bankers' and lawyers' clerks, but, the more stereotyped and fixed the conventions of 'office literature' get as the century progresses, the more that well-established tropes, applicable to the portrayal of office life regardless of 'industry', nevertheless find themselves recurring in portrayals of the civil service. Conversely, because bureaucratisation in the UK in large part emerged out of a more decentralised network of commercial and legal firms, the genre persists in portraying these kinds of structures and these contexts. When we *do* see British portrayals of state employees there is as good a chance the offices will be those of a nationalised industry rather than the civil service itself. This disparity does not *necessarily* reflect real disparities in the bureaucratic scope of these societies, rather, it is also thanks to the vestigial statist or commercial-legal connotations of office life that its tropes are appended to broader critiques of these spheres.

As should already be apparent from this introduction to my comparative approach, accounting for both French and British traditions of office literature affords a more multivalent perspective on the relationship between a society's culture and its socio-economic or historical conditions. My comparative approach allows a degree of abstraction *through* a range of particularities that focussing on one culture would make more difficult to achieve.[85] Indeed, it is in large part thanks to the 'centralisation' of the French tradition that we can better understand the continuity between British texts that may otherwise appear rather disparate: as critic Haun Saussy writes, comparative literature allows us to 'invent new relations among literary works'.[86] 'Office literature' in this light is an emergent category that encompasses a range of tropes employed between national literatures, tropes whose clear resemblance in terms of means may be obscured by the ends to which they are put.

[85] See Rey Chow on how the 'subject (matter) of comparative literature undergoes de-formation', 'A Discipline of Tolerance', *A Companion to Comparative Literature*, ed. Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas (Oxford: Wiley, 2011), pp. 15-26 (p. 17).
[86] Haun Saussy, 'Comparisons, World Literature, and the Common Denominator', *A Companion to Comparative Literature,* pp. 60-64 (p. 60) – Saussy also frames 'invention' as 'the discovery of a common denominator that was there all along' (p. 61.)

4.3. Forms of literature

The texts I focus on in this thesis are all prose works, because—as has been previously mentioned, the office does not consistently appear as the major object of focus in many works of poetry or drama.[87] I have chosen a combination of prose forms, which helps to map the development of both bureaucracy and office literature over the course of the nineteenth century, along with all the logistical and literary issues that accompany that mutually reflective development. In particular, I look at the essays and epistolary texts of the early decades of the nineteenth century, the satirical short stories and sketches, or *physiologies,* of the early-mid period, the baggy mid-century novels which attempted to sustain the previously fractured and repetitive representation of office life, and finally the shorter, more confined, and often more experimental, novels and novellas of the *fin de siècle*, which re-segregated issues that had coalesced unsustainably in the mid-century period.

The heterogenous nature of the prose explored in this thesis is crucial to understanding office literature, since form so closely mirrored both literary content and socio-historical understandings of bureaucracy and office work(ers) over the course of the nineteenth century. Where the hodgepodge of forms in the first two chapters represent vying efforts to *define, categorise,* or *qualify* the nature of an emergent bureaucracy, office, and clerk, from a range of perspectives, it is ultimately via the convergence of these texts' various devices and tropes in the baggy novels of the mid-century that a body of established conventions surrounding these questions coalesces. In turn, office literature thereafter refocuses its attention on social and aesthetic issues represented by these now-established conventions, fragmenting in form rather than, as before, in conceptual understanding. Whether the stylistic inventiveness and heterogeneity of office literature is derived ultimately from a fundamental *inability* to convey office structures' blend of authority and atomisation through nineteenth-century literary forms, or whether the office represents a site conducive to artistic experimentation, remains a tension in the works that I cover.

4.4. Genre and setting

Clerks and bureaucracy-related themes abound in nineteenth-century literature. Although these texts would no doubt provide important insights into the relationship between nineteenth-century literary

[87] For examples of office-based dramas, see Ymbert's *L'Intérieur d'un bureau, ou le Chanson* [The Interior of an office, or the Song] (1823), and *Le Sous-Chef, ou le Famille Gauthier* [The Sub-Chief, or the Gauthier Family] (1825), and *Our Clerks, or No. 3 Fig Tree Court, Temple* (1852), and *A Nice Firm* (1853), both by the playwright and editor of *Punch,* Tom Taylor. For examples of poetry, see some of Thomas Love Peacock's ironic doggerel, and Martin Tupper's mawkish 'The Quill and the Counter' from *A Dozen Ballads About White Slavery* (1854), as well as the short poetical works in Paul Valéry's letters from the 1890s.

aesthetics and bureaucratisation that I describe, for the purposes of limiting texts in this thesis to a manageable number I am specifically focussing on texts that use the *office* as a location of narrative focus. It is only through the unified focus of bureaucracy, clerk, and office that we can fully see the exploration of tension expressed in Section 2 and thereby provide this thesis with the strongest case studies. It is thanks to the relative coherence of these office-based texts, hence their envelopment into the genre I name office literature, that they together present the historical arc of a developing aesthetic that informs our understanding of the relationship between nineteenth-century literature and the process of bureaucratisation.

4.5. Outline of the thesis

What follows is an outline of my argument over the following four chapters. While my argument largely follows a linear, chronological, course, the content of each chapter is characterised by the conceptual and formal issues that underlie the changing aspect of office literature – itself reflecting developments in the process of bureaucratisation – over the century. In this respect, I present less a blow-by-blow account than a series of case studies illustrating how authors could portray office life given the current state of bureaucratisation, the range of pre-existing literary models (from both 'within' and 'without' office literature), and the aesthetic preoccupations of authors themselves.

Chapter One centres around works written in the 1810s and '20s by two early producers of office literature who were themselves clerks: Charles Lamb and Jean-Gilbert Ymbert. While Lamb and Ymbert alike expound many of the same conceptualisations of the character of office life, their presentation of these issues is formally distinct: the former's is highly personal and idiosyncratic, whereas the latter employs the more detached medium of an epistolary 'course' in administration as a vehicle for satire. So too do their conceptions of the character of bureaucracy itself operate from different vantages, with Lamb's appearing more economic, or commercial, and Ymbert's more political. In this respect we see that office literature is rooted in many of the commonplaces that clerks associated with office life and the relatively uniform appearance of office work itself, but that this literature's conceptualisation of the office's place in broader social structures and historical processes remained ambiguous.

Chapter Two focuses on texts from the 'journalistic revolution' of the 1830s and '40s (when censorship waned, and publishing methods improved) and their role in the coalescence of the clerical 'type' who goes on to populate later texts. I frame the comic categories expounded by these short texts and an emergent bureaucratic discourse alike as products of changing methods in the collection and presentation of information during this period. However, because these literary treatises on the clerical 'type' often also satirise such categorical systems, in part by applying deliberately static

schemas to the dynamism (if not disorder) of nineteenth-century public life, the clerk, as an agent of bureaucratic categorisation, becomes a locus of cultural and conceptual tensions.

The texts covered in Chapters One and Two can be typified by their formal heterogeneity, but in Chapter Three I focus on early attempts to portray office life in novels – specifically looking at those by Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens, written from the 1830s to '50s. I argue that where the repetitiousness and isolation of office work (a life of 'no variety of days') present a clear impediment to its sustained novelistic portrayal, the diverse characterisation of bureaucracy as a social phenomenon covered over the previous chapters means that a wide-ranging body of tropes was available to be consolidated and redeployed to a sometimes contradictory range of effects in the similarly rather prismatic mid-century novel. It is in this combination of the ready applicability of office-related themes to novels of various nineteenth-century genres (supernatural, *Bildungsroman,* and 'social'), along with the strange rarefaction attributed to bureaucracy itself, that produces significant instances of literary experimentation in their portrayal.

By virtue of their bagginess, the novels of the mid-nineteenth century represent a point of conceptual convergence in the literary portrayal of bureaucratisation, but it is also once the conventions surrounding office life become well established that these works' all-encompassing perspective starts to fracture. Accordingly, in Chapter Four I move to the final quarter of the century and the rise of novellas that produced more concerted, and often mutually disparate, portrayals of aspects of office life. I argue that this change in office literature results from both developments in bureaucratisation – namely, bureaucracy's crystallisation as social form, the standardisation of office work, and the expansion and relative feminisation of clerical workforces – as well as related developments in aesthetics: the rise of Naturalism as well as more aestheticist experimentalism – which both share an ambiguous relationship with the persisting stereotypes that underlie the portrayal office life. I stress, however, that the conceptual character of office-related structures as they had so far been established enabled late nineteenth-century authors to make these aesthetic tendencies overlap and intertwine in often provocative ways, despite these later texts' more limited scope.

5. Conclusion

Over the course of this introductory chapter I have introduced a notion of office literature as a literary genre, one that reflects a range of shared conventions, but also shared problematics, underlying nineteenth-century portrayals of office life. I have argued, moreover, that by conducting a history of office literature, and through close readings of its exemplars, we can gauge a sense of the broader process of bureaucratisation in nineteenth-century society, insofar as the office setting becomes a site

in which the various social and conceptual issues underlying this process converge and can be explored in aesthetic terms. The 'reflective' capacity of office literature is exhibited in terms of texts' tendency to illustrate the effects of bureaucratic structures on social organisation, and by conveying their ideological standing in broader society. Moreover, office literature is at once indicative of the pertinence of bureaucratisation to, and its influence upon, literary form, as much as the literature itself plays a key role in the conceptual development, interrogation, and contestation of these social phenomena.

I have established that prior critics have outlined the ambiguous social stature of the clerk as a trope in nineteenth-century literature, and, equally, that the general influence of proliferating information on literature from this period is an increasingly popular topic in nineteenth-century studies. Nevertheless, because I am exploring the office as a site of these personal and impersonal structures' convergence, I also therefore attempted in this chapter to provide a 'unified theory' of bureaucracy, offices, and clerks, illustrating the ambiguous relationship between these three phenomena (a relationship that becomes a recurrent sticking point in their literary portrayal) in both formal and historical terms. I argue that it is because these phenomena are so tightly bound together that they need exploring together, despite their apparent pertinence to a heterogeneous range of disciplines. It is also, however, because these phenomena are so broad ranging that I confine my literary (if not conceptual) focus to portrayals of office life specifically. It is possible to explore nineteenth-century portrayals of bureaucracy, or of the clerk, without the office, but it is harder to argue that nineteenth-century portrayals of office life do not encompass these theoretical, economic, and social issues that underlie bureaucratisation and the emergence of the 'tribe of clerks'.

Chapter One – Origins: From the Desks of Lamb and Ymbert

1. Introduction

Charles Lamb (1775-1834) and Jean-Gilbert Ymbert (c.1784-1846) were both employees of large bureaucratic organisations who turned their experiences of office life into literature – and, indeed, they were among the first (if not *the* first) British and French authors to do so.[88] Writing in the 1810s and '20s, Lamb and Ymbert's works therefore represent a valuable insight into both the formative stages of bureaucratisation in the UK and France, and how this process informed the production of literature. In this chapter I argue that, while there are some clear disparities between Lamb's more commercial conception of the East India Company's central administration, and Ymbert's more political understanding of the civil service under the Bourbon Restoration, both writers' works nonetheless explore issues that underlie the emergence of bureaucracy as a social form. To varying extents, both Lamb and Ymbert display a preoccupation with the relationship of the individual to the institution, and with the interplay between the materiality of office life and the intellectual forms that govern bureaucratic procedure. Both (however idiosyncratically) also explore and problematise the nature of bureaucracy as a historical and social phenomenon. Both writers identify these tensions, and, in turn, these tensions underpin their works' formal and intellectual presuppositions, as well as colouring the content of their observations and personal reflections. Over this chapter I therefore argue that, by reading Lamb and Ymbert together, we see the beginnings of bureaucracy's conceptual development into a sphere to be regarded as distinct from both its impetus and its object of administration, and, in turn, the development of a new literary tradition that will find these themes conducive to literary production.

Ymbert and Lamb's works exhibit clear formal disparities: Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives* (1825) constitutes an epistolary 'course in administration', while Lamb's familiar essays by contrast appear far more intimate and idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, I argue that it is in both authors' playful attention to abstract or intellectual structures that their works resonate with each other, as well as linking them to a style of prose writing that the critic Northrop Frye dubs 'anatomy' (which, among Lamb and Ymbert's predecessors, Frye associates with François Rabelais, Robert Burton, Jonathan Swift, and Laurence Sterne).[89] It is insofar as 'anatomy' studies 'human society […] in terms of an intellectual pattern' that this literature's resonance with the abstract character of bureaucracy is

[88] Although I have also seen Ymbert referred to as '*Jacques*-Gilbert', and occasionally also as 'Imbert', I am referring to him by the name recorded in the contemporary *Biographie universelle* (1854), as well as indexed in the Bibliotheque nationale de France: 'Notice de personne – Jean-Gilbert Ymbert', *BnF* <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb131650424> [accessed 02/03/2021].
[89] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) (Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 311.

evident.[90] However, it is equally because Lamb and Ymbert are *portraying* bureaucratic structures – *applied* intellectual patterns, on an industrial scale – rather than merely vocalising abstraction themselves, that we see a distinction develop between the tradition of 'anatomical' writing and an emergent office literature.

1.1. The origin of office literature and choice of texts

By the end of the nineteenth century, office workers were as recurrent as both major and minor figures in British and French literature as they were a substantial constituent of these countries' workforces; but at the beginning of the century, and as I outlined in the Introductory Chapter, there were far fewer clerks, real or fictional, to be found. Nevertheless, the sites of bureaucratic activity to be found sporadically in France and the UK during the early nineteenth century were the immediate forebears of later widespread bureaucratisation, and so too does the literary portrayal of office life from this period prove to be generically paradigmatic. A logical starting place is with these earliest portrayals, and I seek both to contextualise them and to establish their apparent commonalities. From the UK, I will be reading Charles Lamb's essays, 'The Good Clerk, A Character' (1811), 'The South-Sea House' (1820), and 'The Superannuated Man' (1825), drawing also from his correspondence. From France, I will focus on Jean-Gilbert Ymbert's extended epistolary satire, *Mœurs administratives – pour faire suite aux observations sur les mœurs et les usages français au commencement du XIX^{e} siècle* [Administrative Mores – Pursuant to observations on the mores and manners of the French at the beginning of the nineteenth century] (1825); my choice of these authors and this specific combination of texts will be discussed over the course of this section.

Charles Lamb's essays, published in the periodicals of the 1810s and '20s, largely under his pseudonym 'Elia', appear to be the UK's first literary depictions of office life in any level of detail, and therefore represent a clear starting point for any investigation into English office literature. There is the odd precursor clerk to be found in earlier texts who are endowed with some of the stereotypes associated with office workers in later writing, but clerks and bureaucratic work tend not to form these texts' primary focus, and nor does bureaucracy itself figure prominently. Lamb refers to one such example, opening 'The Superannuated Man' (1825) with a quotation from Samuel Arnold and George Colman the Younger's 1787 slavery-themed comic opera, *Inkle and Yarico* – 'A Clerk I was in London Gay'.[91] While *Inkle and Yarico* sets a strong precedent for the dubious associations made between

[90] Ibid.

[91] Charles Lamb, 'The Superannuated Man' (1825), *The Essays of Elia and the Last Essays of Elia,* ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 278-286 (p. 278); George Colman the Younger, *Inkle and Yarico, An Opera Performed in Three Acts at the Theatre-Royal in the Hay-market on Saturday, August 11th, 1787* (London: C.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1787), pp. 54-55.

clerkdom and slavery, or 'thraldom', that populate later literature, the opera's mercantile theme and exotic settings situate it beyond the bounds of the investigations of the present study. By contrast, Lamb's general *failure* to allude to the colonial project of his employers in his office-set essays sets the tone for a century of portrayals of desk work undertaken to no discernible end. Whereas Ymbert's whole literary career was based on 'lambasting bureaucrats and bureaucracy', in Ralph Kingston's words, Lamb's personal essays did not always focus on the office, however large it looms in his works.[92] The three Lamb essays I have chosen to look at explicitly deal with offices and office workers, but, like Lamb's other writings, these topics are vehicles for his idiosyncratic authorial voice and aleatory frame of reference rather than merely the objects of exposition.

Jean-Gilbert Ymbert, whose life I will outline in more detail in section 3.1. below, was perhaps most famous in his lifetime as a vaudevillian – collaborating with the playwright, Eugène Scribe on a number of one-act comedies, some of which depicted office life. I largely focus here on his epistolary satire, *Mœurs administratives* (1825), a long prose work that claims to be a guide to France's state bureaucracy – but which is more a collection of amusing observations, exposé, and criticism. This work is as much an encyclopaedic hodgepodge of Ymbert's own theatrical back catalogue as it is an exhaustive portrayal of the experience of life in a French ministry: some episodes in the book are adapted from his earlier works, including his first hit (written with Eugène Scribe), the play, *Le Solliciteur, ou l'art d'obtenir des places* [The Supplicant, or the art of getting a job] (1816), his pamphlet, *Des dénonciateurs et des dénonciations* [Denouncers and denunciations] (1816) – while the plot of the later play, *L'intérieur d'un bureau ou le chanson* [Inside an office, or the song] (1823) closely anticipates an episode in Honoré de Balzac's novel, *Les Employés* (1844) which appears in Chapter Three. Conversely, Ymbert also lifted an episode from *Mœurs administratives* to become the standalone stage work, *Le Sous-Chef Gautier* [Sub-Chief Gautier] (1825) – although he changed the setting to a private-sector office to escape the libel laws relating to theatre promulgated under King Charles X.[93] In later chapters we will see that many of the bureaucratic episodes, themes, 'types' or temperaments, even metaphors, that appeared in *Mœurs administratives* recur in later French, and occasionally English, prose works depicting office life. There is some evidence to suggest incidences of direct plagiarism of Ymbert on the part of his immediate successors – notably, the comedian Henry Monnier's 1828 lithograph series entitled *Mœurs administratives,* and his later *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique* [Scenes from bureaucratic life] (1835), both appearing in Chapter Two, which, in turn,

[92] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society,* p. 118.
[93] Ibid., p. 120.

directly 'inspired' Balzac's *Les Employés*.[94] Considering that I am tracing a coherent tradition of office literature across the century, this particular work therefore stands out as a more substantial source than do Ymbert's other works.

Even if Ymbert's heightened focus on office life makes him the first French exponent of 'office literature', this is not to say that *Mœurs administratives* is the first ever literary portrayal of French bureaucracy. The radical French Revolutionary, Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, anticipated many of the tropes of office literature in his diatribes against France's bureaucracy, calling it a 'world of paper'.[95] Anticipating Alexis de Tocqueville's later argument regarding the continuity of French administration between the *Ancien Régime* and the Revolution, Saint-Just declared that 'the offices have replaced monarchism' in a 1793 report delivered to the National Convention, in which he also analogises the laziness and documentary prolixity of the '20,000 fools' that populate these offices with the courtly routines of Versailles.[96] Similarly populistic pronouncements against bureaucracy also appear in the Revolutionary newspaper, *Le Père Duchesne,* which is also credited with coining the term 'bureaucrat'.[97] In more explicitly literary terms, Louis-Benoit Picard's 1797 play, *Médiocre et Rampant, ou le Moyen de Parvenir* [Mediocre and grovelling, or how to get on in life] deals partially with ministerial life under the Directory. However, just as clerkdom is largely incidental to the mercantile narrative of *Inkle and Yarico,* so too is bureaucracy subsumed within Picard's primary focus on politics and sycophancy. We will see in the sections on Ymbert that France's bureaucracy was indeed a highly politicised sphere in contrast to the Weberian bureaucratic ideal, but the distinction between bureaucracy, and the environment in which its routines take place, from its *object* of administration (politics, commerce, social institutions) is a key process in its conceptual development – and therefore that of 'office literature' by extension – and I argue it is a distinction that Lamb and Ymbert work toward alike. Although it is not until the mid-century novels of Chapter Three that the various literary interpretations of the nature of bureaucracy and office life converge into an autonomous body of archetypes, Ymbert's earlier efforts toward this conceptualisation in *Mœurs administratives* make it the first substantial prose work to deal with the office and office work in France.

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[94] G. M. Fess, 'Les Employés and Scènes De La Vie Bureaucratique', *Modern Language Notes*, 43:4 (1928), pp. 236–242.

[95] Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, 'Rapport sur la nécessité de déclarer le gouvernement révolutionnaire jusqu'à la paix', 21 Octobre 1793, *Œuvres Complètes de Saint-Just*, ed. Charles Vellay, 2 vols (Paris : Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1908), II, pp. 74-89 (p. 87) – 'Le ministère est un monde en papier'.

[96] Ibid. - 'la République est en proie à vingt mille sots qui la corrompent […] Je ne sais point comment Rome et l'Egypte se gouvernaient sans cette ressource ; on pensait beaucoup ; on écrivait peu. La prolixité de la correspondance et des ordres du gouvernement est une marque de son inertie ; il est impossible que l'on gouverne sans laconisme. Les représentants du peuple, les généraux, les administrateurs, sont environnées de bureaux comme les anciens hommes de palais ; il ne se fait rien, et la dépense est pourtant énorme. *Les bureaux ont remplacé le monarchisme*' (my emphasis).

[97] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society,* p. 1.

2. Charles Lamb (1775-1834)

2.1. Introduction

From 1792 to 1825, Charles Lamb worked as a clerk in the accounting department of the East India Company, at its headquarters on Leadenhall Street in the City of London. Under the pseudonym, 'Elia' (potentially homophonous with 'a liar') he was also a popular writer of semi-autobiographical 'familiar essays'.[98] Although a friend of the Lake Poets and an associate of the group of fellow writers (pejoratively dubbed the 'Cockney School' by *Blackwoods Magazine*) including John Keats, Leigh Hunt, and William Hazlitt, Lamb's life as a full-time clerk did not fully align with the freewheeling model of a Romantic.[99] While his friend, William Wordsworth was at liberty to amble around Westmorland, Lamb was 'by duty chained' (Wordsworth writes) to the 'merchant's desk' because he needed a steady salary in order to care for his mentally ill sister, Mary.[100] Equally, however, Lamb's workplace does not fully evoke the anonymity of the mid-to-late nineteenth-century clerk. However mind-numbing the labour, East India House had a literati of its own, with its staff roster also including the playwright James Cobb, the Indologist Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, the Utilitarian father and son James and John Stuart Mill, and the satirist Thomas Love Peacock.[101]

This blurring of the literary and the bureaucratic evidently created favourable conditions for the emergence of office literature; conditions that are also reflected in the development of the 'familiar essay' form itself at this time, also employed by Hunt and Hazlitt, and theorised by the latter in *Table-Talk* (1821). In the 'familiar essay', Gregory Dart writes, 'commonplace experiences […] were turned into subjects of relaxed, ingenious and often whimsical meditation, regularly sprinkled with references to the literary classics' – a conceit, Uttara Natarajan argues, that reflects a distinctly Romantic attitude to evoke the metaphysical through the intimate and everyday.[102] It is precisely in this convergence and interplay of the mundane and the 'ingenious', of autobiography and mendacity, that Lamb formulates many of the constitutive elements of office literature.

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[98] For a contemporary outline of this genre of essay writing, see William Hazlitt's, 'On Familiar Style', *Table Talk* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), pp. 329-336.

[99] 'Elia' even appears alongside Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Malthus, Walter Scott, Wordsworth and Byron, in William Hazlitt's *The Spirit of the Age* (1825).

[100] William Wordsworth, 'Written After the Death of Charles Lamb', *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. William Knight, 8 vols (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1882-89), VIII (1886), pp. 17-21 (p. 17).

[101] H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire – The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756-1833* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp. 144-146.

[102] Gregory Dart, 'The Cockney Moment', *The Cambridge Quarterly,* 32:3 (2003), pp. 203-223 (p. 207); Uttara Natarajan, 'The Veil of Familiarity: Romantic Philosophy and the Familiar Essay', *Studies in Romanticism,* 42:1 (2003), pp. 27-44 (p. 30).

This is not to say that the first meeting of office life and literature, however fortuitous, was a happy one. Where the high-ranking 'examiner', John Stuart Mill later wrote in his autobiography (1873) that his was an ideal career for 'anyone who, not being in independent circumstances, desires to devote a part of the twenty-four hours to private intellectual pursuits', Lamb the clerk put it differently, complaining to Wordsworth that he had only the 'four pent walls' of 'official confinement' and the 'pestilential clerk faces' of his fellow inmates to inspire him.[103] Reflecting the 'egotistical sublime' of his Romantic correspondent, Lamb's essays, like his letters, provide a highly subjective and individualised account of office life, but his dissatisfaction can in part be pegged to an ongoing process of bureaucratisation at East India House.[104]

Lamb started working for the East India Company in 1792, and these early years still evoked the 'Old Corruption' of the eighteenth century: Lamb paid for his position, and he was constantly playing around and engaging in pranks, as historian, Vahé Baladouni details in 'Charles Lamb, A Man of Letters in the Accountant's Department of the East India Company' (1990).[105] But, as H.V. Bowen writes in his history of the Company, *The Business of Empire* (2006), the middle years of Lamb's career corresponded with 'a campaign of retrenchment designed to cut costs and improve efficiency', which imposed 'several significant restrictions […] upon clerical staff', including cuts to holidays and holiday pay, extension of working hours, and the abolition of the office do – the 'yearly turtle feast'.[106] Baladouni adds that not only did all employees have to sign in and out of work, they also had to sign an attendance book every quarter of an hour.[107]

During this period, Bowen writes, Lamb constantly 'denounced the Accountant and Deputy-Accountant as "true liberty-haters", and "tyrants"' in his correspondence – and only upon retirement [in 1825] was he able to 'laugh off his complaints against the Company as "Lovers' quarrels"'.[108] But the new 'tyranny' at East India House was representative of the early stages of bureaucratisation:

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[103] John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), p. 58; Charles Lamb, Letter CLXXXIX, to William Wordsworth, March 20, 1822, *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, ed. Alfred Ainger, 2 vols (London: Macmillan and co., 1888), II, pp. 39-41 (p. 40).

[104] John Keats, 'To Richard Woodhouse – 27 Oct. 1818', *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Sidney Colvin (London: Macmillan, 1928), pp. 183-185 (p. 184).

[105] Vahé Baladouni, 'Charles Lamb: A Man of Letters and a Clerk in the Accountant's Department of the East India Company', *The Accounting Historians' Journal,* 17:2 (December, 1990), pp. 21-36 (p. 22). See Mann on 'Old Corruption', pp. 454-455. It was largely in the mid-nineteenth century in Britain that recruitment practices in state and quasi-state organisations became more meritocratic, a representative trend in bureaucratisation more broadly: see Oliver MacDonagh, *Early Victorian Government – 1830-1870* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 197-213.

[106] Bowen, p. 147, p. 149.

[107] Baladouni, p. 25.

[108] Bowen, p. 149; Charles Lamb, Letter CLXIX, To Mrs. Wordsworth, February 18, 1818, *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, II, pp. 10-14 (p. 14); Lamb, Letter CCVII, to Bernard Barton, January 9, 1823, *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, II, pp. 61-63 (p. 63).

> As Charles Lamb's experience would seem to suggest, the Company's clerks worked harder and their activities were subjected to greater levels of regulation and control. Conditions of service, career paths, salaries and pensions all became standardised; working conditions became regular and uniform; practices and attitudes became more professional. In part, these important changes occurred as a necessary response to the increasing volume and complexity of the business that needed to be conducted by the East India Company, but they also mirrored the emergence of a permanent civil service within the British state. As a result, Lamb had hundreds of counterparts in offices across London who performed the same tasks with similar rewards, and in that sense he was entirely typical of a new breed of full-time, salaried administrator.[109]

This ongoing process of standardisation and abstraction reflects a general tendency at this time 'towards the creation of ever more complex systems of information gathering, handling, and classification', Bowen continues, and at East India House this process was devoted to constructing an ever more precise vision of activities in India: an 'empire in writing'.[110] Indeed, it is perhaps in Lamb's relative obliviousness to, or ignorance of, the activities of his employers on the other side of the world – relating his 'surprise' at his eloquence on 'the state of the India market' in his essay 'The Old and New Schoolmaster' (1821), and conveying a fantastical image of China in 'A Dissertation upon Roast Pig' (1822) – that we also therefore see one of the chief paradoxes of bureaucratisation: that the all-encompassing knowledge of the institution is predicated upon the narrow routines of its constituents.[111] Of course, it is through a heightened focus upon office life itself, rather than the object of administration, that office literature is to be defined – and therefore the tension between the office as a source of inspiration and as an engine of stultification is reflected in Lamb's office-set essays.

2.2. 'The Good Clerk, A Character – With some account of "The Complete English Tradesman"' (1811)

Published in Leigh Hunt's short-lived quarterly magazine, *The Reflector* (1810-11), Lamb's brief 'character study' seems at first simply to be a forerunner of the many office 'types' that populate later nineteenth-century fiction. It is however in the degree to which Lamb undercuts such reductive typology throughout the essay that we see a more complex process taking place. Both Lamb's ironical style, and also his rather muddled conceptualisation of the clerk (combining servile deference with

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Lamb also evokes the formal-historical tension outlined in the Introductory Chapter in the 1818 letter, writing that 'the dear abstract notion of the East India Company, as long as she is unseen, is pretty, rather poetical; but as she makes herself manifest by the persons of such beasts, I loathe and detest her as the scarlet what-do-you-call-her of Babylon', p. 14.

[109] Bowen, p. 149.

[110] Ibid., p. 153.

[111] Charles Lamb, 'The Old and New Schoolmaster', *Essays of Elia*, pp. 70-79 (p. 73). See also Lamb's facetiously Orientalist letters to his friend, the sinologist Thomas Manning, in *The Letters of Charles Lamb*: Letter XCVII, 19th February 1803 (I, pp. 194-196); Letter CVIII, 24 February 1805 (I, pp. 210-212); and Letter CXXXIV, 2 January 1810, (pp. 255-259).

commercial cunning), reflect a literature that will eternally problematise its object, but they also suggest the still emergent historical character of bureaucracy and office work as separate categories during this period.

The essay opens without context, already in the throes of prescription: 'THE GOOD CLERK. – he writeth a fair and swift hand, and is competently versed in the Four First Rules of Arithmetic'.[112] It continues in this vein, with each homily espoused in Lamb's faux-archaic style: 'he is clean and neat in his person', Lamb writes,' 'not from a vain-glorious desire of setting himself forth to advantage in the eyes of the other sex […] but to do credit (as we say) to the office'; and 'he riseth early in the morning; not because early rising conduceth to health […] but chiefly to the intent that he may be first at the desk'.[113] Throughout the first half of the essay, which builds up this clerical archetype, Lamb presents an image of sacrifice, restraint, and probity: all personal qualities which, whatever benefit they may provide those that embody them, are upheld first and foremost for the benefit of the firm. It is as if self-interest is wholly concordant with, and happily subsumed by, institutional interest: 'his first ambition (as appeareth all along) is to be a good Clerk; his next a good Christian, a good Patriot &c.'[114] Even deities and monarchs come second to red tape.

The essay begins in a heightened version of Lamb's usual Jacobean idiom – a 'rambling, "wit-melancholy" style', Adam Philips writes – that Lamb seemingly lifted from Robert Burton's copious, idiosyncratic, and allusive *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).[115] Lamb adopts this style in a range of essays, and uses it to fit a variety of purposes, but in 'The Good Clerk' its patent artificiality suggests to us that this paean to one who 'regulateth his desires by the custom house or firm to which he belongeth' might not be totally sincere.[116] Indeed, the sense of irony that underlies Lamb's style, his periodic allusions to writers like Lawrence Sterne and Jonathan Swift across his essays, and the general allusiveness of the 'familiar essay' as a form, all affiliate Lamb's work to Northrop Frye's concept of 'anatomy'.[117] An expansion of Menippean satire, Frye writes that 'anatomy' 'deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes': it is satirical or jocular in tone, but coolly abstracting in its gaze, and engages in a kind of bloodless 'dissection or analysis' into the intellectual temperaments of society.[118] Especially in keeping with Lamb's highly prescriptive and mannered portrayal of the ideal clerk, Frye

[112] Charles Lamb, 'The Good Clerk, A Character', *Selected Prose,* ed. Adam Phillips (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), pp. 71-76 (p. 71).
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Adam Philips, Introduction to Lamb, *Selected Prose*, pp. 11-24 (pp. 19-20). See also Hazlitt's, 'On Familiar Style', in *Table Talk,* p. 333.
[116] Lamb, 'The Good Clerk', p. 72.
[117] Frye, p. 311.
[118] Ibid., p. 304, p. 311.

writes that characterisation in anatomy 'is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent'.[119] 'Anatomy' is therefore a useful term to use with regard to depictions of clerks and bureaucracies, governed as they are by intellectual schemas and preestablished roles; but it is also insofar as Lamb, by mapping 'anatomy' onto office life itself rather than just the manner of its portrayal, forces an interpenetration of formal and diegetic themes that expands and complicates the satirical mode he adopts.

Lamb's facetiousness is confirmed in 'The Good Clerk' when we stumble upon a Shandean detour – a change which corroborates, yet complicates, our suspicion that Lamb is an intellectual parodist. Halfway through the essay, Lamb drops his archaic style and breaks from extolling the virtues of this self-abnegating ideal to address us directly, writing that he himself 'sketched' this character 'to divert some of the melancholy hours of the Counting House'.[120] Although Lamb makes the perfunctory qualification that he had only written the essay to idle away 'an interval of business', because this image of a dedicated worker is penned by a clerk in the workplace, we see that the values that govern his classification are belied through the act of its inscription.[121] With every second of his workday that Lamb spends composing a hymn to self-subordination, he undermines its sincerity.[122] That the form (or, more accurately, the process of forming) the essay should undermine its content and guiding principles not only showcases the intricacy of Lamb's ironic voice: it also sets the terms for a literary tradition that capitalises upon the potential antagonism between abstract principles and their 'earthly' execution to which office work gives rise. Lamb therefore not only begins his essay, in keeping with Frye's sense of 'anatomy', as a 'mouthpiece' that he later undercuts – but, by analogising in turn the *role* of mouthpiece with the self-alienating character of clerical work, he also stresses that the satirical form of his essay is itself immanent to office life.

Lamb's concerted use of irony therefore obliquely reflects the willing self-alienation of 'the good clerk', just as his highly affected style reflects the everyday structures of office life; and he goes on to accentuate this paradoxical conceit in the second half of the essay, where he explores the origin and implications of the sanctimonious idiom that he has so far, it now transpires, been parodying. Lamb writes that the tone he cultivated for the essay is

> a recollection of some of those frugal and economical maxims which, about the beginning of the last century, (England's meanest period) were endeavoured to be

[119] Ibid., p. 309.
[120] Lamb, 'The Good Clerk', pp. 72-73.
[121] Ibid., p. 73.
[122] See Simon-Nicolas Henri Linguet, *Théorie des lois civiles,* 2 vols (London, 1767), II, p. 466 – 'If the free worker rests for an instant, the base and petty management which watches over him with wary eyes claims he is stealing from it.' (tr. Ben Fowkes); and Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, p. 342 – a worker who is idle on company time is held to have '[robbed] the capitalist'.

> inculcated and instilled into the breasts of London Apprentices by a class of instructors who might not inaptly be termed *The Masters of Mean Morals*.[123]

Lamb continues that he models his mean moralism in particular on Daniel Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman* (1726), which, in its 'pompous detail, [its] studied analysis of every little mean art, every sneaking address, every trick and subterfuge (short of larceny) that is necessary to the tradesman's occupation', echoes Lamb's own insincerity in the first half of his essay.[124]

Indeed, Lamb is so astounded that Defoe can write sincerely that 'the retail tradesman' must be 'a perfect *complete hypocrite* if he will be a *complete tradesman*', that he posits that Defoe himself was writing in bad faith.[125] In the second half of his essay Lamb therefore implicitly analyses the complicated interplay of equivocation he cultivated in the first by exploring whether Defoe's advice to his readers to behave deceitfully in order to get rich is itself sincere, or whether it ought to be read in 'an *ironical sense,* and as a piece of *covered satire*'.[126] However, not only does Lamb's reading of Defoe therefore corroborate the conflicted sense of overlap between Lamb's own ironical style and the self-denial he attributes to the ideal clerk, so too does Lamb's decision to situate this tension in a primer for cultivating the 'mercantile spirit' illustrate the still ambiguous understanding of office work as a social phenomenon.[127]

It is in the separation between action and intent that underlies Defoe's advice, and potentially also his style, that we can appreciate Lamb's decision to outline his 'good clerk' in the idiom of *The Complete English Tradesman* – mirroring as it does the separation of ideas and their inscription that underpins clerical labour, which Lamb playfully repurposes in turn for his own satirical voice. Nevertheless, it seems strange to associate the clerk with the 'mercantile spirit'. Defoe's idea is that tradesmen, those who engage in commerce, must repeatedly construct and reconstruct *provisional* structures of subordination through bad faith shows of obsequiousness, and that these shows of inferiority are directly contingent on the self-same fact that they are intended to obscure – that, at 'the bottom of all', Lamb writes, is the transactional reality of the market: that one equal party is 'intending to get money by [the other]'.[128] By contrast, we have already seen that Lamb himself was subject to the strict rules of East India House, and, as David Lockwood writes in his classic social study of clerks, *The Blackcoated Worker* (1958), whatever necessity there may have been for interpersonal

[123] Lamb, 'The Good Clerk', p. 73.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid, pp. 74-75. Lamb mainly seems to focus on letter eight of Defoe's book, 'of the ordinary occasions of the ruin of tradesmen', Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman,* 2nd ed. (London: Charles Rivington, 1727), pp. 80-96 (p. 94 for the specific citation).
[126] Lamb, 'The Good Clerk', p. 73.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid., p. 75.

skills between clerk and employer in the smaller counting houses, the nineteenth-century clerk was not an interconnected agent, a node in a transactional network – rather, clerks were, 'as a class, fragmented and isolated in small groups in a great many offices and business', their lives characterised by 'servitude, dependence, and low income.'[129]

Equally, just as the free play of the market is countermanded by the hierarchical structures of the firm, so too does the bureaucratic division of labour preclude any sense of the open, self-regulating, sphere in which Defoe's tradesman ostensibly operated. As Bowen writes, Lamb and his colleagues at East India House had little chance of advancement or transfer – 'most clerical staff […] ended their working lives where they began' and training was therefore limited to one's immediate job role.[130] Not only did the structure of the Company therefore remain a mystery, but 'few clerks could ever have gained any real understanding of how their daily duties related to the Company's activities in the wider world.'[131] Lamb never says why 'the good clerk', an inhabitant of very real structures of subordination and isolation, would similarly be obliged to ape this commercial demeanour – why the good clerk's deference must appear as a product of his personal 'main spring or motive', rather than as behaviour imposed from above.[132] A comparable tension between command and autonomy is identified in the seminal economic analysis of corporate structures, 'The Nature of the Firm' (1937), in which Ronald Coase writes that his fellow economists tend to imagine an economy that 'works itself' via the price mechanism, rather than by coordinated planning.[133] Although Coase couches his attempt to introduce coordinated structures into the Neoclassical model in rational terms, with Lamb's 'The Good Clerk' we see that this error reflects a longstanding theoretical uncertainty about the kinds of intangible tasks conducive to commercial operations, but which are a step removed from the market itself.

The ambiguity between market and firm that underlies Lamb's essay is reflected in turn in that between office and literature. Because Lamb explicitly acknowledges the process of writing 'The Good Clerk' it becomes clear that the essay's conceptual tensions are not simply contained within the work itself: as always with Lamb, there is a semi-autobiographical edge. Lamb stressed throughout his life that clerical employment directly impinged upon his ability to engage in non-clerical writing. Andrea Komlosy, in *Work: The Last 1,000 Years* (2014) describes this as a problem that lies in the 'dual nature and divergent experiences' of work as, on the one side, a means to 'self-actualization', and, on the

[129] Lockwood, p. 32, p. 30.
[130] Bowen, p. 141.
[131] Ibid., p. 143.
[132] Lamb, 'The Good Clerk', p. 71.
[133] Ronald Coase, 'The Nature of the Firm', *Economica,* New Series, 4:16 (November, 1937), pp. 386-405 (p. 387).

other, a 'compulsion'.[134] In 1815, Lamb wrote to Wordsworth of finding himself at the mercy of this 'dual nature', complaining that, although he once thought himself 'a bit of a genius', now 'I "engross" [that is, draw up an official document] when I should "pen" a paragraph', as if the constraining structures of official labour seeped into, or overlapped onto, his consciousness, in turn frustrating his creative autonomy.[135] Gerald Monsman dismisses this as a general malady of modernity, writing that Lamb's 'bitter complaints to correspondents about his India House bondage seem to some degree the product of a more pervasive conflict between art and financial necessity that plagued his whole generation.'[136] However, Lamb's implication that the mechanical similarity of 'engrossing' a document and penning a paragraph causes them, their psychic disparities notwithstanding, to converge, reasserts the distinction that office work creates between information or ideas and their instrumentalised articulation.

Lamb therefore problematises the studied deference of 'the good clerk' as soon as he has constructed it: in cultivating his clerk's uniform ideology, he simultaneously hints toward its conceptual syncretism and instability. Moreover, in tracing clerical demeanour back to a certain brand of bourgeois obsequiousness, he also anticipates later jibes about clerical social pretensions without articulating them himself. Indeed, the essay's midway change of tack, thereby giving it a peculiar *literary* syncretism, is also indicative of the kind of formal idiosyncrasies in which the writer of office literature will have to engage in order to accommodate such conceptual contradictions. Lamb's essay therefore recalls the formal-historical tension surrounding bureaucracy outlined in the Introductory Chapter: the clerk figures as an emergent feature of commerce, and therefore retains its connotations, but also operates in conditions that increasingly divorced from the sphere that he serves.

Although Lamb's essay invents the clerk as a literary 'type', it also struggles to articulate the new field in which this 'type' operates. The word 'bureaucracy' does not appear at all in the essay, and the political, legalistic, or administrative connotations thereof are abjured in favour of more mercantile and 'economical' (if not economistic) terminology.[137] Lamb's essay is therefore as much a point of divergence as it is an assortment of ideas and forms: he plays up the sense of the clerk as 'a creature of fancy', an object to be contemplated, classified, and caricatured – but he also works consistently to undermine this same perspective, to re-historicise this 'type', to resituate him within a labour process that is distinct from, but which is dictated by, the (potentially conflicting) demands of

[134] Andrea Komlosy, *Work: The Last 1,000 Years* (2014), tr. Jacob K. Watson and Loren Balhorn (London: Verso, 2018), p. 25.
[135] Lamb, Letter CLII, to Wordsworth, 1815, *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, I, pp. 286-290 (p. 289).
[136] Gerald Monsman, 'Charles Lamb's Elia as Clerk: The Commercial Employment of a Literary Writer', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 21:3, (1990), pp. 96-100 (p. 97).
[137] The first recorded English-language iteration of the term is 1815 – although 'bureaucratic' first appeared in 1800.

the firm and the market.[138] It is insofar as this reflects further onto the tensions between literary production and scrivening – their mutual antipathy and ready overlap – that the office emerges in this essay as a key site of conceptual conflict.

2.3. 'The South-Sea House' (1820)

In 1791, after leaving school, but before taking up his position at East India House, Lamb briefly worked for the South Sea Company. This essay, the first of Lamb's 'Elia' essays written for *The London Magazine*, amounts to a reminiscence of this first job. The South Sea Company, founded in 1711, and perhaps best known for the infamous 1720 speculative 'bubble', had long passed its prime by Lamb's brief stint, and, by the year of this essay's composition, Lamb '[takes] for granted' that 'time […] has not freshened' it since.[139] The essay thus takes two chronological perspectives: what starts as a wistful remembrance of the ragtag world of late eighteenth-century administration, soon collides with a more fantastical conceptualisation of the grand trading companies of the early eighteenth century. More explicitly than 'The Good Clerk', in 'The South-Sea House', Lamb constructs a pseudohistory of bureaucracy via these two perspectives – perspectives whose mutual contradiction in turn problematises their subject, and in turn its relation to the financial swindles it once helped administrate.

Lamb writes nostalgically that his old colleagues gave off 'an air very different to the public offices [he has] had to do with since'.[140] Where his contemporary desk-mates perhaps accorded more to the self-abnegating incarnation that appeared in the previous essay, Lamb's former colleagues were

> Humourists, for they were of all descriptions; and, not having been brought together in early life (which has a tendency to assimilate the members of corporate bodies to each other), but, for the most part, placed in this house in ripe or middle age, they necessarily carried into it their separate habits and oddities, unqualified, if I may so speak, as into a common stock. Hence they formed a sort of Noah's ark. Odd fishes. A lay-monastery. Domestic retainers in a great house, kept more for show than use. Yet pleasant fellows, full of chat.[141]

These clerks' respective idiosyncrasies, and their quasi-ornamental (rather than industrious) quality, already takes us to new ground. The clerks of the South Sea House are not (and cannot be) readily lumped into one single archetype: Lamb instead '[summons] from the dusty dead' a motley

[138] Lamb, 'The Good Clerk', p. 73.
[139] Charles Lamb, 'The South-Sea House' (1820), *Essays of Elia,* pp. 1-9 (p. 2). On the South Sea Bubble – from David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* – 'The famous South Sea Bubble in 1720 – in which a newly formed trading company, granted a monopoly of trade with the Spanish colonies, bought up a considerable portion of the British national debt and saw its shares briefly skyrocket before collapsing in ignominy – was only the culmination' of a series of speculative "bubbles" brought on by the development of joint-stock companies and credit-money during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.' pp. 341-342.
[140] Lamb, 'The South-Sea House', p. 3.
[141] Ibid., p. 4.

constellation that includes macaronies, wits, rakes, decayed and would-be aristocrats.[142] Indeed, it is when Lamb explicitly associates the characters of South Sea House with 'those grotesque figures which Hogarth has immortalized' that the kind of eighteenth-century scene he is trying to convey solidifies.[143]

The heterogeneity of Lamb's clerks forms a kind of shorthand (rendered shorter still by the allusion to Hogarth) for the sense of nostalgia he is trying to evoke: the South Sea Company is portrayed less like a modern firm powered by an anonymous corps of bureaucrats, each of whom is engaging in readily fungible labour, and more an enterprise administrated by a mixed bag of workers who mirror what Weber described as the 'plutocratic and collegial administration' of eighteenth-century England as a whole.[144] Through the affection and nostalgia that Lamb exhibits in 'The South-Sea House', his old colleagues thus obscure the institution itself rather than embody it, as in the case of 'The Good Clerk'. The South Sea Company (in Lamb's memory at least) therefore comes to represent a pre-bureaucratic bureaucracy – a bucolic fantasy of artisanal desk work: 'a magnificent relic!', as Lamb writes.[145] And it is upon this rather paradoxical premise that Lamb starts to build his grand pseudohistory of the office.

Whereas Lamb himself, paying for his position at East India House and railing against any overtures toward standardisation, appears to us to have himself been a bit of a relic, his old colleagues, the 'odd fishes', at the South Sea Company were even more so. A historical arc starts to build, therefore, which Lamb follows back even further in his portrayal of the South Sea House itself. His *capriccio*-style description of the structure itself gives off a powerful sense of the epic, consisting of

> stately porticos; imposing staircases; offices roomy as the state apartments in palaces — deserted, or thinly peopled with a few straggling clerks; the still more sacred interiors of court and committee rooms, with […] long worm-eaten tables, that have been mahogany, with tarnished gilt-leather coverings, supporting massy silver inkstands long since dry...[146]

Lamb continues with this jarring amalgamation of the sublime and the bureaucratic: imagining that now, any adventurer into these ruins, 'inquisitive to explore the mode of book-keeping in Queen Anne's reign', will not have to contend only with the 'superfoetation of dirt' that encrusts the ancient ledgers, but also with Mammon himself, who stalks its corridors.[147] The treasure-hunter should also beware that an epic age of finance obliges administration of a similar scale: 'scarce three degenerate

[142] Ibid., p. 8.
[143] Ibid., p. 5.
[144] Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 209.
[145] Lamb, 'The South-Sea House', p. 2.
[146] Ibid., p. 1.
[147] Ibid., p. 2.

clerks of the present day' could lift the South Sea Company account books – 'great dead tomes' – from their shelves.[148] Like the gigantic ancestors of modern humans that appear in the more pseudohistorical sections of Giambattista Vico's *New Science* (1744), raised with no fear of 'Gods, fathers, and teachers' (and perhaps also employers), Lamb's mighty precursor clerks do not form the kind of 'corporate body' that constitutes a modern, bureaucratised office.[149]

Taking us from the gigantic ancients, via the variegated Hogarthian oddballs of his youth, to the assimilated agglomeration of anonymous clerks in his present, Lamb thus builds up an allegorical history of bureaucratisation – but the purpose of this process is ambiguous. His ruinous musings and 'pre-corporate' nostalgia certainly situate him obliquely within contemporary trends in aesthetics: the essay anticipates Joseph Gandy's own depiction of decaying offices in *A Bird's-eye view of the Bank of England* (1830), and there is a broader sense that Lamb is playing on the ambivalent feelings that underlay the 'ruin gazing' of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – which either 'reaffirmed the Enlightenment's teleological narrative of progress' towards a rational future, or served as a reminder of the transitoriness of empires and civilisations.[150] Indeed, ruination and rationalisation here seem to amount to the same thing. And moreover, the fantastical historical narrative that Lamb creates also stresses the irony that the South Sea offices, designed to document and record the activities of commerce, evince no clear history of their own.

If Lamb's fantasy of a class of mighty precursor clerks, barbarian cyclopes studiously filling in giant ledgers, seems like a contradiction in terms, it becomes necessary to question his historical arc in general. The fact that the essay starts with an allusion to the possible hoax Gaelic poet, 'Ossian' – whose historical contentiousness was a popular source of debate in Lamb's day – may figure as a deliberate ploy on Lamb's part to burst a pseudo-historical bubble before it might ever in earnest be inflated.[151] In this light, Lamb's fantasy of an epic pre-history of finance and bureaucracy becomes an exercise in pastiche – an appropriation of what Mikhail Bakhtin, in 'Epic and Novel' (1941), later called 'the epic past': the literary sense of a heroic age that is 'walled off absolutely from all subsequent

[148] Ibid., p. 3.

[149] Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, tr. David Marsh (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 140.

[150] Joseph Gandy, *A Bird's-eye view of the Bank of England* (1830), watercolour on paper, 845mm x 1400mm, Sir John Soane's Museum, London; Shane McGowan, 'The Sublime Working of History: Travel, Ruins, and the Romantic Origins of the Post-Apocalyptic Aesthetic', *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (Wayne State University, Detroit, 11 November 2012), cited in Dora Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline* (New Brunswick NJ, Rutgers UP: 2015), p. 13; Apel, p. 14.

[151] Lamb, 'The South-Sea House', p. 1. 'James Macpherson "discovered" the lost work of the early Gaelic poet, Ossian, and in the process manufactured a primitive world in which heroes exhibited the primal qualities of high courage, chivalrous love and humanity.' – Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, & Reactionaries* (Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 16-17.

times'.[152] However, the fact that this epic pastiche converges with Lamb's reminiscences of his underwhelmingly incompetent old colleagues creates a sense of two historical perspectives colliding: the legendary and the nostalgic. The past is at once 'walled off' and within living memory. Indeed, the fantasy of record-books so ancient and huge that they cannot be read by modern clerks – thereby defeating the whole point of keeping records – corroborates the essay's broader sense of paradoxical simultaneity of legendary and recorded history; as do his references to the South-Sea Bubble itself – referred to at one point as a 'tremendous HOAX' – contribute to a recurring sense of the overlap of myth and reality (to be ignored at the investor's own risk).[153]

Guy Thuillier and François Monnier write that 'the unfolding and perception of time plays an important role in administrative life, but specialists of administrative science and historians of administration alike ignore it.'[154] The ahistorically continuous fulfilment of tasks and procedures must be reconciled against the actual history of the organisation, as do the competing institutional-level processes of reform, obsolescence, and speculation jar against the accretive sense of time perceived by the clerk. Time in the office and its perception also form a major issue in its literary portrayal: as we will see in Chapter Three, it is the relationship between these competing temporalities, and their disjunction in turn with that of the novel, that forms an impediment to the portrayal of the office in longer works. In a similar vein, Lamb's object of focus in 'The South-Sea House' is less the character of office work itself, and more the strange temporality that governs this space. The archetypal processes underlying bureaucratisation – rationalisation, stabilisation, and standardisation – are here ironically reframed in declinist terms, ushering us from a largely fantastical heroic past into an all-too real disenchanted present, and thereby leaving us with the paradox that bureaucracy was great when it was not bureaucratic. The history of the institution also seems to jar with Lamb's sense of his own life: the idealised 'lay-monastery' of yesteryear, populated by oddball clerks, is not only destroyed through the passing of time – it is also undermined by Lamb's own ironical repudiation of his own capacity for memory, by which competing images of yesteryear countermand one another. Lamb's essay becomes the site of a struggle between official history and personal memory, and these synthesise in Lamb's faux-Romantic mythology – itself as false and fragile as 'that famous BUBBLE'.[155]

[152] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. Michael Holquist, tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 3-40 (p. 15).
[153] Lamb, 'The South-Sea House', p. 2.
[154] Monnier and Thuillier, *L'Histoire de la bureaucratie,* p. 87 – 'Le déroulement et la perception du temps jouent un rôle important dans la vie administrative, mais les spécialistes de la science administrative, tout comme les historiens de l'administration, les ignorent.'
[155] Lamb, 'The South-Sea House', p. 2.

2.4. 'The Superannuated Man' (1825)

In this essay, presumably inspired by Lamb's own receipt of a pension and his departure from East India House in the year of its publication, the titular 'Superannuated Man' narrates the circumstances surrounding his retirement, as well as his subjective experience of this transition. In so doing, Lamb combines the contradictions that underlay 'the Good Clerk' with the ambiguous interpenetration of official and personal chronologies from 'The South-Sea House' – resituating these antagonisms in the narrator's own consciousness. While it aligns with Lamb's other office pieces in terms of structure and its moments of facetiousness ('superannuation' itself is a pun on old-age and a pension) Lamb's verbal originality is countervailed upon by the more melancholy temperament that we saw expressed in his correspondence.

The essay's hybrid, seriocomic tone is reflected in two distinct perspectives. Wordsworth writes in 'Written After the Death of Charles Lamb' (1835) that 'Not seldom did [Lamb's] tasks/ Tease, and the thought of time so spent depress/ His spirit', and it is similarly the narrator's sense of time in this essay that manifests these two perspectives.[156]

> If peradventure, Reader, it has been thy lot to waste the golden years of thy life – thy shining youth – in the irksome confinement of an office; to have thy prison days prolonged through middle age down to decrepitude and silver hairs, without hope of release or respite; to have lived to forget that there are such things as holidays, or to remember them but as the prerogatives of childhood; then, and then only, will you be able to appreciate my deliverance.[157]

The first temporal perspective is in keeping with the narrator's sense of introspection, of a mind that flits between its present and past incarnations – whose experience of time is as a personal quality, one only to be recognised by those who have undergone similar life experiences. The second perspective seemingly contradicts the first: while wallowing in his own sense of time, Lamb also conveys it as an objective quantity – a resource to be wasted, a mandated sentence that can be shortened, or, more likely, prolonged.

These seemingly incommensurable perceptual registers of office time coexist and intertwine rather than countermand one another. While clerical employment is predicated upon an objective, countable conception of time spent in the office, this institutional schema appears abstracted from the subjective experience of work in the same way that the entries pertaining to various colonial commodities in Lamb's ledgers are untethered from these goods' real material existence (figuring merely as the 'arithmetical figures and names of gourds, cassia, cardamoms, aloes, ginger, or tea', as

[156] Wordsworth, 'Written After the Death of Charles Lamb', p. 17.
[157] Lamb, 'The Superannuated Man', pp. 278-279.

Lamb wrote in an 1818 letter).[158] But it is also through this sense of abstraction that Lamb's narrator's labours divorce him from the immediate material existence of the office itself. It is in this effect of simultaneous abstraction and embodiment, of deracination and constraint, that Lamb roots the melancholic daydreaming in which the essay's narrator is inclined to indulge.

The narrator's tendency to daydream extends to anticipating his own obsolescence, and he increasingly feels himself to be an ineffectual clerk:

> This, during my latter years, had increased to such a degree, that it was visible in all the lines of my countenance. […] I had perpetually a dread of some crisis, to which I should be found unequal. Besides my daylight servitude, I served over again all night in my sleep, and would awake with terrors of imaginary false entries, errors in my accounts, and the like. […] I had grown to my desk, as it were; and the wood had entered into my soul.[159]

Here again in this portrayal of work-related stress, Lamb trades in pseudo-quantitative vocabulary – the 'degree' of his fear, a crisis 'to which he should be found unequal' – as if he has not only grown to his desk, but so too has he become half-man, half-ledger, his 'lined countenance' its top page (his colleagues can even read 'the trouble legible in his countenance').[160] By articulating unquantifiable subjective experiences through the schemas of the office, Lamb's paradoxical metaphors ultimately burst the confines of measurability, while retaining their quantitative appearance: we see that, just as the sleep of reason produces monsters, so too does the sleep of clerkdom invoke the unending proliferation of 'false entries' – empty bureaucratic signifiers that haunt the office worker.

Continuing in this pseudo-quantitative vein, Lamb's narrator writes that, being visibly driven to distraction by his stress, he finds himself 'directly taxed' by the junior partner of his firm. Lamb writes that

> so taxed, I honestly made confession of my infirmity, and added that I was afraid I should eventually be obliged to resign his service. He spoke some words of course to hearten me, and there the matter rested. A whole week I remained labouring under the impression that I had acted imprudently in my disclosure; that I had foolishly given a handle against myself, and had been anticipating my own dismissal.[161]

In describing this exchange between boss and clerk in pecuniary terms – as a tax – Lamb very clearly marks out the conceptual overlap between information and value that underpins his labour. This is not a transactional, market-based, conception of information exchange, however – Lamb's decision to describe his 'confession' as a tax stresses the extent to which all behaviour in a hierarchical

[158] Lamb, Letter CLXIX, To Mrs. Wordsworth, February 18, 1818, *The Letters of Charles Lamb,* II, pp. 10-14 (p. 10).
[159] Lamb, 'The Superannuated Man', p. 280.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid., p. 281.

bureaucratic institution is subject to both commodification *and* structures of authority. What appears to be a moment of compassion is thus reframed as a power dynamic: as with 'The Good Clerk', office life blurs the boundaries of self and role.[162] Fortunately for Lamb's narrator, he is instead offered a 'pension for life to the amount of two-thirds of [his] accustomed salary – a magnificent offer!'[163] But this is by no means a happy ending: the dual perspective to which Lamb's narrator falls victim persists into his retirement, and therefore needs unpicking.

The extent to which Lamb plays on conceptions of quantification and abstraction – and their tentative relation to personal experience – evokes the contemporary discourse surrounding political economy. The Romantics and other critics of this still fairly young discipline asserted that an aesthetic, or even spiritual, 'value', as a qualitative phenomenon, was incommensurate with the quantitative reductions of the political economist – they cultivated what Barbara Herrnstein Smith has since called 'the double discourse of value'.[164] Coleridge wrote in 1818 that political economy 'is a science that begins with abstractions, in order to exclude whatever is not subject to a technical calculation', thereby failing to account for 'morals, health, [and] humanity'.[165] In this light, political economy's methodological shortcomings in turn become intellectual and even ethical shortcomings. Defenders of the discipline disavowed this idea of a zero-sum game between two discourses of value, with John Ramsay McCulloch in 1824 writing that the economist's 'business is with man in the aggregate, [not with the] conduct of a solitary individual.'[166] However, because Lamb's narrator struggles to divide his solitary idiosyncrasies from the technical calculations upon which his labours are predicated, his essay stresses that this intellectual divide has its points of convergence.

Lamb's essay combines the opposing sides of the 'double discourse' in part because these vying schemas figured in contemporary debates about labour that implicated administrative work. Doubt had been cast upon the economic status of this kind of work ever since Adam Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations,* had argued that agriculture and manufacture were the only 'productive' kinds of labour. All other work, including *both* of Lamb's spheres of operation – artistic and administrative work – was 'unproductive': 'how honourable, how useful, or how necessary' it may be, Smith wrote, it 'does not fix or realize itself in any particular subject or vendible commodity'.[167] That is, whatever this work's

[162] See Gooch, p. 35 – 'without the alienation of producing a physical commodity, service work marks the work-relation itself as the fundamental site of domination and command.'
[163] Lamb, 'The Superannuated Man', p. 281.
[164] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 125.
[165] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from 'Unpublished Letters of the Late S.T. Coleridge, *The Canterbury Magazine,* ed. Geoffrey Oldcastle, Vol. 1, July-December 1834 (Canterbury and London: 1834), pp. 121-131 (p. 129).
[166] John Ramsay McCulloch, 'Political Economy', *Supplement to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 6 vols (Edinburgh, Archibald Constable and Co., 1824), VI, pp. 216-278 (p. 220).
[167] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, p. 430.

potential utility, it is not commodity-producing, and therefore does not account for society's self-reproduction and growth through the production of material surpluses.

By Lamb's period, political economists were qualifying this distinction of productivity, with McCulloch, for example, disputing the ontological basis of a 'vendible commodity'.[168] Nevertheless, in Smith's original suggestion that unproductive work could be 'useful', even if such utility cannot directly be subjected to quantification, it can be said that he too was trading in a 'double discourse of value'; one rooted, in turn, in a dualism of types of *labour*.[169] It is in this same vein that French economist, Germain Garnier wrote in 1802 that 'like all other divisions of labour, that between mechanical labour and intellectual labour is sharper and more pronounced as society becomes richer' – and we find that, just as Lamb's narrator is trapped between *value* discourses, so too does Garnier's ever-widening 'double discourse of *labour*' put the clerk, situated midway between these two poles (between 'penning a paragraph' and 'engrossing'), in an increasingly attenuated position.[170] It is moreover the tension between *laissez-faire* individualism and hierarchical planning that F. David Roberts identifies within this developing economistic discourse that speaks to the Superannuated Man's own quandary between personal responsibility and dependence.[171]

It is from this position of discomfort that Lamb, in 'The Superannuated Man', can synthesise these 'double discourses', of value and of labour, combining the quantifying impulse of the office with the reflexive spirit of his art. The office therefore introduces a new hybrid perspective into literary aesthetics, but it is also through this discomfort that Lamb conveys a clerkly version of the Marxian concept of alienation. Marx stresses the literal externality of the labour process and its products to the worker – but, as Lamb's narrator produces no 'vendible commodity', instead merely transposing evidence of the existence thereof into data, the line between alien and alienated becomes harder to find. Where the manual worker creates an 'alien world of objects […] over and against himself', Marx writes, it is the many 'false entries' in the narrator's mind that predominate over him: the clerk's own

[168] McCulloch writes in 1824 that 'the end of all human exertion is the same – that is, to increase the sum of necessaries, comforts, and enjoyments; and it must be left to the judgement of every man to determine what proportion of these comforts he will have in the shape of menial services, and what in the shape of material products.' – McCulloch, 'Political Economy', p. 275.
[169] John Guillory argues that, read together, Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* offer two incommensurable conceptions of value based upon the distinctions between aesthetic and productive value later employed by the Romantics. See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital. The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 303-325, and Anders Mortensen, 'Romantic Critics of Political Economy', *Money and Culture,* ed. Fiona Cox and Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 87-96 (p. 92).
[170] Germain Garnier, (tr.) in Adam Smith, *Recherches sur la nature et les causes de la richesse des nations,* 5 vols (Paris : H. Agasse, An X – 1802), V, p. 4.
[171] F. David Roberts, *The Social Conscience of the Early Victorians* (Stanford, CA: SUP, 2002), p. 111.

consciousness thus becomes site of this alienating dynamic – an effect that stays with him and reverberates into his experience of retirement.[172]

Upon quitting the office, Lamb's narrator writes that,

> For the first day or two I felt stunned, overwhelmed. I could only apprehend my felicity; I was too confused to taste it sincerely. I wandered about, thinking I was happy, and knowing that I was not. […] It was like passing out of time into Eternity – for it is a sort of Eternity for a man to have his Time all to himself. It seemed to me that I had more time on my hands than I could ever manage. From a poor man, poor in Time, I was suddenly lifted up into a vast revenue; I could see no end of my possessions; I wanted some steward, or judicious bailiff, to manage my estates in Time for me. And here let me caution persons grown old in active business, not lightly, nor without weighing their own resources, to forego their customary employment all at once, for there may be danger in it.[173]

In this passage, the narrator's sudden expulsion from the confines of the office into an anomic 'freedom' allows Lamb to extend the already confused discourses of subjective experience and technical abstraction to their extremes. Upon retiring, the Superannuated Man arrives at a kind of intellectual vanishing point, the site at which the tensions between the interweaving discourses that typified his working life do not dissipate, but instead, at last, converge.

Where previously the narrator's subjective perception of time jostled against bureaucratic abstraction, now these two amalgamate into an infinitude that resists calculation while also overwhelming and perhaps even subordinating its subject. Just as Lamb had previously flitted between memories and emotions in describing his personal experience of the office – now he flits between abstract orders of magnitude that ultimately defy reason: time is at first a material resource that encumbers him, is then conceived of in financial terms, and, finally, time becomes space – a colossal dominion that has the effect of sublimity upon its ostensible master. This point is the apex of the narrator's apparent perceptual meltdown – afterwards learning to accommodate himself to his new life – a process cemented by a final cathartic address to the office: 'unhealthy contributor to my weal, stern fosterer of my living, farewell!'[174] Nevertheless, this resolution merely exposes the broader tensions that underlie the narrator's existence: echoing a quip Lamb frequently made in his letters, his narrator ironically refers to the many ledgers that he has filled over the years as his collected 'works', leaving us with the sense of a life dominated by an imbalance between office work and artistic work.[175]

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[172] Karl Marx, from '1844 Manuscripts', *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed., tr. Eugene Kamenka (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), pp. 131-151 (p. 134).
[173] Lamb, 'The Superannuated Man', p. 282.
[174] Ibid., p. 284.
[175] Ibid.

As has been discussed, Lamb's essays are more autobiographical than they are a body of work devoted to depicting the office, or which plays explicitly on a pre-established tradition of portraying office life. Nevertheless, these three essays, in the level of critical attention they give to the types and tropes of clerkdom, to the intellectual schemas and ideological frameworks that govern the office, and in their candour regarding the subjective experience of the office worker himself, show Lamb to have been a major contributor to the development of an office-focussed literary tradition. His irony, his play of perspectives, his sense of time, and the extent to which he pits themes of labour, the economy, and individual and corporate volition against one another, stress Lamb's critical approach to the recurrent concerns that bureaucratisation would invoke in nineteenth-century literature. Nevertheless, Lamb's accounts of the office primarily trade in the individual clerk's experiences of office phenomena – they never mention the East India Company itself, and do not openly differentiate administration from those processes it facilitates. If anything, they are more economistic than explicitly administratively focussed – the latter figuring with the benefit of hindsight as a developing pendant of the former. We will see points of comparison in these respects with Ymbert – but different creative and political priorities, and, most importantly, a different bureaucratic context, will also stress the multivalence and diffuseness of this literature's origins and preoccupations.

3. Jean-Gilbert Ymbert (c.1784-1846)

3.1. Introduction

Largely forgotten today, Jean-Gilbert Ymbert is memorialised in the *Biographie universelle* (1854) as a career bureaucrat in the French civil service who 'did not let office work stop him from indulging in his literary tastes.'[176] In reality, Ymbert's official career was subject to numerous setbacks and hiatuses resulting from regime change, factors that directly informed his secondary career as a satirist. Joining the Ministry of War under Napoleon as a 'supernumerary' (comparable to an unpaid intern), Ymbert rose through the ranks during the First Empire (1804-1814), but struggled under the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830): he was suspended in 1816 for having 'shown a bit too much zeal' during Napoleon's hundred-day resumption of power the previous year, was allowed back with a demotion in 1818, and ultimately lost his job in 1822.[177] It should perhaps come as little surprise that Ymbert's career as a satirist and playwright began around this time, starting with *Le Solliciteur* in 1816, and

[176] Gustave Brunet, 'Ymbert (Jean-Gilbert)', *Biographie universelle – ancienne et moderne*, ed. Eugène Ernest Desplaces, Joseph Francois Michaud, & Louis Gabriel Michaud, 2nd edition, 45 vols (Paris : Madame C. Desplaces, 1845-1865), XLV, p. 262 – '[Ymbert] entra dans l'administration, s'éleva à des emplois importants au ministère de la guerre […] Le travail des bureaux n'empêcha point de se livrer à ses gouts littéraires.'
[177] Guy Thuillier, 'Les « Mœurs Administratives » de Gilbert Ymbert', *La Revue administrative,* 11:64 (Press Universitaires de France: July August, 1958), pp. 357-365 (p. 357) – 'un peu trop de zèle'.

culminating with his major epistolary satire, *Mœurs administratives* in 1825; Ymbert even alludes to the origins of his literary career by dedicating his satirical 1822 pamphlet, *L'art de faire des dettes* [The art of running up debts] to all 'victims of revolutions and changes in ministries past, present, and to come'.[178] Ymbert's bureaucratic career eventually got back on track after the Revolution of 1830: he held several prestigious offices under the less reactionary July Monarchy (1830-48) that followed, but his literary output hereafter consisted of dry pamphlets on finance and the National Guard.[179]

Clive Church, in *Revolution and Red Tape: The French Ministerial Bureaucracy – 1770-1850* (1981), writes that France's large centralised bureaucracy had attained its 'modern' form during the Revolutionary epoch and entrenched itself under Napoleon; but it is nonetheless unsurprising that its first sustained and explicitly literary portrayal should have emerged with Ymbert during the Restoration.[180] Firstly, Church himself stresses that it is during the Restoration that France's bureaucracy became a truly public phenomenon: issues surrounding the hiring and promotion of *employés* (and their potentially undue influence on policy) became major topics of debate at this time.[181] Secondly, the relative politicisation of France's bureaucracy during the Restoration reflects the fact that it had become a site of ideological conflict: both an entrenched and useful means of enforcing state power, it was also a vestige of the liberal regime, and therefore figured ambivalently in national life.[182] Finally, Ralph Kingston suggests that Ymbert's newfound literary career reflects a broader cultural moment in an increasingly mediatised society, writing that Ymbert's 'emergence as a liberal lion' coincides with a general rush on the part of the anti-government press to pay ex-administrators 'to speak out about abuses committed, not during the Revolutionary or Imperial periods, but during the Restoration'.[183] Indeed, it is important to stress, that, in contrast to many later

[178] Jean-Gilbert Ymbert, *L'art de faire des dettes, et de promener ses créanciers* (Paris: chez Pélicier, 1822), frontispiece – 'Dedié aux gens destitués, reformés ; aux victimes des révolutions et des changemens [sic] de ministères passés, présens [sic] et à venir.'

[179] Brunet, p. 262 – 'Les écrits d'Ymbert se partagent en deux catégories distinctes : les uns appartiennent à la littérature enjouée […] D'autres écrits plus graves concernent les questions de finance ou d'administration, et la garde nationale'.

[180] See also G. de Bertier de Sauvigny, *La Restauration* (Paris: Flammarion, 1955), p. 277 – 'De cette époque date, en France, la réputation peu flatteuse de M. Lebureau.' And Vida Azimi, who writes that, although administrative themes percolate through French literature, it was only after the Napoleonic reorganisation that an entrenched body of tropes surrounding the office appears in literature. Azimi, 'Quand le démon d'écrire… L'administration et la littérature', *Cahiers de la fonction publique,* numéro spécial (2004), pp. 1-31 (p. 3).

[181] Church, p. 289.

[182] Jonathan Sperber in *Revolutionary Europe* articulates this as a dilemma for all post-Napoleonic conservative regimes: a restored monarch might 'rule via his state bureaucracy, like an old regime Enlightened absolutist only without any Enlightened ideas or policies'; but returning monarchs 'distrusted the state bureaucracy, seeing it – not entirely incorrectly – both as riddled with officials of liberal sympathies and also contradictory to conservative principles.' Sperber, p. 262. See also Roger Magraw on this tension in, *France 1815-1914: The Bourgeois Century* (Fontana, 1983), p. 42.

[183] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society,* p. 117.

exponents of office literature, Ymbert conceived of bureaucracy as a necessary 'complement to constitutional government' – it had merely lost its way under the restored Bourbons.[184]

Where Lamb's literary focus was largely predicated upon the subjective experience of the individual clerk and his relationship with the strictures of office work, Ymbert's writing unsurprisingly reflects its more politicised context. The political character of *Mœurs administratives* can be felt in Ymbert's contemporary reputation, and traced in his influence on his equally civil service-focussed successors. The liberal novelist, Stendhal, writing in Elia's own *London Magazine* in 1825, tells his English readers that (their) 'liberty is fatal to comedy', and, by contrast, Ymbert, obliged to dodge the censors while 'holding up the mirror to our present habits and manners', is therefore one of the funniest men in Paris.[185] Indeed, Stendhal went on to pen his own ministerial satire in part two of his unfinished novel, *Lucien Leuwen* (1834/94). So too did the satirist Henry Monnier (appearing in Chapter Two) produce a series of lithographs entitled *Mœurs administratives* (1828), while many of Ymbert's phraseologies find their way into Honoré de Balzac's novel, *Les Employés* (1844) (appearing in Chapter Three). Equally, however, Ymbert often articulates these political issues using devices comparable to Lamb's: playing with abstraction and materiality, office temporality, and, inevitably, outlining the influence of bureaucratic life on the *employés'* temperament. However much more centralised around the Paris ministries French office literature may be, its resonances with the English tradition are clear. Issues surrounding the functionality of France's bureaucracy, its private character, and its relation to changing regimes, all predominate in *Mœurs administratives* – and it is via these three perspectives that I explore this text over the following three sections.

3.2. Mœurs administratives (1825)

3.2.1. 'Une sorte de *Cours d'administration'*: the mixed messaging of exposé and satire

'In these letters that I publish, I wanted to outline, while laughing, a sort of *Course in administration.'*[186] The opening statement of Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives* indicates its governing principles and their interrelation: Ymbert's book is predicated upon its epistolary form, and the exposition, but also satirisation, of France's civil service. In this first section I therefore focus on the relationship between Ymbert's chosen form and its pseudo-didactic and satirical message. Just as Lamb, in 'The Good Clerk',

[184] Jean-Gilbert Ymbert, 'Bureaucratie', *Encyclopédie moderne,* ed. Eustache-Marie Courtin, 24 vols (Paris : 1825), V, pp. 79-91 (p. 88).

[185] 'Grimm's Grandson' [Henri Beyle, 'Stendhal'], 'Letters from Paris' No. X, 16 September 1825, [translator not provided], *The London Magazine,* New Series, 3 (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1825), pp. 273-284 (pp. 273-274). For the same article in French see Stendhal, *Courrier anglais,* ed. Henri Martineau, 5 vols (Paris: 1935-36), V, pp. 188-217.

[186] Jean-Gilbert Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives – pour faire suite aux observations sur les mœurs et les usages français au commencement du XIXe siècle,* 2 vols (Paris: Ladvocat, 1825), I, p. i – 'J'ai voulu, dans les lettres que je publie, tracer en riant une sorte de *Cours d'administration*.'

uses the conditions of the essay's composition to undermine its tone, I argue that Ymbert's decision to adopt the medium in which France's bureaucracy itself operated highlights the epistemic and practical limits of 'rule-by-the-desk', while also therefore limiting the revelatory power of his own insights. However, it is precisely by emulating the functional shortcomings of bureaucratic structures that Ymbert also demonstrates the creative, and satirical, potential to be derived from them.

Mœurs administratives comprises nineteen nominally thematic letters written by an unnamed former office chief at the request of an unnamed (and unheard) gentlewoman who is apparently curious about the workings of the state. Despite its didactic pretensions, Guy Thuillier writes, *Mœurs administratives* contrasts with contemporaneous non-literary writing on bureaucracy insofar as it is 'neither a theoretical construction nor a sweeping programme of reform' – rather, its chapters amount to 'reportages' on different aspects of office life.[187] In keeping with this sense of exposé, Ymbert in the preface stresses the mystifying power that bureaucratic language has upon outsiders by citing the various everyday terms associated with state power, '*customs and excise, property tax, door and window [tax], patent, stamp, lottery, etc.'*, and asking

> do you not perceive that behind [these words] are ministers, directors, and clerks? Prefects, royal procurators, gendarmes, and police commissioners? Is it not about time to learn how these shepherds behave? To know how they pen us in, mark us down, and tally us up? […] I wanted to expose the [self-]importance, the idleness, the cupidity, and the egotism of the majority of these shepherds; but, rather than climbing into the pulpit and decking my criticism out in a black robe and berretta, I have dressed it lightly.[188]

Not only does this opening statement establish a disjunction between bureaucratic textuality and the power structures that lie behind it, but it also suggests that Ymbert's 'course' will work to decode such language – as entertainingly as possible. However, in keeping with Fredric Jameson's 'truism' that 'forms such as the epic, the costume tragedy, [and] the epistolary novel are inherently dependent for their existence on possibilities in their content, or in other words on the structure of the social experience which they use as raw material and from which they spring as artefacts' – so too therefore does a work whose form is derived from its content also reflect the limitations of that content.[189] That

[187] Thuillier, Les « Mœurs Administratives » de Gilbert Ymbert', p. 358 – 'Point de construction théorique ni de vaste programme de réforme : un bon vaudevilliste, Ymbert affectionne les chapitres brefs et clairs, sortes de petits « reportages »'.
[188] Ymbert*, Mœurs administratives,* I, pp. iii-iv – '*douane, octroi, impôt foncier, portes et fenêtres, patente, timbre, loterie, etc*.' 'N'apercevez-vous pas qu'il y a derrière tout cela des ministres, des directeurs et des commis ? des préfets, des procureurs du roi, des gendarmes et des commissaires de police ? N'est-il pas à propos d'apprendre comment ces bergers-là se comportent ? De savoir comment ils nous parquent, nous marquent, et nous comptent ? […] J'ai voulu faire connaitre l'importance, le fainéantise, la cupidité et l'égoïsme de la plupart de ces bergers ; mais, au lieu de monter en chaire d'affubler la critique de la robe noire et du bonnet carré, je l'ai habillée à la légère.'
[189] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 352.

is, because Ymbert's narrator, the letter-writing ex-bureaucrat, explicitly operates within the same medium as his subject, the extent to which *Mœurs administratives* is able to pare back what Saint-Just called the 'world of paper' and expose whatever realities may lie behind it becomes increasingly contentious.

Like the 'empire in writing' at East India House, France's bureaucracy administrated the society beyond its walls by constructing an image of this society in data, derived largely from correspondence. Already therefore, this 'impersonal rule', one whose authority is rooted in a continuously expanding bank of written information, runs counter to its political context: the ostensibly *personal* rule claimed by the restored Louis XVIII and articulated in the Constitutional Charter of 1814.[190] Ymbert addresses this issue in his first letter, devising a bureaucratic creation myth underpinned by a humorous version of the social contract: 'a king alone could not meet the needs and complaints that thirty million voices make heard, nor solely administrate the portion of natural liberty and money that thirty million subjects sacrifice' – and thus does executive authority trickle downwards into the ministries, managers, clerks, and, ultimately, into reams of correspondence.[191] Accordingly, the receipt of raw data in the form of correspondence, its processing and transmission between departments and specialists, and finally the acts of devising, checking, and issuing directives back into the world, was a highly complex process: Kingston stresses that, in the long chain of procedures that began with a newly arrived bundle of letters' initial 'dismemberment', there were plenty of opportunities for documents to be misfiled, misdirected, or go missing.[192]

Ymbert is under no illusions about the flaws in the bureaucratic medium in which he operates. Indeed, it is in his exposition of such procedures that we see the satirical and didactic aims of the *cours d'administration* align most (as well as contributing to a mythology surrounding *les cartons*, box files, that hereafter permeates France's office literature). 'The century being essentially petitionary', the

[190] 'La Charte Constitutionnelle du 4 Juin 1814', *Les Constitutions de la France depuis 1789* (Paris : Flammarion, 2006), pp. 217-224 (pp. 219-220) – 'Le roi est le chef suprême de l'État, il commande les forces de terre et de mer, déclare la guerre, fait les traités de paix, d'alliance et de commerce, nomme à tous les emplois d'administration publique, et fait les règlements et ordonnances nécessaires pour l'exécution des lois et la sûreté de l'État.' – [the king is the supreme head of state, he commands land and sea forces, declares war, makes peace treaties, alliances, and trade [agreements], nominates all positions in public administration, and makes regulations and decrees necessary for the execution of laws and the security of the state.]

[191] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives*, I, pp. 10-11 – 'un roi ne pourrait suffire seul aux besoins, aux réclamations que font entendre trente millions de voix, ni administrer seul la portion de liberté naturelle et d'argent dont trente millions de sujets font le sacrifice.' Ben Kafka also makes this social contract parallel in *The Demon of Writing – Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone, 2012), p. 89. See also de Sauvigny in *La Restauration*, p. 269 – who attributes the increased predominance of bureaucracy under the Restoration to Louis XVIII's 'indolence naturelle, ses infirmités, son ignorance des détails de l'administration'.

[192] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society*, pp. 11-14.

narrator sneers, he will focus in particular on the destiny of those appeals sent by individual subjects to the king:

> bundled packets of these petitions arrive daily at each ministry, and are thence sent on to the princes' staff. The packets are opened at the ministry's general secretariat, which distributes the petitions between the various office chiefs, who at last tender them to clerks charged to handle the details. […] This mechanism treats every petition with impassive equality – the equality of death. Just as gloomy Charon imposes his toll, so too with payment of stamp duty do petitions pass like shades from the royal chamber to the ministerial ferry, by whose funereal paddle they are conveyed to the grand kingdom of box files. [193]

Ymbert thus suggests that the act of diffusing an administrative remit to ever finer degrees of granularity slows the whole process down into an ultimately death-like state. Ymbert calls this '*dilatory power*': its 'torpor […] penetrates all agents and enlists all the energy of the administration; and, without depriving them of movement, it slows them down, like the hand of a pendulum clock, which moves but is not seen to move'.[194] These kinds of 'Zenonisms', paradoxes by which proliferating activity results in inertia, recur in portrayals of bureaucracy – often implicitly contrasting bureaucratic power with the days, as Balzac would later write, when 'decisions were spontaneous.'[195] As I will outline in the final section on Ymbert, it is when he describes bureaucracy under Napoleon in contrast to that of the present under the Bourbons, that we see this desire for action realised.

Significantly, it is not merely that executive agency trickles ever outward into a sea of documents, but that these documents interact and converge with each other, producing yet more documents, and further obscuring whatever their original object was. The frustratingly meta-discursive nature of this epistolary tangle is highlighted in the following exchange between a provincial prefect and the minister of the interior in Paris:

> Monseigneur,
> I beg that your excellency please let me know if section 3 in circular no. 7 is not implicitly annulled by section 9 in circular no. 20? I would be inclined to believe so if I relate it to section 15 of circular no. 24; but circular no. 25, which immediately

[193] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives,* I, pp. 231-232 – 'Le siècle étant essentiellement pétitionnaire, il arrive journellement à chaque ministère des paquets ficelés de ces pétitions, ainsi renvoyés des cabinets des princes. Ces paquets sont ouverts au secrétariat général du ministère, qui distribue les pétitions entre les divers chefs de bureaux, lesquels les remettant enfin aux commis chargés de détails. […] ce mécanisme embrasse, avec une impassible égalité, avec l'égalité de la mort, toutes les pétitions. Comme des ombres, et non moins qu'elles soumises, par le droit du timbre, à un tribut semblable à celui qu'impose le noir Caron, elles passent du cabinet royal dans la barque ministérielle dont la rame funéraire les conduit au grand royaume des cartons.'
[194] Ibid., I, p. 248 - *Puissance dilatoire*. […] De nos jours, cette puissance est le seul premier ministre durable. La torpeur de ses doctrines pénètre tous les agents, engage les ressorts de l'administration ; et, sans les priver de mouvement, les ralentit, comme l'aiguille de la pendule, qui marche et qu'on ne voit pas marcher.'
[195] Honoré de Balzac, *Les Employés* (1844), preface by Anne-Marie Meininger (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 44. For an exposition of Zeno of Elea's paradoxes, see Robin Waterfield's in *The First Philosophers – The Presocratics and the Sophists*, Waterfield (ed., tr.) (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 69-74.

> followed the aforementioned, contains, in section 13, a provision that could lead one to think that section 3 of circular no. 7 must still have its execution carried out.

'So lucid a question demands a clear response' Ymbert tells 'madame', 'here is what the prefect received':

> Monsieur le préfet,
> The question contained in the letter that you have done me the honour of writing is sufficiently resolved by article 7 of instruction no. 5; but, if you still have some doubts, I would encourage you to turn your attention to section 9 in circular no. 17, which, when combined with section 16 of circular no. 12, dated two weeks after circular, no. 7, which you cite, leaves no room for equivocation. Please be so kind as to convey this to messieurs the sub-prefects and mayors.[196]

Ymbert's inclusion of these letters not only heightens the farcical character of bureaucratic discourse, it also stresses that the epistolary format lends itself to this same proliferation of textuality. Although Ymbert asserts that behind bureaucratic jargon lie ministers, directors, and clerks waiting to be exposed, as we read *Mœurs administratives* we see that behind them lies yet more jargon: like a bundle awaiting dismemberment, the book is a hodgepodge of correspondence, memos, and ledgers pilfered by the narrator, as well as miniature vaudevilles (which read like the minutes of a meeting) – all of which simulate this sense of bureaucracy's 'dilatory power', slowing the *cours* down by way of tangents and *mises en abyme*. Just as Lamb's play of ideas in 'The Good Clerk' evokes the conceptual character of Frye's 'anatomy', *Mœurs administratives,* in its formal heterogeneity, evokes the classical Menippean satire upon which 'anatomy' is based: which 'mixes poetry and prose; it juxtaposes a variety of voices in dialogue; it blends Greek and Roman traditions; it makes liberal use of inserted genres and tales, and of widely digressive episodes.'[197] But also like Lamb's works, the implication behind Ymbert's proliferating and subdividing letters is that the formal character the book evokes

[196] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives*, II, pp. 47-48 – « Monseigneur,
Je prie Votre Excellence de vouloir bien me faire savoir si le paragraphe 3 de la circulaire no. 7, n'est pas implicitement annulé par le paragraphe 9 de la circulaire no. 20? Je serais porté à le croire, si je m'en rapportais au paragraphe 15 de la circulaire no. 24; mais la circulaire no. 25, qui a suivi immédiatement cette dernière, contient, au paragraphe 13, une disposition qui pourrait donner à penser que le paragraphe 3 de la circulaire no. 7, doit continuer à recevoir son exécution. »

Une question - aussi lucide exigeait une réponse claire, voici celle que reçut le préfet :

« Monsieur le préfet,
La question que contient la lettre que vous m'avez fait l'honneur de m'écrire est suffisamment résolue par l'article 7 de l'instruction no. 4; mais, s'il vous restait quelques doutes, je vous engagerais à reporter votre attention sur le paragraphe 9 de la circulaire no. 17, lequel étant combiné avec le paragraphe 16 de la circulaire no. 12, postérieure de quinze jours à la circulaire no. 7 que vous citez, ne laisse subsister aucune équivoque. Veuillez bien écrire dans ce sens à MM. les sous-préfets et maires. »

[197] Greenberg, p. 71.

features immanent to its content: that bureaucracy *provides* literary models, rather than being subject to them.

Despite the parallels between the two, Ymbert's approach is therefore very different to Lamb's. Although Ymbert shares Lamb's aleatory sense of narrative, his wide-ranging focus necessarily means that his book does not evoke Lamb's Shandean monologue: we are not being led along the circumlocutionary, but singular, path of an individual clerk's daydreams – rather, Ymbert's desire to outline the ministries in their entirety means that the narrative radiates outward in all directions. This disparity is reflected in, and accentuated by, each author's choice of form: where the 'familiar essay' very much operates under the pretence of intimacy, of 'common conversation', by writing *Mœurs administratives* as a series of letters, themselves containing yet more documents, Ymbert's book stresses its own material autonomy: its proliferating letters mediate and fragment our sense of the mind behind them.[198] Ymbert himself stresses this epistemic perspective by having begun his book with an attack upon what anthropologist William Mazzarella has since called the 'politics of immediation', in his claim that bureaucratic data obscures the real power relationships that it purports to convey – but, equally, this leaves us with the impression that the letters that make up *Mœurs administratives* must *also* therefore distort more than they expose.[199]

The apparently self-undermining character of Ymbert's *cours* is clearly a satirical device. In Ymbert's day, the satiric potential of epistolary literature was long-established: its most famous exemplar being Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), in which the flaws of French society are articulated through the perspective of two candid-but-ignorant Persian correspondents, thereby producing 'a "stereoscopic vision" that transcends the epistemologies of the West or the East alone', Jonathan Greenberg writes.[200] However, despite his initially revelatory claims, Ymbert has no interest in employing his letters to transcendental ends. *Mœurs administratives,* while promising to expose bureaucracy, but merely emulating its shortcomings, thus becomes a kind of Platonic *pharmakon*: it undercuts while claiming to supplement.[201] Simultaneously, however, by emulating in miniature what the ministries do on a large scale, the book also therefore very much *succeeds* in exposing the industrial-scale *pharmakon* that is French bureaucracy itself – its author is like a pompous king whose volition is surrendered in the act of its own extension – and therefore its gentlewoman reader gains a

[198] Hazlitt, 'On Familiar Style', *Table Talk,* p. 329.
[199] William Mazzarella, 'Internet X-Ray: E-Governance, Transparency, and the Politics of Immediation in India', *Public Culture,* 18:3 (2006), pp. 473-505.
[200] Greenberg, p. 120.
[201] Plato, 'Phaedrus', *Selected Dialogues of Plato*, tr. Benjamin Jowett, ed. Hayden Pelliccia (New York: Modern Library, 2001), pp. 189-190. Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', tr. B. Johnson, from *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 429-450, (p. 429, p. 436).

profound sense of the nature of Restoration government, if not in the manner she was initially led to believe.

An enthusiastic 1828 review of *Mœurs administratives* praised Ymbert's wit, but remained somewhat sceptical of his premise, writing that although 'a study so complicated as that of administration rarely entails the lighter forms that the author employs with so much success. Each science has its language, and it is hardly any easier to put administration into epigrams than physics into madrigals.'[202] I argue rather that Ymbert's 'success' is predicated upon the conceit that administration is less a positive science, and more that it gives rise to a worldview and style of writing of its own – indeed, as I stress in the following section, this highly mediated sense of both power and meaning produces a *world* of its own, reflected in the rather alien character of office life. *Mœurs administratives*' only relationship to science is therefore to be conceived ironically, insofar as like Lamb, Ymbert's book reflects Frye's 'anatomical' mode of literature. Frye writes that 'anatomy' has a 'tendency to expand into an encyclopaedic farrago', and, with its facetious qualifications of job roles, outlines of official functions and procedures, taxonomies of workers and instruments, *Mœurs administratives* fits the bill.[203] Like 'The Good Clerk', however, *Mœurs administratives* also obliges us to conceive of the processes that lie behind the finished product: while earlier 'anatomists', François Rabelais or Robert Burton, were solitary compilers, Ymbert's literary model is rather a farrago established in Paris by royal fiat and which amasses data by an ever-broadening division of labour. Marx (who reportedly himself owned a copy of *Mœurs administratives*) describes paperwork as 'the supervision and ideal recapitulation' of its object – but Ymbert's book stresses that this ideal construction exists within and between an ever-proliferating material network of documents – a maze of text that adulterates and confuses its sense of its object, and thereby becomes a world (and a literature) of its own.[204]

3.2.2. 'Un pays inconnu': The office setting

Halfway through his *cours d'administration* Ymbert's narrator reminds his correspondent that, 'not so long ago, ministries, departments, and their offices were for you *an unknown land*, about which you had many romantic ideas: you could catch only glimpses of them through the clouds. Console yourself:

[202] '*Mœurs administratives*, par M. Ymbert', *Revue encyclopédique,* 39 (Paris: July 1828), pp. 483-484 (p. 484) – 'Une étude aussi compliquée que celle de l'administration comporte peu ces formes légères que l'auteur emploie avec tant de succès. Chaque science a son langage, et il n'est guère plus facile de mettre l'administration en épigrammes que la physique en madrigaux.'
[203] Frye, p. 311.
[204] Marx, *Capital Volume 2,* p. 212; Bruno Kaiser (ed.), *Ex Libris karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Schicksal und Verzeichnis einer Bibliotek* (Berlin: Dietz, 1967) – cited in Kafka, p. 120.

the offices *themselves* do not always see affairs very clearly' (my emphasis).[205] We have seen that Ymbert's *cours d'administration* depicts the ministries in the medium in which these ministries themselves operate – and that, in so doing, it embodies a tension between demystification and caricature. Having established *Mœurs administratives*' formal precepts and constraints, in this section I will outline Ymbert's portrayal of the ministries themselves, demonstrating how the epistemologically ambiguous character of bureaucratic mediation, previously established, has allowed an alien world of strange behaviour and customs – *mœurs* – to develop. As Ymbert writes, 'the bureaucratic tribe […] has its own manners and practices. You cannot go to the same place for ten years, nor spend seven or eight hours a day of your existence there, without your surroundings leaving their mark on you.'[206]

From the first to final letter, *Mœurs administratives* guides us past bailiffs, through doorways, down corridors, into offices and archives, between ministries in coaches, and into the private apartments of ministers and their cronies; he outlines roles and ranks, their functions, provenance, and relation to one another; all with the effect of anatomising an ungainly administrative leviathan – one which is not fully capable of perceiving its own dimensions. Historians like Church and Kingston tend to stress, whatever its shortcomings, the impressive efficiency and scope of France's civil service – especially after 1789. Ymbert, by contrast, and presumably due to political motivations, instead opts to play up the inefficiency of the ministries under the Restoration, in turn establishing an archetype for future literary portrayals of such institutions that quickly developed its own autonomy.

As we have already seen, the epistolary format of *Mœurs administratives* allows for Ymbert's *cours* to take the form of its subject. In keeping therefore with the limpidly textual character of the book, Ymbert provides his correspondent with no miscellaneous sensorial impressions of the office – least of all those articulated from the perspective of an apparent 'phenomenological body', whose sensations, Fredric Jameson writes, only really appeared on the French literary scene during the 1840s, and whose development Jameson primarily associates with Gustave Flaubert.[207] Accordingly, while later portrayals of the ministries revel in their dustiness and filth, stressing the stifling physical experience of office life as much as its stultifying and rarefied mental world, Ymbert by contrast

[205] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives*, II, pp. 55-56 – 'Les ministères, les directions et leurs bureaux étaient naguère pour vous un pays inconnu, sur lequel vous aviez beaucoup d'idées romantiques : vous ne les aperceviez qu'à travers des nuages. Consolez-vous : les bureaux eux-mêmes ne voient pas toujours les affaires très nettement'.

[206] Ibid., I, p. 172 – 'La gent bureaucratique a aussi ses manières, ses usages. On ne se rend pas dix ans au même lieu, on n'y dépense pas, chaque jour, sept à huit heures d'existence, sans recevoir l'impression des localités.'

[207] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), pp. 31-32.

abjures such 'nameless bodily states' that attempt to evade conventionally allegorical or metonymic systems of meaning, in favour of the reverse: portraying a world entirely composed of signifiers.[208]

Ymbert reminds us in the first letter that 'it is frequently in former convents [those expropriated during the Revolution] that ministries were established', and this conception of bureaucracy, as an 'admixture of the profane to the sacred', speaks also to the intersection of bureaucratic textuality and ontology in Ymbert's book.[209] This is inasmuch as modern functionaries and medieval monks seem to share a worldview: just as, Michel Foucault writes in *The Order of Things* (1966), pre-modern knowledge consisted in 'restoring the great, unbroken plain of words and things', so too does Ymbert give a sense of a bureaucracy that fetishises its own power of signification – and thereby enfolds its own physical, social, and political character into a textual ontology that is in fact highly distorted.[210] Foucault highlights the paradoxical nature of this perspective: if one conceives of '[writing as] part of the fabric of the world; one speaks about it to infinity, and each of its signs becomes in turn written matter for further discourse; but each of these stages of discourse is addressed to that primal written word whose return it simultaneously promises and postpones' – indeed, in a similar spirit of documentary counter-productivity, Kingston writes that, once the Revolutionary administration devoted itself to consolidating all previous knowledge of statecraft into archives and files, 'paperwork engulfed the central bureaux of the French administration. Work was stymied in statistics and scientific detail.'[211]

However much this highly significatory bureaucratic worldview tends toward ever-increasing arcaneness or 'dilatory power', Ymbert, like his peers, 'reads' the structures of his ministries as if they were documentation – that is, the historical is described in formal terms. From such a perspective, ministerial facades tell stories of regime change: 'club-wielding Herculeses' stand alongside figures of Liberty – since 'decapped', Ymbert tells us – and meanwhile, out of the way of this allegorical pageant, lingers a ghost of 1789, in faded red letters one reads the words '*National property for sale*.'[212] As we

[208] Ibid., p. 33. For examples of such sensations of office life see Guy Thuillier, *La vie quotidienne dans les ministères au XIXe siècle* (Paris : Hachette, 1976), p. 16, p. 18.
[209] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives*, I, pp. 15-16 – 'C'est fréquemment dans ces anciens couvens [sic] qu'on a établi des ministères', 'ce mélange du profane au sacré.'
[210] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 44. Michael Herzfeld similarly speaks about a 'language fetish' underlying bureaucracy, in turn producing endless tautologies as documents are employed to verify other documents, *The Social Production of Indifference – Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 121.
[211] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 45-46; Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society*, p. 29.
[212] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives,* I, p. 19 – 'souvent les Hercules avec leurs massues ; quelquefois des Libertés qu'on a depuis décoiffés, conceptions républicaines que l'on doit à des sculpteurs dont le ciseau converti produit aujourd'hui des saint Jean-Baptiste et des apôtres. Dans quelque coin de la corniche, on distingue les restes d'une inscription en lettres rouges, que le temps a insultées ; l'œil a bientôt complété leurs contours, et lit avec facilité les mots : *Propriété nationale à vendre*.'

enter the ministerial halls and corridors, Ymbert continues, 'if governments do not inherit doctrines, they at least inherit furniture': he describes an anteroom whose decor betrays shifting loyalties, to the National Convention, the Directory, and the Emperor Napoleon, in a 'monstrous alliance of times and epochs'.[213] Ymbert envisages his ministry as a palimpsest whose vying inscriptions are to be pared back and deciphered. Passing from the hallways and antechambers to the reception room we find the topmost layer of 'text': 'the paintings, allegories, and *objets d'art* here comply with their circumstances, banishing all opposing views to the anteroom', Ymbert writes, bemusedly noticing that despite being separated, contemporary orthodoxy is compelled to partake in the discourse established by defunct regimes in order to contradict them.[214] Ymbert especially illustrates this sense of pansemioticism through its extremes and aberrations: the interpenetration of mimesis and mediation reverses itself with one director, Ymbert recalls, who translated 'all administrative ideas […] into objects that spoke to the eyes', writing 'his reports as lithographs, and his circulars as aquatints', budgetary information was represented through allegorical images – his 'office was a museum of grotesques', Ymbert concludes.[215] And indeed, just as the ministerial space and decor are reenvisaged as documents, so too, in turn, are the archives a 'ministerial Père Lachaise', a bureaucratic necropolis 'where a few clerks shift and pile pell-mell the administrative skeletons of preceding ministries.'[216]

This sense of bureaucratic pansemioticism persists in the offices themselves – and, inevitably, to conceive of a space that is dedicated to a labour process predicated upon signification as being itself signifcatory spells confusion.[217] Ymbert ends his initial tour of ministerial locations 'at last' with

> the little compartments where the clerks are attached to their seven-hour chain. Altogether these ordinarily consist of a personnel of five or six hundred writers, calculators, drafters, or copyists. [At three workers per room] there are therefore two hundred rooms where circulars, reports etc. are manufactured. This battalion of clerks is commanded by thirty office chiefs, and sixty or eighty sub-chiefs. Imagine the space required for all of these people, and imagine how disorientated an aspiring visitor is when he is cast for the first time into this series of passageways, corridors, doorways, and blind doors which appear to him to present no way out. In truth, every door, every detour, is provided with a notice intended to guide the timid steps of the neophyte; but these inscriptions, [written] in administrative style, bear names of offices that have often been fantastically, capriciously, or preferentially created, and serve only

[213] Ibid., I, pp. 22-23 – 'si les gouvernements n'héritent pas des doctrines, ils héritent au moins du mobilier' ; 'alliance monstrueuse de temps et d'époques'.
[214] Ibid., I, p. 23 – 'la peinture, l'allégorie et les beaux-arts y respectent la circonstance et exilent les contre-sens dans l'antichambre.'
[215] Ibid., I, p. 94 – 'toutes les idées administratives, il les traduisait en objets qui parlaient aux yeux', 'ses rapports en lithographie, et ses circulaires à l'*aqua-tinta*.', 'Son cabinet était un muséum de grotesques'.
[216] Ibid., I, p. 37 – 'Ce bureau est le Père Lachaise du ministère', 'où quelques commis remuent et entassent pêle-mêle les squelettes administratifs des précédents ministères.'
[217] For a theorisation of this concept from an Early Modern context, see Jan C. Westerhoff, 'A World of Signs: Baroque Pansemioticism, the Polyhistor and the Early Modern Wunderkammer', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62:4 (October, 2001), pp. 633-650.

> to lead the petitioner astray: an audience lasts two hours, and this time elapses before he might have been able to find the right door to knock upon.[218]

A principle of ever-proliferating signification governs the bureaucratic space as well as its pseudo-industrial labour (the 'manufacture' of documents). In turn, as bureaucrats' own systems of meaning impinge upon their attempts to rationally order the society around them, this language develops an autonomy of its own in accordance with the strange preoccupations of bureaucrats themselves rather than the needs of 'service-users'. These notices tell the functionary more about the esteem in which a particular office is held, or they betray the neologistic proclivities of a particular bureaucrat, than they give the outsider a sense of their destination. Although the 'unknown land' of bureaucracy can be read, its language has deracinated itself from mere functional usage.

The clerks themselves exploit this new structure of meaning with the 'famous [phrase], *I don't have the time*', which is 'above all in use in offices where there is nothing to do': Ymbert recalls an office, every inhabitant of which – chief, sub-chief, the *commis d'ordre* [overseer clerk], copyist and office boy – was engrossed in his own hobbies,

> a visitor presented himself at the door, and was welcomed with a vigorous *I don't have the time*, which was repeated by all ranks like a military command. There was in this office, when articulating these words, an admirable order and unity: thus was it held to be one of the busiest in the civil service.[219]

This disjunction between the apparent busyness and idleness (or, at least, non-official activity) jointly embodied in the talismanic phrase, *I don't have the time*, is demonstrative of the manner in which the 'unbroken plain of words and things' within the confines of officialdom functions with regard to the

[218] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives*, I, pp. 69-70 – 'enfin les petits compartiments où les employés sont attachés à leur chaîne de sept heures. Tout cela comprend ordinairement un personnel de cinq à six cents écrivains, calculateurs, rédacteurs ou copistes. Le terme moyen à établir entre ce nombre et celui des pièces occupées, est de trois travailleurs par pièce. Il y a donc dans un ministère deux cents pièces où l'on fabrique la circulaire, le rapport, etc. Ce bataillon de commis est commandé par une trentaine de chefs de bureau, et soixante ou quatre-vingts sous-chefs. Vous imaginez quel espace il faut à tout ce monde, et vous concevez combien un aspirant solliciteur est désorienté lorsqu'il est jeté pour la première fois dans ces enfilades de couloirs, de corridors, de portes bâtardes ou dérobées, qui ne présentent à ses regards que des routes sans issues. A la vérité, chaque porte, chaque détour reçoit des inscriptions destinées à guider les pas timides du néophyte ; mais ces inscriptions, en style administratif, où sont détaillées les attributions de bureaux souvent créés par la fantaisie, le caprice ou la faveur, ne servent qu'à égarer le pétitionnaire : l'audience dure deux heures, et elle s'écoule avant qu'il ait pu découvrir la porte à laquelle il doit frapper.'

[219] Ibid., I, pp. 176-177 – 'c'est le fameux *Je n'ai pas le temps*', 'Il est surtout en usage dans les bureaux où l'on n'a rien à faire. J'en ai connu un qui se composait de sept personnes. Le chef étudiait le violon et, favorisé par la position sourde et lointaine de son cabinet, s'exerçait librement pendant les heures de séance, aux difficultés de l'art des Baillot ; le sous-chef prenait des leçons d'anglais ; des deux rédacteurs, l'un crayonnait la caricature et l'autre arrangeait les vaudevilles de circonstance ; le commis d'ordre faisait des ouvrages en carton ; l'expéditionnaire des dessins pour broderies, et le garçon de bureau des vestes et culottes. Un solliciteur se présentait-il aux portes, il était accueilli par un vigoureux *je n'ai pas le temps*, qui était répété dans tous les rangs comme un commandement militaire. Il y avait dans ce bureau, pour articuler ces mots, un ordre et un ensemble admirables : aussi passait-il pour le plus occupé de l'administration.'

behaviour of its agents.[220] As Graeber writes, bureaucracy 'is a matter of applying very simple pre-existing templates to complex and often ambiguous situations' – in so doing, such simplistic templates are at once reified and generalised, they are attributed supreme significance while their referent diversifies and dissipates.[221]

Bureaucracy is predicated upon the efficient processing and management of information pertinent to its institutional remit, in this case, the administration of the French state. France's bureaucracy cohered into a recognised and established tool of an ever-centralising government during the latter half of the eighteenth century, and during this period, up to the publication of *Mœurs administratives*, it was frequently spoken of in quasi-scientific terms: France was an organism and its bureaucracy a 'spine', transmitting sensations between body (society) and brain (the government), or, alternatively, it was viewed in mechanistic terms – Robert Tombs writes that Napoleon's interior minister, Chaptal rather 'optimistically' described communications between centre and periphery as being as 'swift as an electric current'.[222] Ymbert's countervailing contention, that France's bureaucracy is not only obscured to the French people, but that even the offices are blinkered to their own character, represents therefore a fundamental institutional shortcoming. In analogising France's bureaucracy with an 'unknown land', Ymbert retains the general metaphorical schema of his forebears by conceiving of it from within a conceptual field that accounts for the co-dependent interpenetration of the epistemic and the material; but he also reverses this metaphor, from a prior conception of bureaucracy as the constituent sensory and intellectual organ of a broader French nation, it plunges itself into its own system of references and meanings that proliferate to the infinite. It is in this sense of bureaucracy as a 'land' of its own, a subworld whose character emanates – but is also separate from – the society it purports to reflect, that Ymbert develops a sense of the autonomy of administration from its impetus and object alike: albeit in the most hostile way possible.

3.2.3. 'Tout a changé': bureaucracy and national history

A guiding agenda of *Mœurs administratives* is to say that since the fall of Napoleon, '*everything has changed*' – that French administration is less effective and rational since the Restoration (when Ymbert lost his job). However, from my interpretation of the book over the last two sections, in

[220] Compare Ymbert's portrayal of 'I don't have the time' to Gilles Deleuze's reading of the eponymous clerk's phrase, 'I would prefer not to', in Herman Melville's 'Bartleby' (1853): as 'an inarticulate block', a 'formula' that 'hollows out a zone of indetermination that renders words indistinguishable'. Deleuze, 'Bartleby; or, the Formula', *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993), tr. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 68-90 (p. 73).
[221] Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules,* p. 75.
[222] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society,* p. 20; Robert Tombs, *France: 1814-1914* (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 1996), p. 98.

practice *Mœurs administratives* seems divorced from any particular party-political cause. I first argued that *Mœurs administratives* operates from within the textual perspective of bureaucracy to stress bureaucracy's epistemic limitations, and that, in turn, the portrayal of the ministries as a world engulfed by its own significatory fetishism serves to deracinate them from the society they are supposed to administrate. In this final section I will explore *Mœurs administratives*' historical and political preoccupations with this problem in mind. In so doing, we will see that it is precisely in their self-absorption that Ymbert's portrayal of the ministries vocalises developing nineteenth-century critiques of bureaucracy.

Anticipating Max Weber's longstanding hope that charismatic power might form a counterpoise to bureaucratic routine, in *Mœurs administratives*' third letter, Ymbert reminisces about the glory days of the Empire – when '*dilatory power'* was held in check by strongman politics. Today, the career bureaucrat's good qualities go unappreciated, Ymbert writes, whereas Napoleon, 'with his herculean arm, would seize a [talented man] by his hair, place him on a pedestal, and say, *Voilà ma créature*.'[223] Where the Napoleonic administration was the hub of 'vast projects that shook the world', with its industrious clerks retaining superhuman amounts of data pertaining to France's dominions, trade, and troop movements, under the Restoration, now 'everything has changed, conditions, careers, and jobs offer more room; but their limits, now stricter, are perceived by everyone' – that is, although there is less pressure to perform, there is also significantly less opportunity.[224] It is deference and guile, rather than administrative ability, that aid one's career: 'it is by constancy, deportment, tact, diplomacy, or by subterfuge that positions are retained, or a promotion gained'.[225] 'As for work', Ymbert continues, 'it now follows protocol', all innovations or flashes of brilliance have been replaced with mindless ritual.[226] Already we see the three categories against which Ymbert's narrator vindicates his Bonapartism: the nature of the labour process (and one's autonomy in its execution), the effectiveness of one's labour in conjunction with one's patriotic duty, and the opportunities for career progression – under Napoleon each of these was such that it fostered an *esprit de corps* while also satisfying individual ambitions.

Whatever the accuracy (or motives) of Ymbert's differentiation of regimes, as Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, in *Paris as Revolution* (1994), writes, Revolution is 'the distinctive chronotope of

[223] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives,* I, p. 78 – 'Napoléon, de son bras herculéen, le saisissait par les cheveux, le posait sur un piédestal, et disait : *Voilà ma créature*.'
[224] Ibid., I, pp. 80-82 – 'ces vastes projets qui ébranlaient le monde' ; Ibid., I, p. 84 – 'Tout a changé : les états, les carrières et les emplois présentent encore de l'espace ; mais leurs limites, plus resserrées, sont aperçues de tous les yeux.'
[225] Ibid., I, p. 84 – 'C'est par la constance, la tenue, l'esprit de conduite, la diplomatie ou la ruse qu'on demeure en place, ou qu'on avance.'
[226] Ibid., I, p. 84 – 'Quant au travail, il est maintenant de protocole'.

nineteenth-century [French] urban narratives' – that is, evoking Mikhail Bakhtin, space and time in this literature are represented through a principle of radical social change and upheaval.[227] Equally, however, it is because Ymbert focuses wholly on office life that this narrative sensitivity to the succession of regimes is refracted through the mundanities of bureaucratic schemas: historical change, class conflict, and street battles are translated into adjustments to hiring practices, promotions, and labour processes. Marx writes in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843/44) that it is because 'bureaucracy is the imaginary state next to the real state' (because it is a schematic image of the realities of political life) that, 'so far as the individual bureaucrat is concerned, the purpose of the state [is] his private purpose, *hunting for higher positions, making a career*'.[228] Ymbert, in his vindication of Napoleon, takes this sense of self-interested mediation a step further, by which even the slings and arrows of national history are reenvisaged according to the rhythms of the workday and the squabbles of office politics. It is because the focus of Ymbert's satire operates entirely from within the vantage of bureaucracy itself that his critique of Restoration society takes this career-oriented form.

However, just as the mediatory character of bureaucratic knowledge engenders a strange culture of its own, so too is bureaucracy's tendency to refract the vicissitudes of national life into schemas countervailed upon by the emergent political culture of the ministries themselves. As I stressed in the introductory chapter, the history of bureaucratisation appears to be just as much a process of acknowledging administrative work as an independent sphere as it reflects the pervasion of these tasks throughout society: the fact that Ymbert devotes the entirety of the Fourth Letter of his *cours* to the goings-on of a parliamentary session stresses that, just as Lamb conflates the clerk with the tradesman, so too does Ymbert appear to identify administration with government. That said, it is insofar as Ymbert portrays the 'dilatory power' of office proceduralism impinging upon executive volition that bureaucracy also figures as an autonomous sphere of society – albeit one that exerts *unofficial* political power. Politics and administration thus exhibit a confusing relationship in Ymbert's book: at once convergent spheres of national life, their structures and motives are emphatically at cross purposes. It is in this context that Ymbert's decision to depict the effects of a parliamentary session upon office life appears pertinent.

Perhaps emulating the confused conceptual status of bureaucracy with regard to politics, Ymbert can never settle on a metaphor: first, in distinguishing the parliamentary sessions from

[227] Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 5.
[228] Karl Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right' (1843), *The Portable Karl Marx*, pp. 115-125 (pp. 91-92).

prorogations he begins with meteorological language – 'there are, for the ministries, two very distinct seasons, which are not at all dissimilar to summer and winter', during the former 'activity is continual', the latter, 'one rests' – and these pseudo-agricultural seasons are reflected in readings from the 'office thermometer', that is, the relative level of parliamentary unrest.[229] But this pastoral imagery soon evolves. Ever metaphorical ciphers, Ymbert's suffering clerks are subjected to a new slew of analogies: the 'occupation of the *employé,* which outsiders happily compare to the soft and easy life of a canon, is, in the lead-up to and during the session, truly more like that of a galley slave.'[230] The common relationship that has so far unified these seemingly disparate metaphors is that they depict these ministries of villeins and galley slaves as subordinate to the 'higher sphere' of the Chamber, which operates like a ship's pilot, if not the climate and changing seasons.

This sense of metaphorical inferiority changes, however, as the ministries start to assert their autonomy and to effect counter-measures against the potentially reputation- or career-threatening scrutiny and reformation they may endure in the name of politics. After a session has been called, 'common danger silences all little discussions, mollifies little jealousies, and paralyses the squabbles over remit that were dividing the ministries': now, rhetorically-versed office staff tutor their ministers for debates in the Chamber, while 'squads of clerks' manoeuvre between ministries, picking up administrative shortfalls – echoing the vocabulary of the Revolution, Ymbert describes it as 'a *levée en masse* of penknives'.[231] Not only, therefore, does France's bureaucracy defend its own vested interests when faced with political pressure, this institutional closing of ranks also constitutes an interval between episodes of bureaucracy's *own* 'political' rivalries and spats. The warlike ministries are not 'conducting politics by other means' – they are their own centre of political interest and activity. Ultimately, Ymbert skews our conception of where bureaucracy ends and politics begins – we ask ourselves whether a minister is the highest bureaucrat or a copyist the lowest politician.

Ymbert's depiction of the relationship between administration and politics refracts contemporaneous debates surrounding administrative structures in France in the 1820s. The utopian socialist, Henri de Saint-Simon envisaged a society in which politics and governance would be 'absolutely independent of all human will' insofar as it would be outsourced to positively devised

[229] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives*, I, pp. 113-115 – 'Il y a […] pour les ministères, deux saisons bien distinctes, qui ne sont pas moins dissemblables que l'été et l'hiver', 'Durant la session […] l'activité est continuelle', 'mais quand arrive la prorogation […] on se repose', 'le thermomètre des bureaux'.
[230] Ibid., I, p. 117 – 'le métier de l'employé, que, dans le monde, on se plait à comparer à la vie molle et fainéante d'un chanoine, est, aux approches de la session, et durant la session, un vrai métier de galérien.'
[231] Ibid., I, p. 118 – 'Le commun danger fait taire les petites discussions, apaise les petites jalousies, et paralyse les tiraillements d'attributions qui divisaient les ministères' ; p. 118 'Le commun danger fait taire les petites discussions, apaise les petites jalousies, et paralyse les tiraillements d'attributions qui divisaient les ministères.' ; p. 119 – 'On s'emprunte réciproquement des escouades d'employés', 'c'est une levée en masse de plumes et de canifs'.

algorithms.[232] The liberal *Doctrinaires* argued for the reverse, with future Prime Minister, François Guizot, writing in 1821 that 'it is useless to pretend to distribute political and moral life through a system of "administrative navigation" which originates solely from Paris', and Pierre Paul Royer-Collard in 1822 arguing that France and its atomised populace 'have become a nation of administered people, under the hand of irresponsible civil servants, themselves centralised by the power of which they are agents.'[233] Ymbert, by contrast, envisages a bureaucracy in which revolution and regime change on a national level are felt as more or less effective management techniques, but also one that comes to form a revolutionary state in microcosm when politics proper starts to interfere in its business. His sense of bureaucracy under the Restoration is primarily one of conflict and corruption, but whether this is inherent to the character of bureaucratic institutions, or reflects their mismanagement in the context of 1820s society, remains ambiguous. In this respect Ymbert anticipates Weber's unanswered question about the development and social character of these structures:

> How far are administrative structures subject to economic determination? Or how far are opportunities for development created by other circumstances, for instance, the purely political? Or, finally, how far are developments created by an 'autonomous' logic that is solely of the technical structure as such?[234]

Mœurs administratives is therefore an unusual book: promising to demystify bureaucracy, it rather emulates it, subsuming the political and historical issues that surround it into its own schematised perspective, while also recapitulating these issues, writ small, in the office itself. Of course, as I suggested in the first section on Ymbert's book, this is a satirical device, and it allows him to heap literary devices, ideas, and observations on each other with none of the concern for theoretical consistency exhibited by contemporary commentators on these structures. Indeed, whatever his enthusiasm for administration in his life as a career bureaucrat, Ymbert's literary conception of these structures fails to reflect the rational, 'impersonal' model with which it is theoretically associated: rather, as he himself writes, it appears 'like a sphinx, with the head and hands of a girl, the body of a dog, the tail of a dragon, posing barbarous enigmas to passers-by' and 'tearing

[232] Henri de Saint-Simon, 'L'Organisateur', p. 199.
[233] François Guizot, Lettre à M. de Remusat, juin 1821, *Lettres de M. Guizot à sa famille et à ses amis,* ed. Mme de Witt (Paris: Hachette, 1884), pp. 12-15 (p. 13) (translated by Aurelian Craiutu); Amable Guillaume Prosper Brugière, baron de Barante, *La Vie politique de M. Royer-Collard : Ses discours et ses écrits*. 2 vols (Paris: Didier, 1861), II, p. 131 (translated by Craiutu). See also Aurelian Craiutu, *Liberalism Under Siege – The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003).
[234] Weber, 'Bureaucracy', pp. 243-244.

to pieces whoever could not decipher them.'[235] The 'dismembered' – and dismembering – nature of the bureaucracy that Ymbert describes not only connotes a site of social and political conflict, nor does it solely speak to its emergent conceptual character at this time: the image Ymbert presents also models the chimerical character of office literature during this early period, which very explicitly pits a range of contradictory ideas and social phenomena against each other to satirical effect.

4. Conclusion

In her article, 'Sodom, LLC – The Marquis de Sade and the office novel' (2016) Lucy Ives makes the provocative claim that Sade was 'one of the first major authors of what we might term modern bureaucratic literature.'[236] This is because

> his writings are extraordinarily, pruriently concerned with acts that can be accomplished only by people working in groups who follow, in an ordinary fashion, arbitrary rules and regulations. These secular constraints not only defy common sense but fly in the face of what we usually think of as basic respect for the sensations and lives of others. […] In this sense, they foreshadow the social world of the contemporary office.[237]

However appealing it is to analogise the depravity and impassive sex-drive of Sade with the experience of office work, and however accurately this analogy may apply to twentieth- or twenty-first-century office literature, Ives's conceit does not entirely accord with what we have seen so far in the first *actual* portrayals of office life. While Ives certainly speaks to the sense in which Sade, Lamb, and Ymbert are all, in their very different ways, happy to play upon, or are indeed suspicious of, the moral, personal, and social effects of deferring to instrumental reason, Lamb and Ymbert's works both stress the manner in which such reason may be corrupted, rather than purely how it may corrupt.[238]

Lamb, writing from his 'desk's-eye-view', and Ymbert, flitting from minister down to office boy, both stress that bureaucracy is governed by labour processes that may have a more tangential relationship with the subject being administrated than suspected. They portray ostensibly rational systems that have been instituted in order to more effectively gauge trade, or mete out policy, and, in so doing, they therefore evoke a sphere that is increasingly distinct from both administrated object and theoretical impetus. It is from this *intermundia* that Lamb and Ymbert operate – with Lamb playing

[235] Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives*, II, p. 49 – '[administration] apparait aux administrés telle que le sphynx, ayant la tête et les mains d'une fille, le corps d'un chien, la queue d'un dragon, proposant aux passants ses barbares énigmes ; car vous vous rappelez que le sphynx mettait en pièces quiconque ne les devinait pas.'
[236] Lucy Ives, 'Sodom LLC', *Lapham's Quarterly*, IX.4 (September 2016), <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/flesh/sodom-llc> [accessed 4/11/2020].
[237] Ibid.
[238] On Sade's sense of the dangers of reason, see 'Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality' in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, tr. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: SUP, 2002), pp. 63-93.

on the attenuated position this puts the clerk himself in, and Ymbert suggesting that, in its blinkered self-conceptualisation, bureaucracy exhibits a simultaneously rarefied and highly self-interested nature.

Just as office work is itself a process – a labour process, and, indeed, a historical process (despite the atemporal, formalistic spirit in whose image it was apparently made) – so too is office literature subject to change. In focussing respectively on office *work,* and therefore implicitly on the office as an economic phenomenon, and on bureau*cracy*, '*rule*-by-the-desk', as a political phenomenon, Lamb and Ymbert together illustrate the extent to which the conceptual understanding of the office was undeveloped in the early years of its modern incarnation. As we have seen, this tension is partly governed by biographical details and also national intellectual traditions: while Ymbert conceives of bureaucrats as the 'shepherds' of an atomised and petitionary body of subjects, Lamb sees his labour as constituent of 'all mercantile transactions, all traffic, exchange of commodities, intercourse between nations'.[239] Nevertheless, the East India Company was undoubtedly a political body just as the administration of the French state is an activity necessarily predicated upon economic issues. While it is ambiguous as to whether these two understandings derived from the office are ever fully synthesised in later works, bureaucracy and office work themselves attain ever greater conceptual autonomy in the works going forward, just as the 'family resemblances' underlying their portrayal converge into a more coherent genre.

[239] Lamb, Letter CLII, to Wordsworth, 1815, *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, I, pp. 286-290 (p. 289). For an explanation of the political-economic hybrid character of the East India Company, see Andrew Phillips and J. C. Sharman, 'Company-states and the creation of the global international system', *European Journal of International Relations*, 26:4 (2020), pp. 1249-1272. See Meiksins Wood's *Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, on the ambiguously economic character of French politics, pp. 72-73.

Chapter Two – Popularisation: Physiological Literature and the Debut of the Clerical 'Type'

1. Introduction

British and French office literature originates with Charles Lamb and Jean-Gilbert Ymbert, clerks who documented aspects of their working lives; but it soon deracinated itself from the immediacy of office experience and first-hand knowledge, forming an autonomous body of literary tropes that responded to bureaucratisation in its wider context. This development is marked in particular by the emergence of a clerical literary 'type', which I explore in this chapter in the context of the 'journalistic revolution' of the 1830s and '40s. Thanks to improved printing technology and a relative softening of legal pressure, this period was marked by an 'unprecedented expansion of ephemeral print media and graphic journalism', including a range of short-form mass-produced literary works that commentated upon the modern urban landscape and its inhabitants.[240] Often adopting a mock-scientific or proto-sociological paradigm to categorise the society around them, these 'physiological' texts (a term I will explain in Section 1.1. below) resonate with the aims and comparable schemas of an emergent bureaucracy; but equally, as the products of the more indeterminate marketised sphere that they describe, these often satirical works were as free to play with and subvert such schematic perspectives as adopt them.

The highly stereotyped variety of office worker portrayed in this literature by no means forms the only social 'type' to enter the popular consciousness at this time: shopkeepers, lawyers, 'fashionable authoresses', street-hawkers, *grisettes,* and so on all fell subject to this typological tendency. It is, however, because the clerk straddles two social structures, the rigid bureaucratic sphere and a more free-form civil society, each with its own style of cognition, that this particular literary 'type' comes to embody a series of epistemic and social tensions in early-to-mid-nineteenth-century France and Britain. These texts not only crystallise the clerk as a stock character in nineteenth-century literature, they also explore the role of the office in broader society – both features that characterise office literature hereafter. This literature offers a vantage onto office life that is distinct to the self-consciously 'insider' perspectives of Lamb and Ymbert, but it is equally in the extent to which this literature exhibits many 'family resemblances' in its portrayal of the office to those tropes employed in the previous chapter that we see a tradition of office literature start to cohere. It is ultimately with the consolidation of the many vying approaches to the portrayal of office life and

[240] Martina Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth-Century – European Journalism and its* Physiologies, *1830-50* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-2; Simon Eliot, 'Books and their Readers', *The Nineteenth-Century Novel – Realisms,* ed. Delia Da Sousa Correa (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 24-25.

bureaucracy explored between these first two chapters in the novels of Chapter Three that a literary conceptualisation of these phenomena coheres.

1.1. 'Physiological' writing

In this section I outline the origins and character of the 'physiological' literature that I analyse over this chapter, its broader historical and intellectual context, and how I frame this literature in the context of my focus on office literature. I will in later sections discuss the particularities of specific varieties of this literature and its development. In the Introductory Chapter I suggested, via my reading of Poe's 'Man of the Crowd', that bureaucratisation was in part catalysed by the increasing complexity and dynamism of a modern, urbanised society – but the story itself is evidence also of a peculiarly *literary* response to this new social environment. Famously characterised by Georg Simmel as 'the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli', the experience of urban life fosters an aesthetic of its own – one accentuated in this first major period of urbanisation, critic Martina Lauster writes, insofar as the city was very consciously held to be in a state of 'visible transition'.[241] Lauster describes the early to mid-nineteenth-century urban environment as 'a whole universe of signifiers, signifying techniques and viewing methods' – at once representing the proliferation of vying epistemologies and cognitive structures, but, equally, one that, in its anonymity and complexity, foreclosed more intimate or esoteric means of social knowledge to the individual.[242]

This focus on the experience of urban life was reflected in a new range of ephemeral, short-form texts that started to appear in the 1830s in newspapers, magazines, as serials, or as standalone pamphlets.[243] These texts together offered analyses of the urban 'universe of signifiers' by individually inspecting particular urban phenomena and social 'types' (archetypal figures who might be described, paraphrasing McCulloch from the previous chapter, as individualised incarnations of 'man in the aggregate'). But this literature's form and style changed over this principal period of its efflorescence, the 1830s and '40s. At first highly heteromorphic, consisting of impressionistic sketches, dialogues, cartoons, and short stories in the mid-1830s, the identification of urban 'types' lent itself to more formalised literary models, reflected by the end of the decade with the rise of extensive 'encyclopaedic' projects that itemised the components of this new social world for readers'

[241] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', from *The Sociology of Georg Simmel,* pp. 409-424 (p. 410); Lauster, p. 23.
[242] Lauster, p. 23.
[243] I can only give a rough outline of this literature's character and development here, but it receives far more extensive treatment in Lauster's own *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century – European Journalism and its* Physiologies, *1830-50* (2007), and, with a more French-centric focus, in Valérie Stiénon's *La Littérature des Physioiologies – Sociopoétique d'un genre panoramique (1830-1845)* (Paris: Garnier, 2017), and in the first chapter of Anne O'Neil-Henry's *Mastering the Marketplace – Popular Literature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

edification. The peak in this tendency's innovation and its popularity is marked in turn by the coalescence of the Parisian *physiologie* craze over the 1840-42 period – *physiologies* being fairly uniform, one-franc booklets, that were produced by a handful of rival publishing houses, and which, as critic Pierre Bazantay writes, '[misappropriated] their scientific alibi in order to caricature society in a humorous, alacritous, or ironic manner'.[244] The vogue for *physiologies* is notable at once for these pamphlets' highly sardonic and inventive content, and for their formal and historical specificity, with the *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle* (1866-90) remarking that, during these couple of years, 'people set about writing *physiologies* as in the seventeenth century they painted portraits – every profession, every characteristic figure, was analysed to the tiniest detail', this literature '[encompassed] absolutely everything'.[245] The production and popularity of the *physiologies* proper was principally confined to Paris and very quickly declined after 1842, but their influence was felt more broadly and throughout the 1840s, most explicitly in those similar articles or booklets that openly described themselves as 'physiologies' or 'natural histories'.[246] Lumping this literary trend altogether under a single term is of course an exercise in simplification, one that critics past have also had to deal with, but it is because the *physiologies* are the most coherent and charismatic product of this broader but more variegated literary trend that I refer to all of these texts as 'physiological' – even if the *physiologies* proper are only one example of a broader tendency.[247]

Texts are 'physiological' insofar as they catalogue and analyse urban life in certain, primarily visual, ways: they 'botanise on the asphalt', to use Walter Benjamin's famous metaphor.[248] Equally, however, my decision to refer to this tendency by way of the *physiologies* proper already illustrates the kinds of tensions to which categorisation gives rise: one might argue that naming a broad tendency after its most extreme exemplar obscures this tradition's nuances, or that this name erroneously implies that its incarnations prior to 1840 merely anticipate the *physiologies* proper. While these

[244] Pierre Bazantay, introduction to Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie de l'employé* (Rennes: La Part Commune, 2015), pp. 7-8 (p. 7) – 'Ces physiologies détournent l'alibi scientifique pour caricaturer avec drôlerie, alacrité ou ironie la société.'

[245] 'Physiologie – Littér[aire]', *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, ed. Pierre Larousse, 17 vols (Paris : Administration du Grand Dictionnaire universel, 1866-1890), XII (1874), p. 918 – 'vers 1840, on se mit à faire des *physiologies,* comme au XVIIe siècle on faisait des portraits, et toutes les professions, tous les types caractéristiques furent analysés dans leur moindres particularités', 'Il englobe absolument tout.'

[246] Lauster, p. 1. For a self-described 'scientific' treatise on social life, see for example Albert Smith's *The Natural History of the Gent* (1847). By contrast, William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Book of Snobs* (1848) represents a 'physiological' text that less overtly adopts a quasi-scientific paradigm.

[247] Cf. Lauster, p. 1 – 'Although only a minority of European sketches were published under the title of 'Physiology' or 'Natural History', the quasi-scientific method of observing the social body, taking the visible world as its point of departure for the categorisation of types, is common to all of them, and this is why sketches are implicitly subsumed under the genre of *Physiologies* in the subtitle of this study.'

[248] Walter Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire,* ed. Michael W. Jennings, translated by Howard Eiland [and others] (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Belknap, 2006), p. 68.

tensions provide an appealing parallel with those that underlie the practice of identifying social 'types' itself, these texts are more broadly unified by their frequent use of 'scientific paradigms, those of physiology, zoology, and geology' to describe their subjects – or, at least, a meta-discursive attention to *modes* of categorisation as well as to categorising itself.[249] Of course, 'physiological' texts of all varieties 'appropriate and transform' such intellectual models rather than apply them in earnest, thereby 'making possible insights into a social body in transition' – and therefore my focus is less on their relationship to scientific developments of this period than to the social context of changing epistemic practices.[250] Indeed, critic Richard Sieburth argues that these 'inventories of social types' owe as much to pre-existing '*études des mœurs*' (moral studies, in a similar vein to *Mœurs administratives*), as they do to 'a tradition of medical materialism.'[251]

Whether 'physiological' writing was an attempt to understand the manner in which a great concentration of people 'naturally begins to subdivide and improve itself', as Adam Smith claims in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), or whether it was itself simply a product of this same process – a 'commercial', or even 'industrial' literature, as the critic Ruth Amossy writes – is a tension that underlies its exemplars.[252] Indeed, the ambiguous relationship of this literature to its inspiration is reflected in its critical history: while Benjamin contended that 'urban sketches [were] part and parcel of a middle-class attempt to gain control over a threatening social body', Lauster counterargues that they were an 'engine of social knowledge' in a complex society.[253] Of course, the history of bureaucracy tells us that the pursuit of control and that of knowledge need not be conceived of as countervailing projects – nevertheless, the popular demand for 'physiological' literature, and the versatility of these works' style, meant that the apparent social normativity of a project initially focused around the observations of the upper middle-class *flâneur* was partly undermined by the diversity of the medium and its market: as the 'physiological' writer, Jules Janin wrote, 'the individual mocking observer does not exist anymore', instead, 'everybody is studying and commenting on the way we live'.[254]

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[249] Lauster, p. 20.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Richard Sieburth, 'Une idéologie du lisible : le phénomène des Physiologies', *Romantisme* 47 (1985), pp. 39-60 (p. 40). For a more scientifically informed reading of the *physiologies,* see J. Andrew Mendelsohn, 'The Microscopist of Modern Life', *Osiris,* 2nd Series, Vol. 18, Science and the City (2003), pp. 150-170.
[252] Smith, *The Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, p. 122, on the apparent spontaneity of the division of labour see also pp. 117-121; Ruth Amossy, 'Types ou stéréotypes ? Les « Physiologies » et la littérature industrielle', *Romantisme,* 64 (1989), pp. 113-123 (p. 115).
[253] Lauster, p. 3, p. 8. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire, pp.* 46-133 (pp. 66-70).
[254] Jules Janin, 'Asmodée', *Livre des Cent-et-un,* 15 vols (Paris : Ladvocat, 1831-4), I (1831), pp. 1-15 (p. 14) – 'Il n'y a plus de railleur en particulier, en revanche tout le monde étudie et corrige les mœurs' – Lauster's translation.

Insofar as both address issues of social knowledge, the parallels between 'physiological' literature and bureaucracy are clear. Indeed, taken together, 'physiological' literature and bureaucracy alike reflect what Daniel R. Headrick calls the 'information revolution' that spanned the 1700 to 1850 period. In *When Information Came of Age* (2000) Headrick writes that his period of study was not only one of political and economic revolution, it was also typified by an increasing demand 'to classify, process, store, retrieve, or transmit information quickly or with less cost and effort'.[255] This 'swelling demand for information' was in part supplied with new institutions, procedures, and tasks (that is, with bureaucracy), but Headrick stresses that this period is also typified by the development of new 'systematics', new technical means of identifying, articulating, and presenting pertinent information: encyclopaedias, statistics, graphs, and taxonomical systems.[256] It is because 'physiological' texts reconfigure these new 'systematics' for comic ends, or even satirise these modes of information transfer themselves, that their affinity to nineteenth-century bureaucratisation via this concept of 'information revolution' is therefore adulterated by other factors.

This sense of disparity between bureaucratic and 'physiological' cognition is rooted in their structural context – that is, because Headrick's 'information revolution' applies as much to the emergence of a contrasting public sphere as it does to bureaucratisation and the broader consolidation of state apparatuses. Characterised by Jürgen Habermas as a free-form network for information exchange, the 'public sphere' mirrored the market structures that were increasingly constitutive of civil society, and which served as a counterpoise to central government policy through the force of 'public opinion'.[257] 'Rooted in the world of letters', Habermas writes, newspapers were an increasingly integral element of its structure, and therefore whereas bureaucratic knowledge is to be characterised by its 'asset specificity' (that is, it is highly specialised), knowledge in the public sphere is oriented to a general readership – 'information on politics, commerce, and useful discoveries was produced and reproduced at a massive rate' across early nineteenth-century Europe.[258] Where Jean-Gilbert Ymbert parodied the 'dilatory' character resulting from the pedantry of bureaucratic forms of information in *Mœurs administratives*, 'physiological' literature therefore plays up another side to the nineteenth-century 'information revolution'.

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[255] Daniel R. Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution 1700-1850* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 6.
[256] Ibid., p. 10, p. 8.
[257] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, tr. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Polity Press: 1989), p. 85, p. 109 – The conditions underlying the public sphere 'depended altogether on social relationships among freely competing commodity owners, falling within the sphere that was the preserve of their private autonomy.'
[258] Habermas, p. 85; On asset specificity, see Neil Garston, 'The Study of Bureaucracy', from *Bureaucracy: Three Paradigms,* pp. 1-22 (p. 12); Bayly, p. 82. cf. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, pp. 226-227.

Although, as Maurice S. Lee writes in *Overwhelmed* (2019), the tension between an ascendant 'data-based knowledge' and declining 'humanistic authority' was reflected in the nineteenth century by an apparent literary antipathy toward information systems, 'physiological' writing indicates that this relationship was as potentially dynamic and creative as it was confrontational.[259] By contrasting the emergence of this literature as part of a broader journalistic, and information, revolution, with bureaucratisation, I therefore want to stress less the motives behind each project, but rather the differing *structural* character of these phenomena. Rather than construct a monolithic, limpidly instrumental image of society, the 'collective of observer sketchers' that produced these texts operated within conceptual 'orders constituted from a potentially infinite number of parts and aspects' – together constituting what critic, Nathalie Preiss calls 'a shattered mirror' of society.[260] Despite this decentralised product, these texts nevertheless also resonate with the bureaucratic project in their relatively formalised approach to articulating the social world. It is therefore when they turn to bureaucracy and the clerical 'type' that these texts overtly explore the various epistemic, political, and social problematics underlying nineteenth-century bureaucratisation – while also serving to distinguish the means and ends of office literature from those of its subject.

1.2. Choice of texts

My examination of physiological writing covers its main period of emergence and innovation, the 1830s and '40s. Although 'types' certainly persist beyond this period, as do brief sketches of them in periodicals, and so does a tendency to aestheticise the urban scene – very famously exemplified by, and theorised in, Charles Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne* [The Painter of Modern Life] (1863) – the period covered by the present chapter marks the first flourishing of physiological literature: when it was at the height of its both its popularity and inventiveness. I divide my chapter into three sections that at once chart the crystallisation of the clerical type as well as following this literature's formal development by way of its paradigmatic exemplars, from impressionistic sketches to the sardonic *physiologies* proper. I therefore focus on those texts among the hundreds of physiological analyses from this period that make office workers their central object of attention, beginning with Henry Monnier's *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique* (1835) and two clerical appearances in Charles Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* (first serialised in 1836, later published in one volume in 1839) (Section 2). I will then proceed in Section 3 to investigate sketches of clerks in the collaborative, 'encyclopaedic', works that formalised such impressionistic writing: *Heads of the People* (edited by Douglas Jerrold,

[259] Lee, p. 3.
[260] Lauster, p. 211, p. 214 ; Nathalie Press, 'Les physiologies, un miroir en miettes', in *Les Français peints par eux-memes. Panorama du XIX^e^ siècle* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), pp. 62-67 (pp. 62-63).

first serialised in 1838, later compiled into two volumes in 1840-41) and its French counterpart, *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* [The French painted by themselves] (edited by Léon Curmer, first appeared in 1839, later compiled into nine volumes from 1840-42). Finally, in Section 4, I will look at the various satirical imitators and offshoots of these 'encyclopaedic' works from around the height of the *physiologie* craze to see how treatment of the clerk changes with this literature's increasing formal inventiveness. These last texts are Louis Huart's evocation of the clerical temperament in his satirical emulation of more 'encyclopaedic' works, *Muséum parsienne* [Parisian museum] (1841), the clerk as envisaged by the *Physiologies* proper, in Honoré de Balzac's *Physiologie de l'employé* [Physiology of the government clerk] (1841), and articles that each address different conceptual and social issues surrounding office workers that appeared in the first years of the periodical, *Punch* (1841-1992).

Although I focus on the novels of Charles Dickens and Honoré de Balzac in Chapter Three, some of their non-novelistic works also appear in this chapter. I largely include Dickens and Balzac by virtue of their works' pertinence (indeed, Andrée Lhéritier even suggests that the *physiologie* craze owes its 'paternity', or at least its name, to Balzac's 1829 essay, *Physiologie du Mariage*).[261] However these authors' inclusion also gives some continuity to the development of office literature between the short-form works of the present chapter and the large novels of the next. This same sense of a line of development applies to Henry Monnier, whose observations and characterisation of office life Balzac 'borrowed' when writing *Les Employés,* and who himself appeared to lift aspects of his observations from Ymbert. Lauster stresses that physiological sketches constitute a 'distinct type of literature in their own right' and are not '"practice pieces" eventually merging into the great realist novels'.[262] That said, however distinct these two literary forms may be, from the perspective of office literature and its development the two clearly inform one another in terms of their observations and characterisation of office life. Equally though, this sense of continuity does not discount the clear differences between these two mediums: it is in the short, episodic, and descriptive rather than synoptic, nature of physiological writing that the mundane and repetitive experience of office work can take centre stage – office work and clerical 'types' by contrast often appear more secondary in longer-form works.

2. Clerical Sketches – 'Monsieur Prudhomme' and 'Boz'

While the texts covered in later sections are more explicitly physiological by way of their heightened formality, in the 1830s there was a whole range of *feuilleton*-style short-form texts that, although lacking strong categorical strictures, similarly engaged in the identification or construction of similar

[261] Andrée Lhéritier, *Les Physiologies* (Paris : Service International de microfilms, 1966), p. 15.
[262] Lauster, p. 19.

'types'. Both Henry Monnier (1799-1877) and Charles Dickens (1812-1870) in his early sketches (upon whom I will elaborate in further detail in their respective sections) offer ideal examples of 'pre-physiological physiologies' that also portrayed bureaucracy and the clerical 'type' in the years leading up to the 1838-42 'boom' in physiological writing. Dickens and Monnier also provide a degree of continuity between the writing of the 1820s from Chapter One and later works to be explored in this and subsequent chapters. Although there is a clear heredity in tone and style leading from Lamb to Dickens, and onward, it is particularly ironic, as I suggested in the previous chapter, that the Parisian literary circles devoted to mocking copyists should in particular have engaged in so much borrowing, if not direct plagiarism: we will see that Monnier represents another increment in a ministry-based literary tradition that begins with Ymbert and continues onto Balzac, and (in Chapter Four) Joris-Karl Huysmans and Georges Courteline.[263]

2.1. Henry Monnier, *Mœurs administratives* (1828) and *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique* (1835)

Jean-Gilbert Ymbert's portrayal of incompetent or corrupt bureaucrats came with a clear political motivation. By contrast, the superficial character of physiological literature in general is indicative of a shift to comic portrayals of office workers based upon their immediate personal qualities. Ralph Kingston theorises that this shift from political to *ad hominem* satire started in France when the 'ultra' royalist government of the late 1820s 'effectively outlawed direct political attacks' through strict libel laws, but decided it could tolerate the satirisation of minor officials.[264] Although under the July Monarchy after the 1830 Revolution there was (initially) a political thaw, an 'unflattering bureaucratic type' whose work and mannerisms were deracinated from its political context had already congealed in the popular consciousness.[265] Kingston also acknowledges, however, that this shift in focus was also a product of the social conditions that were conducive to physiological writing more generally, writing that the *employé*, was one of a number of '"bourgeois types" – lawyers, shopkeepers, money-lenders, journalists – [who] were being constructed in the same period.'[266] State and civil society alike were pushing the clerical 'type' into existence – and it is this provenance from two worlds that defines him.

Henry Monnier was one such contributor to the development of the clerk as a social archetype. Monnier was a satirist, cartoonist, and actor who, under his own name and that of his comically ultra-bourgeois alter-ego, 'M. Joseph Prudhomme', generally ridiculed the Parisian middle-

[263] Adam Phillips suggests that Lamb's portrayal of the 'rituals of genteel privacy with a fascination and sense of the bizarre […] anticipate Dickens', Introduction to *Selected Prose,* p. 15; Fess, pp. 236–242; cf. Guy Thuillier, 'En marge de Balzac : Les *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique* (1835) d'Henry Monnier', *La Revue administrative*, 54:320 (March April, 2001), pp. 129-137.
[264] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society*, p. 118.
[265] Ibid., p. 126.
[266] Ibid., pp. 194-195.

classes. Monnier's first concerted treatment of the office in particular was in his series of cartoons, *Mœurs administratives* (1828). While *Mœurs administratives* superficially appears to be a visual homage to Ymbert's homonymous observations, rather than, like his predecessor, organise his office scenes by theme, Monnier adopts the more expedient method of taking us through episodes entitled after the hours of the working day. In 'Nine O'clock' we see Monnier's newly-arrived, groggy-looking clerks gather around the office stove (a prop to recur in French portrayals of office life hereafter); in 'Midday' the *chef de division* [departmental head] enters and everyone is obliged to look busy; in 'Two O'clock' we see an empty office littered with top hats – Monnier's *employés* have absconded from the ministry, leaving their hats behind to give the impression that they will shortly return; and by 'Four O'clock' a mass of pot-bellied clerks files homeward through the ministerial lobby.[267]

In contrast to Ymbert's professed interest in bureaucracy's functional relation both to politics and to the administrated peoples of France, we get no sense from Monnier's lithographs of the actual object of the work undertaken by his visor-clad *employés*: Monnier's office is portrayed purely in terms of the immediate, usually empirical, qualities of its setting, routines, and staff – and these also are the terms upon which it is satirised. While a disparity between form and function formed an element of Ymbert's *cours d'administration*, there it read as if it was an emergent property of bureaucracy's own functional blinkeredness, rather than being purely a quality of the artwork itself. This epistemic disparity is reflected in the lives of the authors themselves: where Ymbert was very much an authority on France's bureaucracy, Monnier at most – according to nineteenth-century biographies – was only temporarily a clerk, with one biography claiming that the office exerted a formative influence upon Monnier's future career as a 'painter of mores'.[268] Kingston more recently has written however that Monnier 'deceptively claimed the authority of an ex-*employé*, [and] was therefore not describing the attitudes of real administrators. Rather, he was adding to an already established bureaucratic type.'[269] While Monnier's claim to have been a clerk and the parallel made between office life and the kinds of social categories that Monnier produced is suggestive of a recognised affinity between bureaucratic cognition and that of an emergent physiological literature, the immediacy of Monnier's focus and superficiality of his observations are indicative of the changing role of the office in artistic consciousness. Evidently the predominance of the empirical qualities of the office over the rational

[267] Henry Monnier, 'Neuf heures, arrivée des employés, changemens [sic] de costumes, petit tour de poêle', 'Midi, arrivée de Mr le Chef de Division, travail obligé', 'Deux heures, promenades dans l'intérieur du Ministère, les chapeaux remplacent les absens [sic]', and 'Quatre heures, départ des employés, oubli jusqu'au lendemain de toute affaire bureaucratique' [lithographs] from *Mœurs administratives* (Paris: Delpeche, 1828).
[268] Champfleury, *Henry Monnier, Sa Vie, Son Œuvre,* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1879), pp. 4-5.
[269] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society*, p. 126.

ends to which is put in itself forms a potential critique of bureaucracy, but for Monnier this critique is implied rather than explicit.

This perspective recurs in Monnier's closet drama, *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique – interieur des bureaux* [Scenes from bureaucratic life – Inside the offices] (1835). Like Monnier's *Mœurs administratives*, *Scènes* partly relies on office hours as a structural motif: over forty short dialogues, 'scenes', Monnier takes us all the way from arguments about the heating at the beginning of the day to showing who clocks off – and who does not – at four. It is fortunate that the scenes should be governed by this timeframe because there is no clear narrative: without the nine-to-four arc, Monnier's clerks would otherwise exchange passive-aggressive banalities and pare their nails continuously, a process only punctuated by the re-enactment of episodes from Monnier's *Mœurs administratives* (including the two-o'clock 'hat trick'.)[270] As I argued regarding Ymbert's epistolary style in Chapter One, there is a sense that the writer of office literature is obliged to seek structural devices inherent in the office itself, be it paperwork or, in Monnier's case, the working day, to drive their work rather than expecting a clear narrative arc to emerge from the lived experience of a realm governed by 'dilatory power.'

Despite being confined to the office*,* Monnier's clerks in *Scènes* focus more on the arbitrary signifiers of social status than fetishise the official ranks from which Ymbert's clerks derived their self-importance – a change that heralds the rise of an urban clerical 'type' over the more politicised character of prior portrayals. These vying bases of power converge in the form of M. Doutremer, the tyrannical *commis principale* [head clerk], who scolds an underling for referring to his 'spouse': '*Your wife,* if you please; only labourers use the term spouse to refer to their wives.'[271] Not only does this transition from the self-importance of rank that so galled Ymbert to an obsession with social deportment mirror the general shift from the portrayal of the functions of office work towards its form, it also resituates this form within a broader socio-cultural field: Monnier's clerks are less Ymbert's jealous conspirators than figures who implicitly conflate the values of the more free-form social world with the strictures of office life. Although Lamb's 'Good Clerk' also represented a conflicted amalgam of commercial (if not bourgeois) mannerisms and bureaucratic functionality, these manifested themselves in his behaviour as an agent of the firm, rather than explicitly relating to cachet in a social realm that extended beyond the office.

[270] Henry Monnier, *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique – Intérieur des bureaux* (1835), from *Scènes Populaires dessinées à la plume* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1890), pp. 208-257 (p. 223).
[271] Ibid., p. 238 – '*Votre femme,* s'il vous plait ; il n'y a que les ouvriers qui se servent de ce terme d'épouse pour désigner leurs femmes.'

In keeping with this sense of a shift from official roles to social 'types', *Scènes* begins with an extended *dramatis personae* of Monnier's ministerial employees that closely accords to the short-form physiological style. These biographies largely account for the lack of character development afforded by the cursory portrayal of a single working day, but they also read like a series of decidedly candid *curricula vitae*. Historian, Roger Magraw writes that after the fall of Napoleon, officials were recast as 'gentleman-amateurs from the natural elite', and 'job-seekers learned to begin application forms with an outline of family genealogy' – and so too do Monnier's outlines of management begin with family background.[272] We read that the affected *chef de division,* M. de Saint-Maur, attained his position 'thanks to the influence exercised by a cousin of his mother, a parvenu, [who was] one of those very capable figures of the period, having occupied top jobs under the Empire,' – and of whom Saint-Maur feigns ignorance, perhaps 'persuaded that it was to his personal merit alone that he owed his rise.'[273] It is clearly ironic that Saint-Maur should benefit from the nepotism of a meritocrat and in turn feign his own ability rather than acknowledge the influence of a 'parvenu' – and this Gordian knot of pretensions, predicated upon vying conceptions of rank and merit in the bureaucratic career, recurs in office literature hereafter (itself reflecting not only the contentious character of bureaucratic work, which I explored with regard to Lamb's 'Superannuated Man', but also the equally contentious nature of its reward and recompense.)[274]

M. de Saint-Maur's immediate inferior, M. Clergeot, is equally a beneficiary of nepotism, and because his education was 'badly managed, more neglected', he 'inspired […] little confidence' upon entering the offices, and 'received the formal order never to interfere in work and to do nothing without having obtained prior authorisation from his superiors – authorisation that, incidentally, was never solicited.'[275] In order to occupy himself at work, Monnier writes that upon receiving a newly engrossed document from a clerk, 'with the help of very thick ink, [Clergeot] would cross out entire sentences and then repeat them word-for-word above as his alleged corrections.'[276] Ironically,

[272] Magraw, p. 42

[273] Monnier, *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique*, p. 208 – 'Elevé à la place importante qu'il occupe au ministère, grâce à l'influence qu'exerçait alors un cousin de sa mère, un parvenu, l'une des grandes capacités de l'époque ayant occupé les premières places sous l'Empire […] ou persuadé que c'était à son mérite personnel seulement qu'il était redevable de son élévation.'

[274] Kingston outlines this in terms of tensions between *ancienneté* (seniority), versus merit, versus 'honour', or outright nepotism, in *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society*, pp. 52-72.

[275] Monnier, *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique*, p. 209 – 'L'éducation qu'il avait reçue, mal dirigée, plus négligée encore' ; 'Comme il inspira, dès son entrée, assez peu de confiance, on lui intima l'ordre formel de ne jamais se mêler du travail et de ne jamais rien faire sans avoir obtenu des supérieurs une autorisation préalable, autorisation qui, par parenthèse, ne fut jamais sollicitée.'

[276] Ibid., p. 210 – 'A l'aide d'une encre très épaisse, il raturait des phrases entières et les répétait exactement au-dessus de ses prétendues corrections'.

Clergeot's perverse replication of the activities of a copyist is the closest we get to a real-time portrayal of an office task in *Scènes,* where work is otherwise eternally deferred.

Monnier's portraits of the clerks therefore tend more to itemise their mannerisms, hobbies, political allegiances, and social connections, than their labour. We learn more about their dress than we do their capacity as functionaries. Nevertheless, this eminently social, rather than occupational, characterisation reflects the ideology of Parisian *employés* at this time. Historian Adeline Daumard writes that the diverse constituents of Parisian middle classes during this period could be recognised by their 'desire for autonomy and liberty that they demonstrated in the management of their fortunes [and] in their professional lives'.[277] It is by contrast because the confined and rigidly hierarchical nature of bureaucracy precludes the kind of economic and professional autonomy here implied, that socially-conscious French bureaucrats, Kingston writes, instead operated within a related schema of 'social' and 'cultural capital', represented by membership of learned and cultural societies, as well as through the acquisition of accolades, including the Legion of Honour.[278] It is with these kinds of social markers that Monnier introduces us to his clerks, also distinguishing their positions in the National Guard and the status of their spouses (or wives).

Monnier thus engages in the kind of 'cultural semiology' that Lauster attributes to physiological literature more broadly.[279] That is, whereas Ymbert's ministries were absorbed in their own semiosis, Monnier's offices, by contrast, overlap onto a broader semiotic system in which socio-cultural cues rather than (dys)functional meanings are apparently pre-eminent. The physiological conception of society as a 'totality to which the individual type or phenomenon, empirically observed, is linked via signifiers', but which is itself ultimately abstract, evidently resonates with bureaucracy's own ingestion and processing of social knowledge for the sake of intelligibility, and, ultimately therefore, instrumentality – that is, both confront the issue of an increasingly complex society that outstrips the cognizance of any one person.[280] Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction between Ymbert's ministries' increasing detachment from the social reality they purport to manage, and Monnier's focus on the socio-cultural qualities of the clerk as distinct from his (potentially non-existent) work functions – be these qualities inherent to the office, as in Monnier's *Mœurs administratives*, or related to a broader social schema, as in *Scènes*. Just as 'The Good Clerk' was

[277] Adeline Daumard, *La bourgeoisie parisienne de 1815 à 1848* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), p. 617 – 'Choisir, et choisir dans des domaines multiples et entre plusieurs possibilités, était un des traits distinctifs des bourgeois […] Cette faculté de choix s'alliait chez les bourgeois parisiens à un besoin d'indépendance, à un désir d'autonomie et de liberté qu'ils manifestaient dans la gestion de leur fortune, comme dans leur vie professionnelle'.
[278] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society*, pp. 92-93.
[279] Lauster, p. 318.
[280] Ibid., p. 91.

underlain by a tension between the cultural and functional character of the clerk, so too, Lauster writes, is the physiological mode a reflection of a 'fully commodified civilisation [that] recasts social identity not only in terms of buyers and sellers of labour. It frees an individual's social existence from any fixed "use-value", providing it instead with an arbitrary "exchange-value".'[281] That this literary preoccupation with clerkly 'exchange-value' – social prestige, symbolic distinction – should have also governed the pretensions of *real* Parisian functionaries, as Kingston suggests, demonstrates the peculiar antagonism and overlap of the ideals that govern bureaucracy and those of the world beyond its walls.

2.2. Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (1839).

Between 1833 and 1836, writing under the pen-name, 'Boz', Charles Dickens saw his first works enter publication. These 'sketches' of metropolitan and provincial life first appeared individually in periodicals and were subsequently compiled into a single volume, *Sketches by Boz,* in 1839.[282] Although Dickens had worked as a clerk as a teenager – later writing in a letter that 'a lawyer's office is a very little world, and a very dull one' – he does not convey the experience of this microcosm in his sketches from what might be called a clerk's-eye-view.[283] Instead, the portrayal of office workers is characterised by the same tone of detached bemusement that 'Boz' generally employs in his observations. The ubiquity of this tone is in part due to the fact that, while Monnier 'typologised' clerks by themselves, from within the confines of the office itself, Dickens more often portrays them as one of several components of a rapidly urbanising society. Even more so than with Monnier, therefore, this style represents a shift from the 'inside knowledge' of Lamb and Ymbert, to a more exoteric approach in the portrayal of clerks and office life.

'The Streets – Morning', in which Dickens cultivates an image of London as spatiotemporal organism, is one such example. 'Boz' tells us that

> The bakers' shops in town are filled with servants and children waiting for the drawing of the first batch of rolls – an operation which was performed a full hour ago in the suburbs: for the early clerk population of Somers and Camden towns, Islington and Pentonville, are fast pouring into the city, or directing their steps towards Chancery-Lane and the Inns of Court.[284]

As with Monnier, the governing principle of 'The Streets – Morning' is the hours of the working day. However, where Monnier's *Mœurs* and *Scènes* adhered to the nine-to-four workday imposed by

[281] Ibid., p. 22.
[282] Andrew Sanders, *Charles Dickens* (Oxford University Press: 2003), p. 14; Lauster, p. 30.
[283] Charles Dickens, 'To Johann Kuenzel', July 1838, *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens,* ed. Jenny Hartley (Oxford: OUP, 2012), pp. 45-46 (p. 45).
[284] Dickens, 'The Streets – Morning', *Sketches by Boz*, pp. 59-65 (p. 64).

ministerial management, Dickens's metropolis as a whole operates independently of such directives: beginning his observations 'an hour before sunrise' and ending at 'NOON', Dickens gives us the classic conception of a civil society operating according to relative self-regulation and inadvertent coherence, with every hour in each quarter of the city bearing the character of a different activity, social stratum, and temperament in accordance with need, function, and in tacit relation to the whole.[285] Dickens's city is, in historian Jerrold Seigel's terms, portrayed as a 'self-constituting network' – a dynamic system that operates according to its own spontaneously generated rules – to be contrasted against 'teleocracy' – a system fixed by an external impetus, and governed by some external end.[286]

It is into this conceit of an autonomously operating system that Dickens's clerks emerge, and, in so doing, it is as if they fall naturally into the subdivisions to which 'Boz' ascribes them:

> Middle-aged men, whose salaries have by no means increased in the same proportion as their families, plod steadily along, apparently with no object in view but the counting-house; knowing by sight almost everybody they meet or overtake, for they have seen them every morning (Sundays excepted) during the last twenty years, but speaking to no one. […] Small office lads in large hats, who are made men before they are boys, hurry along in pairs, with their first coat carefully brushed, and the white trousers of last Sunday plentifully besmeared with dust and ink.[287]

Well, not completely naturally: while the particular qualities of these different subtypes of clerk – the totemic gait, taciturnity, and ink stains – manifest themselves in the eye of the sketch-writer as if they were the inevitable outcomes of the time of day, of their location, and their profession, the root causes of their particular appearances are anything but spontaneously generated. Benjamin analogises this 'panoramic' style with rural landscape painting – mapping the ostensible artifice of urban life onto nature – but it is insofar as Dickens's clerks appear compelled by the external force of bureaucracy (the City, the courts) that they figure almost homoeopathically as a germ of the artificial in the urban wilderness.[288] Because middle-aged clerks trudge hypnotically toward chambers or the counting house, and office lads are prematurely aged, bureaucracy therefore comes to figure as an implicit *telos* in a world that otherwise voluntarily self-organises. While Monnier largely extracted the visual cues and verbal habits of clerks from the actual workings of bureaucracy for their portrayal, Dickens attempts to resituate these immediate empirical qualities within a broader tension between the structures of the office and urban life.

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[285] Ibid., p. 59, p. 65.
[286] Jerrold Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life – Society, Politics, and Culture in England, France, and Germany since 1750* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 18.
[287] Dickens, 'The Streets – Morning', *Sketches*, p. 64.
[288] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* tr. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Belknap Press, 2002), p. 6.

It is with this same sense of the disjunction between the unnatural compulsion of the clerk and an otherwise voluntarist world that Dickens characterises the objects of his scrutiny in the sketch, 'Thoughts about People'. This sketch is prefaced with a reassertion of the autonomous dynamism of the metropolis – a conceptualisation here tarnished with the caveat that 'self-constitution' fosters atomisation, and produces interstices into which the atomised might fall:

> It is strange with how little notice, good, bad, or indifferent, a man may live and die in London. He awakens no sympathy in the breast of any single person; 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.[289]

The first example of one of these forgotten figures is a clerk that 'Boz' witnesses wandering around St. James's Park, and there is again the sense that the routinised conscientiousness of the office unnaturally guides his behaviour. Very closely echoing the 'not … but' syntax of the homilies that open Lamb's 'The Good Clerk', Dickens writes that this figure 'had an umbrella in his hand – not for use, for the day was fine – but evidently, because he always carried one to the office in the morning', and he walks back and forth, 'not as if he were doing it for pleasure or recreation, but as if it were a matter of compulsion, just as he would walk to the office every morning from the back settlements of Islington.'[290] The irony is that it is a Monday and this character has therefore presumably 'escaped for four-and-twenty hours from the thraldom of the desk', but apparently, in a clear allusion to Lamb's 'Superannuated Man', he struggles with his free time: 'we were inclined to think […] that he did not know what to do with himself.'[291] The clerk is a bureaucratic fragment, rather than an autonomous individual.

Transgressing the exoteric character of the urban sketch, 'Boz' hereafter fantasises about this figure's time in the office – although he does so only to stress its shallowness, imagining the clerk's 'whole life, or rather his whole day, for a man of this sort has no variety of days.'[292] As with Monnier, the hours of the clock govern this world – but Dickens is keen to impute to us the ultimate meaninglessness of such structures: just as the clerk's day and lifetime are mutually representative, so too is each tick of the office clock 'as monotonous as his whole existence' – the clerk 'only [raises] his head when […] in the midst of some difficult calculation, he looks up to the ceiling as if there were inspiration in the dusty skylight'.[293] This is a life unnaturally impressed upon by a bureaucratic *telos*, here ironically translated into a deified skylight, but which offers no prospect of salvation: so too does

[289] Dickens, 'Thoughts about People', *Sketches*, p. 253.
[290] Ibid., pp. 253-254.
[291] Ibid., p. 254.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.

the conjunction of lifetime, day, and second together form a paradoxical synecdoche, whereby the discrete measures that together constitute his life also individually signify the dreary excess of his earthly innings.

In this portrayal, Dickens reasserts the same sense of conceptual tension established in 'The Streets', where the strange mannerisms of the clerk on the street or in the park are such because the demands of bureaucracy have bled into a sphere of self-constitutive autonomy. The tension Dickens depicts in the office is starkly reminiscent of Lamb's own struggles to reconcile an experiential conception of his life to the measures imposed by the office, but Dickens resituates this struggle on a social, rather than psychological, plane – continuously relating it back to other social 'types', who either respond to the demands of urban life independently of any transcendent coercive force, or, in the case of the sketcher himself, can step back to savour urban life altogether. Described with his characteristically benign mordancy, Dickens's streets are otherwise populated with servants who are free to 'utterly disregard' their masters' demands, with gossiping apprentices, and with seemingly immobile shopmen who rely solely on the seductive power of their goods: it is only the behaviour of his clerks that is explicitly warped by the compulsive influence of an abstract power.[294]

Evidently, if the grand majority of Londoners portrayed operate independently of any particular external force, relying solely on a spirit of self-preservation, it is Dickens's own framing device of the hours between dawn and noon that becomes a determining force. Ironically, while Monnier portrayed a 'teleocratic' world according to the terms that it had itself established (the workday), Dickens externalises *himself* in his attempt to convey the autonomous behaviour of the streets, subordinating everything to the *telos* of his eye and his chosen framing device. In so doing, all 'the heat, bustle, and activity' of this world takes on a grim artifice – with only the extreme somnambulism of the clerks distracting us from a world of equal contrivance.[295] Dickens imposes on his clerks the mantle of unspontaneity and compulsion in order to distract us from the artificially spontaneous observation that underpins urban sketches in general. This complex play of social forms therefore becomes in turn a question of literary form.

Lauster writes that where Dickens's later novels (such as those I cover in Chapter Three) are governed by a 'finite plot', the *Sketches* proceed by 'a discursive process to which a potentially infinite number of observations could be added. Flexibility and potential infinity of composition is the hallmark of sketch collections.'[296] Where Lauster associates the novel form with the artificial brace of plot, the 'sketch', reliant solely upon a certain variety of impressionistic writing, is framed as open-ended, free

[294] Dickens, 'The Streets – Morning', *Sketches*, pp. 62-65.
[295] Ibid., p. 65.
[296] Lauster, p. 30.

to vary to the infinite: in Seigel's social terminology, the former is 'teleocratic', the latter 'self-constituting'. Aside from the degree to which this estimation ignores the relatively haphazard character of Dickens's early novelistic style (which I will cover in the following chapter) I have so far suggested that Dickens's sketches themselves exhibit their own aesthetic constraints – limited as they are by the arbitrary spatiotemporal boundaries established by the author, as well as in the degree to which urban observation is limited to superficialities. This formal tension crystallises the ambivalent relationship between nineteenth-century literary forms and emergent bureaucratic structures: while Lauster's sense of plot as a constraint reflects the formal strictures of bureaucracy as an overarching system, her sense of sketch-writing as a 'discursive process' that can theoretically go on forever inadvertently reflects the proceduralism of office work itself – an aesthetic recapitulation of 'no variety of days'. It is because physiological writing reflects aspects of office life, while novelistic plotting resonates with the bureaucratic form, that office literature exhibits such formal heterogeneity – but, equally, this sense of the aesthetic incommensurability of different aspects of office life becomes an underlying problematic of this genre.

3. 'Encyclopaedic' works

Dickens and Monnier, in the two texts above, engaged in social categorisation and exposition in the general manner of sketch or physiological literature – but it is with the rise of 'encyclopaedic' texts, the paradigmatic examples of which are *Heads of the People* in the UK and *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* in France, that we see this classificatory tendency in nineteenth-century literature reach its most emblematically formal (perhaps even bureaucratic) peak. Rather than offer multifaceted vistas of urban life, the 'encyclopaedic paradigm […] generates a classifying structure whose closest cognates are print media such as reviews and serially published reference works.'[297] 'Encyclopaedic' is itself Lauster's own classification – Ségolène Le Men, by contrast, categorises the kinds of work best embodied here by *Sketches* as a '*livre-macédoine*' [hodgepodge, or medley book], and the encyclopeadic works as '*livres ordonnés*' [ordered books].[298] The contingency of the terminology surrounding such works should therefore perhaps be indicative of their ultimately non-scientific character. Nevertheless, despite the potentially frivolous or mildly satirical nature of their style and descriptive method, these compendious volumes of social 'types' and 'mores' clearly emulate the formal models of Headrick's 'information revolution' – abstracting their objects from any broader

[297] Ibid., p. 21.
[298] Ségolène Le Men, 'La Vignette et la lettre', in *Histoire de l'édition française*, ed. Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier, 4 vols ([Paris]: Promodis, 1983-7), III (1985): *Le temps des éditeurs. Du Romantisme à la Belle Epoque*, 312-27 (pp. 326-7).

social context and presenting them in isolation, a model that in itself suits for the reference criteria of ready 'storage, retrieval, and dissemination', and which, by extension, also suited these texts for commercial serialisation.[299] The fact that the clerks portrayed in these texts themselves operated within a superficially similar sphere of classificatory systems of knowledge is a premise that both *Heads* and *Les Français* approach from different angels – with *Heads* using the clerk as an opportunity to explore the potential for equivocation within the essentialism of typology, and *Les Français* situating its own methods of classification amidst those of bourgeois society and bureaucracy itself.

3.1. *Heads of the People* (1840-41)

Heads of the People, a project led by the publisher and journalist, Douglas Jerrold, was an international hit: it spawned European imitators, including *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, as well as assembling a team of writers and the cartoonist, Kenny Meadows, several of whom would later contribute to *Punch*. Included in its collection of social types we find 'The Lawyer's Clerk', a pseudo-autobiographical account of office drudgery, containing miniature portraits of other members of the clerkly brotherhood, written by the comic playwright William Leman Rede.[300] Whereas the office workers portrayed by Monnier and Dickens were presented to us as fully-formed stereotypes, endowed with a number of preestablished (if confusingly intertwined) social and vocation-specific markers, Leman Rede's portrait of a lawyer's clerk attempts to enlighten the reader to the opinions, working conditions, and background of this social genus, rather than (purely) reify him. Indeed, in so doing Leman Rede's portrait becomes more explicitly narrative than one may expect for an encyclopaedia entry, a tension that problematises Jerrold's overall project while also demonstrating the degree of overlap between bureaucratic divisions of labour and physiological literature.

Heads' eighty-three essays, written by a range of writers and humourists – including such big names as Leigh Hunt ('The Monthly Nurse' and 'The Omnibus Conductor') and William Makepeace Thackeray ('The Fashionable Authoress') – attempt to characterise the many types and temperaments that operate in different spheres of English life: ranging from the aristocracy to the working classes, and figures from private and public, urban and (to a lesser extent) rural life. In its range of topics and perspectives, *Heads of the People* functions as a 'dictionary of types': that is, in its composition it serves to delimit, clarify, and classify – but therefore, by extension, to stress the interrelation of – the

[299] Headrick, p. 143.

[300] For details of Leman Rede's life, see John Russell Stephens, 'Rede, William Leman (1802–1847), actor and playwright', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, May 26, 2016) <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23249> [Accessed 13/11/2020].

types thus isolated as members of 'the numerous family of John Bull', as Jerrold puts it.[301] This two-step rhythm of itemisation and agglomeration contrasts with a work like *Sketches by Boz,* which, despite certainly containing its fair share of generalisations and 'types', displays these figures jostling together in the crowd, or jointly partaking in an overarching narrative. When situated alongside *Heads of the People*, the observations of the urban scene in *Sketches* read like the empirical 'fieldwork' that precedes Jerrold's rationalised analysis – a process that serves to taxonomise but also to replicate artificially an implicit, generalised, association between its various taxa, as embodied in the constitution of the work.

Alternatively, if 'Boz' is on an urban safari, then Jerrold is a zookeeper; he presents to us his captured social types in sequence, each one formally demarcated from the other and presented with quasi-objectivity for our extended scrutiny. That said, in contrast with Dickens's black-coated drudges, as well as many of the other 'Heads' in Jerrold's collection, who are often the objects of satirical portraiture by an implicit third party, the Lawyer's Clerk portrayed by Leman Rede speaks directly to us from within his cage. No doubt the clerk's readiness to speak from his condition of captivity is derived from the extent to which he is used to it, the literary analogies made between office life and incarceration by now well-worn – indeed, Leman Rede complements Lamb's 'daylight servitude', and Dickens's 'thraldom of the desk', with his clerk's gloomy conclusion that 'transportation and imprisonment must be comparative luxuries' to the '*seventy-seven thousand and five hundred hours*' he has so far spent as a copyist.[302]

But Leman Rede's clerk is also afforded this rare degree of subjectivity precisely in order to address the tension between superficial and specialised knowledge that the author must address when portraying bureaucracy. Where, as we have seen, Monnier and Dickens's depictions of office workers were more dependent on visual cues in crafting clerical types than the specialised knowledge functionally inherent, but not empirically evident, in the office, Leman Rede's clerk opens with a fable regarding the potential disparity between the two. The clerk begins by asking us, 'reader', if we have been at Bow Street when the disorderly cases are heard, our clerk tells us that

> If you have, you must have noted the ambiguous manner in which most persons reply to the oft-mooted question – 'Who are you?' Cobblers call themselves translators, ballad-bawlers dub themselves professionals, tailors are decorative artists, and the very porter of an agency office is 'a member of the legal profession.' Sickened at such affectations, I, Kit Mark, announce, boldly and unequivocally, that I am a Lawyer's Clerk – aye, a Lawyer's Clerk; not one whose description requires the aggrandizing

[301] Lauster, p. 270; Douglas Jerrold, Introduction to *Heads of the People,* 2 vols (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1864), I, pp. iii-vi (p.iv).
[302] William Leman Rede, 'The Lawyer's Clerk', from *Heads of the People,* I, pp. 24-32, (p. 32).

> adjective 'articled,' but a Lawyer's Clerk, in the seedy-coated, napless-hatted, sadly-shod sense of that word.[303]

This sets the tone of Kit Mark the clerk's personal testimony, in that he pits two systems of meaning against one another: the verbal and the visual, by which one modulates the other as the occasion suits. In establishing this dynamic, Leman Rede is able to accord to the observational stereotypes of clerkdom laid down, for example, in *Sketches* – those of down-at-heel shabbiness – but also to complicate them by establishing the potential for equivocation that such indicators of 'social exchange-value' afford.[304]

This dynamic also constitutes the driving force of Kit's life story: having established this social duplicity, we imagine that Kit the clerk is to be commended for abjuring the pretensions exhibited by other fictional office workers (Monnier's M. Doutremer, for example). We soon learn, however, that Kit's present matter-of-factness is the direct product of his prior naiveté. This ambiguity between appearance and functionality is not only a principle of class status; behind it lies the problematic status of white-collar work (which appears unproductive to the outsider, but evidently performs *some* implicit function) and bureaucracy in general, whose easily recognised signifiers (pens, bottles, clocks, files) mask the knowledge and practices stored within – and this relationship characterises Kit's inculcation into the law.

In keeping with Kit's opening appeal to honesty in the face of easy equivocation, the overarching narrative of his autobiography is driven by the fatal interpenetration of the superficial and the esoteric, the imagined and the real – with the relationship between these four categories ever shifting. Kit is first pushed toward the office by the presence of a clerk, one Jeremiah Hobbs, who 'lived, or vegetated,' in his mother's boarding house, who 'loudly and learnedly held forth upon the law, and what it would ultimately do for a man', and who was 'delighted to describe himself' a 'gentleman'.[305] Kit's mother, who 'saw visions of the woolsack, and her hopeful son upon it' (that is, who envisaged him becoming a law lord) has Hobbs tutor her boy under the assumption that he might 'smooth the path to Law and Latin'.[306]

Kit's road to clerkdom is paved with fantasies and delusions, therefore, but already the cracks begin to show: the extent of his Latin tuition is 'bounded by the fact that [Hobbs] knew nothing of that language, save such phrases as he had gleaned from "Impey's Practice"' (a nineteenth-century legal

[303] Ibid., p. 24.
[304] This tension between appearance and reality when identifying clerks was a problem within 'industry', as well for the public: an 1878 business guide cautions that 'there is a wide distinction […] between the clerk by profession and the clerk *in statu pupillari* [in the state of pupillage].' From, *The Clerk: A sketch in outline of his duties and discipline* (London: Houlston's Industrial Library, 1878), p. 49.
[305] Leman Rede, p. 24, pp. 26-27.
[306] Ibid., p. 27, p. 24.

textbook).[307] Again, we see superficiality and specialist knowledge at loggerheads – however, rather than this solely being a question of pretensions to status masking ignorance, Hobbs's limited Latin in fact *foreshadows* the largely mechanical use of literacy to be employed by Kit and his fellow clerks. The relative valency of superficiality and hidden knowledge shifts back and forth in Kit's story, therefore: Hobbs's limited Latin betrays his pretensions and self-blinkeredness (but also indicates the *true* nature of clerical work), but equally, on an introductory job-hunting visit to London's legal district, the Temple, it is precisely in Kit's ignorance of the specificities of office life that he can foresee its grim reality.

Kit begins this narrative himself operating in the capacity of an urban sketch writer: he journeys through a visual metropolitan arena, 'gazing, until his brain whirled with wonder at the […] endless riches of humanity', and it is also in these observational terms that he first describes the Temple, which is, by contrast, characterised by a pseudo-ecclesiastical gloom and stillness.[308] At eleven o'clock,

> the scene changed; certain doors, at the end of the King's Bench Walk, opened as if by magic; men and boys were seen running with long strips of parchment in their hands, which said strips were red at one end (for stamps on writs had not then been abolished); anxious-looking men went rapidly by me, their pockets stuffed with papers; all appeared busy, none happy.[309]

In this 'scene' (framed chronometrically, in keeping with the motif that outsiders' impressions of clerkdom are dependent on its temporal strictures) Leman Rede suggests that Kit's youthful ignorance of the institutional practices of the law (to be contrasted against the mature clarification of the scene made in parentheses) renders them fantastical. But this fantastical first impression is broached simultaneously by an immediate grasp for its grim oppressiveness, an observation that Kit will spend the rest of his life corroborating.

The character of Kit's perception transforms as he is further insinuated into clerkdom over the day. At twelve o'clock, Hobbs and Kit enter the King's Bench Office, and his fantasy starts to shed its impressionism while retaining its fantastical character, which now roots itself in literacy as the constitutive system of this new domain: 'there were certain mystic places, all on the ground floor, labelled, respectively, "The Signer of the Writs." "The Judgement Office," (what a term!) "Clerk of the Declarations," &c., &c.'[310] Kit Mark's induction into the law is represented by his progressive inculcation into the linguistic content of bureaucracy, therefore, a process finally solidified through a

[307] Ibid., p. 24.
[308] Ibid., pp. 25-26.
[309] Ibid., p. 26.
[310] Ibid.

rite of passage by which, under Hobbs's instruction, he affixes his own 'mark' to a wall – one covered with

> hundreds of notices from young vipers, seeking to become attorneys during the term then next ensuing; these notices were mingled with others from persons less happily situated, who desired to act as clerk, clerk and servant, &c., either to attorneys or barristers.[311]

However, once he starts work, thereby fully subordinating himself to the law's linguistic structures, superficiality again reasserts itself. Paradoxically, the process of overcoming prior ignorance is ultimately rooted in the recognition that the metier of the copyist is dependent upon the signifiers, rather than the signifieds, of legal practice. In depicting his workday, Kit sinks back into his senses: the 'unctuous […] *mutton*-ity' of parchment predominates over the 'senseless absurdities' that he inscribes thereupon, and he recognises that he himself is 'rapidly becoming a mere thing of pen and fingers – a producing power – a *copying-machine*'.[312] As the significative qualities of literacy are re-subsumed by their immediate materiality, Kit's transition from innocence to experience is complete: his worldliness marked not by inculcation into the law, but rather by a consciousness of his alienation from it. Kit's consciousness of the epistemological terms of his relationship to his employers in turn takes on a social character: while his mother 'took ill from disappointment at [his] not becoming attorney-general at least' and died, Kit himself recognises, in his dependency on his 'eyes and hands' rather than upon legal knowledge, and in his paltry remuneration, that he is one of the working classes.[313]

Following the classic arc of the *Bildungsroman,* Kit's autobiography is marked by 'a clear and irreversible course' from 'youth to maturity, from romantic [or, at least, aspirational] imagination to the patient observation of reality'.[314] But hereafter his life diverges from the generic model: rather than this process of realisation being mitigated by an inculcation into the secrets of the law, Kit's knowledge is highly restricted in accordance with the extreme limitations of his position. The archetypal bourgeois narrative arc therefore only partially maps onto the socially hybrid life of the clerk – for whom a brief flicker of aspirational optimism is not transacted for worldly wisdom, but proletarian drudgery, for a cynical knowledge of the extent to which his engagement with the social world is superficial.

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[311] Ibid.
[312] Ibid., p. 32.
[313] Ibid., p. 28, p. 32.
[314] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (1987), tr. Albert Sbragia (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 91-92.

In this regard we see the extent to which the formal and the social map onto one another in portrayals of bureaucratic careers. Kit's cynical narrative of *Bildung* is eminently non-novelistic, its sense of temporality instead evoking what Fredric Jameson contradistinguishes as the *récit* (tale):

> The time of the *récit* is then a time of the preterite, of events completed, over and done with, events that have entered history once and for all. [This] inauthentic and reified temporality […] necessarily blocks out the freshness of the event happening, along with the agony of decision of its protagonists.[315]

The novel, meanwhile, Jameson continues, '[re-establishes] the open present of freedom, the present of an open, undecided future, where the die has not yet been cast'.[316] The extent to which Kit's life is rigidly determined by his class also determines the manner in which this life is articulated, therefore – 'the dreary drudgery of [the copyist's] unchanging task' would not translate to a long-form work, governed as this labour is by the kind of chronological fungibility and repetition that simultaneously constitute a total lack of free will while giving of no clear narrative course.[317] In this respect, while Leman Rede's clerical taxon incorporates a surprising degree of depth and background in contrast to the presumed reductiveness of a pen portrait (viz. *Sketches* and *Scènes*), it is in the extent to which Kit is fated to clerkdom – to the fact that his crystallisation into a 'type' is inevitable – that 'The Lawyer's Clerk' shows itself to be ultimately a product of its medium.

This formal constraint reflects back onto Jerrold's overall project. Despite claiming to wrangle 'the numerous family of John Bull' together into one big portrait, it is insofar as Kit's ascent to the woolsack was stymied at the very first step that *Heads'* pretension of social congruity is also shown to in fact be discontinuous. Not only does Kit 'say nothing' of his employers (writing that 'they were of the law–lawyers; 'tis with their dependents only that I have to do', and thereby delineating the law from bureaucracy 'proper') he describes his immediate superiors, the fusty managing clerk and the hard-living common law clerk, as figures also blinkered by their position – either in terms of pretension or disaffection.[318] The prematurely aged managing clerk, Joe Grainger, is 'dead to the fascination of beauty', and admires only the recondite functions of his own position – and because recent legal reforms have since tragically made it that these functions 'bear some distant resemblance to common sense', Grainger's 'day-dream of [a] life' is further truncated.[319] Just as Hobbs fetishised the illusory social connotations of his position, Grainger defines himself only by the arcaneness of his functions. The 'legal attainments' of Bob Watkins, the common law clerk, by contrast, 'did not go beyond

[315] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 18.
[316] Ibid., p. 18.
[317] Leman Rede, p. 31.
[318] Ibid., p. 28.
[319] Ibid., p. 29.

knowing the offices, but he had a jaunty air that carried him through' – he instead devotes the majority of his concentration to singing in pubs and theatres.[320] The degree to which these clerical subtypes are portrayed as inward looking oddities who are more or less content with their condition of atomisation – unlike Kit Mark himself – reflects the similar extent to which Leman Rede's legal characters are alienated from their kindred Englishmen and women in *Heads*, and to which all of these types are from each other.

Despite *Heads*' holistic claims, it is in the relative isolation of its 'types' from one another that it *truly* reflects the social world it describes. Leman Rede's story stresses that the 'type' at once represents a superficial means of social classification (one open to manipulation) but is also the end product of a painful and haphazard process of socio-economic differentiation: the individual is sifted into a narrow role after which all material alternatives are foreclosed (even Adam Smith conceded that 'the progress of the division of labour' means that an individual's 'dexterity at his own particular trade [is] to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues.')[321] Importantly, these cultural and socio-economic processes are themselves differentiated from one another: Kit Mark's inculcation into the *realities* of clerical life, behind its prestigious façade, evokes the encyclopaedic work's general focus on a concept of society as being made up of 'types' – as a 'worldly universe of signifiers' – that may paradoxically work to obscure the *signifieds* that it is claiming to uncover.[322] The fact that the linking point between the formal reductiveness of an 'encyclopaedic work' and the process by which people may be rendered one-sided drones in the name of esoteric knowledge should be an office, is indicative of the degree to which this workplace lends itself to the literary exploration of the strengths and shortcomings of classification.

3.2. *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-42)

Showcasing the popularity of *Heads of the People* since its initial serialisation, Jerrold writes in the introduction that his project 'has not only been translated into French, but has formed the model of a national work for the essayists and wits of Paris.'[323] This new 'national work', *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* [*The French painted by themselves*], edited by Léon Curmer, was structurally inspired by *Heads* in its capacity as a 'light' reference work composed by a team of writers and illustrators (including Balzac and Monnier) and launched in a similarly gently satirical spirit. It soon outstripped the British project in the extent of its ambition, however, ultimately running to nine volumes – dealing first with Paris, then the provinces, and finally France's colonies – and containing over four hundred

[320] Ibid., pp. 30-31.
[321] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Books IV and V, 7th ed., 3 vols (London: 1793), III, p. 182.
[322] Lauster, p. 170.
[323] Jerrold, Introduction to *Heads of the People,* p. iv.

'types' ranging all the way from 'the king' to 'the inhabitant of Pondicherry'.[324] We therefore find the *employé* nestled at the core of *two* globe-spanning enterprises: France itself, and its would-be Baudrillardian simulacrum, *Les Français.*

Indeed, the expanding scope of *Les Français* was marked by the increasing strangeness of the project. Lauster writes that the initially 'witty depiction of Parisians' was overtaken by a more 'serious' tone in the representation of provincial types, as if the encyclopaedic mission of *Les Français* started to predominate over satire as it expanded.[325] Moreover, the increasing sincerity of content was to be counterposed against an increasingly farcical form: initially serialised, its many instalments, comprising several social species and interrelated genera, were easily jumbled and confused, and Curmer was compelled to produce 'no less than six different tables, forty pages in all, as an ordering device for the entire collection' to mitigate the chaos, with these tables serving to locate a 'type' by its place in the work, by its author, by its *mœurs* (that is, by social sphere), by order of publication, and so on.[326] Evidently, devising further schemas to explain a schema that itself claims to render French society knowable, speaks to the potentially Quixotic nature of these 'encyclopaedic' projects in general – and it is unsurprising therefore that this literature should have undergone a major satirical backlash in the form of the *physiologies* proper, as we will see in the final section of this chapter.

The Quixotism of this project also overlaps with its conception of the *employé*: servant to an institution engaged in the comparable project of rendering society (or an aspect of it) knowable. This parallel informs Paul Duval's entry on this particular social species.[327] Duval's analysis of the *employé* is superficially an exercise in ventriloquising (and implicitly critiquing) the convergence of bourgeois values and bureaucratic systems in the office already implied in Monnier's *Scènes.* However, by framing the *employé* as the site of competing functional and conceptual orders, Duval also therefore synthesises the ambiguous overlap between highly formalised 'encyclopaedic' analysis and more free-form amusement upon which the whole project of *Les Français* is predicated – and of which it fell afoul. Duval's approach therefore reflects French society as a site of contradictory cognitive systems – or perhaps it merely illustrates the formal limitations of physiological writing.

Leman Rede's clerical portrait constituted an abortive katabatic narrative, one in which Kit Mark's ostensible voyage into a legal underworld (with a view to subsequently ascending to the

[324] Léon Curmer (ed.), *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes – encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle*, 9 vols (Paris : Curmer, 1840-42), V (1842), p. 583.
[325] Lauster, p. 284.
[326] Lauster, p. 282; *Les Français*, V, pp. 544-583.
[327] I have been unable to find any biographical details on Duval – only that Guy Thuillier has resigned to his 'true name' remaining a mystery, assuming that he was one of the many 'prudent functionaries who were careful to reconcile the temptation to write and the tranquillity of their career…' in his article 'Les Français peints par eux-mêmes', *La Revue administrative*, 11:66 (November, December, 1958), pp. 596-605 (p. 597).

highest posts in the land) transpired to be the rather more depressing journey to a domain of empirical superficiality. This narrative arc was, we have seen, in part predicated upon the confused interpenetration of observable, socially-connotative, qualities and activities related to the law, and the specialised, socially-dependent, esoteric knowledge upon which the law is functionally predicated. Duval's *employé,* by contrast, like Ymbert and Monnier's before him, is not the servant to an amorphous body of experts, but, instead, to a centralised administrative state apparatus endowed with a sophisticated division of labour. In contrast to Leman Rede's anti-*Bildungsroman,* which stressed the one-sidedness of clerical labour, Duval's entry frames itself more as an expository treatise on the full panoply of clerkness – as well as exploring this variety in conjunction with the contrasting homogeneity of the clerical worldview.

Duval begins by stressing this conjunction of variegation and homogeneity, highlighting the uniformity of the term '*employé*' in contrast with the apparent variety of those to whom it refers. This conundrum Duval treats in a zoological manner:

> It is the same with the *employé* as it is with *lepidoptera,* of which naturalists count innumerable varieties. There are a thousand nuances of *employé*, but, for the observer who examines them with care, with a magnifying glass, there are numerous resemblances and striking analogies between them. To whatever species of the grand administrative family they belong, the influence of a single goal, the same preoccupations, a common destiny, is always to be recognised in them.[328]

'For taxonomy to be possible', Michel Foucault writes in his history of *epistemes, The Order of Things* (1966), 'nature must be truly continuous' – 'classification requires the principle of the smallest possible difference between things.'[329] By similarly conveying a sense of a proliferating continuum of *employés*, Duval's article initially reflects this taxonomic principle – administrative divisions of labour are held to subdivide to ever greater degrees of granularity. The *employé* exists to

> fill in registers, copy letters, put paperwork in order, issue gun licences, passports, bonds, and receipts; to record those who come, and those who go, and those who are threatened to be hit with conscription duties; to prepare for a bridge in this commune, a primary school in that one, a cavalry garrison in the other; to circulate the thoughts and lies of Paris around France and the whole world; to monitor, from the comfort of his leather seat, this gambler, that convict, these plotters; what else besides? To keep an eye on France's thirty-eight thousand communes, to look out for their needs, their desires, their opinions, on everything that relates to politics, to commerce, to the

[328] Paul Duval, 'L'employé', *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes – encyclopédie morale du dix-neuvième siècle,* ed. Léon Curmer, 9 vols (Paris : Curmer, 1840-42), I (1840), pp. 501-508 (p. 501) – 'Il en est de l'employé comme de ces lépidoptères dont les naturalistes comptent des variétés innombrables. Il existe mille nuances d'employés, mais pour l'observateur qui les examine avec soin, la loupe à l'œil, toutes ont entre elles de nombreuses ressemblances, de frappantes analogies. A quelque espèce de la grande famille administrative qu'ils appartiennent, on reconnait toujours en eux l'influence d'un but unique, les mêmes préoccupations, une commune destinée.'

[329] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 174.

> public good, to religion, to morals, to hygiene, to everything in short. Such are the functions of the *employé* for six hours a day, six days a week.[330]

However, it is insofar as the 'grand administrative family' is united by a 'single goal', an Aristotelian 'final cause', that methodologies already start to get muddled.[331] This essential 'single goal' that unites and drives all *employés* is not functional but social, if not ideological, and maps onto the broader aspirations of bourgeois society. Duval writes that the *employé*'s *telos* is to earn a salary of 1,800 francs by the age of thirty, to acquire a spouse 'who brings him a dowry of six or eight-hundred *livres*' worth of rents', move to suburbia [*la banlieue de Paris*], have two-to-three children, and derive great satisfaction in securing his reluctant son a job in the *bureaux* just as his father had for him, despite his own similar youthful protestations.[332] Indeed, the middle-class banality of this standard-model *employé* is so prescriptive that Duval's outline even extends to delineating how he spends his leisure time*,* itemising the restaurants he visits, the meals he consumes, the concerts he goes to and so on.

The irony here is that the ideological values of *employé* evoke the stereotypical prescriptivism of bureaucracy – even though these goals are situated *beyond* the office – whereas the office itself is to be understood in terms of continuous diversification. As with Monnier, Duval's *employé* therefore represents a convergence of bureaucratic practices and bourgeois values – but where the former author simply hybridises these into the worst of both, the latter explores and reconfigures the nature of these forces' relationship. Indeed, whatever the ideological prescription that unifies *employés*, it is insofar as variability still manifests itself in the personal and social lives of Duval's subjects that we gain further understanding of his initial classification of the *employé*. This is in large part because the ideological values that unite *employés* are largely unattainable – perhaps even undesirable.

There are a great many *employés,* a majority, Duval writes, who, imagining having to provide a wife with the 'thousand distractions, these charming trifles, ribbons and gauzes, flowers and pearls, that make up so large a part of Parisian women's happiness', weigh up the competing bourgeois determinants of convention and fiscal responsibility and ask themselves 'is it therefore impossible to

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[330] Duval, p. 501 – 'Il fait tous les jours deux lieues pour aller remplir des registres, copier les lettres, mettre des paperasses en ordre, délivrer des ports d'armes, des passe-ports [sic], des acquits-à-caution, des récépissés ; enregistrer ceux qui viennent, et ceux que s'en vont, et ceux que l'impôt de la conscription menace d'atteindre ; préparer un pont à cette commune, une école primaire à celle-ci, une garnison de cavalerie à celle-là ; faire circuler les pensées, les mensonges de Paris dans la France et dans le monde entier ; surveiller du fond de son fauteuil de cuir tel joueur, tel forçat, tel complot ; que sais-je encore ? avoir l'œil sur les trente-huit mille communes de France, épier leurs besoins, leurs vœux, leur opinion, sur tout ce qui rattache à la politique, au commerce, à la fortune publique, à la religion, à la morale, à l'hygiène, sur tout enfin. Telles sont les fonctions de l'employé pendant six heures par jour et pendant six jours de la semaine.'

[331] David Bostock, 'Introduction', to Aristotle, *Physics,* tr. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: OUP, 1996), pp. vii-lxxiii (p.xxv).

[332] Duval, pp. 501-502.

live otherwise? Let's give it a try.'[333] Again, however, within this transgression of the 'ideal' lifestyle, prescription reasserts itself. Duval's bachelor *employé* reads a bit like Dickens's solitary clerk in 'Thoughts about people' in the habituality of his solitude, in his frequentation of a favourite *table d'hôte* and so on; but he also anticipates the hobbyist *employés* to be seen in later chapters. As a rule, after the age of forty the unmarried *employé*

> renounces the world, its distractions, and rowdy gatherings, in order to study some good and gentle science, to devote himself to some quiet mania. He engages in ornithology or numismatics, collects minerals, classifies butterflies or shells, stuffs (as best as he can) his neighbours' dead canaries, and subscribes to five or six illustrated periodicals.[334]

In Duval's second allusion to lepidoptery, we see taxonomiser and taxonomised interpenetrate – but, equally, his prescriptive portrayal of the middle-aged *employé* again reflects the fundamental disparity between the *employé*'s fixed worldview and taxonomy. Where taxonomy proper confronts nature as a continuum, chromatically, Parisian life (at least as it is viewed through the eyes of an *employé*) reads like an organ with only so many stops, the permutations between which are therefore theoretically fully knowable.

Just as the relationship between the concrete and abstract aspects of bureaucracy can be understood in terms of an ambiguity between formal and historical conceptualisations (as I illustrated in the Introductory Chapter) so too do the working and social life of Duval's *employé* apparently complicate the fixed values by which he nevertheless continues to abide. Duval in this respect implicitly analogises the schematism of bureaucracy with a highly normative body of social values, while also establishing a pathological dynamic between these paradigms and the lived experiences of the clerks who nonetheless embody them. It is therefore in the extent to which the *employé* who is married, has children, works six days a week, and enjoys lobster salad and meringue on a Sunday, is the *best* possible outcome within a series of preestablished values, that the bureaucratic life, predictable despite its functional diversity, becomes a source of frustration and even personal dysfunction. Duval provides us with a case study:

> Félicien has the honour of belonging to a public administration. He was twenty years old when he started, and is thirty-two today. He can therefore count twelve years of service, and his superiors have always praised his work. However, Félicien has a salary

[333] Ibid., p. 502 – 'ces mille distractions, ces riens charmants, ces rubans et ces gazes, ces fleurs et ces perles qui entrent pour une si grande partie dans le bonheur des femmes de Paris ! […] Est-il donc impossible de vivre autrement ? Essayons.'

[334] Ibid., pp. 502-503 – 'Il renonce au monde, à ses divertissements, aux bruyantes réunions, pour étudier quelque bonne et douce science, pour se livrer à quelque tranquille manie. Il fait de l'ornithologie ou de la numismatique, recueille des minéraux, classe des papillons ou des coquillages, empaille, tant bien que mal, les serins du voisinage, et s'abonne à cinq ou six éditions pittoresques.'

> of only 1,200 francs, and, because he is not without some ambition, he languishes, grows impatient, and solicits advancement.[335]

Unsurprisingly, despite various efforts, he does not get promoted, with a superior ultimately telling him that

> 'it is with great regret, sir, that the minister has been unable to grant you the position that you have solicited. The [sense of] justice that directs his actions makes it his duty to appoint to this role an *employé* who supports his family, and can count twenty-two years of service. Please be assured, sir…'
>
> 'What!' says Félicien, at this instant deviating visibly from his usual prudence, 'is it my fault if you have been unjust towards this family man for twelve years? I will need, therefore, to have twenty-two years of service, and half a dozen children, before I can hope to receive a salary of fifteen hundred francs! What an agreeable prospect.'[336]

Not only do bureaucratic and domestic life overlap in the degree to which they determine Félicien's future, but it is the extent to which both are governed by a preestablished schema of quantifiable values – position in the administrative hierarchy, years of service, number of dependents – in a manner that is at once bureaucratically evaluative but also more ideological than it is functional, that we see that Duval's apparently irresolvable convergence of concrete and ideal factors informs the *employé*'s existence on an institutional, as well as personal level.

Duval takes us further along this route of prescriptive dysfunction, outlining the various pathological 'sub-types' that the office breeds. Where, 'in commerce, industry, the liberal or mechanical arts' these figures could have applied their talents to something great and attained 'a position of some renown', instead we find them fall into the categories of the *employé* who is 'jealous', like Félicien himself, but also

> he who is not [jealous] at all, [there is] the trembler, the flaneur, the hypochondriac, the slogger, the flatterer, the angler, the moonlighter, those who profess a profound political indifference, and those who are attentive to the smallest movements of Egypt, England, and Russia, and every morning calculate in their heads the future destinies of empires.[337]

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[335] Ibid., p. 504 – 'Félicien a l'honneur d'appartenir à une administration publique. Il avait vingt ans quand il y fut admis, et il en a trente-deux aujourd'hui. Il compte donc douze ans de service, et ses supérieurs ont toujours fait les plus grands éloges de son travail. Cependant, Félicien n'a que douze cents francs de traitement, et, comme il n'est pas sans quelque ambition, il languit, il s'impatiente, il sollicite de l'avancement.'

[336] Ibid. – « M. le ministre éprouve un vif regret, monsieur, de n'avoir pu vous accorder la place que vous avez sollicitée. La justice qui dirige ses actes lui a fait un devoir d'y nommer un employé, père de famille, qui compte vingt-deux ans de service. Du reste, soyez assuré, monsieur… - Eh quoi ! dit Félicien s'écartant visiblement, en cette circonstance, de sa prudence ordinaire, est-ce ma faute si vous avez été injuste envers ce père de famille pendant douze ans ? Il faudra donc que j'aie vingt-deux années de service et une demi-douzaine d'enfants pour aspirer à un traitement de quinze cents francs ! La perspective est agréable. »

[337] Ibid., pp. 504-505 – 'dans le commerce, dans l'industrie, dans les arts libéraux ou mécaniques, [ils pourraient avoir obtenu] une position considérable' ; 'Il y a ensuite l'employé qui est jaloux et celui qui ne l'est pas du tout, le trembleur, le flâneur, le malade imaginaire, le piocheur, le flatteur, le pêcheur à la ligne, le

This is not the last catalogue of bureaucratic eccentrics we will see in this chapter, nor in the thesis as a whole, and the degree to which the *employé* lends himself to games of categorisation and subcategorisation in literature speaks to Duval's initial methodological contradiction between variation and fixedness. Duval writes that office workers manifest themselves in 'a thousand nuances', but that they all have the same goal – and we have seen that they therefore operate within the same strictures and value judgements. It is insofar as this self-limiting perspective fails to reflect the many nuances of office work, that that these pathological subtypes of *employé* can develop in the type's interstices – but it is also in the fact that this fixed perspective persists and predominates over the manner in which *employés* imagine their lives, as well as the manner in which their lives actually pan out, that even these pathologies become reified.

Through this principle, Duval's 'L'employé' serves to forewarn *Les Français* against its own paradoxical descent into ever finer degrees of categorisation, but it also problematises the degree to which any rigid worldview (ideological or 'rational') can function effectively as a social instrument. Duval ends his excursus with an outline of the retired *employé* – a figure who, like those in Lamb's 'Superannuated Man', Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), and Huysmans's 'La retraite de Monsieur Bougran' (1888/1964) (appearing in Chapter Four) is a recurrent trope in office literature. As with Lamb, the paradox of the retired *employé*, forced to retire after thirty years of service, is that

> while he was young, he longed for the day when he could retire, break his chains, regain his freedom, his independence, his outspokenness etc.; but, come the moment hitherto so desired, his language changes. […] 'What! Already!' he cries, 'what injustice, what barbarity! Barely had I started to reap the fruits of my labour, to be able to live at my station, and I'm cast out, half of my income destroyed with the stroke of a pen! Me, who derived such pleasure from judging, classifying, correcting, calculating, and copying! What will I become?'[338]

Even if the *employé* retires to the countryside, the tragedy is that, as Duval ends his article, 'he [needs] the verdure of his box files', not that of the landscape.[339] In his capacity as a 'type', the *employé* is very much a product of the office and bureaucracy – but pathologically so, more a product of bureaucracy's

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cumulard, celui qui professe pour la politique une indifférence profonde, et celui qui, attentif aux moindres mouvements de l'Égypte, de l'Angleterre et de la Russie, suppute chaque matin, dans son intelligence, les futures destinées des empires.'

[338] Ibid., p. 508 – 'Tant que l'employé a été jeune, il a soupiré après le jour où il pourrait prendre sa retraite, briser ses chaînes, recouvrer sa liberté, son indépendance, son franc-parler, etc. ; mais vienne l'époque jadis tant désirée, et son langage n'est plus le même. […] « Quoi ! déjà ! s'écrie-t-il ; quelle injustice ! quelle barbarie ! À peine commençais-je à recueillir le fruit de mes travaux, à pouvoir vivre de ma place, et l'on me renvoie, et l'on supprime d'un trait de plume la moitié de mes revenus ! Moi, qui ai tant de plaisir à juger, classer, rédiger, calculer, expéditionner ! que vais-je devenir ? »'

[339] Ibid. – 'Vous savez qu'il s'était retiré dans les environs de Chantilly, aux portes d'un charmant village, en face d'une végétation magnifique, admirable ; mais, le pauvre homme ! c'est la verdure de ses cartons qu'il lui fallait.'

dysfunctions, and its adulteration by the society it administrates, than its instrumental acuity – and therefore he is doomed to be both out of joint within and beyond its walls alike.

Critics like Baron and historians like Kingston alike stress that the *employé* increasingly became an autonomous cultural stereotype with little pertinence to the realities of bureaucracy itself during this period. Nevertheless, the growing literary autonomy of this 'type' implies a cultural understanding of bureaucracy that comes to inform office literature. Amossy illustrates this in terms of the rather fuzzy distinction that emerged during this period between 'type' and 'stereotype': where the former 'has epistemological value' insofar as it links the individual to the general, the latter forms an 'obstacle to knowledge' – 'it categorises abusively, simplifies outrageously and freezes all into a gesture that mummifies more than it stabilises.'[340] However reductive Duval's outline of the clerical 'type' may really be, it is because the generation of this 'type' is framed as the product of society's *own* tendency toward 'stereotype', that he outlines how bureaucracy will develop in the literary imagination hereafter.[341]

This potentially problematic interaction of rigidity and mutability is more the guiding spirit of *Les Français* than an accurate reflection of nineteenth-century administration: as Jules Janin writes in the introduction, because 'we who are today living, will one day be posterity', 'we' must therefore assure ourselves a good descent into 'the abyss' by offering a faithful record of our lives to future generations.[342] That this became an obsessive process, striving for *total* mimesis, is indicative for our purposes of the blinkeredness of a literature that critiques bureaucracy according to the terms of its *own* limited cognition – and it is therefore by extension indicative of the heterogeneous manifestation of 'information revolution' in different spheres of nineteenth-century society. Of course, where Ymbert had already illustrated the dysfunctional effects of bureaucratic rarefaction, the equivalent process in literary history appears to us to be little more than a process of generic crystallisation – a process that was, in any case, alleviated by the onset of the high satire of the *physiologies* proper. As we will see in the next section, these texts ridiculed such efforts at categorisation as much as they attacked their objects of study.

[340] Amossy, pp. 113-114 – '[le type] a valeur épistémologique', 'l'individuel rejoint le général'. 'le stéréotype est accusé de faire obstacle au savoir', 'Il catégorise abusivement, simplifie outrageusement et fige tout dans un geste qui momifie bien plus qu'il ne stabilise.'

[341] Intellectual ossification by itself is itself a fairly standard critique of bureaucracy: Ymbert already suggested it in *Mœurs administratives,* and, outside of literature it becomes a key mode of analysis in Institutionalist Economics – cf. DeGregori and Thompson, p. 96.

[342] Jules Janin, Introduction to *Les Français,* I, pp. iii-xvi (p.v) – 'nous qui vivons aujourd'hui, nous serons un jour la postérité.'

4. Parodies – *Punch* and the *physiologies*

Encyclopaedic texts 'address orders of knowledge and systems of classification, in other words, divisions and subdivisions, and this is why they are able to parody not only other media of classification, but each other'.[343] This parodic tendency manifested itself most strongly in France with the 1840-42 craze for *physiologies*, which are characterised by a particularly mordant version of the physiological style, and which satirised similar elements of social life to those treated more gently in *Les Français,* as well as turning this critical gaze inward, engaging in self-satirisation.[344] This shift was similarly seen in the UK with the emergence of *Punch* in 1841, whose sardonic observations of social types and mores long outlasted the 'educative entertainment' of *Heads of the People*.[345] This potential for self-parody is indicative of a reflexive, inventive literary culture – one in which 'everybody' was not only 'studying and commenting on the way we live', as Janin remarked, but also studying and commenting on how their ways of life were studied and commented upon. Such meta-analytical play suggests that not only was a superficial 'social exchange-value' the primary epistemological handle onto the public sphere in this period, but equally, the superficial, marketised character of modern urban life *itself* became the object of this literature, rather than merely determining its shape and preoccupations.[346]

This culture of parody reflects an increasingly mediatised society – whereby one increasingly encounters the world 'through vehicles set up to represent it' rather than 'in more immediate and bounded ways.'[347] While a consciousness of mediatisation certainly informs the self-parody of later physiological literature, its role within this process also earned it more sober criticism. In this literature's recurrent use of similar observations and the deployment of the same observational schemas, howsoever facetious, Amossy writes that contemporaries criticised it as evidence of a literary culture that prized quantity over quality, that produced with a purely remunerative aim, and which exhibited a 'servile submission to fashion.'[348] Both the reflexivity of this literature and its denigration manifest themselves in the *La Physiologie des Physiologies* (1841), in which the genre's purported inventor is depicted asserting: 'I am a decidedly lazy person, a Sardanapalus of feebleness; – I am decidedly incapable of anything of any worth, – of anything beautiful, – of anything noble, etc.,

[343] Lauster, p. 259.
[344] O'Neil Henry, *Mastering the Marketplace*, p. 35.
[345] Lauster, pp. 271-272.
[346] Cf. *Mastering the Marketplace,* p. 35 – '[The *physiologies*] enter, in an explicit way, into the contemporary debate about the value of commercialized literature.'
[347] Seigel, pp. 470-471.
[348] Amossy, p. 113 – 'Sans doute la critique de la première moitié du XIXe siècle blâme-t-elle le primat de la quantité sur la qualité […], le règne de la fabrication à visée purement spéculative ; elle condamne la soumission servile à la mode.'

etc.', but he nevertheless writes, and, we are told, 'this is how the first *Physiologie* was born.'[349] In this same dual regard we will see in this final section that clerks formed lazy stereotypes to be attacked as much as lazy stereotypes themselves formed objects of criticism. Moreover, the extent to which form and content were attacked in this later, more alacritous breed of physiological sketch, confronts the degree to which these two aims can at all be separated when portraying clerks. This is because, as the constituents of 'information systems', structures predicated upon comparable 'vehicles' of representation and organisation to those employed by 'encyclopaedic' and physiological texts, the nature of office work is as ripe either for parody or appropriation as are its agents.

4.1. Louis Huart, *Muséum parisien* (1841).

Although he was a confirmed producer of *physiologies,* Louis Huart's longer work, *Muséum parisien* [Parisian Museum] (1841), is an ideal transitional subject from *Les Français* to later parodies insofar as his work adopts the 'encyclopaedic' structure and scope.[350] Advertising itself on the frontispiece as a 'Physiological, Pictorial, Philosophical, and Grotesque History of all the curious beasts of Paris and its environs', and facetiously claiming that it serves to follow up the natural histories of the eighteenth-century naturalist, Buffon, this pseudo-zoological format follows through to its articles, which appear not to trade in professional or social types, but animals, ranging from 'the frog' and 'the rabbit' to 'the sphynx' and 'the minotaur'.[351] Indeed, just as Buffon, Foucault writes, held that nature 'is too rich and various to be fitted within [a rigid framework]' (despite his use of a similar structural method of classification to his rival, Linnaeus) Huart's animals are more like temperamental archetypes, that can be mapped onto a number of disparate figures in society, rather than definite subdivisions.[352]

Huart devotes two specific chapters to upper-level bureaucrats, 'The Minister's Dog' and 'The Minister's Cat', the former being a minister's loyal personal secretary, the latter the obsequious but powerful permanent civil servants who *really* run the show.[353] These figures partake in the usual connotations of wifely devotion, blind pomposity, and self-serving corruption that Ymbert's self-

[349] Anonymous, *Physiologie des Physiologies* (Paris: Deloges, 1841), p. 16 – 'Décidément je suis un paresseux, un Sardanapale de mollesse ; - décidément je ne suis capable de rien de bien, - de rien de beau, - de rien de noble, etc., etc., […] et voila comment naquit la première Physiologie.'

[350] Huart is listed as one of the main exponents of this genre in its article in the *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*.

[351] Louis Huart, *Muséum parisien* (Paris: Beauger et Co., 1841), frontispiece – 'Histoire physiologique, pittoresque, philosophique et grotesque de toutes les bêtes curieuses de Paris et de la Banlieue – Pour faire suite à toutes les éditions des Œuvres de M. De Buffon.' Huart, journalist and writer, was also the author of various *Physiologies*, including that of the *Flâneur* (1841) and director of the satirical magazine, *Le Charivari* – 'Notice de personne – Louis Huart', *BnF* <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb12510814d> [accessed 30/07/2019].

[352] Foucault, *The Order of Things,* p. 137.

[353] Huart, p. 187, p. 194.

important higher functionaries embodied, and which also appears in the upper strata of Balzac's *Les Employés* (1844) – connotations of the domestic, the aristocratic, and the political converging at this high level. But it is in Huart's entry on 'The Oyster' that we see the extent to which his method of social categorisation differs from that of *Les Français*.

'It must be recognised that nothing has been made unnecessarily in creation', Huart begins, but 'the Oyster, so appreciated by gastronomes for its physical qualities, has been, it appears, less fairly endowed by nature with regard to moral qualities; its name having become synonymous with stupidity.'[354] More passive than the *tarets* [shipworms] that, *despite* their stupidity, will bore their way up into middle management in Balzac's *Les Employés,* Huart's bivalve gives

> its name to another class of mortals; – we would speak of unfortunates, who, by dint of their social condition, are attached for thirty years non-stop to the same place, to the same stool, just like a shellfish, nailed all its life to the same rock. – For example: – copyists in ministerial offices, collectors at toll-bridges, etc., etc.[355]

Mercifully these figures are endowed with the stoic complacency that their position necessitates – being neither of 'volcanic temperament' nor having irritable nerves, 'and nothing flows in their veins but blood mixed with lemonade' – they are as mild, passive, and modern, as the lemon-flavoured sea in the utopian Charles Fourier's *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (1808).[356] Like Monnier's clerks, oysters, during their free time, 'huddle against the stove in a café, and set themselves to consume fifteen or eighteen… newspapers', or, if not, they play dominos.[357] And like a Greek myth, Huart's article ends with the death of one of these infuriatingly bland souls, who is then reincarnated at the seaside, transformed into the mollusc to which he owes his name – that is, until a fisherman comes to 'ship him back towards Paris, with a gross of his peers,' thereby closing a circuit of metaphor and literality.[358]

This ironic syncretism of the literal and metaphorical alludes to the construction of Huart's whole project, in which superficial qualities and manners are isolated, refined, and then reattributed

[354] Ibid., pp. 288-289 – 'Il faut reconnaitre que rien n'a été fait inutilement dans la création' […] 'L'Huitre, si appréciée des gastronomes pour ses qualités physiques, a été, à ce qu'il parait, moins bien partagée par la nature sous le rapport des qualités morales ; car son nom est devenu le synonyme de stupidité.'
[355] Ibid., p. 290 – 'L'Huitre a encore donné son nom à une autre classe de mortels – nous voulons parler des infortunés qui, par leur condition sociale, sont attachés pendant trente ans de suite à la même place, au même tabouret, à l'instar du coquillage, cloué pendant toute sa vie au même rocher. – Exemples : – les expéditionnaires des bureaux ministériels, les receveurs de sous aux ponts sujets à péage, etc., etc.'
[356] Ibid. – 'il ne coule dans ses veines que du sang mélangé du limonade.' Utopian socialist, Charles Fourier notoriously proposed that the sea could be transformed into a drinkable lemonade in *Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales,* 2 vols (Chicoutimi, Quebec : Université du Québec, 2007), I, p. 160
[357] Huart, p. 292 – 'L'Huitre va se blottir contre le poêle d'un café, et se met à consommer quinze ou dix-huit… journaux.'
[358] Ibid., p. 296 – 'jusqu'à ce qu'un pécheur vienne l'arracher de sa nouvelle demeure pour l'expédier de nouveau vers Paris, en compagnie de douze douzaines de ses semblables.'

to the social world it describes. In so doing, the dreary patience of 'the Oyster' lends itself to the office, but also to other areas of modern life. Because Huart's entry represents a general sense of social immobility and a particular lower-middle class ideology or temperament – mediatised and ritualistic – it is indicative of the kind of meta-analytical play, that which parodies pre-existing categorical schemas, but also the terms of their development, in which this literature increasingly engaged. The 'physiological mode of observation […] allows for a dynamic form of cognition', both observational and meta-discursive, therefore, but, equally, it also doubles down in the cruelty it levels towards its object, surpassing the 'unflattering bureaucratic type' that emerged in the 1820 and '30s by virtue of the verbal and conceptual inventiveness that this dynamic cognition allows.[359]

4.2. Honoré de Balzac, *Physiologie de l'employé* (1841)

Physiological literature, increasingly overt about its own methodological contingency, reaches a satirical-analytical peak with the *physiologies* proper. At first seeming to be 'little more than a wild commercial offshoot of *Les Français*', to which many of these pamphlets' authors had also contributed, Lauster writes that the *physiologies*' 'unremitting satire in depicting differentiation, specialisation, and fragmentation' and their 'high degree of self-awareness and self-irony' situated them far beyond the intellectual remit of Curmer's project; just as their 'self-conscious ephemerality', underpinned in part by the 'ferocious commercialism' of several competing publishing houses, appeared to repudiate *Les Français'* well-meaning completism.[360]

Balzac's *Physiologie de l'employé* (1841) constitutes therefore a sort of 'evil twin' to Duval's article in *Les Français*: where Duval exhibits and queries the low-level bureaucrat with a gentle wryness, Balzac, while adopting a similar thematic register, 'murders to dissect'.[361] Where Huart circumvented issues of precise definition by opting to hypostasise certain clerkly and lower-middle class qualities into a general archetype called 'The Oyster', Balzac's pamphlet, like Duval's article, grapples with this problem head-on. Like Duval, Balzac points out the many thousands of subtle variations of *employé,* distinct despite their clear commonality – and, moreover, he makes this problem of definition the guiding force of his analysis. Indeed, in order to highlight the paradoxical nature of his subject, Balzac goes back to first principles, submitting the *employé* to an absurd version of mathematical analysis – one whose ostensible objectivity plays up trenchant critique.

Balzac therefore begins his exploration via a process of elimination – one which simultaneously becomes an act of deciphering the bourgeois political cant of the July Monarchy. 'If

[359] Lauster, p. 325.
[360] Ibid., pp. 288-289, pp. 294-295.
[361] William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', *The Major Works,* ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 130-131 (p. 131). I will provide more detail about Balzac's life and career in the following chapter.

we had to adopt the political ideas of [the revolution of] 1830, the class of *employés* would comprise everyone from the doorman of a ministry up to a minister', and perhaps even 'the King of the French [himself] is an *employé* on a salary of twelve million', Balzac continues, one who might be 'relieved of his duties by cobblestones cast in the street […], or by votes cast in the Chamber.'[362] Balzac dismisses this broad definition and, despite being a confirmed 'reactionary', instead anticipates the 'simplified […] class antagonisms' of a good Marxist, recognising that the king and ministers of the July Monarchy are a property-owning class – they possess 'domains and not salaries' – and that, as a literal understanding of the word *employé* implies, this figure must instead be 'a man who needs his wages to live, and who is not free to leave his position, knowing nothing else but how to push paper!'[363] Balzac qualifies this further, writing that 'an *employé* must be a man who writes, sat down in an office' – and, moreover, office work and the *employé* are mutually dependent: in a notably oysterish metaphor, Balzac writes that 'the office is the *employé*'s shell. No *employé* without an office, no office without an *employé*'.[364] Evidently this tends toward a problem of causality: the employé simultaneously defines and is defined by his workplace – but this speaks to his generally paradoxical character, he is at once protected and constrained by his 'shell'.

Balzac's analysis is however predicated upon the inherent ambiguity of the *employé*: no sooner does he make his definition than he is immediately forced to concede that the simple presence of an office is not enough to qualify an *employé*, because other figures also inhabit this workplace. It is at this point that he starts punctuating his *Physiologie* with a series of increasingly satirical axioms. The first – '*where the employé ends, the statesman begins*' is supplemented with the corollary '2nd Axiom: *There are no more employés above a salary band of twenty-thousand francs*'.[365] While these two 'axioms' do not countermand one another in terms of content, already they demonstrate that three potentially antagonistic orders of classification are at work – the first is the scientistic, axiomatic, in accordance with what we have seen of physiological writing; the second, the classifications inherent

[362] Balzac, *Physiologie*, p. 9 – 's'il fallait adopter les idées politiques de 1830, la classe des employés comprendrait le concierge d'un ministère et ne s'arrêterait pas au ministre. […] le roi des Français est un employé à douze millions d'appointements, destituable à coups de pavé dans la rue par le Peuple, et à coups de vote par la Chambre.'

[363] Peter Brooks, 'Balzac: Epistemophilia and the Collapse of the Restoration', *Yale French Studies*, No. 101, Fragments of Revolution (2001), pp. 119-131 (p. 120); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, from The Revolutions of 1848, ed. David Fernbach, tr. Samuel Moore (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), pp. 62-98 (p. 68); Balzac, *Physiologie,* p. 10 – 'des domaines et non des appointements' ; 'Un homme qui pour vivre a besoin de son traitement et qui n'est pas libre de quitter sa place, ne sachant faire autre chose que paparasser !'

[364] Balzac, *Physiologie, p.* 11 – 'un employé doit être un homme qui écrit, assis dans un bureau. […] Le bureau est la coque de l'employé. Pas d'employé sans bureau, pas de bureau sans employé.'

[365] Ibid., pp. 11-12 – '1ER AXIOME – Où finit l'employé, commence l'homme d'état' ; '2E AXIOME – Au-dessus de vingt mille francs d'appointements, il n'y a plus d'employés.'

in the state administration itself ('statesmen' are agents of government, the 'skilled mechanics' that operate the state bureaucracy, of which the *employé* is a constituent); and the third is Balzac's own favoured measure of social reality: income. It is no wonder that Balzac concludes this chapter after having ostensibly defined his terms with the '3rd Axiom: *Beside the need to define lies the danger of confusion*.'[366] Evidently the irony here is that France's bureaucracy is 'the most prying, the most meticulous, the most scribbling, paper-pushing, inventorying, controlling, verifying, fussy […] of administrations past, present, and future' – but, not only do we struggle to define its constituent agents, so too is determining the means by which they should be classified causing us problems.[367]

Given their ontological co-dependence, this degree of conceptual ambiguity is structurally inherent also in the *employé*'s workplace: as in Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives*, Balzac's bureaucracy is at once governmental appendage and a political theatre, a site of careerist rivalries, in its own right. In *La vie quotidienne dans les ministères au XIXe siècle* [Daily life in nineteenth-century ministries] (1976), Guy Thuillier writes, concerning recruitment, that, for all its revolutionary pedigree, the French bureaucracy 'lived by the traditions of the *Ancien Régime*: one entered the administration by introduction, [and] employment often went from father to son'.[368] Similarly, Thuillier writes, 'each ministry [had] its system, its traditions' regarding promotion, but that, in practice, advancement was at once governed by age, merit, favouritism, and was therefore in practice little more than 'a lottery'.[369] With this phenomenon in mind, Balzac writes that bureaucracy overlaps both the domestic sphere – it is made up of 'an army of cousins, nephews, relatives once-, twice- or thrice-removed', all seeking positions – as well as interpenetrating with the political: before each *employé* lie 'a thousand chances' of advancement embodied in each one of the July Monarchy's readily-schmoozed 'thousand sovereigns' – that is, parliamentarians and courtiers.[370] The appeal of Balzac's satirical vision of France's bureaucracy is that it is nepotistic but also atomised: he addresses the parents of potential *employés*, writing that, were they to push their son to enter the bureaucracy, after twelve years in an office he will have done little more than indebted himself in striving to appear respectable, and will have '*cretinised* himself' through mind-numbing work.[371] Whatever their proximity to power and its opportunities for cronyism, insofar as office work 'cretinises' the *employé* we gauge the extent to

[366] Ibid., p. 13 – 'habiles mécaniciens', '3e Axiome : À côté du besoin de définir, se trouve le danger de s'embrouiller.'
[367] Ibid., p. 15 – 'la plus fureteuse, la plus méticuleuse, la plus écrivassière, paperassière, inventorière, contrôleuse, vérifiante, soigneuse […] des administrations passées, présentes, et futures.'
[368] Guy Thuillier, *La vie quotidienne dans les ministères au XIXe siècle* (Paris : Hachette, 1976), pp. 105-121.
[369] Ibid., pp. 131-143.
[370] Balzac, *Physiologie,* pp. 22-23 – 'une armée de cousins, de neveux, d'arrière-germains, de parents à la mode de Bretagne' ; 'les moindres places sont soumises à milles chances : il y a mille souverains.'
[371] Ibid., p. 26 – 'votre fils : A vécu à vingt-deux sous par tête ! Se débat avec son tailleur et son bottier ! N'est rien ! A des dettes ! Et s'est *crétinisé* !'

which, like Leman Rede's clerk, the *employé* is conceived of as much an offshoot of the working class as he is as an appendage of the ruling.

This sense of proletarianisation also underlies an important distinction: 'there are *employés* and [there are] *employés*', Balzac writes, 'we distinguish the Parisian *employé* from the provincial *employé*', and 'this *Physiologie* completely abjures the provincial *employé*' – this is because the 'provincial *employé* is happy'.[372] Balzac paints the provincial *employé* in the same way that Duval portrayed his 'ideal type' of *employé*: as a relatively cheerful, social, healthy, and autonomous figure with a happy family. Meanwhile, the Parisian is (in an image re-used in *Les Employés*) a 'goose-quilled mammal', bringing us to the '7th Axiom: *The provincial employé is* someone*, while the Parisian employé is* something.'[373] Where Huart isolated a series of related social mores and instantiated them into a satirical, animalistic temperament, Balzac's Parisian *employé*, in already being a thing, cuts the need for this process, actively lending himself to *physiologie*: one whose author will feel no moral pangs about objectifying their subject because they have apparently been beaten to it. Indeed, this is dehumanisation of such an alienating degree that Balzac beholds the *employé* as a living embodiment of contradictions: *it* is 'something marvellous, common and rare, singular and ordinary, that takes after plant and animal, mollusc and bee.'[374]

As with the *employé* and his *bureau*, form and content in Balzac's *Physiologie* share a symbiotic relationship. In keeping with the meta-analytical, high-physiological, style, Balzac apes the arbitrary and convoluted systems of categorisation in which he imagines the *employés* are themselves engaged, enveloping within this parody the critique that to engage in such a process professionally, day in, day out, somehow dehumanises (in Balzac's terminology, 'cretinises') the agent, turning *employés* into mythological-seeming creatures of supernatural banality. Imitating almost word-for-word the same section in Duval's article, this epistemological-ontological confusion breeds all manner of pathological *employé*-subtypes, including the dandyish 'handsome *employé*', 'the old fool' (a 'model employee'), 'the collector', the 'man of letters' (or would-be), 'the moonlighter', 'the usurer', 'the flatterer', 'the trader', 'the slogger', and finally 'the poor *employé*', whose life is a 'battle between stomach and hand'.[375] It is not only the 'poor' *employé* who is compromised – every one of these

[372] Ibid.*,* p. 28 – 'il y a employés et employés […] nous distinguons l'employé de Paris de l'employé de province. Cette Physiologie nie complètement l'employé de province. L'employé de province est heureux'.
[373] Ibid., p. 30 – 'mammifère à plumes […] 7E AXIOME *: L'employé de province est* quelqu'un, *tandis que l'employé de Paris est* quelque chose.'
[374] Ibid., – 'quelque chose de merveilleux, de commun et de rare, de singulier et d'ordinaire qui tient de la plante et de l'animal, du mollusque et de l'abeille.'
[375] Ibid., pp. 59-77 – 'L'employé bel-homme' ; 'La ganache' – 'cet employé-modèle' ; 'Le collectionneur' ; 'L'employé homme de lettres' ; 'Le cumulard' ; 'Le flatteur' ; 'le commerçant' ; 'le piocheur' ; 'le pauvre employé' – 'lutte entre le ventre et la main'.

categories constitutes a one-dimensional type whom Balzac, emulating 'the collector', can array in commodious rows and satirically taxonomise over a modicum of paragraphs.

Alex Woloch, in his analysis of characterisation in the nineteenth-century novel, *The One vs. The Many* (2003), divides minor characters into 'the *worker* and the *eccentric*, the flat character who is reduced to a single functional use within the narrative, and the fragmentary character who plays a disruptive, oppositional role within the plot'.[376] Perhaps by virtue of not being a novel, Balzac's *employés* in the *Physiologie* are literally *both* 'worker' and 'eccentric'. However, not only did Balzac transfer a number of his observations from the *Physiologie* to his novel, *Les Employés* (1844), so too do the 'types' he outlines here re-appear between its pages, but now endowed with names and backgrounds. Largely forming a kind of Greek Chorus to the actual events of the novel, however, they figure as neither 'worker' nor 'eccentric': narratively they are passive and isolated rather than functional. It is in the *employé*'s ultimate uselessness, despite all of the negative effects that office life visits upon him for his toils, that the incisive cruelty of Balzac's *Physiologie* manifests itself.

4.3. *Punch* – 'Government Offices' (1842), 'The 'Lawyer's Clerk Question Settled' (1844), and 'Punch's Guide to Servants – The Clerk' (1845).

While the trend for *physiologies,* in terms of their uniform format and their decentralised provenance, was a strictly Parisian phenomenon, the aesthetic tendency that they embody – an increasingly inventive and sardonic attitude toward social categorisation – also manifested itself in the periodicals established in Britain during this period.[377] Arlene Young writes that 'a variety of marginal social and occupational types populate the comic sketches of the *New Monthly Magazine* and *Bentley's Miscellany*', but, more closely evoking the 'type' as it has so far been explored, '*Punch*'s cartoons and sketches tended to focus on the genus rather than on individual representative characters.'[378] Founded in 1841, the high point of the *physiologies* craze, *Punch*, *or the London Charivari,* explicitly aligned itself with the French satirical tradition in its self-description as a British complement to the satirical *Charivari* magazine, founded in 1832 by Charles Philipon; but equally, it drew from a pre-existing British satirical culture covered partially in this chapter – with its contributors including Jerrold, Meadows, and Thackeray.[379] Founded by the social reformer Henry Mayhew, *Punch* was initially known for its liberal and often humanitarian sympathies – a nineteenth-century historian of the magazine stresses its satirical agenda in terms of being a 'kindly cauteriser of social sores'.[380]

[376] Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many* (Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 30.
[377] For a sense of the proliferation of satirical and popular magazines in London at this time, see F. David Roberts, *The Social Conscience of the Early Victorians,* pp. 264-265.
[378] Young, p. 62.
[379] M. H. Spielmann, *The History of "Punch"* (New York: Cassell, 1895), p. 15.
[380] Roberts, p. 266; Spielmann, p. 3.

Equally, however, as Young's allusion to its caricatures of *marginal* social types suggests, *Punch*'s satirical typologies of the lower-middle class clerk evoke as much a sense of bourgeois hauteur as they do a purported 'sympathy for the poor, the starving, the ill-housed, and the oppressed; for the ill-paid curate and the worse-paid clerk'.[381]

Like the French *physiologies,* the unsystematic heterogeneity in the composition of *Punch* serves to undermine any claims to the kind of earnest encyclopaedism to be found in *Heads* or *Les Français*. Moreover, in its capacity as a topical periodical, the magazine adds an additional degree of diachrony to a genre that has hitherto adopted a more synchronous, panoramic, focus: between issues of this first decade of *Punch,* we see the influence of contemporary events and changing ideas on the process of satirical sketch-writing. Of course, this quality of historicity is inevitable in a long-running topical periodical – but it is in the continued pretension of a kind of atemporal objectivity in the 'Physiologies', 'Natural Histories', and 'Guides' to be found in *Punch* that we see how sketch-writing was receptive to changing conceptual paradigms and themes in its effort to satirise, despite satire's ostensibly 'context-resistant' tenor.[382]

Socially, we have seen that in the French texts the constraints of income and working conditions inform the character of the *employé* as a bureaucratic-bourgeois hybrid – his confinement and the meanness of his income warp the manner in which he participates in bourgeois culture, where social shibboleths of terminology, dress, and dining habits attempt to stand in for the absence of autonomy; equally, the upper echelons of *employé* broach against aristocratic structures and pretensions while also maintaining a professional identity (as with Monnier's M. de Saint-Maur). *Punch,* meanwhile, at once delineates the lower orders of clerk, the degraded copyists and minor law-writers, from the more prestigious sinecures in the government offices, while also playing on the clear similarity of their functions and labour-processes – and this question of clerical distinction and similarity in no small part analogous to the broader distinctions between an inchoate lower middle class and a vested, quasi-aristocratic, upper middle class.

The upper stratum of clerk, largely in the civil service, is most often portrayed in conjunction with cushiness: in a short 1842 article we read that 'THE GOVERNMENT OFFICES Are the temporary residences of numerous patriotic gentlemen who are anxious to serve their country – at from 75l. to 5000l. per annum.'[383] The article continues in this ultra-sarcastic vein, writing that these offices 'are generally very snug berths, and are pleasantly situated in the vicinity of the parks, thus rendering one of the duties of the *employés* – that of looking out of window – less arduous and irksome', and thereby

[381] Spielmann, p. 3.
[382] Aaron Matz, *Satire in an Age of Realism* (Cambridge University Press: 2010), p. xii.
[383] 'The Government Offices', *Punch, Or the London Charivari*, 2 (London: 1842), p. 178.

facilitating 'those valuable reveries in which the government clerks are in the habit of indulging for the benefit of their country.'[384]

The article represents a general repudiation of a largely unreformed civil service, one which, Oliver MacDonagh writes in *Early Victorian Government* (1977), was 'the last refuge, not of the scoundrels exactly, but of those who had failed in all other professions, who were delicate in health or undistinguished in intellect yet sufficiently fortunate as to have a string which could be pulled on their behalf.'[385] Alongside the article's allusions to easy chairs, to mahogany desks, to the 'beauty of the paper and the pliability of the quills' (used by the 'Raphaeline Clerk' to doodle caricatures of his superiors), the social character of its critique manifests itself most plainly with the statement that 'salaries are always arranged upon that gentlemanly scale which connects the greatest remuneration with the least labour.'[386] That is, as in the French critiques we have seen above, an ambience of patronage, cronyism, and the resultant incompetence and spirit of torpor, reflects, and is reflected in, its historical character: MacDonagh writes that the civil service was 'a general undifferentiated mass of drones and mediocrity [for which] work degenerated into meaningless routine and promotion into a mechanical movement according to seniority.'[387]

Despite the anti-aristocratic social and political agenda of this article we see the same *literary* conventions here as elsewhere in the chapter. There is a very clear social disparity between Leman Rede's clerk and the younger sons of MPs in 'The Government Offices'; indeed, the overarching concern in 'The Lawyer's Clerk' and 'The Government Offices' alike is precisely this issue of social disparity, viewed from opposite ends of an official hierarchy that, in Leman Rede's article, had erroneously been imagined continuous. Nonetheless, Kit Mark's mother is here partially vindicated inasmuch as her mistaken assumption of social mobility was predicated upon the similarity of environment and labour process between the lowest and highest strata of 'mechanical' office worker. Although Kit worked with 'muttony' parchment in some minor legal practice while the government clerks work with 'superior quality' paper, both sets of office worker are portrayed in conjunction with the empirical materiality of office work – in neither case do we gain any sense of specialised knowledge or expertise.[388] Just as Kit Mark explicitly identified his own proletarian status in the fact that his toils lay purely in this bureaucratic materiality – he was more 'copying machine' than trainee lawyer – so too is the fatuousness of the semi-aristocratic government clerk bound up in the predominance of office materiality over 'the regulation of the affairs of [the clerk's] native land' (a function only ever

[384] Ibid.
[385] MacDonagh, p. 199.
[386] 'The Government Offices', p. 178.
[387] MacDonagh, p. 200.
[388] 'The Government Offices', p. 178.

sarcastically alluded to).[389] Indeed, where the act of inscription, for Kit, was divided from the 'senseless absurdities' inscribed, we read in *Punch* that 'the true government goosequill is selected from that class of pinion-feathers which admit of its being instantly converted into a tooth-pick': neither a site of head nor of hand labour, the government office is a machine repurposed toward the bodily needs of the semi-aristocratic voluptuaries out of which it is constituted. In all cases it is as if Balzac's maxim, that we can have 'no *employé* without office, no office without *employé*', rings true.

The ultimately 'mechanical' conception of office work is taken to its logical extreme an 1844 *Punch* article, 'The Lawyer's Clerk Question Settled'. Addressed 'to the ingenious Mr. Babbage', Mr. Punch writes that his 'office is absolutely choked up with letters from Lawyer's Clerks, complaining of over-work, under-pay, and ill-usage.'[390] Despite his sympathies for 'the poor Clerks', were the titular puppet to 'redress the grievances of the servant, [his] bosom, ligneous [that is, wooden] as it is, would bleed for the unhappy master' – so the conditions of work and the conditions of the worker are apparently at loggerheads.[391] That is, until Mr. Punch has the brainwave that

> the misery of the Clerk at present in use is, that his frame is composed of flesh and blood; that there is a heart in his breast, a brain in his skull; there are nerves, pulses, and other delicate and touchy structures in his anatomy; and emotions and sensibilities in his moral nature. This constitution of his ill qualifies him to work on an oak seat, leaning against a hard desk from morning till near midnight [and so on].[392]

That is, it is precisely in the clerk's *literal* physiological qualities, in his capacity as a living being, that he is unsuited to be an office worker – and so Mr. Punch asks Mr. Babbage, just as 'you have invented a Calculating Machine. Cannot you likewise a invent an Engrossing Machine – an Automaton Lawyer's Clerk!'[393] Where Louis Huart grounded the clerk's 'moral nature' in personal temperament, Mr. Punch goes the other way, reifying the artificial, instrumental nature of the office, and of office work, in the contention that humanity will always jar with them. Where the quality of Oysterishness becomes a fuzzy catch-all for lower-middle class despondency, it is insofar as the artificial nature of the office is readily intuitable, intelligible, that its demands can be automated. 'Mr. Punch' continues:

> Mahogany has no nervous system, springs and wires do not vibrate with sensations; and to the Attorney's wrong and the Solicitor's contumely, the whole clockwork would be impassible. The machine could not contract matrimony and have to keep a family; […] It would bear all kinds of indignity and ill-treatment without a murmur; it would call no meetings, write no letters to the newspapers. Like master like slave, it would be wholly unfeeling.[394]

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[389] Ibid.
[390] 'The Lawyer's Clerk Question Settled', *Punch, Or the London Charivari*, 7 (London: 1844), p. 194.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Ibid.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Ibid.

Although it is largely a convoluted attack on lawyers, the article also exaggerates the contrast more subtly outlined by Leman Rede between the empirical character of office work against the legal or governmental subtleties of the 'head labour' it exists to facilitate. While physiological writing often played up the extent to which structures of knowledge are contingent, the implication behind this article is that the office, in the rational instrumentality of its functions, is wholly knowable and therefore, presumably, wholly mechanisable. By extension (as has been implied in the texts throughout this chapter) offices are therefore to be conceived as only as irrational as their inhabitants – whose particular brand of strangeness is, moreover, a direct product of their lives as organic beings housed in synthetic strictures. In light of this article, the comic varieties of office worker appearing in other texts are symptoms of an acrimonious conjunction of the organic and synthetic: the recurrent 'moonlighters', 'sloggers', and 'hypochondriacs' in the French tradition are, we see upon reading Mr. Punch's letter to Babbage, simultaneously to be conceived of as the manifestations of a rational system deformed by its human agents, and as crooked human 'frames', only partially amenable to the order this system demands. This pathological relationship can only be resolved, therefore, by the rather sinister step of seeing the economic 'Babbage Principle' itself to its extreme, extirpating the organic element through total mechanisation.[395]

The 1845 'Punch Guide to Servants – The Clerk' partly follows this spirit of clerical contingency within a rational order. The comic 'Guide', like prior examples in this chapter, applies inappropriate intellectual models to the office worker's exposition: where Balzac opted for mathematical axioms, in *Punch* we read

> The education of a clerk is of course a matter of importance, and the following instructions to a parent, intending his child for the desk, should be implicitly followed. First take your son, and soak him well in spelling and writing. Grind in a few ounces of grammar, stuff with arithmetic, and season with geography. Lard with a little Latin and baste with birch wherever you find it requisite. Serve up on a high stool, at the first convenient opportunity.[396]

A whimsical retelling of Kit Mark's own tragic entry into clerkdom, this clerical 'recipe' is at once a repudiation of parents who affix their child to the desk as soon as possible, as well as to the kind of

[395] On the 'Babbage Principle', by which mechanisation serves to routinise and fragment human labour, and thereby cheapen and render it more readily controllable, see Charles Babbage's own *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures* 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1846), p. 54 – 'One great advantage which we may derive from machinery is from the check which affords against the inattention, the idleness, or the dishonesty of human agents.' And pp. 173-174 – once a portion of manufacture 'is the sole occupation of one individual, his whole attention being devoted to a very limited and simple operation', we see the tools used as well as their use honed, made more efficient, a process 'generally the first step towards a machine.'

[396] 'Punch's Guide to Servants – the Clerk', *Punch, Or the London Charivari,* 9 (London: 1845), p. 29.

reductionist (not to mention punitive) conception of education that the clerk undergoes – in which the qualitative branches of learning are transmuted into rude quantities.

Where other physiological sketches have parodied systems of knowledge in their exposés of the office-dwelling caste, here we also have an ironical take on readership. Punch's 'Guide' claims to be 'for clerks themselves' and offers to give 'a few general directions for their moral and intellectual guidance.'[397] Naturally this advice tends toward sharing ways of avoiding work, or consists in boyishly naïve methods of improving one's apparent standing:

> the term "recreation" does not necessarily apply to the time after office-hours, for in the absence of the principals the course of the day will furnish many opportunities for relaxation from the toils of business. […] Where the clerks are all on friendly terms, and particularly in a government office, leap-frog is an agreeable exercise; for it not only fills up the time, but obviates the chief objection to the employment of a clerk, on the ground of its being sedentary.

In a manner similar to previous physiological texts, 'Punch's Guide' covers the whole remit of clerkdom, offering sage advice to each stratum. An Ymbertian passage reads that 'it need hardly be suggested [to the Government Clerk] that if a stranger should enter, he must be received with a stare and a yawn'; the bank clerk, meanwhile, should 'not cut short a good story to attend to an impatient fellow who comes to pay in or draw out money.'[398] Of Law Clerks, the articled kind, by virtue of pay, 'may imitate those in the government offices to a certain extent'; the copyist is advised to 'flirt with the house-servant, in the hope of getting an occasional draught of small beer or a hunch of bread and cheese when he pops down into the kitchen', and the barrister's clerk's 'greatest [accomplishment] consists in knowing how to shirk attendance at chambers'.[399] In the previous article the prescriptions of clerical labour were cut off from their human vessels and automated; here they blur with its realities – as long as teenage boys are sat at desks, yawning and doodling will be as much inevitable elements of office life as 'engrossing'.

Where Lamb's 'Good Clerk', in the previous chapter, ironised the over-deference and keenness apparently exhibited by some aspirant office workers, here we see the reverse – the *true* voice of the 'Guide' is the shadowy form of the visiting stranger to a ministry, the 'impatient fellow' in the bank, and the lawyer's client, all of whom *want* to deal with Lamb's facetiously described ideal. Elsewhere in *Punch* we see clerks perform ancillary functions as nameless foils in comic sketches; the 'Guide' to the Clerk, conversely, paints in the negative space around the ideology of the harrumphing middle-class public man who finds himself eternally stymied by the idleness and incompetence of his

[397] Ibid.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Ibid.

inferiors. The sketch-writer is no longer merely observer but also service user – and thus does order reassert itself. It is against this reassertion of a socially determined ideological mainstream that the radical epistemological contingency of physiological writing founders – the quirks and contingencies of 'social exchange-value' in a public realm resolve themselves into exchange-value pure and simple, and the clerk is ultimately a social subordinate, to be ridiculed in literature as he is to be 'ill-used' in the office.

5. Conclusion

In its compiled edition, *France administrative* (1840-1844) – the self-appointed '*Gazette des Bureaux*' founded by former administrator Charles Van Tenac – begins with a foreword vindicating the *employés* of France.[400] Addressing a contemptuous straw-public, 'we', the author writes, 'take care of your property, your interests, yourselves even; we look after the lands, the wealth, the forces, and the prosperity of France: – is this not a noble mission?'[401] The author continues, 'is it not time at last that we might destroy the absurd prejudice, born from ignorance and stupidity, that divides the French into two enemy classes, – administrated and administrators?'[402]

A noble mission indeed – and one which *France administrative* seemingly betrays. Whatever its desire for France's *employés* to shed their collars and sit at the desk of brotherhood with their fellow Frenchmen, and despite its laudable articles about famous clerks-done-good, administrative reform, and those articles that call out 'irregularities, nepotism, and favouritism in appointments and promotions' – *France administrative* also indulges in the very same process of stereotyping that it ostensibly repudiated.[403] One such article, by Wilhelm Ténint, reads:

> Offices are like a vast convent to which the younger sons of this *grande dame* we call *Fortune* are destined.
> All classes of society are represented there: the descendent of a noble family consumes ink side-by-side with the son of a cook. It is equality on earth, – for six hours a day.
> It would be an error therefore to create a single type named *employé*. […] There exist around eight distinct species of *employés.* Scattered outside this grouping there are a few individualities of greater or lesser eccentricity – but they do not constitute a race.

[400] See Guy Thuillier 'La « France administrative » de Van Tenac', *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates au XIX^e siècle,* pp. 177-192.
[401] 'Avant-propos', *France administrative – Gazette des Bureaux – Organe des intérêts moraux et matériaux des administrateurs* (1840-44)*,* 4 vols (Paris: 1841-1844), I (1841), pp. 1-4 (pp. 1-2) – 'nous sommes commis à la garde de vos propriétés, de vos intérêts, de vos personnes même ; à la garde des domaines, des richesses, des forces, de la prospérité de la France : – n'est-ce pas là une noble mission ?'
[402] Ibid., p. 3 – 'N'est-il pas temps enfin que nous détruisions l'absurde préjuge, né de l'ignorance et de la sottise, qui divise les Français en deux classes ennemis, – les administrés et les administrateurs ?
[403] Thuillier, 'La « France administrative » de Van Tenac', p. 182.

> These eight species are: *the pure-blood, the dandy, the littérateur, the rustic, the labourer, the intriguer, the hedonist, the Don Juan.*[404]

Assuming that someone is not guilty of plagiarism, we are left to conclude not only that, as Daumard puts it, such systems of 'mental categories' were highly widespread in the culture of the July Monarchy, but also that clerks themselves actually *enjoyed* seeing themselves humorously dissected and classified.[405] The fact that everyone seemed happy to categorise clerks in this comic way, from the vantage of antipathy to that of affection, speaks to a broader ambiguity in the physiological sketch: between the caustic classification of people, and the satirical (mis)use of classificatory systems themselves.

It is because the clerk as a 'type' represents both a recognisable vocation *and* a (mis)user of classificatory systems that the tensions that underlie physiological writing appear at once more explicit and more complex when it intersects with office literature. However, despite the diversity of physiological writing during this first period of its efflorescence, it is equally because of the fundamental limitations of this genre – constraints determined by the epistemic, structural, and ideological character of its social context – that its conceptualisation of bureaucratic structures is equally limited. This limitation is marked by an inability to focus on the organisational and social character of office life and to contrastingly fetishise its superficial qualities, and, rather than explore the nuances of bureaucracy's interplay of formal and historical patterns, it portrays a more stereotyped collision of bourgeois values and rather less-than-bourgeois working conditions. That said, the fact that Van Tenac supplied his clerical readership with the same analyses as those read by the general public implies that clerks' adherence to bourgeois cultural values, a phenomenon identified and ridiculed by the likes of Monnier and Duval, was evidently not far from the truth.

As it has so far been explored over these first two chapters, office literature exhibits a diverse range of conceptual preoccupations (even if it exhibits clear repetitiveness in certain aspects of content): for Lamb, the office is a site of tension between individual psychology and organisational schemas, for Ymbert, it provides literary models that satirically countermand literary aims, meanwhile physiological literature at once sets up a cultural, social, and epistemic boundary between the office

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[404] Wilhelm Ténint, 'Les Employés', *La France administrative,* I, pp. 238-244 (p. 238) – 'Les bureaux sont comme un vaste couvent destiné aux fils cadets de cette grande dame qu'on appelle *la Fortune.*
Toutes les classes de la société y sont représentées. Le descendant d'une noble famille y consomme de l'encre côté à côté avec le fils d'une cuisinière. C'est l'égalité sur la terre, – six heures par jour.
On aurait donc tort, selon nous, de créer un type unique qu'on nommerait l'*employé.* […]
C'est qu'en effet il existe environ huit espèces d'employés bien distinctes. En dehors s'éparpillent quelques individualités plus ou moins excentriques, mais qui ne peuvent faire race. Ces huit espèces sont : *l'employé pur sang, – l'employé dandy, – l'employé littérateur, – l'employé campagnard, – l'employé travailleur, – l'employé intrigant, – l'employé viveur, – l'employé don Juan.*'
[405] Daumard, p. 618.

and broader public life, if only to explore its porousness. So too is this diversity in the literary conceptualisation of emergent bureaucratic structures and their staff reflected in this literature's heterogeneous formal execution: familiar essays, epistles, closet dramas, sketches, treatises and so on. The content of office literature is in part predicated upon its form – and I have moreover stressed in the present chapter that the form that these texts take relies in turn upon particular social and intellectual contexts. The ability to agglomerate these vying strands of office literature, to counterpose their respective shortcomings while also retaining their strengths, becomes a problematic that underpins the novels of the following chapter.

Chapter Three – Convergences: The Consolidation of Genre in the Novels of Balzac and Dickens

1. Introduction

Over Chapters One and Two I covered 'familiar essays', epistolary 'courses', closet dramas, sketches, 'encyclopaedias', and *physiologies* – and I argued that this degree of formal heterogeneity speaks in part to the inchoate historical character of bureaucracy during the early nineteenth century, as well as reflecting the diffused aspect of bureaucratic structures and their components in general. While certain literary forms might lend themselves more to conveying the personal experience of the clerk, others appear more suited to interrogating the nature of bureaucracy more broadly; one form may repudiate the structures inherent to office life, while another may resonate with them; some portray bureaucracy from 'behind the desk', others more in the capacity of 'service users'. But however formally diverse these texts may have been, they all attempted to address those same issues that underlie their diversity: the ambiguous character of office work, and office workers, the interplay of the historical and formal in bureaucratic structures, and the epistemic tensions to which these personal and structural aspects of office life give rise. More prosaically, the first exponents of office literature are also unified by their attention to similar features of office life: its hierarchies, its tedium, the artificial character of the office landscape ('the verdure of box files'), and of course its intellectual pedantry. In these respects, office literature is at once unified by its self-acknowledged instability, and by a body of tropes derived from the relative uniformity of the humdrum office itself.

In the present chapter I turn to the novelistic portrayals of office life by Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens; a transition that at once represents an upheaval *and* a point of consolidation in my history of office literature as the vying strands of the genre converge in and are transformed by this prismatic literary form. This chapter superficially represents upheaval and consolidation insofar as, by focussing on the novels of the mid-nineteenth century, my chosen texts exhibit a greater uniformity than those covered in prior chapters. Equally, however, this dynamic of change and coherence is rooted in the fact that the baggy novels of this period could individually accommodate a range of approaches toward the portrayal of office life, thereby unifying the various 'family resemblances' exhibited between exponents of office literature so far explored – but also often stressing some approaches' mutual contradiction. I argue in the following section that the degree of internal heterogeneity – perhaps even instability – exhibited by office literature's first novels in large part lies in the comparably tendentious character of both the novel and bureaucracy alike as concepts during this period.

Another key qualitative distinction between the works of the present chapter and those of the previous lies in the novel's greater emphasis on plot: a feature that struggles to reconcile itself to

the office's 'no variety of days', in Dickens's own terms.[406] That is, the rote and isolating nature of office work does not lend itself to long-form fiction as easily as it does to essays, sketches, and outlines. This problem is exemplified by Monnier's portrayals of the office in Chapter Two, in which the working day was the *only* narrative impulse, bringing us from nine o'clock to four with his characters bickering indiscriminately in between. The closest we have come to conventional plotting so far was Leman Rede's 'Lawyer's Clerk', where Kit Mark's protagonistic twists and turns are recounted from the office as a point of resolution from which his past actions appear inexorable: whatever minimal degree of autonomy Kit may have once had has since been cauterised by the tedium of his job, and he recounts his narrative to us from a desk-bound afterlife.

This notion of the narrative 'suitability' of the office to different literary forms, at least in terms of plotting, is in part derived from Fredric Jameson's distinction between the 'tale' and the novel – a distinction introduced in the previous chapter. The tale, defined by the 'mark of the irrevocable', is to be contrasted to the novel, which works to convey an illusion of freedom, open-endedness, and presentism – an aesthetic conceit that will necessarily jar against its eventual need for resolution.[407] The sense of irrevocability that characterises the tale underpins some of the most famous office-based texts that lie beyond the purview of the present study (Nikolai Gogol's 'The Overcoat' [1842] and Herman Melville's 'Bartleby' [1853]), as if only a clerk's death can interrupt the unending routines of the office; equally, on the rare occasion that a novelistic 'open present' *is* fully invested in the unvarying mechanism of bureaucratic procedure, the author often comes to an end before their novel does, as with Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), Stendhal's *Lucien Leuwen* (1834/1894), or, from the twentieth century, Franz Kafka's whole novelistic career.[408] From this same perspective, David Graeber writes that 'administrative procedures are very much *not* about the creation of stories; in a bureaucratic setting, stories appear when something goes wrong'.[409] One might therefore contend that the nature of office work is incommensurable with amalgam of presentism and plotting that characterises the novel, at least that of the early to mid-nineteenth century.

The problem of centring a long-form plot in the office is in large part evaded by the texts in the present chapter because, as my above allusion to the heteromorphism of mid-nineteenth-century novels suggests, these texts often do not focus solely on office life. Rather, the categories of 'bureaucracy', 'office', and 'clerk' outlined in the Introductory Chapter are often scattered between episodes or structural levels within an individual work – the clearest example from the present chapter

[406] Dickens, 'Thoughts about people', *Sketches*, p. 254.
[407] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 19, p. 26.
[408] Ibid., p. 18.
[409] Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*, p. 185.

being *David Copperfield* (1850), in which bureaucratic structures are in large part represented by an episode centred around Doctors' Commons, whereas the most prominent clerical character, Uriah Heep, figures in a different part of Copperfield's 'world'. Of course, it is because bureaucratic structures and their components are so scattered, thus representing at once stages in David Copperfield's own *Bildung*, as a site of intellectual and social apathy, *and* figuring as a malcontent-style adversary, that my sense of these novels' consolidatory and contradictory use of aspects of office literature becomes clear. By contrast, it is with the example of a novel like Balzac's *Les Employés* (1844), in which bureaucratic structures, office life, and the eponymous clerks themselves form centre stage, that we see the novel-form warp and stretch itself into something virtually unrecognisable.

I am not simply outlining the diffuseness of the role of the office in these novels, therefore – rather, the *character* of this diffuseness is my primary object of focus. Bureaucracy's amorphous role in these novels owes itself to formal, ideological, and conceptual factors – but I equally intend to argue in this and the following chapter that this amorphous character was ultimately a historical phenomenon. We will see in the following, and final, chapter that it was largely with major qualitative and quantitative changes in the functioning and application of bureaucratic organisation in the years following the 1860s that a more definite subset of 'office novels' could develop, each with its own more coherent image of bureaucracy and office life – these changes were the 'industrialisation' of the office, the introduction of women to the workforce, and the further consolidation of France and the UK's civil services.

1.1. Bureaucracy and the novel

'Novel' is a term much like 'bureaucracy', insofar as both enjoy a confused conceptual status – at once canonical and contingent, monolithic and heterogeneous. In order to illustrate this sense of parity, I will now elaborate on some well-established criticisms and attempts to define the novel as a literary form and relate these formal distinctions to the literature so far explored. In turn I compare these to the conceptual problematics underlying bureaucracy as they were outlined in the Introductory Chapter.

Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), illustrates the established reputation of the novel by conjuring up a straw critic, one who imagines that prose attained its 'great deliverance in Defoe' (that is, by crystallising the novelistic form) and who therefore considers the novel to be a *telos* toward which all prose fiction had previously been working.[410] Frye contrastingly repudiates this 'novel-centred view of prose fiction'.[411] He pegs the unwieldy term 'novel' to a far narrower definition

[410] Frye, p. 303.
[411] Ibid., p. 304.

– that of a prose form that is 'closely linked to the comedy of manners' – and by supplementing the novel's lost territory with related categories of his own devising, including 'anatomy', as discussed in Chapter One of the present study.[412]

Meanwhile, Mikhail Bakhtin offers the counter-argument that it is precisely in the categorical diffuseness of the novel, to which Frye looks askance, that we can gauge its form. Unlike the relative fixity of other literary forms, Bakhtin writes in 'Epic and Novel' (1941), the novel is 'the genre of becoming' – and, he elaborates in 'Discourse in the Novel' (1973), that this distinct character is rooted in the novel's tendency to replicate the dynamic heterogeneity and stratification of language as spoken in society at large ('heteroglossia'), which therefore necessarily also renders the novel amorphously wide-ranging and changeable.[413] Of course, problematically for the present chapter, Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia' conception of the novel means that 'authoritative discourse' (of which he includes 'bureaucratic' discourse) 'can not [sic] be represented' in the novel:

> its inertia, its semantic finiteness and calcification, the degree to which it is hard-edged, a thing in its own right, the impermissibility of any free stylistic development in relation to it – all this renders the artistic representation of authoritative discourse impossible. Its role in the novel is insignificant.[414]

Bureaucratic discourse is as alien to Bakhtin's understanding of the novel as were the clerks, trudging automatically through the chaos of the London streets in *Sketches by Boz*.

Ian Watt's definition, in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), complements Bakhtin's idea of the novel's decentralised discourse, insofar as Watt argues that it is from the vantage of this form's 'realistic particularity' that it is to be defined against other literature.[415] 'Realistic particularity' refers to the 'individualisation of [the novel's] characters' and the 'detailed presentation of their environment' – and this new focus on particularities is to be contrasted to the explicit use of narrative formulas and recurring stock characters in non-novelistic narratives, a development that, Watt argues, emulates a similarly particularistic and individualistic sea-change in Early Modern philosophy.[416] While such individuation and immediate sensation may chime in which Lamb's essays or Leman Rede's 'Lawyer's Clerk', it also appears to run in direct opposition to the armies of 'types' that fill the formalistic pages of Ymbert, Monnier, and *Punch* – and, we will see, those of Dickens and Balzac.

In these regards we see that the novel has long served as a by-word for a distinct kind of prose writing, one whose general diffuseness, in contradistinction to the particularity of its individual

[412] Ibid., p. 304.
[413] Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', p. 22; Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination,* pp. 259-422 (p. 263).
[414] Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 344.
[415] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 17.
[416] Ibid., p. 18.

exemplars, can map itself onto questions of categorisation, language-use in society, and intellectual history. The ambiguities about the character of bureaucracy explored in prior chapters are only indirectly related to those of the novel – insofar as bureaucracy, unlike the novel, is ultimately to be recognised as a specific means of administering and informing executive power of one kind or another. Nevertheless, as I stressed in the introductory chapter, 'bureaucracy' also has a chequered theoretical history: 'the word is used to identify an institution or a caste, a mode of operation, an ideology, a way of viewing and organizing society, or a way of life' writes Eugene Kamenka at the beginning of *Bureaucracy: The Career of a Concept* (1979), and what one generation may imagine to be the apex of rational organisation, the next might well regard as parochially inefficient and inadequate.[417]

Just as Frye attacks an all-encompassing conception of 'the novel', so too, therefore, has 'bureaucracy' over its three-hundred-year theoretical history undergone some degree of 'concept creep': as grains of sand are to the 'heap' in the Sorites Paradox, it is hard to gauge what specific quality it is that needs removing to stop bureaucracies and novels alike achieving their categorisation. Bureaucracy converges with the novel – especially those of the period covered in this chapter – in that they are both monolithic terms for conceptual heterogeneity. It is this specific degree of consonance between the two that will inform our understanding of the portrayal of bureaucracy *within* the novel.

1.2. Choice of Texts

In order to explore the range in portrayals of bureaucracy in the mid-nineteenth-century novel with a degree of continuity, I will be focussing on the novels of Honoré de Balzac and Charles Dickens. Naturally, Balzac and Dickens do not represent all British and French novelists of this period, but the strong recurrence of office-related subjects in their works makes them useful objects of study in order to gauge the diffuse character of this workplace in the novel with any coherence – just as their continuity between 'physiological' and novelistic modes of writing illustrates the historical development of office literature more broadly. I conceive of Balzac and Dickens's works as two 'case studies' with regard to the questions relating to the portrayal of bureaucracy in longer-form literature during this period explored in the previous section.

From Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* [The Human Comedy], a sprawling, interconnected series of works that chronicle French society in the late eighteenth and early-to-mid nineteenth centuries, I am looking at his supernaturally-themed novella, *Melmoth reconcilié* [Melmoth reconciled] (1835), then the *Bildungsroman*, *Un début dans la vie* [A start in life] (1842), and finally Balzac's most bureaucratically focussed novel, *Les Employés* (first published as *La Femme supérieure* [The Superior

[417] Eugene Kamenka, 'introduction', from *Bureaucracy – The Career of a Concept*, pp. vii-ix (p. vii).

Wife] in 1837, but substantially reworked and republished under its new title in 1844). From Dickens's works I am reading the similarly supernatural novella, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), and the two mid-career novels, the *Bildungsroman David Copperfield* (1850) and the epic legal satire *Bleak House* (1853). All of these works depict office workers, offices, and bureaucratic institutions to a substantial degree; but between and within each work, these portrayals are subject to major fluctuations and perform potentially contradictory functions, thereby reflecting a protean characterisation of these social phenomena, at least in conjunction with the novel form.

While other novels by Balzac and Dickens of course contain clerks and offices (*Modeste Mignon* [1844] or *The Pickwick Papers* [1836] for example) it is because of my chosen texts' degree of focus on clerks, offices, and bureaucracy – and upon these themes' interrelationship – as well as in the extent to which these works resonate with each other, that they are the most pertinent for this chapter. Of course, my focus on supernatural works, *Bildungsromane,* and satires was intended to facilitate ready comparison between authors, but it should also become clear the themes underlying office literature also resonate strongly with these particular genres. Unsurprisingly, there are also novels by other authors from this period which similarly fall into my category of office literature. For example, alongside *Les Employés,* Anthony Trollope's *The Three Clerks* (1858), and Émile Gaboriau's *Les Gens du Bureau* [The People of the Office] (1862) also portray the 'world' of bureaucracy; the ambivalent character of the clerk is as relevant in Wilkie Collins's *Basil* (1858) and Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1868) as in *Melmoth reconcilié* or *David Copperfield*; and aspects of the bureaucratic career figure in Stendhal's *Lucien Leuwen* and William Makepeace Thackeray's *The History of Samuel Titmarsh* (1841), as well as in the opening chapters of George Henry Lewes's *Ranthorpe* (1847), and Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* (1857), just as they appear in *David Copperfield* or *Un début dans la vie*. Due to the remit of the chapter, and (in the context of the thesis more broadly) to the fact that these other authors did not writer earlier physiological work with which we can trace this genre's development, they will perform a largely peripheral function.

2. Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850)

2.1. Introduction

In Chapter Two we saw Balzac the 'physiologist' facetiously taxonomizing the social 'types' that populated Paris via the medium of the short article. Although I covered only his *Physiologie de l'employé,* Balzac also produced a handful of 'types' for *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes,* and, indeed, he wrote a *Physiologie du Mariage* [Physiology of Marriage] in 1829 which arguably set an

early precedent for the later craze.[418] In this chapter we see Balzac the novelist operate in a similar vein, as one who was 'steeped in contemporary social theory', and who wanted to distil his observations into text.[419]

We read as much in his 'Avant-propos' [foreword] (1842) to *La Comédie humaine,* which Balzac begins by arguing that society resembles nature, insofar as there are recognisable 'Social Species like there are Zoological Species.'[420] However, he continues, 'Nature has set down boundaries between animal varieties to which Society is not beholden': the complicating factors of gender, class, politics, and history, not to mention their interrelation, render social existence more multifaceted, and more categorically contingent, than the natural world.[421] While the naturalist can dispose of zoology in one book, Balzac argues, for society we need a model like that of *La Comédie humaine,* a decentralised network of novels and stories that interlink primarily through the motif of the *retour des personnages* [recurring characters].

György Lukács writes that *La Comédie humaine* is a 'strange, boundless, immeasurable mass of interweaving destinies and lonely souls' – an entropic vision of novelistic diffuseness – but Balzac's own 'Avant-propos' indicates that his subject is less a clear division between the atomised individual and society and more a complex interpenetration of the two.[422] Balzac's characters are at once clear products of the various interweaving structural factors outlined in the 'Avant-propos' (thereby signifying broader social 'types') but they are also individualised insofar as their personal destinies involve negotiating the interstices of these chaotically shifting impersonal phenomena: where one *parvenu,* Eugène de Rastignac flits from strength to strength between the novels, another, Lucien de Rubempré in *Illusions perdues* [*Lost Illusions*] (1837-43), fails miserably. The *retour des personnages* thus serves as a means of balancing the agency of the character against the structural factors of their context. It is by literally fragmenting these images of characters and of society between different volumes, offering distinct combinations and permutations of the two in each individual work, that Balzac's novelistic project emulates what Lauster ascribes to physiological literature: as a whole it simulates 'the unseen bond pulling the types together [which] can only be imagined'.[423]

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[418] Bazantay, introduction to Balzac, *Physiologie,* p. 7.
[419] Lauster, pp. 92-93.
[420] Honoré de Balzac, 'Avant-propos', *Œuvres Complètes,* 27 vols (Paris : Louis Conard, 1912-25), I (1912), pp. xxv-xxxviii (p.xxvi) – 'Il a donc existé, il existera donc de tout temps les Espèces Sociales comme il y a des Espèces Zoologiques.'
[421] Balzac, 'Avant-propos', p. xxvi – 'Mais la Nature a posé, pour les variétés animales, des bornes entre lesquelles la Société ne devait pas se tenir.'
[422] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, tr. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 108.
[423] Lauster, p. 87.

As much as *La Comédie humaine* simulates the complex interplay of structures and agents in society, so too is it underlain by competing epistemic models. *La Comédie humaine* began to cohere into a single project relatively haphazardly: the 'Avant-propos', its 'mission statement', was written long after the historical novel *Les Chouans* (1827), which Balzac retroactively counts as his series' first text.[424] The piecemeal, relatively accidental character of this project not only reflects Balzac's own conception of the nebulous complexity of society and that of its 'species', in turn relating to his historical moment – a world increasingly to be known for its 'emerging urban agglomerations, its nascent capitalist dynamics, its rampant cult of the individual personality' – it also follows on from the argument above that both bureaucracy and the novel are also categories in part subject to dynamics of historical accretion and coalescence.[425] Conversely, however, Balzac's fragmentary social vision is subject to its own centralising and totalising force in the paradigm that is *La Comédie humaine* itself – one in which Balzac plays the role of 'secretary' to modern society itself.[426] Far from a novelist who accepts social unknowability, Albert Béguin labels Balzac a 'visionary' who claims to see through the complexities he fabricates.[427] So too does Jameson attribute to Balzac 'an obsession to know everything and all the social levels from the secret conversations of the great all the way to the "*mystères de Paris*" [mysteries of Paris] and the *"bas fonds*" [margins]': he was 'a know-it-all' whose recognition of social complexity is mirrored in a 'conception of absolute knowledge' that in part informs his narratives.[428] Tim Farrant therefore evokes the Balzacian novel as a site of vying notions of intelligibility, at once a self-described 'transcription of social reality', but also 'more than a document': a work that '[makes] connections, via symbolism, imagery and coincidence, in order to reveal a truth […] an enterprise of vision and synthesis.'[429]

Evidently, Balzac's preoccupation with the character of society, and how best to represent it, situates him firmly in the ideological and intellectual context of his period: one underpinned by a dynamic between de Gournay's vying categories of *laissez-faire* and bureaucracy – 'characteristic institutions of the bourgeois-liberal era' alike – of which the latter was starting to compile and instrumentalise knowledge in earnest (indeed, Balzac's upwardly mobile father had made his name in

[424] See Félicien Marceau's timeline of *La Comédie humaine* in *Balzac and his World* (1955), tr. Derek Coltman (London: W.H. Allen, 1967), pp. xi-xiv.
[425] Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 22.
[426] Balzac, 'Avant-propos', p. xxix; Martin Kanes (ed.), 'Introduction', *Critical Essays on Honoré de Balzac* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co. 1990), pp. 1-21 (p. 10).
[427] Albert Béguin, 'The Visionary', tr. Martin Kanes, *Critical Essays on Honoré de Balzac*, pp. 120-125 (p.123).
[428] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 217.
[429] Tim Farrant, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (London: Duckworth, 2007), p. 109, p. 125.

the 'tentacular administration' of the Napoleonic regime).[430] Beyond such parallelism, rather, it is via his more dynamic figuration of an interplay between the intelligible structures that underpin social existence, and the emergent factors that complicate these underpinning structures, that we come to understand Balzac's conception of office life. When approached from this perspective, the Balzacian *employé* figures as the rarefied product of social complexity as much as he is a supposed agent of intelligibility.

The three novels I will be looking at, aside from their shared attention to bureaucracy, offices, and clerks, appear on the surface to be rather diffuse: *Melmoth reconcilié* is a parody Gothic novel, *Un début dans la vie* a *Bildungsroman,* and *Les Employés* a political satire. They all, nevertheless, deal with the recurrent Balzacian themes of, Jerrold Seigel summarises, 'bourgeois ambition, greed, determination, narrow-mindedness, and failure', which are in turn superimposed onto Parisian life, to be characterised, Adeline Daumard writes, by a population undergoing 'rapid growth, and incessant renewal'.[431] In so doing, these works reflect the conceptions of the novel so far discussed, portraying an atomised world of individual interests and overlapping institutions. In keeping with the broader conceit of *La Comédie humaine,* each text also provides a distinct vantage onto the career of the clerk, life in the office, the character of bureaucracy, and the role of wider society with regard to these themes; together, they form a multi-perspectival account of the narrative potential of bureaucracy in the early and middle decades of the century. Of the three texts, *Les Employés* provides the fullest image of the themes I am exploring, but, no doubt for this reason, its structure is possibly the strangest – as I will explore in section 2.4.

2.2. *Melmoth reconcilié* (1835)

In the Gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Irish novelist, Charles Maturin, the titular Melmoth trades in his soul for extreme longevity and superhuman powers, but he is still able to escape the damnation that this entails if he can in turn conduct this Faustian deal with another person before

[430] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, p. 234; Nadine Satiat, *Honoré de Balzac* (Paris: Association pour la distribution de la pensée française, 1999), p. 6 – 'il allait poursuivre dans l'administration tentaculaire du Consulat et de l'Empire une carrière plus qu'honorable pour un fils de laboureur'. Lukács comparably conceives of Balzac's *œuvre* as coming out of vying interpretations of history and society during the Restoration period, *The Historical Novel* (1937)*,* tr. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969), p. 84. Moreover, Janell Watson situates this descriptive imperative within the 'logic of modern material culture under consumer capitalism', *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 110.

[431] Seigel, p. 198; Daumard, p. 5 – 'Deux traits caractérisent la population parisienne dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle : son chiffre, en accroissement rapide, et son incessant renouvellement, lié aux mouvements migratoires.'

dying (which he attempts, to no avail).[432] In this satirical sequel, Balzac sends Melmoth to Paris, whose unscrupulous inhabitants are all too happy to unburden Maturin's Gothic creation of his diabolical powers in exchange for their soul, thereby releasing Melmoth from his fate and potentially damning themselves in the pursuit of short-term, licentious, and petty goals. The curse's first purchaser is corrupt bank cashier, Castanier, who quickly tires of the omnipotence it affords so decides to float it on the Paris Bourse in return for a new soul: before long the curse is passing between buyers like a cosmic futures contract. Confidence eventually drops, leaving the curse in the possession of a solicitor's clerk [*clerc,* in the legal instance, rather than *commis*] who, overcome with shame after sating his various lusts, accidentally kills himself with mercury – much to the amusement of his office colleagues. A story bracketed by two office workers, Balzac's satire is rooted in the interplay of structure and agency that typifies *La Comédie humaine* more broadly, in this case serving to model in turn the relationship between bureaucracy and market, and the earthly and the cosmic, and ultimately exploring conceptions of absolute knowledge and its complicating particularities.

Evoking the emergent physiological style in vogue during this same period, as well as operating from the social-zoological perspective later outlined in the 'Avant-propos', *Melmoth reconcilié* begins with an extended analysis of bank cashiers. Balzac outlines the cashier as a 'hybrid species', an 'anthropomorphic product' – a creature selectively nurtured on a concoction of secular deterrents and superstitions that endows him with the ability to sit 'unendingly in the presence of fortune like a cat before a caged mouse.'[433] Balzac jokes that 'moral nature has its caprices, it permits itself here and there to produce honest people, and bank cashiers' – and he continues that it is, ironically, 'the corsairs, whom we honour with the name "Bankers"', that benefit most from 'these rare products of virtue's incubations'.[434] Anticipating Weber's argument that clerks under bureaucracy are 'indispensable' in the same way that slaves are in slave society (necessary, but powerless) – Balzac writes sardonically that the 'veneration' that Bankers exhibit for these freaks of nature is so great that they 'encage [cashiers] in booths to protect them just as governments do curious animals.'[435] The ideal

[432] Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer,* 4 vols (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co., 1820), IV, p. 441 – after traversing the whole world, Melmoth finds 'no one [who], to gain that world, would lose his own soul!'
[433] Honoré de Balzac, *Melmoth reconcilié* (1835), *La Maison Nucingen,* ed. Anne-Marie Meininger (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), pp. 65-124 (p. 67) – 'une espèce hybride', 'produit anthropomorphe', 'un homme qui soit sans cesse en présence de fortune comme un chat devant une souris en cage'.
[434] Ibid.*,* p. 68 – 'la nature morale a ses caprices, elle se permet de faire ça et là d'honnêtes gens et des caissiers' ; 'les corsaires que nous décorons du nom de Banquiers' ; 'ces rares produits des incubations de la vertu'.
[435] Ibid. – 'ont-ils une telle vénération pour ces rares produits des incubations de la vertu qu'ils les encagent dans des loges afin de les garder comme les gouvernements gardent les animaux curieux.' ; Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 232 – 'if "indispensability" were decisive, then where slave labour prevailed and where freemen usually abhor work as a dishonour, the "indispensable" slaves ought to have held the positions of power, for they were at least as indispensable as officials and proletarians are today.'

cashier in *Melmoth reconcilié* is not only functionally indispensable, therefore, but an object of curiosity, a source of entertainment to the dishonest society that benefits directly from his scruples.

Unlike Louis Huart's similarly complacent 'Oyster', in Chapter Two, Balzac stresses that this hybrid creature is neither born, nor an emergent 'social product': he is made. The workplace, Balzac continues, is to employers in the 'Social Kingdom' what the 'hothouse' is to florists in the 'Vegetable Kingdom' – and it is in particular the stove, recurring motif in French office literature, that forces the cashier's nature:[436]

> The stove puts one to sleep, it stupefies, and serves solely to cretinise porters and office workers. A room with a stove is an alchemical tube in which energetic men dissolve, where their resilience dwindles, where their will is exhausted. Offices are the great factories [that produce] the mediocrities necessary to governments so as to maintain the feudalism of money upon which the current social contract depends.[437]

Starting with the seemingly innocuous stove, Balzac here expands outwards, with the apparently unique cashier falling readily into a broader stratum of white-collar lackeys to be found throughout French society. Both the 'species' that is the cashier and *employé* genus more broadly are produced by, and benefit, a society to which their nature is strangely incongruous. Administrative means and ends are intrinsically related, yet exhibit contradicting natures.

This irony is countermanded by another – that the particular cashier in question, Castanier, is introduced to us engrossed in an act of fraud: forging a letter of credit from his employers.[438] That is, this particular instantiation of the cashier is as corrupt as the society against which the 'type' is otherwise being contrasted. This interplay between the 'realistic particularity' of Castanier himself, against the stock 'type' that is 'the cashier' recalls that between Lamb's idling narrator and 'The Good Clerk' that he describes. However, because Balzac takes pains in his introduction to outline the ideological, social, and material factors that contribute to the development of 'the cashier' as a veritable social phenomenon, it is less that Castanier *belies* the existence of this 'type', as Lamb appears to do, and more that Balzac's protagonist has somehow diverged from it. We therefore have two 'realistic particularities' – that of Castanier as an individual persona, and the aggregated particularity of 'the cashier' as a recognisably recurring figure in modern society.

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[436] Balzac, *Melmoth reconcilié*, p. 67 – 'Il est une nature d'hommes que la Civilisation obtient dans le Règne Social, comme les fleuristes créent dans le Règne végétal par l'éducation de la serre'. On the stove as a recurrent office trope in Balzac, cf. Owen Heathcote, 'Le bureau comme sociotope balzacien: du « Colonel Chabert » aux « Employés »', p. 316.

[437] Balzac, *Melmoth reconcilié*, p. 71 – 'Le poêle endort, il hébète et contribue singulièrement à crétiniser les portiers et les employés. Une chambre à poêle est un matras où se dissolvent les hommes d'énergie, où s'amincissent leurs ressorts, où s'use leur volonté. Les Bureaux sont la grande fabrique des médiocrités nécessaires aux gouvernements pour maintenir la féodalité de l'argent sur laquelle s'appuie le contrat social actuel.'

[438] Ibid., p. 78.

It is from this instance of a contradiction between individual and 'type' that Balzac's narrative derives its impetus: as soon as Castanier begins forging his banker's draft the spectral Melmoth appears, as if it is only once 'moral nature' has been transgressed that the *super*natural element of Balzac's narrative can in turn be unleashed. Franco Moretti writes that magical devices in Balzac's early novels play the same determining role that impersonal social factors do in his later works – here, however, we see that the supernatural is as much dependent upon the transgression of social norms as the reverse.[439] As we saw above, 'stories appear when something goes wrong', in this regard, Balzac's opening excursus is less about setting the narrative pieces into place, than constructing an already perverted social order that his story might go on to subvert – and thereby satirise.

Indeed, just as one menial white-collar worker's transgression of 'typehood' introduces the supernatural, the whole chaotic narrative is resolved at the end with the resurgence of clerical scruples. At the Bourse, Castanier is able to 'traffic a soul as one trades public funds', and the curse passes between speculators of different classes and professions, from property developer to housepainter, until finding its resting place in a lovelorn solicitor's clerk.[440] Upon gaining superhuman powers, the clerk visits the object of his infatuation, and 'stayed there for twelve days without leaving and there expended his place in heaven, dreaming of nothing but love and orgies, in the midst of which drowned the memory of hell and its privileges'.[441] However, 'on the thirteenth day of his fitful nuptials, the poor clerk lay on his filthy bed, in the garret of his master's house on the Rue Saint-Honoré. Shame, that stupid goddess who dare not behold herself, had seized the young man, who then fell ill.'[442] Intending to treat his shame-induced sickness, and presumably conflating shame with syphilis, the clerk accidentally overdoses on mercury: 'his cadaver became black like the back of a mole. A devil had certainly passed through him, but which?' Balzac asks, 'was it Astaroth?'[443]

As in the opening analysis of the cashier, in which society and the office environment 'force' a certain brand of unthinking compliance to develop, Balzac's conception of clerkly morality here is less one of personal conviction or conscience than it is the product of external forces, just as the psychological recognition of guilt is itself sublimated into a somatic reflex. For the clerk, 'shame' is a divine, or diabolical, agent, one whose presence the victim recognises largely through physical

[439] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European novel 1800-1900* (Verso: London, 1999), pp. 108-109.
[440] Balzac, *Melmoth reconcilié*, p. 117 – 'il pourrait trafiquer d'une âme comme on y commerce des fonds publics.'
[441] Ibid., p. 122 – 'Il y resta douze jours sans en sortir en y dépensant tout son paradis, en ne songeant qu'à l'amour et à ses orgies au milieu desquelles se noyait le souvenir de l'enfer et de ses privilèges.'
[442] Ibid., p. 123 – 'Le treizième jour de ses noces enragées, le pauvre clerc gisait sur son grabat, chez son patron, dans un grenier de la rue Saint-Honoré. La Honte, cette stupide déesse qui n'ose se regarder, s'empara du jeune homme qui devint malade'.
[443] Ibid. – 'son cadaver devint noir comme le dos d'une taupe. Un diable avait certainement passé par là, mais lequel ? Était-ce Astaroth ?'

symptoms rather than pangs of conscience – indeed, he takes it more as an externalised venereal disease than immanent psycho-social emotion. Of course, all of the novel's characters are framed as amoral equivocators, for whom selling one's soul 'is a deal like any other [insofar as we] are all shareholders in the grand enterprise of eternity', but the market traders' amorality is framed in terms of personal self-interest – an ideologically informed conception of agency.[444] It is by contrast in the sense that the ethical qualms an office worker may exhibit are to be understood purely as the manifestation of a series of constraining structures – that clerical morality is an artificial brace rather than an internally situated conviction – that Balzac's particular disdain for these figures finds distinct novelistic potential.

Although, aside from Castanier himself, the office workers in *Melmoth reconcilié* are therefore portrayed in terms of their compromised agency – alienated beings whose mind and body (and, indeed, soul) are ultimately beholden to a series of abstract and material constraints – they retain nevertheless the meanest vestiges of personality. Balzac's book ends with a German mystic, brought in to investigate the mystery of the clerk's death, who is unwittingly teased as he tries to discuss the case with the ex-clerk's fatuous and discordant colleagues: 'although he was a first rate demonologist, the foreigner did not know what malign devils clerks are', Balzac quips.[445] The office in this sense attains a dual function – conceived of both as a site of constraint, even imprisonment in the case of Castanier's cage-like booth, and of incisive, if ultimately frivolous, dialogue – 'heteroglossia' of the most epiphenomenal kind in the midst of the office's constraining structures.

'Typehood' in *Melmoth reconcilié* therefore serves to bookend Balzac's narrative: the plot begins with, and resolves itself in, stock office 'types'. This can be conceived of as a 'natural order', however warped, from which the novella's protagonist, and its supernatural plot, diverge, and to which it ultimately must return. Unlike contemporary physiological literature, therefore, it is less that the motif of the 'type', and an instance of its transgression, are intended solely to illustrate issues surrounding the social role in question: rather, Balzac's interplay of particularity and generality, the natural and the supernatural, not only serves as an engine for his plot, it in turn comes to model broader conceptual issues.

The first and most evident of these illustrations lies in the satirical crux of the story: Balzac's relocation of the motif of the Faustian pact in the stock exchange. Because this traffic of souls begins with an outline of the 'ideal cashier', then turns to an example of its deviation, and ultimately resolves

[444] Ibid., p. 118 – 'N'est-ce pas une affaire comme une autre ? Nous sommes tous actionnaires dans la grande entreprise de l'éternité.'
[445] Ibid., p. 124 – 'Quoiqu'il fut un démonologue de première force, l'étranger ne savait pas quels mauvais diables sont les clercs'.

itself in the constrained will of a clerk, Balzac uses the plot of his novella to create a contrast between the highly synthetic morality of bureaucracy and the nakedly amoral world of truck and barter that lies beyond the boundaries of the cashier's 'cage'. Balzac's obsession with money penetrates virtually all of his works – he very famously writes in *La Cousine Bette* (1846) that, whatever the succession of governments and regimes, the *true* centre of power in emergent modern society is 'the holy, venerated, solid, amiable, gracious, beautiful, noble, youthful, all-powerful five pence piece'; but here, however, the antagonistic yet interdependent character between compliant cashier and piratical banker, framed by Balzac as a kind of freakish symbiosis (a relationship that is subsequently writ large in the interplay of market and firm) suggests that he also acknowledged that this power manifested itself differently in different social morphologies, at once contradictory and co-dependent.[446] In *Melmoth reconcilié,* this relationship is framed in predominantly moral terms: via Castanier and the law clerk, Balzac evokes the hypocrisy of modern society by suggesting (echoing 'The Good Clerk') that the rules of personal conduct expected in one sphere appear inappropriate in the other: mercantile self-interest in the office reframes itself as corruption, and bureaucratic scruples and deference in the market tend to humiliation – and death. Recalling Moretti's argument that magic in Balzac's early works stands in for impersonal or structural social phenomena, the supernatural motif in *Melmoth reconcilié* of the 'soul' passing from the hierarchical order of the bank, to the egalitarian Bourse, back to another hierarchical firm, thus becomes a means of illustrating the force that circulates between, and thereby unifies, these symbiotic poles: capital itself – but alongside suggesting the pervasiveness of its morally corrosive effects, Balzac also evokes their diversity.

This potentially radical critique of the 'feudalism of money' that governs France in various forms is complemented, if not also complicated, moreover, by Castanier's own experience of diabolical power. Very soon after enjoying a 'bacchanal worthy of the great days of the Roman Empire', Castanier's estimation of his omnipotence begins to waver.[447] He loses all sense of his former self, indeed, this 'no longer existed': 'his senses had grown. His thought embraced the world, he saw things as if he had been placed at an immense height.'[448] Castanier transcends all sense of humanity, even finding himself to be 'beyond pleasure'; but equally he feels more trapped than ever: 'in a

[446] Balzac, *La Cousine Bette* (1846), in *Œuvres Complètes de Honoré de Balzac,* 27 vols (Paris : Louis Conard, 1912-25), XVII (1914), p. 342 – 'Vous vous abusez, cher ange, si vous croyez que c'est le roi Louis-Philippe qui règne, et il ne 'sabuse pas là-dessus. Il sait comme nous tous, qu'au-dessus de la Charte, il y a la sainte, la vénérée, la solide, l'aimable, la gracieuse, la belle, la noble, la jeune, la toute-puissant pièce de cent sous !' Harry Levin frames this in the context of Balzac as a newly commercialised literature's 'most enterprising entrepreneur', *Gates of Horn – A Study of Five French Realists* (Oxford: OUP, 1963), p. 153.
[447] Balzac, *Melmoth reconcilié,* p. 105 – 'une bacchanale digne des beaux jours de l'empire romain.'
[448] Ibid., p. 104 – 'Castanier […] n'existait plus' ; 'ses sens avait grandi. Sa pensée embrassa le monde, il en vit les choses comme s'il eut été placé à une hauteur prodigieuse.'

moment he could go from one pole to the other as a bird flies desperately between the two sides of its cage'.[449] Castanier finds that prayer is his only remaining human quality: this is because it represents the infinitude *beyond* that which Castanier can experience – the salvation that he has sacrificed – and it therefore also compromises his experience of total power. Balzac translates this sense of transcendental anomie for us in social terms: 'if it were permitted to compare such great things to social inanities, he resembled one of these rich bankers, with many millions, whom nothing in society can resist; but who [are] not admitted into the circles of the nobility'.[450]

Although Castanier (unlike Melmoth in the original novel) is quite easily able to save his soul by buying another at the Paris Bourse, the irony up until that point is that he has traded his old life in for an extreme parody of itself, his cashier's cage is now the world-as-cage, and the bureaucratic vantage now an alienatingly aggregated omniscience. But just as capital-as-curse links two seemingly opposing spheres of social life, so too does this irony lead in turn to a second point of thematic convergence in the narrative. The recurrent motifs of the novella here attain cosmic stature: the experience of diabolical power ironically resonates with Balzac's initial description of the constrained cashier, but equally, such compromised omnipotence is simultaneously associated with the *arriviste* banker. As with the unifying role of the traffic in souls, the powers of the curse in this central section of the novella therefore unify the otherwise dyadic social 'types' of cashier and banker.

Unlike the motif of the traffic in souls, however, this device constitutes less a critique of capital than it is a theory of society in line with Balzac's own nascent literary project, *La Comédie humaine*. The image of a will constrained *especially* at the level of the cosmos and of total knowledge, is to be compared to Balzac's own qualification in the 'Avant-propos' that humanity cannot be known through a single study, that it incessantly complicates itself. Castanier's assumption of total knowledge and total power – the convergence of extreme parodies of bureaucratic control and financial clout (as indicated by the cage and banker metaphors) – therefore situates him at once beyond and beneath Balzac's conception of humanity, at once a beast and a god.[451]

Balzac strains concepts of humanity and the transcendental alike through his diabolical cashier, and these in turn mirror in vying depictions of knowledge and power – either chaotic or totalised – themes in turn enfolded in various social institutions and 'types'. This construction, distention, and reconciliation of polarities within the world of the novella becomes in turn a reflexive

[449] Ibid., p. 107 – '[il] se trouver au delà [sic] du plaisir' ; p. 108 – 'en un moment, il put aller d'un pôle à un l'autre, comme un oiseau vole désespérément entre les deux côtés de sa cage'.
[450] Ibid., p. 113 – 'S'il était permis de comparer de si grandes choses aux niaiseries sociales, il ressemblait à ces banquiers riches de plusieurs millions à qui rien ne résiste dans la société ; mais qui [ne sont pas] pas admis aux cercles de la noblesse'.
[451] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, p. 59 – 'Any one who by his nature and not simply by ill-luck has no state is either too bad or too good, either subhuman or superhuman'.

device. It is in the extent to which Balzac begins the novella as 'know-it-all' on the subject of the cashier, and that it ends with the similarly sage-like demonologist being ridiculed by the clerks while trying to explain to them the nature of reality according to Jakob Böhme, that we see Balzac question the role of the novelist. At once a parody of totalising theorists, in which Balzac himself might be found, the demonologist, citing Böhme, remarks that '*if God has ordained all things by* FIAT, FIAT *is the secret matrix that comprehends and holds nature*'.[452] We have seen that the society Balzac portrays exhibits a contradictory character – between the brace-like morality of the hierarchical firm, and the amoral chaos of the market – and that so too does his cosmos: insofar as both total knowledge and total power, once attained, transpire to be reductive by way of their homogenised character. Similarly, this final scene recreates the epistemic tensions underlying *La Comédie humaine*. An ambiguity is constructed over whether the demonologist, as prattling pseudo-intellectual, is an ironic stand-in for the novelist, or if the novelist's presence is instead to be felt in the omnipresent being that the demonologist describes: one who determines this world through the power of 'the word'.[453]

Through the interpenetration of 'type' and individual, and that of bureaucratic and commercial structures, motifs that map themselves in turn onto general questions of freedom and destiny, and ultimately transforming into a disquisition regarding the epistemic capacity of the novelist, *Melmoth reconcilié* appears to us to be as much a 'hybrid species' as the cashier it initially describes. In *Satire in an Age of Realism* (2010), Aaron Matz writes that satire 'is a fundamentally ahistorical, context-resistant mode of writing. Satire tells us the same, continuous truth about mankind's folly; realism articulates it in new ways.'[454] While Matz himself identifies a reconciliation of these two vantages later in the century in satire and realism's shared aestheticisation of surfaces, and in the growing jadedness of realism even regarding its own perspective, with *Melmoth reconcilié* we see instead less a resonance between the two poles than enfolding of the one into the other: the stultifying realities of the office are a gateway into the artifices of satire, themselves recontextualised in turn by the play of abstractions that underpins a complex modern society. In this light the individual office worker figures as an ideologeme, the smallest instantiation of such contradictions, and the gateway to their exposition.

[452] Balzac, *Melmoth reconcilié*, p. 123 – '*si Dieu a opéré toutes choses par le* FIAT, *le* FIAT *est la secrète matrice qui comprend et saisit la nature*' (italics original).
[453] Cf. Béguin on Balzac as an '[imitator] of God the Father' – a 'Promethean gesture' that in turn renders him comparable to Satan, pp. 124-125.
[454] Matz, p. xii.

2.3. *Un début dans la vie* (1842)

Un début dans la vie is a *Bildungsroman* whose milksop protagonist, Oscar Husson, as the title implies, is just starting out in life. The novel begins in 1820: Husson's mother has secured him his first job, but, while travelling to his new place of work by *coucou* [stagecoach], Husson is goaded into a bragging match by his fellow passengers, during which he inadvertently insults his new boss (travelling incognito) to his face, thereby forfeiting his position. After this false start, Husson then becomes a solicitor's clerk, immersing himself in the world of *la basoche* (France's traditional guild of legal clerks, formally abolished during the Revolution, but a persisting cultural phenomenon). Again, however, Husson's naïve pride leads him to gamble away a sum of money entrusted to him by the firm. Husson's last resort is the army, where he finally attains some degree of maturity, but at the cost of losing an arm during the French invasion of Algeria in the 1830s. He ends the novel, Balzac writes, 'an ordinary man, gentle, without pretention, modest and always keeping himself […] in a *juste milieu*. He excites neither envy nor disdain. In short, he is the modern bourgeois.'[455]

In *Melmoth reconcilié,* written as physiological literature more broadly was on the rise, the clerk is very markedly stressed as a 'type'. However much this 'type' is situated in a broader narrative, social, not to mention cosmological, web than in physiological literature proper, the clerk is still largely a creature devoid of agency, subject to structural and ideological constraints. By contrast, the solicitor's clerks in *Un début dans la vie* at once exhibit far greater personal autonomy, and they are more virtuous with it – a device that only heightens Husson's second fall from grace. Given that *Un début* charts the choices and missteps of its protagonist, a fuller sense of agency, distinct to the fairly limited transactional choices in *Melmoth reconcilié,* recurs throughout. That said, the activities and mannerisms of the clerks in *Un début* also certainly resonate with their 'traditional' portrayal as it has so far been explored. It is in this more complex portrayal of the office that Balzac models the narrative and conceptual issues underlying his *Bildungsroman,* and *La Comédie humaine* as it has so far been outlined, a theme I turn to in the second half of this section.

Francois-Claude-Marie Godeschal, head clerk, and Husson's mentor when he starts at the solicitor's chambers, is framed as the embodiment of clerical virtue: indeed, his outline of the qualities that make 'a good clerk' (wearing black and exerting financial prudence when it comes to footwear) is the only example so far encountered to be articulated with total sincerity – uncoincidentally it is equally the first such outline voiced in-diegesis.[456] It is no doubt because Balzac was conscious of the

[455] Honoré de Balzac, *Un début dans la vie,* ed. Pierre Barbéris (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), p. 207 – 'Oscar est un homme ordinaire, doux, sans prétention, modeste et se tenant toujours […] dans un juste milieu. Il n'excite ni l'envie ni dédain. C'est enfin le bourgeois modern.'

[456] Ibid., p. 155 – 'Un bon clerc, lui disait Godeschal, doit avoir deux habits noirs (un neuf et un vieux), un pantalon noir, des bas noirs et des souliers. Les bottes coutent trop cher.'

various parodic outlines of clerks in literature, including his own, that he felt compelled to qualify Godeschal's sincerity, writing that 'if [Godeschal] professed the strictest principles with regard to honour, discretion, and probity', this is because 'he practised them himself without emphasis, as he breathed, as he walked. This was the natural play of his soul, as movement and respiration are the play of organs.'[457] In direct contrast to the 'hothoused' ideal cashier and the spiritually compromised clerks in *Melmoth reconcilié*, Godeschal embodies the qualities of a 'good clerk' as essential features of his own being – the individuation that constitutes Watt's conception of 'realistic particularity' and the prescribed work functions of the office are here entirely consonant.

Whatever this sense that to embody clerical assiduousness is a kind of 'play', Balzac also takes the time in *Un début* to conduct a portrayal of clerical *work* – and here we see Godeschal's idealised clerical holism in practice. Like the clerk that concludes *Melmoth reconcilié,* Husson and his colleagues live in the chambers' garret, they also work twelve-hour days, and the engrossment and copying of documents is subject to the extreme punctiliousness of Godeschal and Desroches, the solicitor – the latter of whom warns from the start that they will work Husson 'day and night'.[458] In contrast to the cage-like offices in the previous section, however, this regime is not framed as purely oppressive: the aspirational Desroches takes pride that he and his five clerks work 'as much as twelve others. In ten years, I will have the finest practice in Paris', because, Desroches continues, in unnervingly contemporary terms, 'here we are passionate about business and about our clients'.[459] Just as Godeschal's clerical and personal identity are entirely consonant, the office in general is portrayed in the same vein, as a vaguely benign 'total institution': the labour, lifestyle, and ideology of the clerks and the solicitor are totally integrated with one another.[460] Recalling Lamb's 'lay-monastery' at the South-Sea House (in conviviality, if not in workload) Balzac writes that Husson 'was maintained in his schedule and his labours with such a rigidity that his life in the middle of Paris resembled that of a

[457] Ibid. – 'S'il professait les principes les plus stricts sur l'honneur, sur la discrétion, sur la probité, il les pratiquait sans emphase, comme il respirait, comme il marchait. C'était le jeu naturel de son âme, comme la marche et la respiration sont le jeu des organes.'
[458] Ibid., p. 152 – 'Ici l'on travaille jour et nuit.'
[459] Ibid., p. 153 – 'mes cinq clercs et moi, travaillons-nous autant que douze autres ! Dans dix ans, j'aurai la plus belle clientèle de Paris' ; 'Ici l'on se passionne pour les affaires et pour les clients !'
[460] A 'total institution' according to Goffman's schema at least insofar as Desroches's chambers are self-contained, prescribe behaviour and dress, and are subject to formal rules (the work process and clerical ranking system, as well as the tenets of the law more broadly). Erving Goffman, 'On the characteristics of total institutions', *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), pp. 1-124.

monk' – a lifestyle of such 'severe discipline and continuous labour' that it makes our truculent protagonist fall into 'a profound disgust with life' in general.[461]

But Husson's malaise is quickly rectified by the very same integrative nature of office spirit that caused it: recalling the wise-cracking office workers at the end of *Melmoth reconcilié,* Balzac tells us that even the 'most sombre of clerks is always nagged by a need for pranks and mockery. The instinct with which clerks will seize upon, and develop, a practical joke or trick is marvellous to see'.[462] This countervailing spirit of misrule works to assimilate Husson into the office more happily – and, in so doing, a 'clerical carnivalesque' is portrayed as being just as inherent to *la basoche* as copying title deeds. Indeed, joking and ribaldry are not purely spontaneous properties of office camaraderie: because Desroches's practice is so new, and therefore 'composed of clerks that come from different chambers, without links between them', the clerks actively devise for themselves a kind of mystery religion, underpinned by a fake legendarium, written in faux-Rabelaisian French, that outlines the ritualised parties, feasts, and games of imaginary predecessors.[463] This 'invented tradition' is in keeping with the 'taste for mystery and conspiracy' that pervades Balzac's works, but it also hearkens explicitly to the historical guild of *la basoche,* which was as well-known for its literary and theatrical culture as for its legal functions – despite the false artefact's fifteenth-century style, its last entry is dated to 1792, the year of the guild's abolition.[464] Where Bakhtin identifies the cultural aspects of 'Queen Basoche' as one of several carnivalesque '[reactions] against […] cold rationalism, against official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism', in *Un début* these two spheres are not only directly continuous, they nearly totally overlap.[465]

The sense of the ideological coherence, not only of the clerks with each other, but also with their employer, in *Un début,* in part reflects the character of the smaller nineteenth-century office, where, Lockwood writes, relationships between employer and employed were immediate and therefore often intimate, and where the organisation of tasks was potentially idiosyncratic, without being *ad hoc*.[466] Moreover, the recurrent ambiguity in office literature so far encountered between empirical aspects of office work and those that are intellectual or intangible is in the case of Balzac's law clerks heightened insofar as they engage in tasks that approach what Arlie Hochschild later termed

[461] Balzac, *Un début*, p. 154 – 'il fut maintenu dans ses heures et dans ses travaux avec une telle rigidité que sa vie au milieu de Paris ressemblait à celle d'un moine' ; p. 156 – 'la discipline sévère et le labour continu de cette vie' ; 'en tombant dans un dégout profond de la vie'.
[462] Ibid., p. 159 – 'Le clerc le plus sombre est toujours travaillé par un besoin de farce et de gausserie. L'instinct avec lequel on saisit, on développe une mystification et une plaisanterie, entre clercs, est merveilleux à voir'.
[463] Ibid. – 'Son étude fut composée de clercs pris à différentes études, sans liens entre eux'.
[464] Marceau, p. 328; cf. Fabre, *Les Clercs du Palais* (1875).
[465] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World,* tr. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana: IUP, 1984), pp. 36-37.
[466] Lockwood, p. 20.

'emotional labour': that is, interacting with clients, rival lawyers, and the courts (one such episode is characterised as a 'little skirmish').[467] The relative intangibility of office work during this period, and its necessarily sociable aspects, therefore preclude the degree to which those working relationships long associated with the oppressiveness of manual labour can crystallise: although Desroches's chambers are certainly portrayed as a testing workplace, they do not mirror 'the planned and regulated *a priori* system on which the division of labour [was] implemented within [a contemporary] workshop' – nor the large-scale offices of the later nineteenth century that would come to emulate this more industrial structure.[468] In this sense, the spontaneity of clerical pranks and games that Balzac finds so 'marvellous' mirrors the relative plasticity of the clerical division of labour itself – dependent as it is upon the idiosyncrasies of the clerks in question and the specific character of the relationship between them. This sense of plasticity and ideological continuity is complemented by the fact that Husson and his fellow *basochiens* are understood to be in training to become lawyers themselves – just as Desroches himself appeared, alongside Godeschal, as a jocular clerk to the lawyer Derville in Balzac's earlier novella, *Le Colonel Chabert* (1832). 'My clerks are all strapping lads who can count on nothing but their ten fingers to make their fortune', Desroches tells Husson – unlike Leman Rede's clerk in Chapter Two, the rather proletarianised 'eternal present' of life as it is portrayed in the office in *Un début* is therefore maintained by a promise of bourgeois destiny.[469]

In the previous chapter, Balzac wrote that 'the office is the *employé*'s shell. No *employé* without an office, no office without an *employé*.'[470] Both *Melmoth reconcilié* and *Un début dans la vie* illustrate that this symbiotic relationship is an integral part of Balzac's portrayal of the clerical 'type', as well as a means of informing characterisation. Balzac fixates on the factors that underlie and accentuate this interdependence between office and clerk: citing external and social factors, as well as qualities inherent to the experience of office work – be they the 'mephitic heat' of the stove, producing brain-dead compliance, as in *Melmoth reconcilié,* or the camaraderie that arises from a blend of cooperation, aspiration, and ritual in *Un début*.[471] But Balzac's paradox of causality between office and clerk also alerts us to the major disparity that lies between the clerks of *Melmoth reconcilié*

[467] Balzac, *Un début,* p. 168 – 'cette petite escarmouche'. See Arlie Russell Hoschchild, 'Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure', *American Journal of Sociology,* 85:3 (Nov. 1979), pp. 551-575. In keeping with Godeschal's internalised sense of clerical zeal, and Husson's process of overcoming his own work-related malaise, Hochschild stresses that emotion work is about the 'evocation' of feelings necessary for the successful execution of a sociable or public-facing task, and the 'suppression' of those deemed inappropriate to a task (p. 561).
[468] Marx, *Capital*, *Volume I*, p. 476.
[469] Balzac, *Un début,* p. 153 – 'Tous mes clercs sont des gaillards qui ne doivent compter que sur leurs dix doigts pour gagner leur fortune.'
[470] Balzac, *Physiologie*, p. 11 – 'Le bureau est la coque de l'employé. Pas d'employé sans bureau, pas de bureau sans employé.'
[471] Balzac, *Melmoth reconcilié*, p. 71 – 'la chaleur méphitique'.

and those in *Un début*: the former are framed as unconscientious labourers, governed by a will artificially imposed by the office setting, while the latter behave similarly but through an apparent will of their own, their intersubjectivity constituting the objective order of office life.

There are clearly social and structural factors we could point to that at least partially inform the difference between the clerks in *Melmoth reconcilié* and those in *Un début*: the contrast between banking and the almost artisanal world of the law, and the contrasting aspirations of these industries' respective employees in turn.[472] However, it is also evident that Balzac's two portrayals, interrelated but distinct, additionally reflect the formal qualities of their respective works. Just as the office makes the clerk, and the clerk the office, these variations in characterisation are predicated upon the nature of the novel in question, just as they inform the novel and its narrative in turn. In *Melmoth reconcilié,* the disjunction between Castanier's character and that of cashiers more broadly maps onto the novella's satirical interpenetration of fantastical and realist devices – equally *Un début*'s characterisation of clerks as self-restraining aspirants is reflected in its broader capacity as *Bildungsroman*.

To outline the formal role of the office within the narrative of *Un début* requires a brief digression into Balzac's own tangential style. In the previous section I stressed the tension between Balzac as tiresome know-it-all, and as omniscient painter of social life. This tension is at its starkest with the lengthy 'excursuses' on subjects nominally related to the plot that tend to open Balzac's novels and which they are prone to diverging into. Peter Brooks discounts these excurses as 'outmoded and indigestible', and 'often unreadable' in their degree of theorisation; they often appear tangential, and apparently countermand the relative epistemic circumspection that characterises the interrelation of works underpinning *La Comédie humaine* more broadly.[473] But equally, it is in the character of the relationship between these excursuses and the greater narrative that we see formal aspects of the individual work, as well as those underpinning *La Comédie humaine,* reflected: for example, *Melmoth reconcilié*'s opening excursus on the 'ideal cashier' and its subsequent narrative deviation models the relationship between 'type' and individual more broadly. Similarly, *Un début dans la vie* begins with an excursus on 'the picturesque *coucous* [stagecoaches]' that once served Paris and its environs – the formative opening episode of the novel taking place in one such vehicle.[474]

Balzac, writing in the 1840s, self-consciously frames the *coucou* of the 1820s as an old-fashioned phenomenon – writing that the railways mean that the 'people and things that make up the

[472] Although covering a slightly later period, Gardey stresses the relative fixity of banking hierarchies in contrast to more politicised civil services and to industries typified by smaller-scale economic units alike. Gardey, p. 36.
[473] Brooks, 'Balzac: Epistemophilia and the Collapse of the Restoration', p. 131.
[474] Balzac, *Un début,* p. 17.

elements of [the present novel] will soon earn it the merit of an archaeological work'.[475] Balzac thereby establishes a frame of structural inevitability that informs but is distinguished from personal decisions: the historical character of the stagecoach at once reflects and determines the content of Husson's career slip-up, without actively causing it.[476] It is as if Balzac is actively applying Jameson's claim that a text's 'historical moment […] [blocks] off or [shuts] down a certain number of formal possibilities available before, and [opens] up determinate new ones'.[477] Old-fashioned transport is therefore also fixed to an old-fashioned narrative end: a means of forcing otherwise socially disparate characters together over a fixed period of time.[478] Although Moretti writes that Balzac's narrative world tends to be characterised by '*mediation:* you can ruin or be ruined by someone without ever having looked them in the face, even remaining unaware of their existence' – in *Un début,* we also see the complement to Moretti's observation, that entirely *unmediated* meetings are predicated upon impersonal processes, in this case, the transport history of the 1820s.[479]

Having established a procedure for modelling the interplay between society and the individual, and between plot and context, Balzac's shift to the law office episode therefore represents an opportunity to formulate a new model for this relationship. This model draws from the character of the office in *Un début* as it has so far been established: at once an isolated, quasi-communal space, but one that nevertheless plays a mediating role for the Parisians beyond its walls – as Owen Heathcote writes, Balzac's law offices are 'at once open and closed', 'hybrid' spaces that serve as a narrative and conceptual 'crossroads'.[480] However, and perhaps due to this ambivalently 'hybrid' character, the role of the of the office in relation to Husson's life story is less explicit than that of the stagecoach.

At the centre of the office is 'a long table where papers were piled up in the form of the Alps', one might therefore imagine that just as the first episode of the novel was predicated upon the *verbal* exchange of secrets, Husson or one his fellow-clerks will similarly unearth or correlate some *written*

[475] Ibid. – 'Les chemins de fer, dans un avenir aujourd'hui peu éloigné, doivent faire disparaitre certaines industries, en modifier quelques autres' ; 'bientôt les personnes et les choses qui sont les éléments de cette Scène lui donneront-elles le mérite d'un travail archéologique.' Balzac opens in a similarly nostalgic vein, in another *Bildungsroman, Illusions perdues*, this time regarding the printing industry.
[476] Cf. Peter Brooks's reading of the depiction of the printing industry in *Illusions perdues* as a symbol of historical inevitability in *Realist Vision,* p. 24.
[477] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 148.
[478] Cf. The French 'classical' adherence to the 'three unities' – 'it was Castelvetro who, in his edition of the *Poetics* published in 1570, formulated in rigid terms [these] "Aristotelian rules"' – from T.S. Dorsch, Introduction to *Classical Literary Criticism – Aristotle, Horace, Longinus* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), pp. 7-28 (p. 18).
[479] Franco Moretti, 'Homo palpitans', tr. Susan Fischer, *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms,* pp. 109-129 (p. 122).
[480] Heathcote, p. 311.

secret that will spell his second error, and thereby stress the mediating role of the law – a recurrent device in nineteenth-century novels, as we will see in the Dickens sections later in the chapter.[481] However, as we have seen, it is because the office is reframed in *Un début* as social space with its own ideological autonomy, because it figures less as a material manifestation of bureaucratic forms than as the sum total of professional and clerical ambition, its role as an impersonal narrative cue becomes less likely. Rather, it is the interpenetration of Husson's 'office family' and his actual family that result in his second error: entrusted with five hundred francs by Desroches for the reproduction of a court report, Husson gambles it away at an 'orgy' hosted by the mistress of his rich uncle, in the company of a distant cousin (who also happens to be a clerk). The office and Husson's family alike are more structurally ambiguous than the stagecoach: but as a blend of immediate and mediated relationships, coincidental meetings, and unwitting links between members, they inform our conception of Husson's second mistake.

Despite *not* explicitly informing the character of Husson's error, the protean character of the office as a social space and workplace in the novel therefore complements the similarly ambiguous role of the family. Indeed, Balzac explicitly parallels the two: just as Husson's family, initially framed as a protective force, also becomes the inadvertent setting of his downfall, Desroches envisages the office as a quasi-familial unit, but one, rather paradoxically, limpidly delimited by impersonal professional rules – washing his hands of the disgraced Husson, he remarks that he '[hates] imbeciles, but [hates] even more those people who make mistakes despite the paternal care with which they have been surrounded.'[482] The chambers' capacity as a mirror image of family life, and the fact that Husson's failure is derived from these half-open, half-closed worlds' convergence, therefore hints at their structural role in the narrative.

As with the novel's first episode, the chambers are to be analysed in terms of their historical character: which is, as we have seen, a hybrid of monkish cell and Rabelaisian carnival, family, sweatshop, and 'startup'. Where the *coucou* as historical throwback merely furnished the context of Husson's first failing, the more ambivalent historical character of the law firm therefore muddies the circumstances that lead to the second. It is as if Husson's own range of decisions, including those impulses that lead to yet another fateful error, are complemented by the chambers' own contradictory web of paternalistic and professional, isolated and mediating features. This nest of contradictory impulses frames Husson's autonomy, and, indeed, Balzac forewarns us before the fatal night that 'unchaining the senses of a clerk weaned off pleasures, and who, for so long, has aspired to

[481] Balzac, *Un début*, p. 152 – 'une longue table où les papiers étaient amoncelés en forme d'Alpes.'
[482] Ibid., pp. 187-188 – 'Je hais les imbéciles, mais je hais davantage les gens qui font des fautes malgré les soins paternels dont on les entoure.'

some debauchery, will make him forget the wise advice of Godeschal and his mother' (again, a suggested parity between office and family roles).[483]

Balzac's *Bildungsroman* of errors thus problematises those factors that determine one's behaviour. Where the inevitability of the decline of the stagecoach industry contradistinguishes Husson's own freedom to err (or not) while *en route,* the more ambivalent historical character of the legal chambers – looking back to the *basoche,* and forward to business success – forms a reflection of Husson's own potential to repeat past mistakes or make a name for himself. That is, where Heathcote argues that the Janus-faced character of the office in Balzac's 'Le Colonel Chabert' reflects its narrative role in processing the transition from Empire to Restoration, with *Un début* we see also that this role applies to the protean socio-economic character of French society during this same period: in which family connections, personal pride, guild-like paternalism, and market imperatives are *all* determining factors in individual decisions.[484] In presenting vying models of a relationship between structure and agency, the *Bildungsroman* format becomes a sociological thought experiment for these early years of modernity, the office a crisis point in this historical moment's underlying patterns. Moreover, it is insofar as the character of the offices in Balzac's novels reflects these novels' formal structures, that Balzac's treatment of the alien world of the ministries makes *Les Employés* a decidedly strange work.

2.4. *Les Employés* (1844)

In *Les Employés,* Balzac focusses directly on the world of the French civil service with which Ymbert, Monnier, and so on have already made us familiar. Balzac's novel is therefore in part beholden to the preestablished body of institutional connotations that surround the ministries as much as its themes also resonate with those of *La Comédie humaine*. Indeed, Balzac partakes directly in much of the pre-existing 'physiological' and satirical motifs of texts previously explored, while also pinning these to an ongoing narrative. As I suggested in 2.1., such tensions between 'type' and character, panorama and plot, undergird *La Comédie humaine* generally*,* but with *Les Employés,* abstraction and particularity are more closely intertwined than usual, at once reflecting an aesthetic that can apparently accommodate bureaucratic forms, while also consolidating the conventions of a prior satirical tradition.

The overarching message of *Les Employés,* Kingston suggests, is that 'the pressures of career-making in nineteenth-century offices […] inevitably [transform] ordinary men into machines of

[483] Ibid., p. 176 – 'chez un clerc sevré de plaisirs, et qui, depuis si longtemps, aspirait à quelque débauche, les sens déchainés pouvaient lui faire oublier les sages recommandations de Godeschal et de sa mère.'
[484] Heathcote, p. 314.

government and innocents into crooks'.[485] This is also the estimation of the novel's ostensible protagonist, Office Chief, Xavier Rabourdin, who is introduced having accordingly formulated a secret plan to radically reform France's overgrown bureaucracy. When a promotion to Division Chief presents itself, Rabourdin sees an opportunity to put his plans into action and purge the 'Lilliputians that shackle France to Parisian centralisation', thereby also liberating the *employés* themselves from their own brain-deadening 'administrative *dolce far niente*'.[486] However, just as Alexis de Tocqueville warns in *De La Démocratie en Amérique* (1835-40) that the culture of place-hunting in bureaucratised countries 'propagates throughout the body of the nation a venal and servile humour', Rabourdin's fellow middle-manager, Isidore Baudoyer, the embodiment of venal servility, also has his eyes on the position.[487] Echoing Huart's 'Oyster' in the previous chapter, Balzac refers to the dim-witted Baudoyer and his party of supporters as 'les tarets' [shipworms]: molluscs that bore their way upward.[488]

Tocqueville also remarks that careerism equally 'inhibits manly virtues': an assertion literalised in Balzac's novel insofar as the Rabourdin-Baudoyer rivalry is largely played out by their wives, Célestine and Élisabeth, who exploit their connections in the ministry, in the Church, in polite society, and in the *demimonde* to bolster their husbands' chances – hence the title of the novel's earlier 1837 version, *La Femme supérieure* [The Superior Wife].[489] While the incorruptible Rabourdin initially seems to be the frontrunner, the *tarets* play dirty, moving from charm offensives, to calling in favours, and even issuing bribes, to scupper his chances – a series of outmanoeuvres that culminates with Rabourdin's plans to 'streamline' the civil service being leaked, thereby earning him the ire of his once loyal colleagues. While the two middle-managers tilt at each other, these underlings, the various clerks, copyists, and supernumeraries in the offices, in Shakespearean fashion, gossip, joke, and commentate on the action – and here Balzac not only self-plagiarises his own *Physiologie de l'employé,* but also uses 'borrowed material' from Henry Monnier's works, as well as borrowing the likeness of Monnier himself for the office caricaturist and gadfly, Jean-Jacques Bixiou.[490]

Anne-Marie Meininger describes *Les Employés* as a 'little known' work despite, or perhaps because of, its clear originality:

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[485] Kingston, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society,* p. 135.
[486] Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 46 – les 'lilliputiens qui enchainent la France à la centralisation parisienne' ; p. 242 – '*dolce farniente* administratif.'
[487] Alexis de Tocqueville, *De La Démocratie en Amérique*, 13th ed., 2 vols (Paris : Pagnerre, 1850), II, p. 281 – 'ce désir universel et immodéré des fonctions publiques est un grand mal social, qu'il détruit chez chaque citoyen l'esprit d'indépendance et répand dans tout le corps de la nation une humeur vénale et servile'.
[488] Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 75.
[489] Tocqueville, *Démocratie en Amérique*, II, p. 281 – '[la centralisation] étouffe les vertus viriles'.
[490] Fess, p. 236; Balzac is reported as having said 'Mon Bixiou, c'est Henri [sic] Monnier', see Bertall, 'Henry Monnier', *L'Illustration,* 1768 (13 January 1877), p. 27.

> Beneath its purely classical structure – three parts, [each with] three chapters, and a denouement – are entangled a plot, an essay on mediocrity, a pamphlet on bureaucracy, a plan for the reform of the administrative and financial system, portraits and analyses of the men and the facts [relating to] the history of France under the Restoration, and, last but not least, comic sketches of daily life amongst the pen-pushers of a ministry.[491]

These threads are indeed well and truly 'tangled', so much so that they are at times individually evident while collectively hard to distinguish. After initially introducing Rabourdin, Balzac digresses into his protagonist's grand plan to reform *l'administration,* but this free indirect recapitulation soon starts to read suspiciously like yet another of Balzac's own characteristic excursuses. This sense of entanglement gains a third strand in Balzac's comic portraits of the titular *employés* themselves, which oscillate from novelistic characterisation, to excerpts from Rabourdin's own staff dossier, while also closely aping physiological works (including Monnier's *dramatis personae*) in the degree to which role seems to gain an autonomy from individual character.[492] Where, in the 'Avant-propos', Balzac acknowledges that social categories are easily blurred and adulterated, with *Les Employés* these epistemic tensions are therefore visited upon the narrative itself.

However, because Meininger establishes that *Les Employés* is to be characterised by the 'classical' orderedness of its form, but also simultaneously by the chaotic jumble of its content, the novel also therefore addresses the categorical tensions that have so far underpinned portrayals of bureaucracy, offices, and clerks. That is, the chimerical character of Balzac's novel actively embodies the conceptual instability of the office so far encountered – at once formal and historical, material and abstract, esoteric and exoteric – rather than merely portraying such instability. While prior texts, such as Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives,* or the obsessively completist *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes,* have appeared to emulate or exhibit parallels with particular features of bureaucratic structures, in Balzac's novel this relationship is more complex. The novel at once replicates the conceptual problematics underlying bureaucracy, the office, and clerk, as these have so far been explored, but also maps its own aesthetic concerns back onto these phenomena – a relationship made possible by Balzac's contention that, with bureaucracy, 'everything [takes] literary form.'[493] *Les Employés* therefore effects a strange sense of double vision in the reader: it figures as office literature's first

[491] Anne-Marie Meininger, preface to *Les Employés,* pp. 7-28 (p. 7) – 'Il y a des œuvres de Balzac mal connues et, parmi elles, *Les Employés*. C'est dommage pour ce roman original. Roman est peu dire. Sous la construction d'un pur classicisme – trois parties de trois chapitres et un dénouement –, s'enchevêtrent une intrigue, un essai sur la médiocratie, un pamphlet sur la bureaucratie, un plan de réformes du système administratif et financier, des portraits et des analyses des hommes et des faits de l'histoire de la France sous la Restauration et enfin, et non des moindres, de cocasses sketches sur le quotidien chez les ronds-de-cuir d'un ministère.'
[492] Cf. Fess, pp. 237-238, and Woloch, p. 272.
[493] Balzac, *Les Employés,* p. 45 – 'tout prenait la forme littéraire.'

conscientious effort to theorise the nature of bureaucracy via the aesthetic character of the work itself, while equally seeming to employ these social phenomena to its own very literary ends.

This tension underlies prior readings of the novel, with Alex Woloch, in *The One Vs. The Many* (2003), rooting the anomalousness of *Les Employés* in terms of formal tensions in characterisation:

> Confronting the multiplicity inherent in bureaucratic work leads to the static portraits of many individuals crammed into a little space, and submerges the central character who cannot control or anchor his novel's aesthetic form, just as he is unsuccessful in controlling his fate *within* the novel. Spending too much time shifting attention from one employee to another, the narrator kills the story itself, so that the plot falls victim to excessively close observation of monotonous work.[494]

Despite this focus on characterisation, Woloch's reading of *Les Employés* evidently also resonates with contemporary criticisms of bureaucracy as a system. Recalling the *Doctrinaires* (who appeared in Chapter One), and evoking Tocqueville's fear that administrative centralisation 'diminishes […] the civic spirit' of the people, so too does Rabourdin (or indeed Balzac) contend that offices 'render themselves necessary by substituting written action for living action': bureaucratic discourse, monolithically referred to as 'the report', hijacks executive agency, whereas 'the greatest things in France were accomplished when there were no reports and decisions were spontaneous.'[495] As Woloch suggests, so too is Balzac's *narrative* itself similarly over-centralised around the largely inconsequential office and its inhabitants, pushing the actual plotline, the *real activity*, out of the limelight and rendering it narratively ineffectual. The novel's formal inconsistencies therefore appear coterminous with those called out in its content.

If we regard the inconsistencies and anomalous resonances in Balzac's novel in more historical terms, we see that the strangeness of *Les Employés* is in part predicated upon its composition. Balzac himself acknowledges the perspectival imbalances of his work in his introduction to the 1838 edition of *La Femme supérieure,* warning the reader that they may find 'many *employés* and few superior wives', a self-criticism that points to his later decision to rewrite the novel and change its title.[496] What began as *La Femme supérieure* in 1837 was therefore subsequently adulterated with sections adapted nearly word-for-word from *La Physiologie de l'employé*. This adulteration is especially noticeable when the *Physiologie*'s axiomatic opening attempt to pinpoint the identity of the *employé,* concluding

[494] Woloch, p. 270.

[495] Tocqueville, *Démocratie en Amérique*, I, p. 105 – 'la centralisation administrative n'est propre qu'à énerver les peuples qui s'y soumettent, parce qu'elle tend sans cesse à diminuer parmi eux l'esprit de cité.' ; Balzac, *Les Employés*, pp. 44-45 – 'les bureaux se hâtèrent de se rendre nécessaires en se substituant à l'action vivante par l'action écrite […] Les plus belles choses de la France se sont accomplies quand il n'existait pas de rapport et que les décisions étaient spontanées.'

[496] Honoré de Balzac, preface to *La Femme supérieure*, from *La Femme supérieure, La maison Nucingen, La torpille,* 2 vols (Paris: Werdet, 1838), I, pp. vii-lviii (p.li) – 'vous trouvez ici beaucoup d'employés et peu de femmes supérieures'.

with the warning that 'beside the need to define lies the danger of conclusion', is reborn at the end of *Les Employés* as a satirical Socratic dialogue between two *employés*: the sardonic Bixiou and the stolid, soon-to-retire Poiret.[497] Balzac's self-plagiarism (not to mention that of others) in this later version of the novel, Anne O'Neil Henry writes, 'effectively [shifts] the focus and the genre of the work' toward becoming 'a hybrid text: a "sociological" study, as well as the fictional narrative of the struggle for one bureaucratic position.'[498]

This degree of generic duality is strongest with Balzac's sub-types of clerk, who are reincarnated in the novel as named characters: for example, the 'foolish *employé*' in *La Physiologie*, a middle-aged sop who 'regards his Division Chief as a man of genius, [and] proposes him as a model to his son', is here the tragically pompous Phellion, who 'would say that if he could leave [with] one of his sons following in the steps of a Rabourdin, he would die the happiest father in the world.'[499] Balzac's self-plagiarism does not, however, simply count as recycled material – nor does it simply recapitulate the interplay between 'type' and individual that underlies *La Comédie humaine*. Rather, the content of the *Physiologie* gains new meaning in the context of the novel because its abstract structures are here replicated as features inherent to the novel's setting: Balzac introduces each of these character-types in succession as they file down the 'gloomy corridors' to their office, as if the literary formalism of successive typification is embodied in the institutional formalism of the 'hive'-like ministry.[500]

Alongside the physiological chapters that outline the office's various 'types', Balzac also periodically diverges from straight prose into closet drama, or dialogue-style chapters, that depict the *employés* in conversation. However much these chapters form a kind of Greek Chorus to the action of the novel, as Woloch suggests they also thereby obtrude upon this action's portrayal – indeed, their discussions, recalling *Melmoth reconcilié,* are largely epiphenomenal in content (the first such chapter is ironically entitled 'The Machine in Movement').[501] That is, Balzac's *employés* are occasionally seen to conspire, but they more often pun together, talk politics, play word games, and chew over the nature of bureaucracy and of the *employé*. That is, they 'physiologise' themselves – including Bixiou's own confusingly dialectical assertion that

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[497] Balzac, *Physiologie*, p. 13 ; Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 284 – 'à coté du besoin de définir, se trouve le danger de s'embrouiller.'

[498] Anne O'Neil Henry, '"[Le] Besoin de définir" and "le danger de s'embrouiller", p. 167.

[499] Balzac, *Physiologie* – p. 62, p. 64 – '*L'Employé Ganache* […] il regarde son chef de division comme un homme de génie, il le propose comme un modèle à son fils' ; Balzac, *Les Employés, p.* 120 – 'Il disait que s'il pouvait laisser un de ses fils marchant sur les traces d'un Rabourdin, il mourrait le plus heureux père du monde.'

[500] Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 104 – 'des corridors obscurs', 'la ruche appelée ministère'.

[501] Ibid., p. 143 – 'La Machine en Mouvement'.

> serving the State is no longer serving a prince who knows to punish and reward! Today, the State is everyone. But 'everyone' doesn't care about anyone. To serve everyone is to serve no one. No-one cares about no-one. An *employé* lives between these two negations![502]

However much *Les Employés* therefore evokes aspects of prior office literature, Balzac is always keen to situate this sense of satirical reduction in the materiality of bureaucracy itself, writing that, just as peasant customs exhibit a parallel with the natural world in which they live, 'nature, for the employee, *is* the office' (my emphasis):

> his horizon is on all sides bounded by green box-files; for him, atmospheric circumstances are constituted in the air of the corridors, in the breath of other men that fills unventilated rooms, in the smell of papers and pens; his landscape is a cubicle, or a parquet floor littered with curious debris, and moistened by the office boy's watering can; his sky is a ceiling, to which he addresses his yawns, and his element is dust […] Distinguished doctors remonstrate against the influence of this nature – at once savage and civilised – on the moral being contained in these frightful compartments, known as offices.[503]

Unlike the largely intellectualised world of Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives*, Balzac highlights his attention to the 'realistic particularity' associated with his novelistic portrayal of the office and its inhabitants. Balzac thus convinces us that he is not the one operating within a register of satirical reduction – rather the 'realistic particularity' of this particular setting is *itself* one of artificial generalisation: after all, 'in Paris, nearly all offices resemble each other.'[504]

Balzac therefore resituates many of the forms of office literature so far encountered within the ministry itself. Indeed, his novel is itself redoubled in-diegesis in the guise of Rabourdin's reform plans, insofar as they at once criticise bureaucracy while also formally embodying many of its shortcomings. Recapitulated at the beginning of the novel, Rabourdin's scheme, like Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives,* is to be typified by its many satirical 'Zenonisms', paradoxical metaphors that convey the assiduous unproductivity of office work – in place of Ymbert's 'dilatory power', Balzac describes bureaucracy as a 'power of inertia', with a tendency to '[perpetuate] slowness' – as well as those that speak simultaneously to bureaucracy's scale and to its pettiness: not only are bureaucrats 'Lilliputians'

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[502] Ibid., p. 162 – 'servir l'État, ce n'est plus servir le prince qui savait punir et récompenser ! Aujourd'hui, l'État, c'est tout le monde. Or, tout le monde ne s'inquiète de personne. Servir tout le monde, c'est ne servir personne. Personne ne s'intéresse à personne. Un employé vit entre ces deux négations !'

[503] Ibid., p. 142 – 'La Nature, pour l'employé, c'est les bureaux ; son horizon est de toutes parts borné par des cartons verts ; pour lui, les circonstances atmosphériques, c'est l'air des corridors, les exhalaisons masculines contenus dans des chambres sans ventilateurs, la senteur des papiers et des plumes ; son terroir est un carreau, ou un parquet émaillé de débris singuliers, humecté par l'arrosoir du garçon de bureau ; son ciel est un plafond auquel il adresse ses bâillements, et son élément est la poussière […] plusieurs médecins distingués redoutent l'influence de cette nature, à la fois sauvage et civilisé, sur l'être moral contenu dans ces affreux compartiments, nommés bureaux'.

[504] Ibid., p. 103 – 'À Paris, presque tous les bureaux se ressemblent.'

inexplicably holding France's Gulliver hostage, but so too is bureaucracy 'a gigantic power set into motion by dwarfs'.[505] The 'metaphorical excess' of Rabourdin's attack is so various that, beyond the deliberately paradoxical character of individual metaphors, his criticisms appear to actively contradict one another: the civil service is decried as a site of 'agitated intrigues, like those of the seraglio, between eunuchs, wives, and imbecilic sultans', but within a few sentences, he warns that 'the *employés* must sooner or later find themselves in the condition of gears screwed into a machine'.[506] Such devices appear not solely as criticisms of bureaucracy, they also compile and implicitly commentate upon literary approaches to bureaucracy – recalling at once Ymbert's emphasis on the excessive power invested in the caprice of bureaucrats, and Lamb's on the alienation of these same figures. Indeed, by simultaneously hearkening to a capricious Oriental despotism and hyper-rationalised modernity, the internal contradictions of Rabourdin's floweriness also reflect theoretical ambivalence in the contemporary criticism of bureaucracy. They evoke De Gournay, the Doctrinaires, and Tocqueville in the fear that insular bureaucratic rivalries and interests may dominate national policy, while also alluding to Saint-Simon, and anticipating Marx, Weber, and his successors, by conveying the impersonal oppressiveness of bureaucratic systematisation: the titular *employés* are simultaneously too powerful and dehumanisingly subordinated.

Rabourdin stresses the need for a *managed decline* of the workforce, thereby avoiding (in a phrase seemingly pilfered from Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives*) a 'Saint Bartholomew['s day massacre] of *employés*' – a desire that situates Balzac's protagonist in a long tradition of would-be reformers stretching back to before the Revolution.[507] By alluding to contemporary calls for more limpid divisions of labour and the application of new technology to administrative procedure (both ideas that realise themselves in the post-1870 period that I cover in Chapter Four), Balzac in turn parodies such reformist ideals through the contradictions between the content and the composition of Rabourdin's plan.[508] Rabourdin fantasises that 'the rich would administrate *départements* for free, gaining a peerage for recompense', meanwhile his plan is itself engrossed by the unpaid supernumerary, Sébastien de la Roche, who

> copied and recopied the famous dissertation, composed of five hundred pages of large foolscap paper, as well as the supporting tables, the summaries, which were on

[505] Ibid., p. 45 - 'puissance d'inertie' ; p. 47, p. 44 – elle 'perpétuait les lenteurs' ; 'La bureaucratie, pouvoir gigantesque mis en mouvement par les nains, est née ainsi.'
[506] Kafka, p. 94; Balzac, *Les Employés, p.* 48 – 'intrigues agitées, comme celles de sérail, entre des eunuques, des femmes et des sultans imbéciles […] les employés devaient tot ou tard se trouver dans la condition de rouages vissés à une machine'.
[507] Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 55 – 'pour éviter une Saint-Barthélemy d'employés, Rabourdin demandait vingt années' ; Ymbert, *Mœurs administratives*, I, p. 256 – 'Persuadez-vous bien que ces Saint-Barthélemi [sic] d'employés s'exécutent, de la part du ministre, sans fiel ni haine personnelle envers les victimes.'
[508] See Kingston on reformers during this period, *Bureaucrats and Bourgeois Society,* pp. 131-132.

> single sheets, the bracketed calculations, titles in copperplate and subtitles in a round hand.[509]

That is, while Rabourdin imagines a paperless administration fuelled by *noblesse oblige*, his voluminous project directly benefits from the glut of unpaid hopefuls that presently riddle the offices: Sébastien is 'animated' only by the thrill of 'mechanical participation in [Rabourdin's] grand idea' (and the hope of a job at the end).[510] Just as *Les Employés'* form resonates unnervingly with its content, so too does Rabourdin's project, the novel's own in-diegesis avatar, corroborate this sense of multi-layered self-contradiction. Thus do the bureaux figure as a protean space, in which Rabourdin is 'at once a great man, a tyrant, and an angel' to Sébastien, and in which the seemingly incommensurable fantasies of old-fashioned civic virtue and mechanisation are satirically conjoined in the present, united in the form of the supernumerary himself, 'an infamous speculation of the Government for obtaining free labour.'[511]

While the plans' content, and the relationship between their content and the process of their inscription, are seemingly at odds – so too does the broader relationship between Rabourdin's plans and Balzac's office setting represent another layer of simultaneous influence and contradiction within the novel. After Sébastien accidentally leaves the plans in the office, a Baudoyer-supporting colleague shows them to the rather unctuous General Secretary to the Minister, des Lupeaulx. By this stage of the novel, Balzac's narrator has already provided us with a 'physiological' pen-portrait of des Lupeaulx, but when the General Secretary is shown Rabourdin's plans, he is horrified to see himself 'succinctly analysed in five or six sentences' in their pages.[512] Woloch stresses the bizarreness of this redoubling of the novel's content by pointing out that Balzac's narrator 'suggests that Rabourdin's description is even stronger than its own portrait of des Lupeaulx' – obscuring the fact that Balzac obviously wrote both.[513] However much the physiological literature of the previous chapter held itself to be frivolous or was wilfully self-contradictory, with *Les Employés,* Balzac constructs a narrative in which the physiological style is simultaneously a reductive, potentially invective, means of depiction, yet also one that is somehow inherent to the world that it is depicting – indeed, the apparent superiority of Rabourdin's pen-portrait to Balzac's suggests that this mode is *more* pertinent to the bureaucratic

[509] Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 94 – 'Le surnuméraire copiait et recopiait le fameux mémoire composé de cent cinquante feuillets de grand papier Tellière, outre les tableaux à l'appui, les résumés qui tenaient sur une simple feuille, les calculs avec accolades, titres à l'anglaise et sous-titres en ronde.'
[510] Ibid., p. 54 – 'les riches administraient gratuitement les départements, en ayant pour récompense la pairie'; p. 95 – 'Animé par sa participation mécanique à cette grande idée'.
[511] Ibid., p. 94 – 'Rabourdin […] était à la fois un grand homme, un tyran, un ange' ; *Les Employés*, p. 93 – 'une infâme spéculation du Gouvernement pour obtenir du travail gratis'.
[512] Ibid., p. 168 – 'Des Lupeaulx était succinctement analysé en cinq ou six phrases, la quintessence du portrait biographique placé au commencement de cette historie.'
[513] Woloch, p. 272.

world than to the novel portraying it. As in Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives*, the world of the office has its own rarefied semiotic ontology, but with *Les Employés,* this is an ontology that the novel portrays itself almost struggling to depict.

With devices such as these, Balzac's novel figures as a metacommentary on issues underlying *La Comédie humaine* more broadly. Because the overlap between character and 'type' in his works in *Les Employés* figures simultaneously as an effect of authorial composition *and* as a product of the diegesis portrayed, 'typification' is no longer a neutral process of aggregation but a tension that underlies the clerk's working life. Equally, the oft-critiqued sense of contradiction between the action of his novels and what Béguin calls their 'preachier pages' is here ironically addressed insofar as Balzac shares the authorship of the opening excursus with his failed protagonist.[514] But because this simultaneous sense of heightened artifice and internal conflict resonates so strongly both with the novel's plot and its bureaucratic setting, its apparent clumsiness or shortcomings have been reappraised as its greatest strengths. Woloch writes that *Les Employés* is 'an extremely unstable text: […] it gets harder to say which parts novel are "boring and insipid" [as contemporary critics remarked] and in which parts the narrative is most accomplished'.[515] Moreover, Marco Diani, who argues that the novel's unnerving interpenetration of form and content hearkens to a fundamental antinomy between individualistic bourgeois subjectivity and the 'objective' structures of bourgeois society, concludes that *Les Employés* is 'the great novel of the Bureaucracy, [with Balzac] paradoxically managing to create at one stroke both a new literary genre and its uncontested masterpiece.'[516]

Behind Diani's plaudits lies an implication that *Les Employés* derives its strength solely from issues underlying bureaucracy or the office itself. However, I have so far stressed that it is less that the novel's strengths are purely the product of training a novelistic eye on the unmediated content of office life, but rather that Balzac's novel also explores issues underlying an already relatively well-established tradition of office literature. Although *Les Employés* evokes the concerns and devices of office literature as it has so far been explored, these elements are themselves constantly replicated within the 'world' of the novel, thereby commentating upon genre and subject matter simultaneously. Balzac's success in his summation of office literature is therefore rooted in the fact that it is often covert: the satirical devices of office literature figure quite explicitly in *Les Employés* as emergent qualities of the setting itself, rather than as generic conventions superimposed upon the office as the result of malicious stereotyping. Recalling Frye's generic categories in Chapter One, *Les Employés* is

[514] Béguin, p. 121.
[515] Woloch, p. 270.
[516] Marco Diani, 'Balzac's Bureaucracy: The Infinite Destiny of the Unknown Masterpiece', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 34:1 (Spring 1994), pp. 42-59 (p. 42).

framed as the novelistic portrayal of a world that views *itself* 'anatomically', rather than the book itself being the satirical 'anatomy'. That is, the predominance of reductive schemas, and the characters' capacity as mere 'mouthpieces for the ideas they represent' (insofar as they are the 'mechanical participants' in intellectual structures) are framed as elements of the novel's diegesis, rather than being Balzac's own device.[517]

This illusion of an intra-diegetic abstraction conveys the extent to which *Les Employés* is not simply the recapitulation (and plagiarism) of prior trends in the portrayal of the office and their conjunction with novelistic conventions. Rather, with *Les Employés,* Balzac at once capitalises upon and accentuates the fortuitously analogous relationship between certain satirical styles of writing and modern bureaucracy, a relationship rooted in their shared intellectual tendencies. To try, therefore, to make a coherent narrative out of 'no variety of days' becomes an exercise in resituating the forms of prior office texts in the context of the office setting itself, a process that gives *Les Employés* the near-bewildering sense of meta-fictionality ascribed to it by critics. However, by conjuring up a ministry that is no small part based on literary stereotypes, but also by framing these stereotypes themselves as inherent to bureaucracy, we see that, like its titular clerks, *Les Employés* finds itself suspended 'between two negations'.

3. Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

3.1. Introduction

Just as Balzac the physiologist blurs with Balzac the novelist, so too do the sketches by 'Boz' of the previous chapter morph into Dickens's novels. But in contrast to the decentralised network of *La Comédie humaine,* which overlaps 'physiological' and novelistic devices within and between different works, Dickens's transition from sketch-writer to novelist is generally to be characterised by a more cumulative process: Philip Davis writes that Dickens began his career 'as a serial producer of loose collections of scenes and characters, unstable, expansive, and picaresque, until an increasingly continuous narrative began to shade into genuine novel-writing as it went along'.[518] As such, Dickens's novels rest on foundations laid by Boz: a 'rhythmic mixture of planning and improvisation became the maze-like Dickensian way of writing.'[519] Evoking Lamb's sense of overlap between clerk and tradesman explored in Chapter One, the blend of improvisation and routine in Dickens's work process situates

[517] Frye, p. 309.
[518] Philip Davis, *The Oxford English Literary History: The Victorians* (Oxford University Press: 2002), p. 309.
[519] Ibid.

him in oblique relation to the clerks and bureaucracies he portrays – and underlies the manner in which his novels accommodate the tropes of office literature.[520]

This oblique relationship to bureaucratisation is also reflected in the aesthetic conceits that undergird Dickens's works. Raymond Williams, in *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970) argues that the nineteenth-century English novel can be seen as a series of attempts to accommodate what Williams dubs 'the crisis of the knowable community'.[521] This 'crisis' emerges from the apparent incompatibility between the self-contained diegetic conventions inherited from the fiction of the turn of the nineteenth century (the 'precise social world of Jane Austen') with the new context of a society that was 'very rapidly increasing [in] size and scale and complexity'.[522] The mid-nineteenth-century novelist therefore had to re-establish 'realistic particularity' within, or reconcile it to, a setting that explicitly seemed to operate through impersonal and unintelligible processes. Where we have seen that Balzac's network of novels constructs and reconstructs models for the interplay between novelistic knowability and social complexity, Dickens, especially in the mid-career novels that I am examining in this chapter, offers us in each work a huge diegesis that crystallises in its coherent totality as the narrative progresses. *Bleak House* especially, Gage McWeeny writes in *The Comfort of Strangers – Social Life and Literary Form* (2016), 'is frequently instanced as an example of the realist novel's own sociological ambitions', insofar as a 'vast set of characters [are] revealed to be not simply a set, but a densely interconnected network of social affiliation'; in other words, Dickens bypasses Williams's 'crisis' by unearthing the community latent in society.[523] Because the tightening of this web of hitherto seemingly isolated figures and interests is in part achieved by 'arbitrary coincidences, [or] sudden revelations and changes of heart', Williams writes, literal meetings and immediate relationships, however improbable, stand in for society's more impersonal unifying structures.[524]

Of course, this return to 'knowability' is countervailed upon by the pre-eminence of the urban setting and modern institutions in Dickens's novels – and also in the apparent 'flatness' of many of his characters.[525] McWeeny writes that Dickens's characters exhibit 'an uncanny, and distinctly novelistic, play between particularity and representativeness' – that is, like Balzac, Dickens also hybridises Watt's

[520] This method of writing novels is also reflected in their serialised publication. Dickens's novels were 'commodity fictions […] sandwiched between commercials' in magazines, and were also therefore 'inextricably bound up with daily processes of ordinary living.' – Grahame Smith, *Dickens and the dream of cinema* (Manchester University Press: 2003), pp. 5-6, p. 55.
[521] Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970) (Frogmore: Paladin, 1974), p. 14.
[522] Ibid., pp. 12-14.
[523] Gage McWeeny, *The Comfort of Strangers – Social Life and Literary Form* (Oxford University Press: 2016), p. 15.
[524] Williams, *The English Novel*, p. 28.
[525] Ibid., p. 27. 'Flat' characterisation evidently resonates with the tensions that underlie the 'type' more broadly. For an early analysis of 'flatness' in characterisation, see E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) (New York: Harcourt, 1955), p. 67.

'realistic particularity' with the 'type'.[526] Evidently, this 'play' speaks to Williams's mooted collision between literary conventions of the knowable and a modernity apparently not conducive to such conventions, and, in so doing, Dickensian characterisation also continues the dynamic sense of ambivalence between abstract and particular, between superficial and specialised knowledge, explored in the previous chapter. It is because literary and sociological epistemologies, and particularistic and generalised representations of social life, perform these co-dependent, while seemingly contradictory, functions in Dickens's novels, that the office, as a localised space of abstract 'information work', becomes a site in which these categories can collide.

Characteristic features of Dickens's portrayal of office work and bureaucratic structures, more so than Balzac, are both their ubiquity and their functional diversity. Clerks in particular are nearly omnipresent in Dickens's works, revealing 'a preoccupation – almost an obsession – with this social group', Wild writes.[527] But the recurrence of the term does not signify simple uniformity: rather, echoing the formal theme of this chapter, the homogeneity of the designation masks the heterogeneity of the role. Indeed, the ambiguity of the clerk as a motif bookends Dickens's career: in the *Sketches by Boz* short story, 'The Boarding House', the 'recently imported' Irishman, O'Bleary aspires 'to be an apothecary, a clerk in a government office, an actor, a reporter, or anything else that turned up – he was not particular'; meanwhile, in Dickens's last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), the minor character Blight is depicted as being, 'in one grand comprehensive swoop of the eye, the managing clerk, junior clerk, common-law clerk, conveyancing clerk, chancery clerk, every refinement and department of clerk'.[528] 'Clerk' is a role conceived, by the gung-ho O'Bleary at least, as only one of a miscellany of nondescript service jobs to be obtained in London, while also, and to the misfortune of the overworked Blight, the clerk's duties are shown to subdivide and proliferate *ad infinitum*. Dickens plays up the sense that 'clerk' as a term is both hypo- and hypernymically vague, and unsurprisingly therefore clerical signifiers are also prone to adulteration, as with Jeremiah Flintwinch, in *Little Dorrit* (1857), who 'might, from his dress, have been either clerk or servant, and in fact had long been both.'[529] Moreover, the Dickensian clerk's diversity is reflected in that of his employers: where law firms and small businesses of varying stamps abound in Dickens's novels, as we will see in the following sections, so too does he portray a huge trading company in the form of the

[526] McWeeny, p. 17.
[527] Wild writes that there are one hundred and four clerks, 'of whom nineteen represent characters of reasonable significance.' Wild, p. 11 – citing George Newlyn (ed.), *Everyone in Dickens, Volume III, Characteristics and Commentaries, Tables and Tabulations: A Taxonomy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 176, 184, 185, 363, 384.
[528] Dickens, 'The Boarding House', *Sketches by Boz*, pp. 329-369 (p. 354); Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), p. 130.
[529] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Stephen Wall and Helen Small (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 47.

eponymous *Dombey and Son* (1848), whose desk-bound clerks are both contrasted against, yet connected through their labour to, the nautical and imperial motifs that appear elsewhere in the novel. Equally, *Little Dorrit* echoes the French tradition in dealing with ineffectual ministerial bureaucracy in the guise of its fictional Circumlocution Office, whose aristocratic sinecures are to be contrasted against the 'honest rugged order' in the books of the firm of Doyce and Clennam.[530]

Dickens's life accommodated 'at least two early phases of capitalism', Jay Clayton writes: the industrial, 'and the emerging, bureaucratic, managerial, or administered form'.[531] It is in the sense that this 'administered form' is both 'emergent' and thoroughly capitalistic, with all of the implications of atomisation and diffusion that this entails, that the office and clerk can exhibit such heteromorphism in Dickens's novels. But, however indicative of a future managerialism such structures and work-processes may be in Dickens's novels, like Lamb or Leman Rede, Dickens plays up the seeming antiquity of office life: in his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), the Temple consists of

> low-roofed, mouldy rooms, where innumerable rolls of parchment, which have been perspiring in secret for the last century, send forth an agreeable odour, which is mingled by day with the scent of the dry rot, and by night with the various exhalations which arise from damp cloaks, festering umbrellas, and the coarsest tallow candles.[532]

For all the animus Dickens directs at such proto-bureaucracies, and the abstract power they wield in his novels, their retrograde appearance burdens us with the biases of hindsight: we 'find it very difficult to believe that [they] had really been as powerful as [they are] represented to be.'[533] Given their heterogeneity, I can only account for a minority of these depictions, especially considering, in keeping with the section on Balzac, my aim to explore the relationship between the character of Dickens's portrayal of the office and the formal underpinnings of this portrayal in his novels. In this respect the following readings of *A Christmas Carol, David Copperfield,* and *Bleak House* are intended to demonstrate not merely the diverse character of clerks and bureaucracy in Dickens's works, but also the concomitant multiplicity of literary perspectives that such diversity offers the novelist of this period. It is, by contrast, as bureaucratic structures expand and start to crystallise in the decades following these novels' publication that this tendency to agglomerate and interrelate the tropes of

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[530] Ibid., p. 283.
Little Dorrit's resonance with French portrayals of the civil service is made all the more explicit by way of the novel's Marseille-set opening chapters, in which French officialdom is metonymically embodied by 'the cocked hats': customs officers who engage in 'a mighty production of papers […] and a calling over of names, and great work of signing, sealing, stamping, inking, and sanding, with exceedingly blurred, gritty, and undecipherable results.' p. 36.
[531] Jay Clayton, *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 148.
[532] Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (London: Vintage, 2009), pp. 418-419.
[533] Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War,* tr. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), p. 41.

office literature appears to be no longer tenable: rather, the different motifs dynamically employed by Dickens within different works are sequestered between more formally coherent works.

3.2. *A Christmas Carol* (1843)

The first and most famous of Dickens's 'Christmas Books', *A Christmas Carol* revolves around the successful businessman and confirmed miser, Ebenezer Scrooge, who harbours a particular antipathy toward celebrating Christmas.[534] 'Partly realistic, partly allegorical', the plot details how Scrooge is subjected to a series of festive hauntings, with each providing him a perspective onto the ramifications of his behaviour, including his own potential damnation.[535] The ghosts' intention is to show Scrooge that his austere worldview is detrimental not only to his own wellbeing, but also to those around him – to society in general and, in particular, to his long-suffering clerk, Bob Cratchit, and to the clerk's family. Scrooge undergoes the intended conversion: he not only gladly celebrates Christmas, but vows to 'keep it all the year'.[536]

In its conjunction of cosmic and earthly themes, and covering issues that extend from maintaining a salubrious office to avoiding eternal hellfire, *A Christmas Carol* clearly resonates with Balzac's *Melmoth reconcilié*. Evidently, however, where Balzac used supernatural devices to deride his contemporaries' moral and intellectual bankruptcy, Dickens's story, however satirical, is pitched toward benign ends. In his 1898 *Critical Study* of Dickens, the novelist, George Gissing, contrasts the two authors in this same capacity, writing that 'Balzac delights in showing us how contemptible and hateful [people] can be; whereas Dickens throws all his heart on to the side of the amusing and the good'.[537] It is this conjunction of moral agency and broader social themes that Dickens's portrayal of the office becomes both a site of convergence and disjunction.

Scrooge at first appears to be a fairly reductive 'type' like those that riddle the literature of this period (see 'Mr. Bite', the money-lender, in *Heads of the People*).[538] Although he is by no means a waged office worker of the kind I have focussed on heretofore, unreformed Scrooge (like his spectral former partner, Jacob Marley) is one whose 'spirit never walked beyond [the] counting-house'; and

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[534] On the success of *A Christmas Carol,* see Sanders, *Charles Dickens*, p. 24 – 'In the case of *A Christmas Carol* Dickens proved shrewd both as a popular moralist and as a writer attuned to his public. The book, published in an edition of 6,000 copies on 19 December, sold out in a few days. By the May of the following year, this ostensibly seasonal tale had exhausted its seventh printing. Despite the healthy sales of the four subsequent Christmas Books […] none ever attained the enduring popularity, or the singularly mythic quality, of *A Christmas Carol*.

[535] Robert Tracey, '"A Whimsical Kind of Masque": The Christmas Books and Victorian Spectacle', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 27 (1998), pp. 113-130 (p. 113).

[536] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in *Dickens at Christmas* (London: Vintage, 2015), pp. 19-105 (p. 97).

[537] George Gissing, *Charles Dickens – A Critical Study* (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1929), p. 210.

[538] Douglas Jerrold, 'The Money Lender', *Heads of the People*, II, pp. 14-25.

his demeanour therefore echoes that of the clerical type insofar as it bears the office's tell-tale marks even when he is physically beyond its walls.[539] These office-related tropes are always tinged with an additional moralistic edge, however: the by-now obligatory mollusc comparison returns when Scrooge is described as being 'as solitary as an oyster' (but he is also as 'secret, and self-contained' as one jealously guarding its pearl), so too, like the ledger-faced 'Superannuated Man', is Scrooge marked with 'harsh and rigid lines' (but those of 'avarice', rather than fret), and, like Dickens's clerks in *Sketches*, Scrooge '[edges] his way along the crowded paths of life', but less in a spirit of workaday stupefaction than resolute isolation from society.[540] Scrooge and Marley alike are typified by bureaucratic paraphernalia: Scrooge '[beguiles] the evening with his banker's-book', and lives in a building otherwise 'let out as offices', while Marley's ghost is enchained not only with the more tangible trappings of wealth, 'cash-boxes' and 'heavy purses', but also the documentary incarnations thereof, 'ledgers [and] deeds' – the counting-house has grown into his soul.[541] In contrast to the abutting worlds of cashier and banker, bureaucracy and Bourse, in *Melmoth reconcilié,* Dickens's businessman and the clerk as a literary trope therefore exhibit some overlap from the outset.

However, it is less that Dickens's miserly type is deliberately intended as a parallel to the clerk, and more that the material of the business world also happens to be that of the office. The functions of a capitalist – marketing, direction, supervision – to which Scrooge exhibits such zeal, are activities undertaken in an office, and, as Marx writes in Volume Two of *Capital*, they may be performed by the owner-manager or readily parcelled out among white-collared wage-workers, in turn branding both parties with similar associations.[542] Although both clerk and businessman work in offices, the latter also owns and controls the firm; '*ownership* and *management*' of business are separable qualities, and the latter, on its own, its responsibilities subdivided into rote administrative functions, can be made as servile or exploitative as other work-processes.[543] Despite both exhibiting the physical marks of the office, therefore, it is rather in *non-material* factors that Dickens's businessman and the clerks we have so far encountered are to be distinguished: in Scrooge's capacity to change. *A Christmas Carol* is based entirely upon Scrooge's agency, and Scrooge's moral agency is always paralleled with his economic agency. Where we have seen the clerk's life framed as an unwilling captivity, as the 'thraldom of the desk', Scrooge and Marley's excessive care for the needs of the firm above 'the common welfare' thus becomes a fetter 'girded […] on of [their] own free will, and of [their] own free will [they] wear it.'[544]

[539] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol,* p. 37.
[540] Ibid., p. 22, p. 53, p. 23.
[541] Ibid., p. 30, p. 34.
[542] Marx, *Capital, Volume II*, p. 207.
[543] Duménil and Lévy, 'The Emergence and Functions of Managerial and Clerical Personnel in Marx's *Capital*', p. 64, p. 66; cf. Pollard, pp. 12-36.
[544] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 36.

The distinct character of Scrooge's metaphorical association with the office is evident insofar as he is also associated with the broader connotations of the London business scene: he has 'as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the City of London' including 'the corporation' itself – the extent of his humanity reflects that of a legal personality.[545] By contrast, because the material of the counting house is lumped in with its ultimate purpose – in this case, commerce – and that all of this is bound up metaphorically with Scrooge in turn, we see a relative shift in the portrayal of his clerk, Bob Cratchit, from those clerks previously covered. Where the clerks of the previous chapters were metaphorically appended to the empirical structures of the office, Cratchit, by contrast, is shorn of the connotations of bureaucratic labour processes: all that remains is his status in the firm, that of long-suffering subordinate to Scrooge. This descriptive imbalance serves to reflect the two characters' power relationship: just as Balzac's satirical descriptions of his *employés* monopolise the action of the eponymous novel in the same manner that *l'Administration* monopolises (and stymies) the energy of the French state, Cratchit's poverty of stereotyping mirrors his poverty of purse, and his put-upon role in Scrooge's firm. Indeed, Cratchit goes unnamed, referred to only as 'the clerk', or as Scrooge's clerk, until the novella's third 'stave' when Scrooge is supernaturally conveyed to the Cratchit Christmas dinner; and, as if his role as poor subaltern were still not clear enough, at this point Dickens puns that Bob pockets 'but fifteen copies of his Christian name' per week.[546]

'The clerk' therefore serves largely to illustrate the negative ramifications of Scrooge's parsimony, as well as the steadfastness of the Christmas spirit: Cratchit copies letters 'in a dismal little cell […], a sort of tank' in the cold, and under Scrooge's constant scrutiny, yet he is 'still warmer than Scrooge' in his willingness to indulge in festive greetings, even under the eye of his employer.[547] Indeed, Cratchit's profession moreover serves as a means of situating an underling in immediate *proximity* to Scrooge, their relationship is a particular iteration of Scrooge's generalised misanthropy. The clerk's synecdochic relationship to more impersonal structures is indicated by his disciplinary working conditions, which recall the 'the Treadmill and the Poor Law' (that is, prisons and workhouses) of which Scrooge expresses approval.[548] But the extent to which Cratchit can fully function as a social everyman is undermined by the particularities of the clerk-employer relationship, which Dickens also portrays: Scrooge begrudgingly acquiesces to Cratchit's request to take Christmas Day off in a manner evocative of the unofficial 'gentleman's [agreements]' that, Lockwood writes, typified the 'unwritten, tacit expectations of conduct' in the comparatively intimate relationship between clerk and

[545] Ibid., p. 30.
[546] Ibid.: 'the clerk', p. 23-30 (passim), 'Bob Cratchit', p. 65.
[547] Ibid., p. 23, p. 26.
[548] Ibid., p. 27.

employer.[549] The counterintuitively 'unofficial' character of the office in *A Christmas Carol* is also reflected in Cratchit's working day, which similarly depends in part on Scrooge's whims: closing time is 'tacitly admitted […] to the expectant clerk in the Tank' by Scrooge's act of '[dismounting] from his stool'.[550] Whatever sense of Foucauldian panopticism Cratchit's 'tank' may exude is eroded by such appeals to custom and the office's two-way dialogic relationship. In contrast to contemporary manual work, 'codes [of conduct] often tend to overshadow violence' in service work due to the latter's 'immaterial products and its use and construction of social relations' – a disparity that therefore also leaves it open to the assumption of the festive customs Scrooge ostensibly abhors.[551] As an intimate yet hierarchical working space, one even described as an 'imaginary family relationship', the office in fiction simultaneously forms a microcosm of broader social relations, while also undermining this metonymy insofar as its structures, also seen with the focus on clerical *esprit de corps* in *Un début,* are framed as more subjectively determined than those beyond its walls.[552]

Of course, in establishing this imperfect synecdoche between Scrooge's relationship with his clerk, and his attitude toward society more broadly, Dickens perhaps stresses the degree to which the particularities of the former *must fail* to reflect the abstraction of the latter. This is because it is precisely an over-abstracted conception of society that underpins Scrooge's own moral shortcomings: his social views consist of 'that wicked cant' preoccupied with 'What the surplus is, and Where it is' – a political economy of an extremely reductionist and universalised persuasion.[553] Scrooge's economistic worldview can be seen as one response to Williams's 'crisis of the knowable community' – but it is portrayed by Dickens as morally dysfunctional as a solution to this crisis insofar as it permits Scrooge to discount the faces, lives, feelings, and nuance of the world around him (indeed, in personifying such a worldview, Scrooge's abstracting tendencies are self-contradictory). Dickens uses *A Christmas Carol* to play out the moral implications of the 'double discourse of value' explored in Chapter One: to countermand Scrooge's 'doctrinaire utilitarianism', Dickens's ghosts demonstrate to Scrooge the importance of 'things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up', namely, of unquantifiable, intangible factors – represented in particular by the benefits of maintaining a Christmas spirit.[554] Indeed, Scrooge is shown that even miners 'who labour in the bowels of the earth', lighthouse keepers, and sailors – people who, in contrast to Bob in his 'tank', labour

[549] Lockwood, p. 29 – 'needless to say', Lockwood continues, 'this relationship was often exploited by the employer'.
[550] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 29.
[551] Gooch, p. 162.
[552] Titolo, p. 176.
[553] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 70.
[554] Edgar Johnson, 'The Christmas Carol and Economic Man', *The American Scholar*, 21:1 (The Phi Beta Kappa Society, 1952), pp. 91-98 (p. 91); Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 53.

under particularly extreme and remote conditions, and in direct conjunction with the elements – have their toil lightened by the seemingly frivolous Christmas spirit.[555] This supernatural access to the lives of others allows Scrooge to gauge society in personal terms, to make the unknowable, but interconnected, knowable in a manner beholden usually only to the omniscient narrator – itself a device conventionally barred from making equivalent diegetic interventions.[556]

The role of supernaturally assisted knowledge of individuals' lives, of 'realistic particularity', in Scrooge's moral awakening, is reflected in Dickens's own conception of the social world. M. Brian Sabey, in 'Ethical Metafiction in Dickens's Christmas Hauntings' (2015), writes that Dickens believed that 'human sympathy involves human imagination', that imagination is required if one is 'to have any concrete idea of another person' – thereby granting fiction (and its writers) a privileged, instructive status.[557] Scrooge's hauntings explicitly allude to his childhood reading habits, and these are conflated with the pseudo-narrative character of his memories more broadly, and this ethical-narrative amalgam allows, Sabey argues, in turn for literalised empathetic insights into Cratchit's life, as well as those of miners and sailors. Sabey suggests that *A Christmas Carol* is a metafictional text insofar as Scrooge's empathy and sociality are awakened precisely because of the narrative character of the haunting – Scrooge is changed by being able to perceive his 'reality' from the same vantage that we as readers perceive it. By stressing the link between imagination and sociality, the 'text makes it obvious that the reawakening of Scrooge's imagination is what reanimates his moral being' – thereby setting up a sense of opposition between imagination as such and the conflated commercial and bureaucratic impulses that had driven Scrooge so far.[558]

This privileging of the fictional distinguishes Dickens from Balzac: where the latter seemed to ironise the omniscient narrator in the form of the hapless occultist in *Melmoth reconcilié,* and abjured the literariness of clerical stereotypes in *Les Employés,* instead passing such temperaments off as emergent properties of the material conditions of office life, Dickens attributes total importance to the novelistic perspective as a heuristic for maintaining social ties. But the privileging of such imaginative, non-empirical faculties in sustaining an intangible social cohesion is to be qualified by Dickens's general '[rejection] of abstraction', his 'disdain for Utilitarian thought and his well-

[555] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, pp. 73-74.
[556] Cf. Tracey, who uses the theatrical metaphor of the masque to conflate the experience of Scrooge's haunting with that of novelistic narration: 'Dickens's machinery allows the Spirits to transform reality in an instant, and even fly Scrooge out over the sea, so that he may witness Christmas revels: Bob Cratchit's house, Fred's house, the lighthouse, the graveyard. By supplying the Spirits with this ability to transport Scrooge rapidly from scene to scene, Dickens dramatizes the ease with which a novelist can instantaneously transfer characters and reader from one locale to another.' Tracey, p. 116.
[557] M. Brian Sabey, 'Ethical Metafiction in Dickens's Christmas Hauntings', *Dickens Studies Annual,* Vol. 46 (2015), pp. 123-146 (p. 125).
[558] Ibid., p. 130.

documented aversion to elaborate theological systems'.[559] 'Dickens deplored the ruthless disenchantment of lived experience entailed by utilitarianism' and it is here that the relative antipathy Dickens shows toward bureaucratic structures, and which will appear more prominently in later sections, becomes apparent.[560] Just as Lamb satirically employed the incommensurability of abstract schemas and individual subjectivity in the head of his 'Superannuated Man' to literary effect, Dickens, in actively *privileging* the imaginative power of individual subjectivity to maintain civil society, therefore aims to distinguish it from any more abstractly rational or systematic attempt to do so – be it Scrooge's own economism or bureaucratic reason alike – despite their shared intangible character. The transcendental power of the ghosts to inform Scrooge about the world beyond the normal functioning of his senses may initially seem to mirror the aims of the 'information revolution' of the period – however, Sabey's argument demonstrates that the ghosts function more as stand-ins for the novelist-narrator than as figures collating the benefits of the merriest Christmas for the greatest number. This tension between the epistemic powers of the novelist and those of bureaucratic structures will recur in greater detail in Section 3.4., regarding *Bleak House*.

In *A Christmas Carol,* meanwhile, these conceptual tensions are recapitulated in the novella's counting-house setting. It is insofar as the office serves as a site whose work processes are still sufficiently informal, despite their rational underpinnings, as to metaphorically illustrate either abstracting parsimony, or intimate, and potentially subjectively determined, cooperation (however hierarchical), that it constitutes an ideal bridge not only between *A Christmas Carol*'s realist and allegorical elements, but also the two competing ideologies of the novella: Dickensian empathy and 'Scroogean' economism. The fact, however, that these two features of the setting must necessarily *coincide* – that the tangible tools and lived relationships in Scrooge's office can be construed as an instantiation of the abstracting schematism that governs his initial worldview, or, equally, as the basis of the charity that characterises his reformed self – means that it becomes a rather ambivalent site in the narrative. The office's dual-character is not a simply a dilemma that mirrors Scrooge's potential to be reformed or not, rather, it embodies both worldviews simultaneously: even post-reform, Scrooge's account books will still rely more on the schematic worldview of 'that wicked cant' than imaginative empathy. Indeed, Dickens even seems to marry the two ideologies, however incommensurable he has previously made them: one of Scrooge's first acts of post-reform charity is to tell Bob to 'buy another coal-scuttle before [he dots] another i' – that is, the employer's generosity is to be measured

[559] Sabey, p. 127, p. 126; cf. Lee, on Dickens's 'Full Account of the First Meeting of the Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything' (1837), a 'precocious satire' on quantitative methods, *Overwhelmed,* p. 116.
[560] Titolo, p. 180.

favourably against the smallest imagined 'unit' of the employee's labour, rather than to be distinguished from this relationship altogether.[561]

The counting-house is portrayed simultaneously as a workplace and a social space, and, again, in this respect it judders between representativeness and rarefied specificity. Its intimacy means that Scrooge's newfound morals can be exhibited on a daily basis, but the whole purpose of Scrooge and Cratchit's proximity is to meet the impersonal needs of Scrooge's business. Whatever the slightly bitter taste this ambivalence may leave, it plays up the historical character of the bureaucratic division of labour, especially in small offices like that in the novella: it is strangely personal, despite its impersonal ends – in its pre-massified, pre-automated state it lies 'outside organized spaces of production', and it is explicitly contrasted with the miners and sailors in the novella whose miseries and Christmas festivities alike remain out of their employers' sight and mind.[562] As industries automate, Scrooge's 'wicked cant', Alfred Sohn-Rethel writes, obtains an objective character in technology, thereby '[replacing] the subjectivity' of the worker; in a similar regard, Marx frames the nineteenth-century Factory Acts, much hated by factory owners, as a necessary and beneficial brace to industrial capital's automatic impulses, insofar as such legislation preserved the workers upon which industry depends.[563] The office (to remain untouched by similar legislation in the UK until the Offices, Shops, and Railway Premises Act in 1963) by contrast forms a setting whose conditions have not yet crystallised to this same degree, and which are therefore dependent on the ethical character of its owner-manager – thus rendering it susceptible to an incursion from the spirit world.[564] The office therefore becomes a site in which the nineteenth-century novelist can treat generally structural issues in terms of agency.

3.3. *David Copperfield* (1850)

David Copperfield is another *Bildungsroman,* following the life of its eponymous Dickens stand-in from abusive childhood to a career as a successful novelist. Before finding fame as an author, Copperfield spends the middle part of the novel as a would-be 'proctor' in the now-defunct legal body, Doctors' Commons (given prior satirical treatment in *Sketches by Boz*), and Dickens in this section devotes some attention to the apparent obsolescence of Britain's various legal institutions, before fate compels

[561] Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, p. 104.
[562] Gooch, p. 16.
[563] Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour – A Critique of Epistemology* (1970), tr. Martin Sohn-Rethel (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 173; Marx, *Capital, Volume I,* pp. 375-381.
[564] 'Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act' (1963) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1963/41> [accessed 20/01/2020].

Copperfield to make a name for himself elsewhere.[565] In the novel's second half, the clerk, Uriah Heep emerges as an antagonist: Heep's oft-vocalised humility and apparently workaday sense of ambition serve to mask a manipulative social climber, one who exploits and defrauds his employer, the alcoholic lawyer, Mr. Wickfield. As such, the narrative course of both Copperfield and Heep's careers is historically illustrative, insofar as it differs from a later bureaucratic conception of ascending the 'hierarchical order' in a linear and qualifiable fashion.[566] Equally, the place of offices and clerks in relation to Copperfield's own life story is potentially indicative of their status and function in Dickens's novels.

As with the *Melmoth reconcilié* and *A Christmas Carol,* apparent thematic similarities between Balzac and Dickens's works mask disparities in their execution, including in their portrayal of a protagonist's *Bildung*. With *Un début dans la vie,* Balzac depicted the belaboured emergence of a restrained social conformism via the mistakes of its egotistical protagonist. Despite the novel's recognition of historical change, explored above, there is a formal degree of stasis to each of its episodes, the implication being that Husson could readily succeed in any of the situations secured for him if not for his youthful impetuosity. In keeping with this sense, the novel's final lines, depicting Oscar as 'the modern bourgeois', suggest a protagonist that has finally dissolved into the social values expected of him.[567] *David Copperfield,* by contrast, reads almost like a picaresque account of how its protagonist *retains* his middle-classness despite the various ordeals he undergoes – indeed, Jeremy Tambling writes that Dickens's novel 'charts the triumph of a middle-class hero'.[568]

Where Balzacian *embourgeoisement* consists in the dissolution of its protagonist's ego into a quasi-objective *juste milieu,* therefore, the world of *David Copperfield* appears more like Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia' at its most turbulent. Cast out from the vaguely yeomanish rural setting of his birth by his wicked stepfather, Copperfield's genteel *picaro* is buffeted back and forth in a predominantly urban world of intermingled stories and diverse occupations: passing from child labourer, to trainee proctor, from jobbing parliamentary sketch-writer, to successful novelist, Copperfield's life story straddles social and institutional heterogeneity, until this variety finds itself subordinated to his

[565] Doctors' Commons was a 'collegiate society' for practitioners of civil law. It was established in 'the late fifteenth century perhaps in conscious emulation of the longer-established inns of court and chancery', i.e. the centres of common and equity law in England. Wilfred Prest, *The Professions in Early Modern England* (Beckenham, Kent: Croon Helm, 1987), pp. 66-67. It was abolished in 1858 after courts of Divorce and Probate were established – Jeremy Tambling, notes to Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, with an introduction and notes by Jeremy Tambling (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 959n3.
[566] Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 203.
[567] Balzac, *Un début*, p. 207.'
[568] Jeremy Tambling, Introduction to *David Copperfield,* pp. xi-xlii (p.xvi). See also, Tambling, p. xiii, on the novel's picaresque credentials.

values.[569] 'Copperfield as narrator submerges his own anxiety about social mobility, class anger, and aristocratic privilege into his representations of the people around him, thus legitimating his own social position', David Kellogg writes, rendering the novel, in John P. McGowan's eyes, a battle of warring discourses, from the puritanical to the florid, in which it is Copperfield's own 'transparent style' that is attributed the privileged, objective character – albeit one simultaneously problematised in its initial contingency.[570]

The simultaneously emergent and privileged character of Copperfield's voice (in epistemic and, by extension, social terms) is reflected in the novel's form: that of a fictionalised autobiography. It is easy to peg Copperfield's vantage on the world to a broader middle-class worldview, but whether 'the value system that [he] espouses' is to be considered purely triumphant, or is shown to be alloyed with bias, remains ambiguous, with John O. Jordan arguing that Dickens's portrayal of class in the novel forms a 'play of textual effects that undermines David's narrative authority.'[571] This same dissension of vantages underlies the novel's composition: the implied autobiographical course of the narrative, its episodes of conscientious 'retrospection' in particular, jar with the forward thrust of Dickens's improvisational writing process.[572] Just as the novel's conflict arises from Copperfield's potentially beleaguered position in an idealised social 'middle', so too therefore is the narrative itself interpolated between the distinct chronological vantages of Copperfield's memoir and Dickens's composition, between *fabula* and *syuzhet*. As with *Les Employés,* Dickens plays with the extent to which the narrative of *David Copperfield* is an emergent property of its diegesis, rather than the brainchild of its author.

The character of Copperfield's road to triumph is not merely a product of its author, but also of its age, insofar as it is substantially more chaotic than the career model that started to develop in the years immediately following the novel's publication. While an objective and rational system of promotions and careers in institutions was long the subject of Utilitarian fantasy, the paternalism of Lamb's day was replaced instead largely by a 'positive and aggressive individualism' in Dickens's.[573] A

[569] Ibid., p. xvii.
[570] David Kellogg, '"My most unwilling hand": The Mixed Motivations of "David Copperfield"', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 20 (1991), pp. 57-73, (p. 58); John P. McGowan, 'David Copperfield: The Trial of Realism', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* 34:1 (1979), pp. 1-19 (pp. 8-9).
[571] John O. Jordan, 'The Social Sub-Text of "David Copperfield"', *Dickens Studies Annual,* 14 (1985), pp. 61-92 (pp. 63-64).
[572] Dickens's plans for the novel served more as ongoing memoranda as to what had been written so far than as a forecast for what he would write next, c.f. Dickens, *David Copperfield,* p. 907; For 'retrospects', see p. 237, p. 769, p. 878.
[573] MacDonagh, pp. 34-35, pp. 9-12. Weber's conception of the bureaucratically 'rationalised' career consists of a 'pre-scheduled' table of ranks in which one 'moves from the lower, less important, and lower paid to the higher positions' – a system that only started to develop in Britain from the 1850s onwards. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, 'The Man and His Work', *From Max Weber*, pp. 3-76 (p. 49); Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 203; cf.

standardised career path was not formally entertained to any major extent in any field until the mid-century, during which the ever-growing demands that 'the classic triad of population growth, industrial revolution, and urbanisation' made upon British society worked to foster, almost inadvertently, more classically bureaucratic procedures and structures – a process punctuated by specific episodes such as the Northcote-Trevelyan report of 1854 (in whose wake Trollope wrote his 1858 novel *The Three Clerks*).[574] This almost inadvertent process of bureaucratisation is also reflected in the growth and concentration of private firms, which metamorphosed from individual and family enterprises into 'Juridical persons […] owned by shareholders, employing hired managers and executives'.[575] Before such structural changes took place, Sidney Pollard writes, career 'success' was first predicated upon a blend of nepotism and patronage, and then to a growing extent upon virtual battlefield promotions of men from 'the ranks', based on perceived loyalty and technical knowledge.[576] In a world dominated by the 'entrepreneurial ideal' of 'capital and competition' it is unsurprising that Copperfield's social status should be viewed by critics largely in cultural terms, as a 'system of values' that guide his behaviour – especially given that his diverse range of occupations preclude him from a continuous middle-class status in material terms.[577] Indeed, despite his clear misgivings throughout the book about the experience of slipping through the net and living 'Life on [one's] own account', Copperfield espouses his contemporaries' antipathy to a more regulated alternative, a society 'skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape.'[578]

This ideological conflict in mid-nineteenth-century British society also reflects the formal tensions of the novel explored above: not only do Dickens and Copperfield's crossed perspectives emulate the 'heteroglossia' of the novel's world, Copperfield's personal rise and Dickens's chaotically revolving backdrop together model an interplay between linear progress and elemental conflict. But where Copperfield's eventual triumph has been mapped onto the broader historical ascendancy of bourgeois society and its values, his various wrong turns are more ambiguous. We recall from Graeber that 'stories appear when something goes wrong', and that *David Copperfield* therefore depends on

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Amanpal Garcha, 'Career', *Victorian Literature and Culture,* 46:3 (2018), pp. 598-601; and, Celia Moore, Hugh Gunz, and Douglas T. Hall, 'Tracing the Historical Roots of Career Theory in Management and Organization Studies,' *Handbook of Career Studies*, ed. Hugh Gunz and Maury Peiperl (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007), pp. 13-38.

[574] MacDonagh, p. 205; Roberts, p. 404. On the causes of this change – impersonal or conscientious – see Roberts, p. 413, who criticises Karl Polayni's assertion that bureaucratisation occurred between European states 'irrespective of national mentality and history' by 'peoples [who] were mere puppets.' Karl Polayni, *The Great Transformation* (1944) (Boston: Beacon, 2001), p. 226.

[575] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire – 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1995), p. 10.

[576] Pollard, pp. 149-151.

[577] Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society,* p. 272.

[578] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 164, p. 632.

such detours as compelling narrative devices, but, unlike his picaresque forebears, Copperfield's 'life journey' is not transmuted wholesale into a literal journey, a road upon which 'events governed by chance' can conceivably occur.[579] Rather than mere happenstance, Dickens recapitulates picaresque chance into the vying interests that gird Copperfield's autonomy: he is in part dependent on 'outside intervention', Aleksandar Stević writes,

> the Dickensian *Bildungsroman* repeatedly rehearses different scenarios in which external factors, variously understood as state bureaucracy [that is, workhouses and orphanages], caring benefactors, malevolent conspirators, or simply the bizarre imagination of strangers, demonstrate the power to shape the hero's fate'[580]

The narrative interplay between personal memoir and social panorama thus becomes a question of, as Copperfield begins his memoir, 'whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life' or not.[581]

Copperfield's episode as a trainee proctor is predicated on just such 'outside intervention', in that his position is purchased for him by his aunt, Betsey Trotwood, at a premium of one thousand pounds.[582] As such a premium might suggest, and in contrast to the many other 'difficulties of [Copperfield's] journey', his clerkship is not framed in terms of suffering and conflict.[583] Rather, Dickens focuses on 'the dreamy nature of this retreat', its 'languid stillness', its 'opiate' character, and describes its atmosphere – faintly ridiculously – as 'a cosy, dosey, old-fashioned, time-forgotten, sleepy-headed little family-party'.[584] As with the chambers in *Un début,* Doctors' Commons is associated with the Middle Ages: the proctor, Copperfield's friend Steerforth remarks, 'is a sort of monkish attorney […] he is a functionary whose existence, in the natural course of things, would have terminated about two hundred years ago', but for his 'ancient monopoly in suits about people's wills and people's marriages, and disputes about ships and boats.'[585] That is, *unlike* Balzac's portrayal of Husson's clerkship, which only exhibited the cultural character of *la Basoche,* no revolution has stripped the proctor of his ancient privileges, and Doctors' Commons persists despite its apparent obsolescence. Indeed, just as Doctors' Commons appears to be a historical blind alley, spatially too it is preternaturally isolated: upon entering its 'little low archway […] the noise of the city seemed to melt, as if by magic, into a softened distance', and, like a parody of Grimms' fairy tales, the receptionist

[579] Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 84-258 (p. 244).
[580] Aleksandar Stević, 'Dickensian Bildungsroman and the Logic of Dependency', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 45 (2014), pp. 63-94, p. 72.
[581] Dickens, *David Copperfield,* p. 13.
[582] Ibid., p. 359.
[583] Ibid., p. 198.
[584] Ibid., p. 361.
[585] Ibid.*,* p. 353.

to this world is 'a little dry man, sitting by himself, who wore a stiff brown wig that looked as if it were made of gingerbread'.[586]

In keeping with this spatiotemporal dynamic, Matthew Titolo writes that Dickens's office is 'a classic Bakhtinian chronotope, in which past and present, place and professional identity, are collapsed into one'.[587] However much Dickens's offices exhibit their own narrative-diegetic logic, Doctors' Commons in particular also evokes from Bakhtin's Chronotope essay the 'viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space' which cannot 'serve as the primary time of the novel'.[588] Accordingly, Titolo writes that Doctors' Commons seems 'more appropriate as a home for [Tennyson's] Lotos Eaters than it does for hardheaded professionals', and that the 'deep structural irony' that undermines its snug isolation is the implied suffering of those who depend on its incompetently executed services.[589] Graeber writes that bureaucratic structures are in large part about mediating and ossifying structural violence, and therefore, as Dickens writes in *Sketches by Boz,* this cosy world is an obstacle in *other people*'s life stories – would-be legatees named in the wills of which the Commons is custodian, 'silent but striking tokens, some of them of excellence of heart […] others of the worst passions of human nature' – rather than a narrative juncture for Copperfield.[590] Neither marketised site of conflict, nor pre-scheduled career machine, working for an unreformed bureaucracy in *David Copperfield* forms a 'refuge' from *both* the machinations of others and from one's own agency.[591]

The extent to which the vocational doldrums that is Doctors' Commons is meant to map onto Copperfield's life story is indicated by its relation to his love life. His first wife, the simultaneously infantile and oedipal Dora Spenlow, who has a fear of all things 'practical', and deems Copperfield's faith in 'perseverance and strength of character' anathema, is also the daughter of the proctor under whom Copperfield is undertaking his clerkship: we might therefore say that her 'frivolity, girlishness, and inability to fulfil the traditional wifely role of housekeeper' form a feminine cognate to the values of Doctors' Commons – values against which Copperfield comes to define his own.[592] The device of a dissipated family fortune forces Copperfield to rescind his premium and re-enter the world of bourgeois values, to 'clear [his] own way through the forest of difficulty', while, Maria Ioannou writes,

[586] Ibid.*,* p. 358.
[587] Titolo, p. 179.
[588] Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', p. 248.
[589] Titolo, p. 178.
[590] Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*, p. 57; Dickens, 'Doctors' Commons', *Sketches by Boz*, pp. 105-110 (p. 110).
[591] Titolo, p. 175.
[592] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, pp. 546-547; Maria Ioannou, 'Dora Spenlow, Female Communities, and Female Narrative in Charles Dickens's "David Copperfield" and George Eliot's "Middlemarch"', *Dickens Studies Annual,* 44 (2013), pp. 143-164 (p. 149).

Spenlow's untimely death after a miscarriage *releases* her from the corresponding 'domestic destiny' these new conditions demand of her.[593] Spenlow's demeanour mirrors the sinecurism of Doctors' Commons, but she is also conscious, Kelly Hager writes, of her inability (and disinclination) to fulfil the 'angel of the house'-style role Copperfield expects of her – it is in the space between these two poles of domesticity that we see the female office workers of the next chapter emerge, indeed, all three roles are respectively filled by the Winstanley sisters in Eliza Lynn Linton's 'New Woman' novel, *The Rebel of the Family* (1880).[594]

David Copperfield's overarching course is its protagonist's *Bildung*: Dickens thus steers clear of writing a novel like *Les Employés,* in which what Balzac calls 'administrative *dolce far niente*' becomes the predominant object of focus in spite of itself; while equally the premodern state of an institution like Doctors' Commons precludes a narrative structure in which *Bildung* and what might be called '*Beförderung'* [promotion] are one and the same. Indeed, Nicholas Dames argues that it was only after 'irregular, profit-driven enterprises on a large scale [were] reshaped, streamlined, and organized into […] a preplanned trajectory for individuals with a set sequence and nameable steps along that sequence', that a standardised, career-predicated narrative form could correspondingly develop.[595] We have seen that Dickens accordingly couches Copperfield's rise in more entrepreneurial terms – and, tellingly, it is only the hapless Micawbers who imagine that a clerkship will lead 'to the top of the tree.'[596] Equally, however, in the next chapter we see that standardised career progression was accompanied by an ossification in the division of roles: while the career ladder became something for white-collar mangers to climb, the rote functions undertaken so far by virtually all 'classes' of clerk (from the aristocratic scribes in 'The Government Offices' to poor Kit Mark, in Chapter Two) were undertaken by a more proletarianised (and increasingly female, in Britain at least) workforce.[597] Just as the managerial stratum might expect mechanically ordained promotions in this new order, for the jobbing clerk the prospect of an impromptu rise in status seemed less likely.

This leads us finally to Uriah Heep: the novel's antagonist, but also a 'type' – 'an excessively unctuous and sinister version of the insinuating clerk' – as well as another would-be social climber.[598] Heep 'determines to advance into the middle class, using the pretence of "umbleness" as a cover for his devious manipulations behind the scenes', Jordan writes – however, it is less that one 'covers' the

[593] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 526; Ioannou, p. 147.
[594] Kelly Hager, *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce – The Failed Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 135-137.
[595] Nicholas Dames, 'Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition', *Victorian Studies,* 45:2 (Winter, 2003), pp. 247-278 (p. 250).
[596] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 538.
[597] Lockwood, p. 68.
[598] Young, p. 72.

other, and more that these qualities readily align.[599] As I explored in the previous section, the ostensibly limpid economic relationship between clerk and employer is muddied by the relative 'intimacy' of the early-to-mid-nineteenth-century office and the sociable, potentially malleable, nature of its division of labour – and this ambiguity Heep exploits. Heep famously plays up his social inferiority, as one who 'had better not aspire. If he is to get on in life', a person like him, 'must get on umbly' – just as Copperfield does for his own middle-classness, Heep stresses his status in *cultural* terms, largely as a question of demeanour with others, rather than by material factors.[600] However, in so doing, Heep's deference distorts the intersubjective character of the office relationship: the seeming willingness of the 'fawning fellow' to be an instrument of his employer, Mr. Wickfield, grants him a 'subtle and watchful' knowledge of Wickfield's weaknesses, so that his 'his position', apparently subordinate, 'is really one of power'.[601]

The office's sociable character has appeared in my prior analyses; however, so too has the countervailing asymmetry of this dialogism between master and servant also been framed as a feature inherent to the office: the cashier in *Melmoth reconcilié,* Balzac's eponymous *employés,* and even Cratchit to an extent, are benumbed and rendered pliant by their working environment. By contrast, Heep is sinisterly able to divorce the 'head' and 'hand' elements of his labours: Copperfield recounts that Heep's 'sleepless eyes […] like two red suns' would 'stealthily stare at me for I dare say a whole minute at a time, during which his pen went, or pretended to go, as cleverly as ever.'[602] Heep's divided self reflects his interstitial social pedigree, 'he occupies uncharted social territory somewhere between the autonomous, middle-class professional and the deferential, hat-tipping worker', but it also figures as a conscientious manipulation of his working conditions.[603] Indeed, Heep in himself embodies the bureaucratic labour process: while he engages in menial 'hand labour', he also gathers and uses information for himself – in this case not so much legal knowledge (despite his proclaimed love of *Tidd's Practice,* a legal textbook) but knowledge of others to be used for his own benefit.[604] Where Kit Mark in Chapter Two fell afoul of bureaucracy's knot of the empirical and the esoteric, Heep ties his own: he dissociates his status from routine elements of office work, pegging it instead to the structures that this labour serves, framing himself as a readily understood and innocuous 'type' within his employer's instrumental network of knowledge.

[599] Jordan, p. 80.
[600] Dickens, *David Copperfield, p.* 264.
[601] Ibid., pp. 376-377.
[602] Ibid., p. 231.
[603] Titolo, p. 187.
[604] Dickens, *David Copperfield,* p. 243, see also p. 955n2 on *Tidd's Practice* (1790-94) – 'the authority consulted for common-law practice'.

Where Heep's opportunistic rise to power highlights, like Copperfield's, the informal character of the pre-regulated career trajectory, the degree to which his obsequiousness translates into exploitation stresses that Heep is conceived foremost in terms of *interaction* rather than the autonomy ascribed to Copperfield. Of course, this is an artificial contrast: as we have seen, Copperfield's life is as much influenced by 'outside intervention' as Heep's exploitation of Wickfield is undertaken under his own 'entrepreneurial' initiative – rather, it is that the *novel* makes a concerted effort to ascribe autonomy to Copperfield and dependence to Heep. Where the details of Copperfield's literary career are curiously absent from the novel, his 'growing reputation' framed in anonymous terms, Heep's corresponding period of success is explicitly predicated upon unmediated working relationships, it forms an object of intense scrutiny to Copperfield and his peers, and is thereby ascribed the mark of illegitimacy.[605] This is an ideological distinction: where, James Eli Adams writes, a solitary, prophetic, ideal of the man of letters was cultivated during this period to countermand any unmanly suspicions regarding intellectual labour, the similarly unstrenuous character of office work relies also on cooperation and courtesy – Gooch writes that service work was 'haunted' by a longstanding conception of dependence at this time.[606] In *Un début,* the sociable, intersubjective, character of the office is framed as an inherent part of its labour, but equally, Desroches, Godeschal, and the rest are framed foremost as peers with a shared interest; with a subaltern figure like Heep, by contrast, this intersubjective character therefore becomes a vulnerability, as well as a vice.

Where Copperfield's own rise to power is represented by the ascendancy of his voice over the chaotic 'heteroglossia' of civil society, Heep's amounts to commandeering a seemingly homogenised workplace discourse. Just as the dominance of Copperfield's own voice manifests itself in his career as a novelist (and therefore also in his supposed authorship of the text itself) Heep falls when it is revealed he has 'systematically forged' documents in Wickfield's name.[607] Once exposed, Heep's hold over Wickfield is reframed as the hijacking of the latter's dominant role in a discursive power structure – exposing the crime 'breaks the spell' of Heep's anti-charisma by reasserting his function as the mechanical participant in Wickfield's intellectual enterprise. Insofar as Heep only temporarily usurps Wickfield, just as his ghostly power over Copperfield (extending to the latter's inability to 'shut [Heep] out' of his mind) is ultimately exorcised, Dickens evokes between Heep and Copperfield a relationship of simultaneous parallelism and subordination.[608]

[605] Ibid.*,* p. 823.
[606] James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints* (London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 34; Gooch, p. 44.
[607] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 758.
[608] Ibid., p. 235.

Heep's abortive rise and Copperfield's own life story exhibit points of commonality – Heep's divided selfhood between mechanical and intellectual labourer forms a miniature version of Copperfield's own transition from boyhood factory worker to novelist, and indeed, their shared sexual aspirations in the form of Agnes Wickfield, who ultimately becomes Copperfield's second wife, reinforce their rivalry, as well as Heep's ultimately inferior standing in it. This play of parallels and distinctions between Heep and Copperfield is not just Dickens's attempt to explore the 'contiguous and kindred' relationship between the lower middle classes and the middle classes proper, it also serves to complicate Copperfield's own heroism.[609] Where Copperfield's memoir as a whole problematises the ideological interplay of linear progress and chaotic social conflict, so too does Heep evoke the contradictions of Victorian values when he sardonically recalls that at school he was taught 'from nine o'clock to eleven, that labor [sic] was a curse, and from eleven o'clock to one, that it was a blessing and a cheerfulness, and a dignity'.[610] Heep thus states bluntly and explicitly in dialogue what Copperfield intimates by way of his narrative's composition, and Heep's 'hostile takeover' of Wickfield's firm forms an over-literalised parody of Copperfield's own heroic *Bildung* in society at large.[611] Where Doctors' Commons forms a sub-world of the narrative diegesis at large, so too is Heep a sub-Copperfield who simultaneously provides a second vantage onto our hero, while also stressing the latter's virtues by dint of comparison.

As with *A Christmas Carol,* and echoing the oblique analogy between Dickens's methods and bureaucratisation implied in 3.1., the office and bureaucratic structures are simultaneously representative of themes underlying *David Copperfield,* but they are also distinct from its overarching structural and ideological character. Bearing in mind Dickens's privileged conception of *literary* representation, the office's distinct character arises from the fact that its representative power in the novel is held to be debased: the symbolic function of bureaucratic knowledge is suggested to be, in Platonic terms, at a remove from reality (indeed, if Copperfield is a stand-in for Dickens, then Heep, as a sub-Copperfield, 'stands at third remove from reality').[612] This antipathy to bureaucratic knowledge in part stems from the ideological privileging of 'entrepreneurial' values over the 'professional', as explored above – but the fact that the office is *at all* capable of representativeness, however warped, also suggests that Dickens does not, and cannot, dismiss bureaucracy out of hand. If the irony of Doctors' Commons is that, however removed from society it may seem, it exerts real,

[609] Young, p. 61.
[610] Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 765.
[611] Titolo, p. 190.
[612] Plato, *Republic,* tr. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 363.

largely harmful, power over this society, then Dickens's conception of bureaucracy is not that of a satirical microcosm, but rather something more complex, as we will see in the following section.

3.4. *Bleak House* (1853)

The Doctors' Commons episode in *David Copperfield* signals a common theme that underlies Dickens's mid-career novels: alongside the usual interpersonal network of strangers, benefactors, and malefactors, these novels also depict an 'institutional level' of society in substantial detail, a preoccupation that subsides when Dickens eventually turns to the more abstract problems of class ideology in *Great Expectations* (1861). Although, as D. A. Miller writes, Dickens always made use of 'carceral institutions' as a counterpoint to 'liberal society and the family' in his works, and, as David Parker writes, he often constructed legal establishments as potentially 'sanctuary'-like spaces, the institutional preoccupation of the mid-period novels serves to satirise Britain's diverse bureaucracies.[613]

In this respect, Dickens is a product of his time: Thomas Carlyle's 1850 'latter-day pamphlets' are replete with attacks on 'our "redtape" [sic] establishments', each a 'jungle of redtape [sic], inhabited by doleful creatures, deaf or nearly so to human reason or entreaty'; the Birmingham lawyer and political theorist, Joshua Toulmin Smith launched the 'Anti-Centralization Union' in 1854 which aimed 'to oppose Bureaucracy as a Government system'; and (ironically after losing his job at the recently abolished East India Company) John Stuart Mill fretted over the permanent character of bureaucratic rule in *On Liberty* (1859), while, in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), he attacks the 'bureaucracy-ridden nations of the Continent, who would rather pay higher taxes, than diminish by the smallest fraction their individual chances of a place for themselves or their relatives'.[614] These criticisms are contemporaneous with Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856), which blames an ongoing process of state formation between the two regimes on the latter's descent into tyranny, as well as echoing the French *Doctrinaires* of the 1820s and '30s; and such episodes of

[613] D. A. Miller, 'Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and *Bleak House',* from *Bleak House – Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 87-127 (p. 88); David Parker, 'Dickens, the Inns of Court, and the Inns of Chancery', *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, 8:1 (March 2010) <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/march2010/parker.html> [Accessed 29/1/2020].

[614] Thomas Carlyle, 'Downing Street', from *Selected Writings*, pp. 264-271 (p. 264); Joshua Toulmin Smith, *Government and its Measures* (London: 1857), p. 2 – on Toulmin Smith see also Martin Krygier, 'State and Bureaucracy in Europe: the growth of a concept', in *Bureaucracy: Career of a Concept*, pp. 1-33 (p. 27); John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty,* from *On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays,* ed. Mark Philp and Frederick Rosen (Oxford University Press: 2015), pp. 5-115, (p. 108), and *Considerations on Representative Government,* from *On Liberty…* pp. 181-388 (p. 234).

vocal resistance, James Beniger argues in *The Control Revolution* (1986), are indicative of waves of bureaucratisation in modern societies.[615]

While Dickens falls into this trend, as we saw in *David Copperfield* this Janus-faced moment of bureaucratisation means that his institutions are often portrayed as motley or even antique as much as they may be pervasive, or harmful: it is less the tenor of Dickens's focus on these structures that is notable than the fact that they are portrayed at all.[616] In *Dombey and Son* (1848), Dickens takes care to distinguish the eponymous firm against its homonymous father-son relationship (unlike Mr. Dombey himself) – and the firm, alongside the Royal Exchange, the Bank of England, and 'the rich East India House', is in turn framed as a constituent of the City of London, a world of proto-corporate interest where Hobbesian individualism is agglomerated into the City's tutelary giants, 'Gog and Magog'.[617] Similarly, in *Little Dorrit* (1857) a civil service that resembles those of Ymbert and Balzac appears in the form of the 'Circumlocution Office', famously described as demonstrating in the 'Science of Government' the art of 'HOW NOT TO DO IT'.[618] Unlike Balzac's ministry – and like Doctors' Commons – the 'Circumlocution Office' is not a bubble: the keys to Dickens's various protagonists' salvation are lost in the ministry's 'bushel of minutes' or in one of its 'sacks of official memoranda'.[619] In the unevenly modernising Dickensian world, the imperious abstractions 'Treasury', 'Admiralty', 'City', and 'Bar' happily conspire at the same table as the feudal hangovers, 'Bishop' and 'Horse Guards'.[620] Moreover, Dickens's institutional perspective does not foreclose his portrayal of the clerical 'types' that constitute such structures, who also recur in these same novels: Uriah Heep's role in *David Copperfield,* that of a clerk who lies between incorrigible social climber and dangerous Jacobean-style malcontent, shifts from the Machiavellian James Carker, and his tragic brother John, in *Dombey,* and the sinisterly deferent Flintwinch in *Little Dorrit.*

It is in *Bleak House,* however, that these portrayals of bureaucracy, its staff, and its long-suffering 'subjects' are at their most interwoven and chaotic – not only within the world of the novel, but also relating directly to its form. Dickens devotes much of *Bleak House* to satirising the court of Chancery and the network of lawyers that fringes it – and the semi-public and -private character of

[615] Beniger, p. 14. For an account of anti-bureaucratic sentiment from this period heightened by the perceived rigidity of bureaucratic structures in the management of the Crimean War, see Sukanya Banerjee, 'Writing Bureaucracy, Bureaucratic Writing: Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit,* and Mid-Victorian Liberalism', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 75:2 (September, 2020), pp. 133–158 (p. 138).
[616] Banerjee stresses this ambivalence toward, yet focus on, bureaucratic structures in Dickens's mid-century works, writing that Dickens's frames the 'Circumlocution Office [as] an example of a failed bureaucracy because it is profoundly unbureaucratic.' Banerjee, 'Writing Bureaucracy, Bureaucratic Writing', p. 152.
[617] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son,* ed. Alan Horsman (Oxford University Press: 2008), p. 36.
[618] Dickens, *Little Dorrit,* p. 119.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Ibid.*,* p. 267.

the law allows Dickens to portray a grand institution blurring into a heterogeneous mass of competing or vested interests and back. Dickens acknowledges this tension between the structural and the personal in the novel, exemplified in a minor claimant's frustration that 'I am told, on all hands, it's the system. I mustn't look to individuals. It's the system.'[621] And in keeping with this oscillation between unification and fragmentation, between state and civil society, Dickens portrays a wide tranche of the Victorian social world in the novel, from the aristocratic Dedlock family to Jo, the smallpox-ridden crossing sweeper, and asks us 'what connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!'[622] The answer is that these disparate figures are directly or indirectly united by the long-running Chancery case of 'Jarndyce and Jarndyce' – as well as by a series of improbable familial ties and coincidences.

It is insofar as the progress of the Jarndyce trial tentatively provides structural or institutional means of circumventing the 'crisis of the knowable community', alongside Dickens's usual closing net of personal ties, that the novel's sociological and satirical ambitions seem to be at odds with one another. The degree to which the coherence of the novel's social world is apparently overdetermined, by both impersonal and explicitly personal factors, is mirrored in its strange use of dual narration: its action interchangeably being recounted both by a disembodied narrator and from the point of view of the novel's heroine, Esther Summerson – ward of the last remaining Jarndyce, illegitimate daughter of Lady Honoria Dedlock, and earnest benefactor to the novel's various waifs and strays. Following the spontaneous combustion of Krook, the rag merchant, the resolution to the case is discovered amongst Krook's effects: via *deus ex machina*, therefore, Dickens manages to close the novel's loop between seemingly contradictory impersonal and personal social ties. Meanwhile, in this darkest of Dickens's 'dark novels', the role of incorrigible climber gains a lighter aspect in the form of Summerson's would-be suitor, the clerk, William Guppy.[623]

The spirit of contradiction marks the novel from its opening pages: with the extended device of 'fog everywhere', from Lincoln's Inn down into the 'Essex marshes' and up to the 'Kentish heights'.[624] Dickens's motif of the fog already distinguishes *Bleak House* from the 'carceral' themes of his early works, and from the knots of vested interests in the narrative webs of *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield,* and which will recur in *Little Dorrit*. In its all-pervasiveness, the fog is a vehicle for

[621] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Mandarin, 1991), p. 225.
[622] Ibid., p. 230.
[623] Philip Collins, 'Some Narrative Devices in "Bleak House"', *Dickens Studies Annual,* 19 (1990), pp. 125-146 (p. 131).
[624] Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 1.

the narrator's expository voice, but it also symbolises the nature of Chancery's power: D. A. Miller writes that

> the matter with being 'in Chancery' is not that there may be no way out of it (a dilemma belonging to the problematic of the carceral), but, more seriously, that the binarisms of inside/outside, here/elsewhere become meaningless and the ideological effects they ground impossible.[625]

But the fog's ambiguous sense of spatiality reflects also an ambiguous *epistemic* character: not only does 'the groping and floundering condition' of someone in the fog evoke the confusion of someone 'in Chancery', as Dickens suggests, but so too does the fog as paradoxical expositional device reflect the novel's conception of bureaucratic knowledge.[626] The fog device models a specific form of epistemic power: connecting the locations of Dickens's hereafter fragmented world, while also obscuring this world from its inhabitants, the fog monopolises worldly knowledge for 'itself'. Similarly, in Chancery, social knowledge is strung out across an amorphous body of 'bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, [and] mountains of costly nonsense' – and the more such knowledge is invested in mismanaged, corrupted, ever-proliferating, and quasi-fungible documentation, the less its custodians, producers, and subjects appear to know.[627] That is, where the ministry's insiders operated within a rarefied language and worldview in Ymbert's *Mœurs administratives*, *Bleak House*'s all-pervading glut of data, like fog, escapes the grasp even of its creators: the substance of Jarndyce and Jarndyce is 'so complicated [that] no man alive knows what it means'.[628] In this regard can Dickens arrive at the improbable position of simultaneously satirising Chancery's various agents as inept or even corrupt while also suggesting that the power of Chancery, as an institution consisting of abstract processes, instantiated in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, exhibits a quasi-autonomous all-pervasion.

Balzac writes that, with bureaucracy, 'everything [takes] literary form', but where the ministry in *Les Employés* simply obtrudes upon a conventional narrative, and where the smaller offices appearing in the other works covered in this chapter figure as self-contained – even 'carceral' – nodes in often larger-scale narratives, in *Bleak House,* the fog's symbolic function as both narrative pneuma and bureaucratic miasma suggests that the narrative and Chancery's power are of similar substance, despite the latter also figuring as the object of the former's ire. The world of the novel must naturally be conceived of as existing in literary form, but the fact that this diegesis is *internally* dominated by a pervasive field of elusive textual knowledge suggests a degree of parity, if not contiguity, between

[625] D. A. Miller, p. 90.
[626] Dickens, *Bleak House, p.* 2.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Ibid.*,* p. 4.

narrative and diegesis. Indeed, Dickens stresses the textual character of his world: Jo the crossing sweeper, who 'don't know nothink', '[shuffles] through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes, and in utter darkness as to the meaning of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of the streets, and on the doors, and in the windows'.[629] Jo drifts through a fog of ciphers just as the Chancery lawyers fumble through documentation, and, by reflecting their professional illiteracy in illiteracy *tout court*, Dickens renders the textual ontology of the novel and the bureaucratic information that underlies its characters' existence continuous.

The 'reality' of the novel's world and bureaucracy are also closely intertwined in Krook, the rag merchant. Krook '[personifies] the Chancellor and Chancery from the first' and, as if parodying Chancery's chaos, his shop consists of 'heaps of old crackled parchment scrolls, and discoloured and dog's-eared law-papers'.[630] However, this sense of mere facsimile is upended: rather than just a shabby likeness of the legal establishment, Krook's shop contains Jarndyce and Jarndyce's key missing document, a fact of which, despite Krook's illiteracy, he is graspingly aware. Krook, as both Chancery stand-in and illiterate outsider, as custodian of the 'truth', yet unable to know the precise substance and nature of this truth, like the fog thus serves to effect a breakdown in binaries between bureaucratic knowledge and the novel's diegesis. Krook's tenant, Miss Flite, exaggerates this motif: equating Jarndyce and Jarndyce with all Creation, she conflates the Day of Judgement with the end of the case after '[discovering] that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelations is the Great Seal [of the court]' – as if even Biblical hermeneutics are subordinated to Chancery's pervasive totality.[631]

The apparent epistemic primacy of unreadable or inaccessible bureaucratic knowledge in the novel means its characters presumably must exist in varying degrees of alienation from a reality toward which they failingly strive – indeed, Paul A. Kran writes that '*Bleak House* consistently portrays human existence on earth as a fallen one'.[632] Through this reading, *Bleak House* provides an almost Schopenhauerian vision, but one in which it is not a bodily, gratification-seeking 'Will' that underlies a phenomenal world, but rather the ever-dissipating proliferation of *wills*, codicils, and other such Chancery-related documentation that both constitute true reality and perpetuate the ever-increasing alienation of those that inhabit it.[633] However, this entropic state of affairs is in part related to the

[629] Ibid., pp. 231-232.
[630] D. A. Miller, p. 90; Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 52 – 'they call me Lord Chancellor, and call my shop Chancery'; Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 52.
[631] Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 33.
[632] Paul A. Kran, 'Signification and Rhetoric in "Bleak House"', *Dickens Studies Annual,* 26 (1998), pp. 147-167 (p. 156.)
[633] Cf. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*: 'As we know, the world as *will* is the first world (*ordine prior*), and the world as *representation,* the second (*ordine posterior*). The former is the world of craving and therefore of pain and a thousand different woes.' From, *The Essential Schopenhauer,* ed. Wolfgang Schirmacher (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), p. 104.

'character' of Dickens's first, disembodied narrator, whose vision is largely pessimistic: J. Hillis Miller writes that it envisages a 'general return to the primal slime, a return to chaos which is going on everywhere in the novel and is already nearing its final end when the novel begins.'[634] Philip Collins takes care to distinguish the narrator from Dickens himself, and he also stresses that it is 'far from omniscient' – as does Doris Stringham Delespinasse who writes that the narrator is 'not totally omniscient in that he [sic] knows nothing of the thoughts or feelings of any of the characters; he can move anywhere in space but has only a surface view of events'.[635] Delespinasse moreover attributes a 'mechanical intellect' to the disembodied narrator, it is 'a collection of transcendent ideas and views rather than a human being' – and she even associates this perspective generically with Frye's 'anatomy'.[636] In such a regard, the suggested continuity between the hidden or unreadable data of Jarndyce and Jarndyce and, by virtue of its similarly textual character, the narrative itself, is in part a feature of the pessimism of this first narrator: indeed, the specific non-omniscience of the narrator's knowledge, alongside the abstract nature of its persona, stress the profaned character of the ostensible totality it describes. Although the abstract narrator can connect the aristocratic Dedlocks at Chesney Wold to poor Jo in his slum, 'Tom All Alone's', it does so with what has been called an 'impersonal' or 'uninvolved' degree of ironic detachment, there is little of the imaginative empathy that Sabey argues underpinned Dickens's conception of moral and social ties.[637] Therefore, just as Scrooge's economism provided an atomised vision of society, *Bleak House*'s abstract narrator provides an imagined view of society from the vantage of its bureaucratic networks: this is not a 'knowable community' but one alienated from the very fact of its coherence.

If Balzac almost seems to frame the 'anatomical' features of *Les Employés* as immanent qualities of the office environment he portrays – the novel poses as a realist portrayal of a world constructed along 'Menippean' lines – the first narrator of *Bleak House* can be seen to elaborate upon, and complicate, this device. Where Balzac's narrator is 'looking in' on the self-contained world of *les bureaux*, *Bleak House*'s first narrator operates 'from within' the imagined bureaucratic system – as if, in order to satirise Chancery, it must emulate its reductive and alienating worldview: it has 'the form of that of which it speaks'.[638] This envelopment of Dickens's satirical voice serves to accentuate the sense that, unlike the isolated *bureaux*, the Court of Chancery is a metastasising force: it has 'decaying

[634] J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens – The World of His Novels* (Harvard University Press: 1959), p. 195.
[635] Collins, pp. 130-131; Doris Stringham Delespinasse, 'The Significance of the Dual Point of View in *Bleak House*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction,* 23:3 (Dec. 1968), pp. 253-264 (p. 256).
[636] Delespinasse, p. 256, p. 254.
[637] Delespinasse, p. 256 quoting Lionel Stephenson, *The English Novel: A Panorama* (Boston, 1960), p. 301; Delespinasse, p. 262.
[638] Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (1967), *Writing and Difference,* tr. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 361-370 (p. 362).

houses and […] blighted lands in every shire', 'a worn-out lunatic in every madhouse', it 'exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope' and 'overthrows the brain and breaks the heart.'[639] That is, whatever the contingency of it and the narrator's shared perspective, Chancery must be understood to exert real power: not only Flite and Krook, but also the young ward, Richard Carstone, are consumed by it – like the narrator they cannot see beyond its 'event horizon'. By stressing the narrator's *non*-omniscience, we see that Chancery is therefore that rare paradox, like Swift's Laputa or Borges's cartographers, it is a conquering microcosm.

This unusual status is made apparent by virtue of Dickens's *second* narrator, Summerson, who not only actively ignores Jarndyce and Jarndyce, but who is 'the only major character who consistently tries to control the tendency to evil and chaos by help fully involving herself with others'.[640] Where the first narrator is cynically impersonal, Summerson is to be characterised by constant sympathy: as in *A Christmas Carol,* two worldviews are therefore being pitched against one another, with the ethical imagination no longer hypostasised into a spiritual realm, but resituated in its rightful place within a human consciousness. Because of Summerson's counter-perspective, the first narrator cannot be the world-weary voice of a Schopenhauerian demiurge, rather it is the reification of an institutional ideology – a worldview that, in Žižekian fashion, it maintains in bad faith.[641]

Dickens's use of two narrators suggests a complex diegetic ontology, therefore: although both disembodied narrator and Summerson are hostile to Chancery's processes, they represent vying ideologies insofar as the former operates from *within* the alienated perspective of bureaucracy (so conceived in the novel) while the latter lives by an ethic of sociability. Moreover, this is not some kind of Manichean solipsism: Dickens is keen to stress that the world of *Bleak House,* and the battle between reified legalism and humane sociability, exists independently of its narrators' perspectives. The degree to which these two vying systems can collide or coincide is suggested in the subplot involving a legal suit between neighbours Sir Leicester Dedlock and the otherwise convivial landowner, Lawrence Boythorn. Indeed, the excessive weight Dickens's first narrator gives to the power of Chancery and the Jarndyce trial would almost serve to obscure the riddle of social and pecuniary struggles that go on beneath it, were it not for the class-status subplot surrounding Lady Dedlock, being 'wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool' to be easily subsumed into the main narrative (deliberately so, it transpires).[642] The two narrators are as much spectators of a broader

[639] Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 3.
[640] Delespinasse, p. 264.
[641] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 45 – 'The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.'
[642] Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 8.

ideological struggle in British society, one characterised by callously impersonal (and inefficient) mediation, the other by a more communitarian spirit, as much as they themselves exemplify these ideologies' 'ideal types'. Even so, in the name of narrative coherence, Summerson and the narrator as literary devices complement one another so that 'the novel-reader' (if not Dickens's characters) can be 'confident that he/she is not being presented with a random collection of documents, [and] quickly [cotton] on to the connections between the two narratives' – diegetic fractiousness is mitigated in the name of narrative coherence.[643]

Dickens's novel is a baroque construction – indeed, Miller argues, its final chapters' transition from Chancery's entropic totalism into a more localised detective story surrounding Mr Bucket is necessary for any kind of closure to be possible.[644] But where the police inspector, Bucket resolves the narrative, the 'amateur detectives' that precede him are 'punished' – including the clerk, William Guppy, if minorly so.[645] Just as Uriah Heep plays up the ambiguously sociable and functional character of his labour to improve his status, Guppy combines his functional skills as a clerk with his status, 'the chivalry of clerkship', to attempt to marry Summerson (despite being repeatedly rebuffed).[646] It is because Guppy, as a legal middleman, is relatively free to move between the high aristocratic world of the Dedlocks, Summerson's social circle, Chancery, and the underworld of Krook and Flite, that he recognises Summerson's social pedigree, and can attempt to win her approval by proving her aristocratic parentage. Like the abstract narrator, Guppy's legal role permits him fog-like omnipresence and some privileged knowledge, but, where the incorporeal narrator dissolves into pessimism, Guppy is sustained by a sexual drive – Guppy is one of the few characters to appear in both narratives, and here we see that he also unites them.[647]

Or, rather, he is squeezed between them – where the abstract narrator ironically alludes to clerkly chivalry, Summerson's accounts of Guppy are, through her benevolence, reliably 'typical': when he first proposes to her he has 'an entirely new suit of glossy clothes on, a shining hat, lilac-kid gloves, a neckerchief of a variety of colours, a large hot-house flower in his button-hole, and a thick gold ring on his little finger. Besides which, he quite scented the dining-room with bear's grease and other perfumery.'[648] Complementing Heep's disingenuous humility, Guppy reflects the counterproductively 'excessive' character of lower middle-classness in Victorian fiction.[649] Guppy simultaneously personifies the interlocking spheres of bureaucracy, status, and interpersonal feeling

[643] Collins, p. 139.
[644] D. A. Miller, p. 99.
[645] D. A. Miller, p. 96.
[646] Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 281.
[647] Collins, p. 138.
[648] Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 127.
[649] Young, p. 72.

that govern the novel – but in each case in a comically petty form. As the diegetically 'anatomical' character of the law is dissolved in the narratively 'physiological' type of the clerk, *Bleak House*'s tragedy appears as farce.

Bleak House is an exemplary bureaucratic novel insofar as it amalgamates both comic and polemic attitudes to the office: echoing Balzac's 'gigantic power put into motion by dwarfs', Chancery's bad infinity is paradoxically divisible into all-too finite comic 'types'. More broadly, the novel is exemplary in the degree to which Dickens agglomerates themes that pertain both to the abstract, ideological character of bureaucracy and to its physical presence, its documents, its human agents (and 'victims') – a process by which the 'paradox of the heap'-like nature of bureaucracy as a social category and phenomenon becomes apparent. Beyond its comically or sinisterly incompetent agents, Dickens's portrayal of Chancery is characterised by autonomy and indeterminacy – as suggested by the fog motif, it 'threatens to produce an organisation of power that, ceasing entirely to be a *topic,* has become topography itself: a system of control that can be all-encompassing because it cannot be compassed in turn' – and this principle, as we have seen, extends from the internal world of the novel to the manner of its portrayal.[650]

The office in this chapter has appeared as 'at once open and closed', but where Balzac more often leans toward its closed, zoo-like character, and where Dickens too focuses more regularly upon 'carceral' institutions, in *Bleak House* he invests his efforts into exploring the ramifications of the office's 'openness'. In contrast to the often disciplinary character of these other works, Chancery's fantastical portrayal unwittingly evokes the social formation of 'limitless *postponements*' and 'free-floating control' that Gilles Deleuze anticipates in his *Postscript on the Societies of Control* (1990).[651] Of course, such eternal 'presentism' must, in the case of a novel, collide against resolution – and Chancery's indeterminacy collapses against the ultimately determinate requirements of narrative, represented in the novel by what is revealed to be an improbably interconnected social world. It is less that Dickens was anticipating Deleuze's analysis of postmodernity, than, as he writes in the preface, he 'purposely dwelt on the romantic side of familiar things': in *Bleak House,* he constructs a fantasy that might later realise itself.[652]

[650] D. A. Miller, p. 89.
[651] Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', tr. Martin Joughin, *October,* Vol. 59 (Winter, 1992), pp. 3-7.
[652] Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. xxii.

4. Conclusion

As I stated in the introduction, this chapter at once represents a point of consolidation and a sea-change in my history of nineteenth-century office literature. A point of consolidation inasmuch as my analyses in this chapter often initially revolved around how Balzac and Dickens redeployed the pre-existing tropes of office literature, developed between the works of the last two chapters, and thereby effected their convergence within the novel form. A sea-change firstly because this reconstitution of hitherto disparate literary tropes into single works demanded an exploration of these tropes' new relationships with one another, and, secondly, because the more plot-focussed character of the novel as a form necessitated an investigation into how already established facets of office literature were repurposed or transformed to meet these narrative demands – and indeed, into how Balzac and Dickens also employed *new* literary devices derived from conceptions of the office and bureaucratic structures, often in conjunction with the heightened narrativity of their works.

The *simultaneity* of continuity and change in this chapter owes itself to the relative heteromorphism of the novels covered, as well as to the comparably protean character of bureaucratic structures during this same period. These factors meant that any potential sense of mutual contradiction between the various strands of office literature wound together in these works proved largely inconsequential – like Lamb's South Sea House, these capacious novels, and novel sequences, could happily accommodate office literature's 'separate habits and oddities.'[653] Equally, however, this degree of breathing room for the various elements of office literature does not mean that their redeployment left them unchanged: between supernatural works, *Bildungsromane,* and social satires, Dickens and Balzac developed sophisticated and diverse methods of applying aspects of office life (or their cultural perception) to a range of narrative ends. They *metabolised* the tradition, rather than simply engorge it.

Office literature and bureaucracy alike can therefore be typified by an uneven and heteromorphic process of growth during this early to mid-century period. Balzac and Dickens's novels together equally stress that bureaucratic staff, tasks, and workplaces permeated finance, commerce, the law, government – and exhibited a strong presence in public life more generally; but, equally, while they do not discuss the office in primarily economic, or political terms, like at the beginning of the century, but rather recognise it as a (semi-)autonomous sphere, these social phenomena do not quite inhabit the classically Weberian, standardised, form. Offices in these works often exhibit features associated at once with corporate structures originating in Middle Ages or the Early Modern period, with the competitive individualism of the mid-nineteenth century, while also exhibiting

[653] Lamb, 'The South-Sea House', *Essays of Elia,* p. 4.

aspects of the quasi-objective rational proceduralism that would become widespread in the following decades. It is thanks to the many-sidedness and heteromorphism of these structures that Dickens and Balzac could employ them to such diverse ends, even within a single work, translating the experience of office work into a brain-deadening captivity while also framing its abstract aspects in world-spanning supernatural terms, or pitching the ideological or historical character of these structures against that of these structures' agents, or even, as in *Les Employés* or *Bleak House*, cultivating an interplay between the reductive perspective of these structures and the motley world from which they emerge.

Les Employés and *Bleak House* in particular are at once unique products of this period and harbingers of the issues that underlie office literature in later years. They are of their time because, as bureaucratisation entered a new phase of standardisation and expansion after this period, office literature changed accordingly. The transition from Dickens's expansive, rambling narratives to the more career-delineated plot of Trollope's *The Three Clerks* (1858) is suggestive of the beginnings of this change; as does Balzac's metatextual interpenetration of office and office literature, and of tragic and satirical devices, hereafter ramify into the more stable schemas of farce *or* immiseration, reflected respectively in Émile Gaboriau's office-hopping picaresque, *Les Gens de Bureau* (1862), and in Zola's squalid tale of clerk-murder, *Thérèse Raquin* (1868).

In this same regard, therefore, as well as metabolising the tradition of office literature as it had so far been established, it is within *Les Employés* and *Bleak House* that new issues underlying office literature could congeal. In their portrayal of bureaucratic structures, these novels can generically be considered realism only in the loosest sense of such a term – one rooted in the irony that an ambitiously and self-consciously mimetic literature that strives to recreate the whole world, must eventually broach upon the anti-mimetic traditions and institutions in our society, those in which practices and relationships are seemingly predicated on intellectual forms which mask their origins in history or in earthly life. While the crystallisation of bureaucratic structures and increasing articulation of their constituent elements meant that the ambitious universalism of Balzac and Dickens was succeeded by the in-depth focus on narrow features of a vastly expanded and therefore unportrayable bureaucratic structure, so too was an intensified social realist focus on the minutiae of the clerk's life in subsequent literature countervailed upon by the heightened attention to those abstract or symbolic structures integral to office life that this focus inevitably (but often inadvertently) demands.

Chapter Four – Divergences: Aesthetic Reconfigurations in Later Office Narratives

1. Introduction

The last quarter of the nineteenth century, the period covered by the present chapter, is marked by a series of consolidating developments in modern bureaucracy. The invention and pervasion of new office technology, further institutional standardisation, and the expansion and relative feminisation of office workforces all brought this structure to a state approaching that in which it would ultimately be defined by Weber. Equally, where many institutions consolidated by way of standardisation, others obtained a similarly 'established' character inasmuch as the extent of their ossification apparently escaped all efforts at reform. These historical developments – detailed over Section 1.1. below – are complemented by corresponding developments in the literary portrayal of the office, which I explore in Section 1.2.

More markedly than in previous chapters does the material character of bureaucratisation during this period inform developments in both the form and content of 'office literature'. Just as the expansion and modernisation of administrative infrastructures entailed both greater structural complexity, but also uniformity, so too do individual portrayals of office life from this period appear more particularistic in subject-matter than those preceding, while these texts' *conceptualisation* of bureaucracy is of a sphere that is more coherent and autonomous than the various interpretations suggested between the texts covered in prior chapters.[654] Where prior authors' primary concerns appear to have been exploring *what* an emergent bureaucracy, office work, and clerks were, and *how* they could be presented to readers; for the authors of these later decades, living in more bureaucratised societies, and building upon a well-established tradition in the portrayal of office phenomena, such categorical and presentational issues appear all-too evident. Equally, however, and evoking aesthetic developments in literature more broadly during this period, the authors I cover in this chapter shift their focus more overtly to exploring *what* it is *like* being a clerk, and *how* bureaucracy might actively *resonate with*, or *inform*, developments in literary form. Of course, many of the 'family resemblances' of office literature still persist into this new generation – but it is because the manner in which these tropes are deployed and interact appears to undergo a rearrangement in light of historical changes, that this period marks a new stage in the history of the genre.

[654] C. A. Bayly characterises this paradox of nineteenth-century modernisation more generally as 'a worldwide shift to political and cultural uniformity accompanied by the emergence of more complex and recognizably modern social patterns.' Bayly, p. 27.

1.1. Changes in the office

1.1.1. Automation and standardisation

Historians of bureaucracy regard the office as having been at a 'low level' of development in the period so far considered.[655] Although the physical articles and tools of office work – pens, ink, stationery – and their production changed and were improved throughout the mid-nineteenth century, the 'highly skilled' work itself still almost resembled a handicraft.[656] While the previous three chapters have certainly dealt with 'soft' technological development, such as data management and presentation (Headrick's 'information revolution') or institutional organisation (beginning with 'The South-Sea House') – the usual joke in nineteenth-century literature is that bureaucracies *fail* to develop organisationally or to adopt new intellectual models either because of institutional complacency (as with *David Copperfield*'s Doctors' Commons) or the staff's own spirit of self-preservation (as with the ministry in *Les Employés*). Indeed, the 'slight and intimate' character of the division of labour in the old-fashioned office is sometimes even framed as one of its strengths (*Un début dans la vie*).[657]

This relatively slow or intangible character of bureaucratic development changes in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Sociologist, James Beniger describes these changes as an outcome of the Industrial Revolution, arguing that unfettered mass production and an expanding world economy, by the mid-nineteenth century, spelled economic inefficiency and volatility.[658] This 'crisis of control' over an accelerating industrial economic apparatus was correspondingly mitigated by new means of gathering, recording, communicating, and storing information – by more extensive institutional standardisation and amalgamation, and a change in bureaucratic practices via the development of new technology. Marxist economist, Harry Braverman, similarly argues that this same process represents the capitalist subsumption of hitherto autarkic labour and recruitment processes, as well as that of scientific and technical innovation.[659] Whatever the impetus, by the end of the

[655] Gregory Anderson, 'The white-blouse revolution', from *The white-blouse revolution: Female office workers since 1870,* ed. Anderson (Manchester University Press: 1988), pp. 1-27 (p. 3).
[656] Anderson, 'The white-blouse revolution', p. 3; on early technological developments see Beniger, p. 282. For an illustration of the character of this early change, see Marx: 'The first steel pens were supplied by the handicraft system, in the year 1820, at £7 4s. the gross; in 1830 they were supplied by manufacture at 8s., and today [c.1867] the factory system supplies them at a wholesale price of from 2d. to 6d. the gross.' Marx, *Capital*, *Volume I*, p. 590.
[657] Lockwood, p. 19.
[658] Beniger, p. 278.
[659] Braverman, p. 44 – 'While the attempt to purchase finished labor, instead of assuming direct control over labor power, relieved the capitalist of the uncertainties of the latter system by fixing a definite unit cost, at the same time it placed beyond the reach of the capitalist much of the potential of human labor that may be made available by fixed hours, systematic control, and the reorganization of the labor process. This function, capitalist management soon seized upon with an avidity that was to make up for its earlier timidity'; Braverman, p. 108.

century, in historian, Delphine Gardey's words, we see the widespread emergence of the 'technical and cognitive infrastructures, [upon which] so-called "information societies" are based.'[660]

The most radical developments in the physical tools of office work are the proliferation of telegraphy in the 1860s, the development and introduction of the typewriter over the 1860s and '70s, and the invention of the telephone in 1876.[661] Developments in what Gardey refers to as the more intangible 'cognitive infrastructures', meanwhile, amount to, as Lockwood writes, 'the concentration and rationalization of office work and staffs' resulting from 'industrial concentration and amalgamation' in the private sector, and, in the public, reflecting 'the vastly enhanced functions of government in an industrial *milieu*'.[662] In organisational terms, this meant 'specialisation in the internal division of labour [to match] similar developments in the wider economy', as well as 'departmentalisation'.[663] Altogether this became an autocatalytic, accelerating process: structural and technological changes brought up 'new types of data', which demanded yet more clerks and produced yet more types of office work.[664] By the beginning of the twentieth century, bureaucracies were often larger, more complex, and also more uniform.

1.1.2. Massification and feminisation

The standardisation of office work reflects a change to which many manual workers had already succumbed: moving from an (almost) picturesque, workshop-like environment, with its implication of intimacy and vaguely artisanal skill, to a massified, standardised workplace in which 'the skill of the worker […] passes over to the machine' – or, at least, over to increasingly prescriptive, rationalised work practices that are detached from the skills and knowhow of the clerk themselves.[665] Although automation and systematisation diversified office work on a large scale, on a local level these changes necessarily put paid to the potential idiosyncrasies and *ad hoc* collaboration that preceded it, and that we have seen represented in previous chapters.[666] Automation therefore threatened the once relatively secure (if put-upon) position of a longstanding employee: a figure who was accustomed to, and embodied, the practices of a particular office, and maintained an intimate, journeyman-and

[660] Gardey, p. 13 - 'sur quelles infrastructures techniques et cognitives reposent les sociétés dit de l'information'.
[661] Saval, p. 36, p. 41.
[662] Lockwood, p. 36
[663] Anderson, 'The white-blouse revolution', p. 5.
[664] Lockwood, p. 36; Anderson, 'The white-blouse revolution', p. 5 – 'office workers at the turn of the century faced a rising tide of information and documentation.'
[665] Marx, *Capital*, *Volume I*, p. 545.
[666] Ibid., p. 547.

master-style relationship with their employer – but it also enabled clerks to enter new working environments more readily.[667]

This freedom of movement between relatively deskilled jobs was complemented by increased competition: between a new, more literate, generation of would-be clerks, well-educated foreign immigrants, and, increasingly, women (who, between 1851 and 1901, leapt from constituting 0.1% to 13.4% of Britain's ever-expanding clerical workforce).[668] Indeed, both institutional standardisation and expansion, and the growth of the potential clerking population, are reflected in a new trend in education legislation in England (beginning in 1870) and France (1881-82), which both widened and standardised the provision of primary education, replacing the preceding hodgepodge of charitable and religious schools.[669] Equally however, standardisation naturally stymied a haphazard or unconventional rise, such as the kind attempted by Uriah Heep, and in many cases it spelled a reduction in career progression altogether.[670] The fact that female clerks, initially regarded by their male colleagues as competitors, were, by the end of this period, streamed into 'a fairly distinct group within the clerical labour market', is indicative of the extent to which institutional and occupational crystallisation spells hierarchical rigidity – a rigidity here complemented by broader sexual prejudice.[671]

Taken together, these factors indicate a major period of transition in clerical working populations: indeed, while Lockwood writes that the 'hitherto monopolistic position of the blackcoated worker' was broken, Braverman contends that the clerical workers of the late nineteenth

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[667] Lockwood, p. 18; on this process of modernisation and anonymisation more generally, see Marx, *Capital*, *Volume I*, pp. 546-547.

[668] Lockwood, p. 36; Anderson, pp. 52-65; Regarding improving literacy rates: 1820 – France: 38%, UK: 53%. 1870 – France: 69%, UK: 76%. Source: Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, 'Literacy', *Our World In Data* (2018) <https://ourworldindata.org/literacy> [accessed 29/01/2021].
Regarding the double-edged sword of mass literacy: Mann writes – 'At the beginning, literate tasks were not separated from more senior tasks requiring experience; thus promotion from clerical (and sales) to managerial positions in commerce, industry, and civil service was frequent by midcentury [sic] and greater than upward mobility of manual workers […] But with further routinization, *mere literacy became separated from other skills*.' (My emphasis). Mann, p. 560.

[669] Perkin cites late nineteenth-century education legislation in the UK as part of a broader 'decline of Liberal [i.e. *laissez faire*] England', *The Rise of Professional Society*, p. 42. The legislators of the new Third Republic (1870-1940), most famously Jules Ferry, insisted that education 'should be not only compulsory but also free and above all in the hands of laymen', as part of the broader policy of *laïcité* (secularism). J. P. T. Bury, *France, 1814-1940* (6th ed.) (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 126.

[670] The larger scale of firms and bureaucracies allowed for reductions in 'the ratio of managerial to lower office positions', Lockwood, pp. 62-63. Indeed, this reduction in numerical opportunities was aggravated by a general policy of 'blocked promotion opportunities for clerical grades' – management of large firms or government bodies was often recruited externally, from (British) public schools, or (in France), if not from well-established 'administrative families' then from the prestigious *grandes écoles*. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, p. 90; Lockwood, pp. 62-63; Thuillier, *La vie quotidienne,* p. 169 – 'des familles administratives sont parfois solidement implantées', but also, 'le rôle des grandes écoles n'est pas négligeable.'

[671] Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, p. 60; Babbage, p. 184.

century were 'virtually a new stratum' in society – markedly different in social and working terms to the 'almost feudal' retainers that preceded them.[672] Similarly, literary critic, Kate Thomas writes that 'the employment of women [was seen] as both sign and cause of the increased erosion of the status, rights, wages, and masculinity' of the clerk.[673] These interpretations should be qualified by the claims made by historians like Michael Heller that a difference in the *character* of late nineteenth-century clerical work did not spell *immiseration* – rather that the newly 'straitjacketed' experience of the office was counterbalanced by the *general* increase in opportunity it represented, and even, considering the expanded scope of bureaucracy during this period, a relative *demand* for clerks.[674] Indeed, despite the clear profundity of late nineteenth-century bureaucratisation, most of the seminal sociological analyses relating to this period and beyond highlight clerks' apparent ignorance to it, reflected in their mistaken 'class consciousness': their general unwillingness to unionise, or even to acknowledge what one might consider to be their increasingly proletarian character – an assumption also made at the time by those who branded the clerk 'a professional Judas for Capitalism'.[675] While office automation often served to deskill and cheapen clerical labour when it was in increasing demand, there were no clerical 'machine breakers' of the kind associated with periods in the history of the mechanisation of manual work – trade unionism was a limited (albeit growing) movement among clerks, while the more notable evidence of concerted resistance is on the part of those male clerks in Britain who lambasted their female and foreign rivals.[676] Rather, it was sometimes the stereotypically intransigent character of well-established institutions themselves that impeded these changes, of which France's ministerial bureaucracy is an example.

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[672] Lockwood, p. 37; Braverman, pp. 203-204.

[673] Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures – Sex, Scandal, and Victorian Letters* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 105.

[674] Michael Heller, *London Clerical Workers, 1880-1914* (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 2011), p. 8; and Heller, 'Work, income and stability: The late Victorian and Edwardian London male clerk revisited', *Business History,* 50:3 (2008), pp. 253-271.

[675] 1915 *Annual Report* by the President of the National Union of Clerks, cited in Lockwood, p. 12. See Lockwood in particular regarding nineteenth-century clerks' 'class consciousness'. Major twentieth century-related texts include Michel Crozier's *Le monde des employés de bureau* (1965) and Rosemary Crompton and Gareth Stedman Jones' *White-Collar Proletariat: Deskilling and Gender in Clerical Work* (1984). Note that Upton Sinclair coined the term 'white-collar' in 1919's *The Brass Check* as a metonym for clerks' mistaken identification with their employers. Meanwhile, Roger Girod writes that, while office workers are 'not yet conscious proletarians, they are already, however, "proletarioids"' – presumably suggesting that they embody a proletarian 'shape', if not a Lukàcsian proletarian subjectivity. *Études sociologiques sur les couches salariées, ouvriers et employés* (Paris: Marcel Rivières, 1960), p. 38.

[676] Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* – on female and foreign rivals, see pp. 59-65, on unionisation see p. 108. Lockwood frames unionisation among clerks as a (hesitant) process more confined to the 20th century, *The Blackcoated Worker,* pp. 137-198. In France Thuillier writes that the grievances of government *employés* largely manifested themselves in an 'administrative press' (such as *France administrative* mentioned in Chapter Two of the present study), with unionisation gaining predominance in the early 20th century, 'Du Corporatisme au Syndicalisme', *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates en France au XIXe Siècle,* pp. 220-241. For a literary evocation of inter-clerical conflict, see George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) (Oxford University Press: 2008), p. 151.

1.1.3. Ossification and resistance

It is no doubt because bureaucratisation in France was pioneered largely by the state that French office literature is (echoing Tocqueville) similarly 'over-centralised' around the portrayals of the state bureaucracy that began with Ymbert.[677] Despite this disproportionate literary focus, the French civil service was decreasingly representative of what a modern bureaucracy should be: where other French institutions bureaucratised along the lines explored above, the civil service instead serves here as a representative case of an apparent intransigence, or inability, to modernise.[678] Of course, 'modernisation' and 'backwardness' are relative terms: France's civil service was far more classically bureaucratic in character than its British opposite number in the periods covered by previous chapters, and, during the period covered by the present chapter, it could still no doubt have found cognates in some of the more venerable firms of the City of London, or in ossified quarters of Britain's legal system.[679] Equally, the heterogeneous character of bureaucratic institutions suggests that this modernising-ossifying dynamic was potentially uneven: a failure to adopt telegraphy does not also mean a failure to departmentalise, and vice versa. Besides, a tendency toward institutional intransigence is one of modern bureaucracy's typical features: the sense of standardisation and impassivity that Weber evokes when he outlines the 'permanent character of the bureaucratic machine' can equally be interpreted as a voyage from 'routinisation' into 'rigidity, so that bureaucratic actors cannot or will not respond to exceptions or a new context.'[680] With all of these caveats in mind, it is because French literature of this period focusses so heavily on bureaucratic underdevelopment, and because historians of France and its bureaucracy have similarly latched onto this sense of institutional stagnation, that *l'Administration* serves here as the foremost example of bureaucratic intransigence in this period – a claim that leaves open the counter-argument that it is the *literature* itself that failed to adapt in its portrayal of France's bureaucracy, to be explored in Section 1.2.

In institutional terms, Clive Church writes that France 'paid a price for being a pioneer': its bureaucracy was established on the technological and conceptual terms of the 1790s and further

[677] Gardey, p. 50.
[678] I.e. banking and the law (which have both appeared in texts explored in previous chapters) and indeed office work in heavy industry (as explored by Gardey in *La dactylographe et l'expéditionnaire*).
[679] Writing from the British context, Nicola Bishop frames the uneven development of bureaucracy during this period as a dilemma for aspirant clerks: 'At the turn of the twentieth century, clerks who worked in the grand new office buildings were subsumed into their collective bureaucratic function, while those in old warehouses and cellar offices were at risk of ill-health'. Bishop, 'Middlebrow "Everyman" or Modernist Figurehead? Experiencing Modernity through the Eyes of the Humble Clerk', *Middlebrow and Gender, 1890-1945,* ed. Christoph Ehland, and Cornelia Wächter (Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2016), pp. 101-120 (p. 111)
[680] Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 228; DeGregori and Thompson, p. 96.

modernisation was therefore structurally and politically difficult.[681] Although various coups and popular revolutions rocked French politics over the century, 'no government, and no regime, was willing to rationalize and professionalize the bureaucracy, which […] was far less well organized by the mid-nineteenth century than that of Germany or Britain', and this was because 'the only way to keep it under ministerial control seemed to be to continue with arbitrary appointment, favouritism and occasional wholesale purges of the politically unreliable.'[682] Pierre Ronsanvallon frames what he calls *le paradoxe français* in ideological terms, writing that France's long-established tradition of statism maintained a continual ambivalence between the sovereignty of a citizens' 'general will', and that of a clearly delimited administration; that is, complementing Tocqueville, not only was France too bureaucratised to become 'truly' democratic, it was too democratic to become truly bureaucratised.[683]

At the level of office work, France's bureaucrats were 'hostile to innovations', taking 'thirty years to diffuse the metal pen'.[684] Speaking tubes, and then telephones, were only hesitatingly and haphazardly installed to facilitate communication in the vast ministerial palaces for fear of 'troubling administrative customs'.[685] Typewriting only started to supersede scrivening in the 1890s, and accounts were still being written by hand in the 1950s.[686] Such institutional intransigence is reflected in a relatively privileged workforce: it was acknowledged that, where an idle copyist could easily pretend to be hard at work, the loudness of the typewriter meant that the *dactylographe* [typist] could be readily subordinated to aural surveillance.[687] Importantly, 'beyond the laundresses of the ministerial household', and apart from a few 'auxiliary' roles in the central Post Office administration, women only started working for France's state bureaucracy in large numbers after 1900 – Gardey designates the very end of the century 'the time of pioneers' in the feminisation of the *bureaux*, the 'explosion' of the female workforce taking place after 1914.[688]

This relative lack of female office workers in France's civil service is heavily accentuated by their erasure in the French literature covered by the present study. Gardey writes that the persistent 'masculine ambiance of [the office] is notable' in the French literature of this period – and the masculine character of such portrayals is all the more marked when contrasted to their British

[681] Church, p. 74. See Weber on this principle in 'Bureaucracy' p. 228.
[682] Tombs, p. 100.
[683] Pierre Rosanvallon, 'Administration, politique et société' ; *Réseaux*, 8:40, (1990), pp. 49-70, (p. 58).
[684] Thuillier, *La vie quotidienne,* p. 195 – 'les bureaux sont hostiles aux innovations', 'il fallut trente ans pour diffuser la plume métallique.'
[685] Ibid. – 'troublant les coutumes administratives.'
[686] Thuillier, 'Les Gestes des Fonctionnaires', *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates en France au XIXe Siècle,* p. 551.
[687] Albert Navarre, *Manuel d'organisation du bureau à l'usages des écoles de commerce et du personnel des bureaux modernes* (Paris : Delagrave, 1924), p. 61.
[688] Thuillier, *La vie quotidienne,* p. 197 – 'hors les lingères de l'hôtel du ministre' ; 'à partir des années 1860, on développe le recrutement d'auxiliaires féminines à l'administration centrale des Postes' ; Gardey, p. 54 – 'le temps des pionnières, en cette fin du XIXe siècle'.

counterparts.[689] As an illustration, Georges Courteline's bureaucratic satire, covered in Section 5 of this chapter, *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* (1893), only finds its 'white-bloused' cognate in Anna Pasquin's 1958 novel, *Ces dames les ronds-de-cuir.* This is to be contrasted to the widespread popularity of the 'type-writer girl' in Anglophone culture at the turn of the twentieth century, which Christopher Keep argues embodied a range of potentially contradictory cultural connotations.[690] Equally, however, there is a clear variety in the factors that effected the apparent technical and gender disparities between English and French portrayals of the office, not all of which relate to the historical character of French institutions themselves as I have outlined here – I will explore the more cultural and literary factors in the next section.[691]

1.2. Changes in office literature

In the above sections we saw that bureaucratisation in Britain and France entered a new phase in the last decades of the nineteenth century, one typified by the crystallisation of bureaucratic structures, and the corresponding alienation of an expanded, subdivided, and often more precarious office workforce. It would certainly be a mistake at this point to look back on the office work of the early to mid-nineteenth-century with rose-tinted spectacles as 'a personal unity of head and hand', as Alfred Sohn-Rethel describes artisanal labour proper.[692] Nevertheless, the historically accretive character of Germain Garnier's dictum, mentioned in Chapter One, that the division between head and hand grows 'sharper and more pronounced as society gets richer', is exemplified here in the degree to which texts in prior chapters have focussed on the *overlap* of these otherwise apparently divergent poles: in the economistic-idiosyncratic consciousness of Lamb's 'Superannuated Man' (even after retiring) in Chapter One, in the interplay of empirical and ideal factors in Kit Mark's memoir in Chapter Two, or in the relative intersubjectivity of office divisions of labour portrayed in *Un début dans la vie,* and even in *A Christmas Carol* in Chapter Three.[693] Indeed, the sharpest division of 'head and hand' evoked in prior chapters was in *Punch*'s satirical call for an 'Automaton Lawyer's Clerk' to relieve humans of the experience of desk work (and extirpate the humane values that pollute the law). Office literature from these earlier periods therefore portrayed bureaucracy, office work, and the clerical 'type', with a

[689] Gardey, p. 53 - 'La littérature du XIXe siècle nous a familiarisés avec le monde du bureau, […] l'ambiance masculine des lieux est notable.'
[690] Keep, 'The Cultural Work of the Type-Writer Girl', pp. 401-426.
[691] Of course, the history of bureaucracy in France is not one solely of decline – on the uptake and invention of new ideas surrounding office equipment and architecture in twentieth-century France, see Alexandra Lange, 'White Collar Corbusier: From the *Casier* to the *cites d'affaires*', *Grey Room,* 9 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 58-79.
[692] Sohn-Rethel, p. 112.
[693] Garnier, V, p. 4.

degree of organic coherence – whereby the abstract aspects of bureaucracy, its schemas and procedures, are largely vested in the crooked timber of the office workforce.

This same relative degree of holism has manifested itself in the aesthetics of office literature so far. Just as Balzac's titular *employés* are simultaneously the products and causes of bureaucratic dysfunction, so too is Balzac happy to equivocate about his novel's confusing interplay of form and content. He at once invests the bureaucratic setting of *Les Employés* with the many established literary tropes of office life, while also conveying a sense that the strangeness of the work is derived from the realities of the setting that it describes. However much the *employés* and the novel in which they are portrayed reside 'between two negations', this condition of disaffection lies in their position as the *medium* of administration – just as Balzac's muddled aesthetic is rooted in the ambiguous conceptualisation of mid-nineteenth-century bureaucracy more broadly.[694] This sense of simultaneous holism and heterogeneity reaches its most baroque and swollen extent in *Bleak House,* in which bureaucracy veers back and forth from omnipresent alienating force to a hodgepodge of motley agents, and which is partially narrated by a jaded, would-be omniscient, bureaucratic spirit.

By contrast, in this chapter I argue that the objectification of bureaucratic structures and the corresponding alienation of the office workforce during this period in turn reconfigures these motifs in office literature, and thereby also effects a qualitative shift in the aesthetics of office literature to account for this apparent polarisation. This historical shift impacts office literature's conceptualisation of the relationship between worker and workplace, and therefore the texts covered in this chapter together represent more a *range of attempts* to portray this reconfigured relationship. While I parallel the developments in the aesthetics of late nineteenth-century office literature with this changed thematic presentation of the office, I outline these developments in this section in broad, paradigmatic terms – we will see in my close readings however that this new paradigm manifests itself differently, and with different points of emphasis, between different texts.

Office literature reflects the transformation of office life during this period firstly in its portrayal and characterisation of clerks. Rather than figuring as a vessel of bureaucratic structures, however unwilling or unable, the clerk is more often framed as a compromised being: although often figuring more centrally in the narrative, the clerk is by contrast now just an *appendage* of the office, but also one for whom the desk is 'a haven of refuge' from the even greater vicissitudes of modern society.[695] That is, the comic 'type', who somehow mediates bureaucratic values, is instead subsumed into the 'layered, recomposing, pluralist aggregation' of their social world (albeit one still largely

[694] Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 162.
[695] Anthony Trollope, 'The Young Women at the London Telegraph Office' (1877), *Miscellaneous Essays and Reviews,* ed. Michael Y. Mason (New York: Arno Press, 1981), pp. 27-34 (p. 28).

viewed 'from without', Peter Bailey writes); and this shift from 'anatomy' to a more particularistic, even humanising, focus is reflected as much in character of the clerks portrayed between the works of this period as it is in the highly diverse terms of their portrayal.[696] Female office workers often come to reflect the bleaker end of this social realist impulse – as in George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) in which typewriting provides the cold comfort of financial security for the 'half a million more women than men' in Britain doomed to spinsterhood – but even a comical figure like Charles Pooter, in George and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892), who replicates many features of the traditional clerical 'type', is also subsumed into a broader lower-middle class milieu (if only to heighten his comic sense of self-delusion).[697]

This shift toward portraying clerks from a more particularistic, social realist vantage is complemented by an increasing attenuation in the tension between plot and presentism that Fredric Jameson identifies in nineteenth-century realism more broadly.[698] For Dickens, the clerk often helped to resolve the 'crisis of the knowable community' by, as he writes in *Great Expectations* (1861), 'knowing something to everybody else's disadvantage' (or advantage); conversely, and evoking the detachment of clerks from the 'cognitive infrastructures' that they were once depicted embodying, clerks during this period are instead surrounded by an almost phenomenological sense of 'non-narrative perceptuality', one that is increasingly deracinated from the plot.[699] That is, clerks' lives are more often framed as the sites of particular sensory impressions and minutiae, while clerks' *fates* are beholden to unintelligible, or apparently arbitrary, changes in the institution or society more broadly.

The notion of an increased polarity between clerk and bureaucracy correspondingly manifests itself in a reconfigured sense of bureaucratic structures and their aesthetic potential. This development is rooted in the irony that the strongly *historical* process of bureaucratic standardisation (or ossification) should manifest itself in a social structure that appears all the more abstract, formal, even *ahistorical,* as a result. What anthropologist Michael Herzfeld calls the 'transcendental identity' attributed to modern bureaucracy has evidently appeared in prior chapters, but this was usually exaggerated through its continuity with supernatural or metaphysical devices.[700] By contrast, it is as

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[696] Bailey, 'White Collars, Gray Lives?', p. 289, p. 273.

[697] Gissing, *The Odd Women,* p. 44. On the 'cruelty' of Pooter's characterisation, see A. James Hammerton, 'Pooterism or Partnership? Marriage and Masculine Identity in the Lower Middle Class 1870-1920', *Journal of British Studies,* 38:3 (1999), pp. 291-321.
As I imply in the Choice of Texts section, it is because *The Diary of a Nobody* and texts like Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881) or Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) take the clerk *out* of the office, that they are not given close treatment in this chapter. Equally, it is precisely because of this greater sense of clerks' immersion in the social and personal milieu that we can have these non-office portrayals of clerks.

[698] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 10.

[699] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1861)*,* ed. Charlotte Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 165; Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*., pp. 148-149.

office work solidifies yet further into complex chains of routines and machines that are independent of the cognition of individual clerks, but constitutive of their daily lives, that the rarefaction often attributed to bureaucracy generally attains a newfound thematic and narrative character in office literature, at once more worldly and more abstract.[701]

In thematic terms, bureaucracy therefore increasingly tends to be portrayed as Weber described it: as an impersonal, arbitrary, and prescriptive force that governs office tasks, and which appears no longer to depend upon the relationships, trust, and tacit agreements of office staff – even less upon morale-boosting rituals and pranks. It is usually less therefore that the fixed routines of office life form the central focus of literature (as opposed to Dickens's institutional focus in his mid-career novels), but rather the personal experiences of individual and often isolated clerks *in contraposition to* an increasingly monolithic structure. Indeed, this embedded sense of arbitrary routine tends instead to manifest itself in aesthetic terms – in the narrative and formal character of office literature itself. Where *Bleak House* and *Les Employés* alike attempted to subordinate their administrative subject-matter to a wider principle of narrative resolution (the Jarndyce case and the contest over a promotion), the texts covered in the present chapter more often *emulate* bureaucratic structures, displaying a greater willingness to portray 'no variety of days' with limited promise of resolution.[702] As Dean de la Motte argues, during this period 'bureaucracy moves from a source of thematic, discursive material to a structuring paradigm for fictional *écriture*.'[703]

It is in this sense of a shift in narrative emphasis toward the everyday and routine that the historical phenomena of the standardisation *and* ossification of bureaucratic structures come to figure as strangely complementary. As I suggested in section 1.1.3., there is a clear conceptual resonance between the intransigent character attributed to mechanistic and stagnating institutions alike, and so too therefore do the routine lives of the most modern-seeming 'typewriter girl' and the most outdated copyist in the literature of this period exhibit a mutual sense of *narrative* resonance, even if their social or thematic connotations are otherwise presented as quite disparate. More generally, there is frequently a sense in these later texts that the newfound attention to the mundanity of office life,

[701] Compare this aesthetic sense of the effects of bureaucratisation to Sohn-Rethel's critique of late nineteenth-century management techniques, and of Taylorism in particular: 'It is of the essence of Taylorism that the standards of labour timing are not to be mistaken for the empiricism of the work as the workers themselves do it. Taylor does not learn his time measures from the workers; he imparts the knowledge of it as the laws for their work' (p. 154); 'In strict keeping with the characteristics of Taylorism is the fact that the concepts of time and motion used in its job analysis are *technological categories* and no true terms of human labour at all', p. 155.

[702] It is worth recalling at this point D.A. Miller's argument that the plot of *Bleak House* could *only* be resolved by turning a bureaucratic narrative into a detective story. Miller, 'Discipline in Different Voices', p. 99.

[703] Dean de la Motte, 'Writing *Fonctionnaires*, Functions of Narrative', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 34:1 (Spring 1994), pp. 22-30, (p. 22).

while initially appearing to be an *avant-garde* development in office literature, also seems like a doubling down upon this genre's established conventions (or indeed *vice versa*): to entrench the terms of what Anne-Marie Baron called the 'bureaucratic mythology' suddenly also appears to be a metacommentary on bureaucratic formalism (and that of its portrayal), as do experimental attempts at portraying a mundane existence periodically appear like latter-day *physiologies*.[704] As Moretti writes, a text's participation in a genre can be conceived of in terms of its 'obedience to a prevailing system of laws' – but it is within the strangely ahistorical strictures of bureaucracy during this period that the laws of office literature manifest an ambivalent and often Janus-faced aesthetic.[705]

Finally, these processes of consolidation, fragmentation, and reconfiguration that underlie the focus and aesthetics of office literature resonate with themes in late nineteenth-century literary history more broadly. Roland Barthes identifies a transition in nineteenth-century literature toward new attempts at 'integrating, disrupting, or naturalising literary language' that he attributes to the increased complexity and dissociation brought about by the industrial, social, and political developments of the mid-century.[706] Jameson similarly argues that the overlap between the personally subjective and socially objective represented in mid-century literature is reflected in its provenance from a period of lower development – unlike late nineteenth-century authors, those of the mid-century were able 'to see objects not as completed material substances but as they issued from human work'.[707] The argument runs that, as society became more atomised, and more sophisticated, a once canonical literary style was more compelled to 'justify' itself to a fragmented, diversifying world – late nineteenth-century authors attempted this either by focussing heavily upon daily life and everyday minutiae in order to convey a heightened sense of mimetic fidelity, or by fetishizing the aesthetic values of textual 'craftsmanship' as an end in itself.[708] These tendencies, represented in particular during this period by Naturalism and comparable social realist impulses on the one side, and by the Decadent, Aestheticist, and other *avant-gardes* on the other, therefore intersect with my readings of office literature during this same period.[709] It is insofar as

[704] Bijaoui-Baron, 'Le thème bureaucratique chez Flaubert et Maupassant', p. 53.
[705] Franco Moretti, 'The Soul and the Harpy', p. 12.
[706] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), tr. Jonathan Cape (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), pp. 60-61.
[707] Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, pp. 203-204.
[708] Barthes, pp. 61-67.
[709] On Naturalism in its historical and intellectual context see James McFarlane, 'The Mind of Modernism', *Modernism 1890-1930,* ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), pp. 71-93; as well as David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990); and Dario Villaneuva, *Theories of Literary Realism* tr. Mihai I. Spariosu and Santiago Garcia-Castañòn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); and, from the period, Émile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental,* 2nd ed. (Paris: Charpentier, 1880). For an indication of late nineteenth-century ambivalence about mimesis, or overt anti-mimesis, see Clive Scott, 'Symbolism, Decadence and Impressionism', *Modernism 1890-1930*, *pp.* 206-227 (p. 212); Victor Brombert, 'Flaubert and the Temptation of the Subject', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies,* 12:3

bureaucratisation during this period comes to represent a countervailing force of uniformity and homogeneity during a period otherwise associated with subdivision and sophistication, however, that these aesthetic developments appear often in oblique or incongruous ways in office literature.

By way of illustration, Naturalism's claims to 'objectivity' through a focus on frank portrayal of hitherto taboo topics – sexuality, violence, disease, and addiction, as well as the hitherto peripheral or sentimentalised working classes – were ultimately derided because of its tendency, David Baguley writes, toward a 'fundamental repetitiveness and conventionality'.[710] However, this tension between domineering abstract or artificial formulae and the mundane particularities of daily life appears all too pertinent to the formal-historical tensions that underlie the portrayal office life. Similarly, the Decadent preoccupation with artifice and virtuality, and the Symbolist sense that language is not 'a natural outcrop of the person', but 'a material with its own laws and own peculiar forms of life', counterintuitively convey a *realistic* sense of the rarefied, intangible strictures that govern office work, and of the synthetic character of the office space.[711] From the vantage of office literature, therefore, Émile Zola's claim in his theoretical outline of Naturalism, *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), that the Naturalist novelist is 'nothing more than a court clerk, who forbids himself from making judgements or conclusions', becomes a far more complex statement than perhaps initially intended.[712]

2. Choice of texts

This chapter deals with the developments in Franco-British office literature in roughly the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I focus on four authors whose portrayals of the office best illustrate the historical and aesthetic developments that I outlined over the course of Section 1 – particularly illustrating the range of approaches to portraying this reconfigured relationship. I begin with Anthony Trollope's novella, *The Telegraph Girl* (1877), then look at Joris-Karl Huysmans's novella, *À vau-l'eau* [With the Flow] (1882) and his short story, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran' [Monsieur Bougran's Retirement] (1888/1964), then I turn to Courteline's novel, *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* (1892), and finish with Arnold Bennett's novel, *A Man from the North* (1898).

(Spring 1984), pp. 280-296; Alex Murray (ed.) *Decadence, A Literary History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020); and, from the period itself, Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying' (1889), in *De Profundis and Other Writings,* ed. Hesketh Pearson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), pp. 55-88.

[710] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, p. 153; Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction*, p. 4; for a contemporary critique of Naturalism along these lines see Edmund Gosse, 'The Limits of Realism in Fiction', *Questions at Issue* (London: Heinemann, 1893), pp. 135-154.

[711] Farrant, p. 138; Scott, p. 212.

[712] Zola, *Le Roman expérimental, p.* 125 – 'Je passe à un autre caractère du roman naturaliste. Il est impersonnel, je veux dire que le romancier n'est plus qu'un greffier, qui se défend de juger et de conclure.'

'While nobody would suggest that the literature of a nation should slavishly mirror its entire working population', Jonathan Wild writes in *The Rise of the Clerk in Literary Culture – 1880-1939* (2008), there is, he argues, a proportional *lack* of texts on office workers during the 1880-1900 period.[713] Nonetheless, compared to the period I have so far covered, portrayals of the office are far more prevalent during the *fin de siècle*; reflecting, if incompletely, the relative boom in French and British clerical populations. There are of course therefore a number of additional texts, some already referred to, which can only perform a supplementary role in my following readings, either because of periodisation (Trollope's *The Three Clerks* [1858] and Gaboriau's *Les Gens de Bureau* [1862]), their similarity to other texts (Eliza Lynn Linton's *The Rebel of the Family* [1880], and André Theuriet's *L'Affaire Froideville* [1883]), or, despite clear pertinence in the portrayal of clerkly temperament, only very tangential focus on offices and bureaucracies (Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* [1881], Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* [1889], or George and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody* [1892]).

The relative increase in the popularity of office subjects in the literature of this period does not entail the increased popularity of clerks: it is as if Shan F. Bullock, in *Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk* (1907), is calling out a *white-collar peril* when he broods over the mass of office workers 'hurrying for the bridges, each in his cheap black coat, each with his pale face and uneven shoulders: thousands of them. Slaves of the desk. Twopenny clerks.'[714] The history of this hostility, in Britain at least, is in large part covered by Wild, as well as John Carey in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992). Rather, my texts are predominantly chosen with the aesthetic developments of office literature, and these developments' historical and social context, in mind.

I want to disavow any conception that the novel *always* marks a literary 'telos' – in the case of the present thesis, one to which Lamb, Ymbert, and 'physiological' writers were building toward. Nevertheless, Chapter Three was framed as a point of consolidation in a formerly heteromorphic literary tradition – albeit producing what may well appear to be untenably exhaustive works. Continuing with this generic mechanism of development, in this chapter I argue that the historical developments in the office of this period are reflected by this literature's subdivision: whereby the variegated themes surrounding the office in baggy novels like *Bleak House*, and the aesthetic devices associated with its portrayal in socially critical *and* metafictional novels like *Les Employés,* appeared redistributed between separate works. In this regard, I will continue to focus on novellas and novels, rather than sketches and essays, insofar as the various exemplars of an increasingly 'specialised' novelistic tradition are nonetheless as prone to internal complexity and contradiction as the novels in

[713] Wild, p. 1.
[714] Shan F. Bullock, *Robert Thorne – The Story of a London Clerk* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1907), p. 138.

Chapter Three, having merely swapped a panoramic narrative horizon for a specialised narrative focus. Although the *physiologie* craze of the 1840s had long died down, publications like *Punch* were of course still periodically producing comic sketches and scenes that included social 'types', including clerks, but these do little more than perpetuate the connotations established in the boom years of this form, covered in Chapter Two.[715] Indeed, George and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892), and Georges Courteline's *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* (appearing in Section 5) – both of which started out as disaggregated feuilletons in *Punch* and *L'Écho de Paris* respectively before subsequently being reworked into novels – stress the extent to which the previously autonomous 'physiological' form had since become a gateway into novel-writing.[716]

3. Anthony Trollope (1815-1882): The Telegraph Girl (1877)

Beside the actual content of his books, Trollope is pertinent to the history of nineteenth-century office literature for two reasons. Firstly, he was himself a Post Office functionary: after undergoing a very informal entrance test in 1834 (described in 1883's posthumous *An Autobiography,* and fictionalised in his 1858 novel, *The Three Clerks*) Trollope rose from clerk to a series of managerial positions, until he retired in 1868.[717] Secondly, his career as a writer straddles the periodisation outlined in the chapters of my thesis: his first novel was published in 1847, his last, posthumously, in 1884.[718] The longevity of Trollope's Post Office career thus makes him a witness to the very real changes that British state bureaucracy underwent over this period, while, conversely, the continuity of Trollope's novelistic career complicates any sense of a reductive stadialism that my outline of the changing literary portrayal of the office may have conveyed. In keeping with this sense of overlap, the subjects of this section, *The Telegraph Girl,* alongside its 'sister article', 'The Young Women at the London Telegraph Office', published in the same year, anticipate the naturalistic portrayal of office workers, while they also, despite – or because – of Trollope's relative 'innocence of theory', ultimately problematise the

[715] For examples of later 'physiological' portrayals of office workers see: 'An Ancient Clerk', *Punch,* 68 (London: 1875), p. 42; 'Frank, at all Events' which makes fun of German clerks, *Punch*, Vol. 72 (London: 1877), p. 81. The same applies in France: in the journal *L'Eclipse* (1868-1876), for example, as with clerks in *Punch*, *employés* regularly appear as either an idling Greek chorus (evoking their role in Monnier and in Balzac's *Les Employés*) or as the unhelpful human face to modern technology (for example, railways) see 'Ceux qui Reste à la Gare de l'Est', *L'Eclipse,* 131 (Paris: 1870) p. 2; and 'Gazette à la Main', *L'Eclipse,* 390 (Paris: 1876), p. 3.

[716] This is in contrast to Lauster's assertion that the *Physiologies* 'proper' of the 1840s were a literary form in their own right, cf. Lauster, p. 19.

[717] Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* ed. Michael Sadleir and Frederick Page (Oxford University Press: 1989), pp. 373-375.

[718] Trollope, *An Autobiography*, p. 36, p. 277.

generically formalistic narrative and aesthetic tendencies to which such an appeal to objective representation inadvertently gives rise.[719]

Trollope's two telegraph texts are by no means his first portrayals of office workers: alongside *The Three Clerks, The Small House at Allington* (1864) also includes a major clerical character. However, in the terms of the developments in the office and in office literature as they have so far been outlined (and bearing in mind my previous qualifications regarding stadialism) these earlier novels appear transitional. While they may show an increased narrative focus on the 'social question' of the clerk, as later social realist texts do, this is only insofar as the successful civil servant and 'swell' in *Allington,* Adolphus Crosbie, is characterised as 'only a mere clerk' just as 'you might as well say that [another of the novel's characters,] Lord De Guest is a mere earl'.[720] That is, the 'question' surrounding Crosbie amounts to one of status anxieties regarding the successful *arriviste,* rather than being an aestheticisation of the 'unpleasant, depressing, desolate truth' that underlies naturalistic social realism.[721] This transitional character is also reflected in shifting narrative conventions: while Dickens had David Copperfield ultimately reject clerkdom in order for him to finish his *Bildung*, for the equivalently middle class Charley Tudor, in *The Three Clerks*, there is no dilemma – he makes a name for himself as a civil servant *and* as a novelist in his spare time. In Trollope's works, *Bildung* becomes, as Nicholas Dames points out, a 'career': ever-standardising bureaucratic hierarchies are no longer ideologically anathema to this kind of narrative.[722] Such literary forms do not seem as pertinent in *The Telegraph Girl*: as clerkdom became even more mainstream, but equally more proletarianised and disenfranchised, Trollope refocuses on social questions surrounding poverty and respectability.

The evolutionary character of Trollope's literary conception of office workers is substantiated in his ambivalence to the reforms undertaken during his time at the Post Office, and which reflect those outlined in Section 1.1.[723] These reforms were overseen by 'Benthamite businessman and schoolmaster', Rowland Hill, who, starting with the Penny Post in 1840, steered the Post Office toward greater efficiency and uniformity at ever greater orders of magnitude.[724] Trollope's criticisms of Hill in his autobiography recall the mechanistic metaphors employed in prior chapters: Hill regarded 'the servants of the Post Office [as] so many machines who could be counted on for their exact work

[719] Walter Kendrick, *The Novel-Writing Machine: The Theory and Fiction of Anthony Trollope* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 1.
[720] Anthony Trollope, *The Small House at Allington* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 9.
[721] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis – The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, tr. Willard R. Trask (Princeton UP: 1968), p. 512.
[722] Dames, 'Trollope and the Career', p. 271.
[723] Trollope, *An Autobiography*, pp. 133-134.
[724] Thomas, pp. 10-11.

without deviation'.[725] By contrast, in 'The Civil Service as a Profession', an 1861 lecture delivered to the post office clerks, Trollope stressed the 'manliness' (that is, the 'spirit of independence') of their profession, and defended their right to live their life and express opinions as freely as those 'who are in the open professions and open trades' do.[726]

Trollope's vying conceptions of the 'manly' or 'mechanised' bureaucrat anticipate Weber's later distinction between societies of 'cultivated men' and those of 'specialized training for expertness' (that is, bureaucratised societies).[727] But, where Weber deems the 'Anglo-Saxon gentleman' and other such non-specialist ideals of leadership to be 'obstacles' to bureaucratisation, Trollope has no sense that the two might be mutually exclusive: criticising competitive examination for civil service berths, in his *Autobiography,* as amounting to so much 'cramming'*,* Trollope concludes that 'there are places in life which can hardly be well filled except by "Gentlemen"' (consciously framed as an ineffable quality), especially bureaucratic posts.[728] Indeed, Ceri Sullivan, in *Literature in the Public Service* (2013) argues that Trollope idealises bureaucracy less as 'an externalised cage of rules [than] an ecology of acts and responses by people who can make decisions'.[729] Trollope's career foundered, presumably along with his humanist conceptions of officialdom, against the rising tide of automation: he tendered his resignation in 1867 after being passed up for a promotion in favour of moderniser, Frank Ives Scudamore, who nationalised the UK's various telegraph firms under the Post Office in 1870.[730] In contrast to his independent, gentlemanly bureaucratic ideal, it is authors, Trollope tells us, who should 'seat themselves at their desks day by day as though they were lawyers' clerks': a sentiment that earns him Walter Kendrick's sobriquet, 'the novel-writing machine'.[731]

Trollope's changing portrayals of office life amount to so many shifts in the often incongruous relations between his authorial, bureaucratic, and social ideals. In keeping with Trollope's conception of the 'independence' of the ideal bureaucrat, the plot of *The Three Clerks* portrays officials whose identity as civil servants is contested not by impersonal, social or economic, factors, but by moral dilemmas. However, by *The Telegraph Girl,* the sphere of contestation, while still framed in personal terms, is less moral than *materially* mandated. That is, almost as in a tragedy, the material misfortunes of *The Three Clerks'* Charley and Alaric Tudor are determined by temperamental flaws (hedonism and ambition); meanwhile, for the telegraphists, Lucy Graham and Sophy Wilson, the emphasis shifts:

[725] Trollope, *An Autobiography*, p. 133.
[726] Anthony Trollope, 'The Civil Service as a Profession' (1861), *Four Lectures* (London: Constable, 1938), pp. 4-28 (p. 12); Trollope, *An Autobiography*, p. 134.
[727] Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 243.
[728] Weber, 'Bureaucracy', p. 243; Trollope, *An Autobiography*, pp. 40-41.
[729] Ceri Sullivan, *Literature in the Public Service – Sublime Bureaucracy* (London: Macmillan, 2013), p. 106.
[730] Katherine Mullin, *Working Girls – Fiction, Sexuality, and Modernity* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), p. 20, p. 56.
[731] Trollope, *An Autobiography*, p. 122; Kendrick, frontispiece.

relative poverty serves to appraise their strength of character. There is of course no question that the shift of emphasis in a moral-material continuum represented between these two narratives is a question of gender – Trollope's allusion to the 'manliness' of the independent civil servant in 1861 is rebuffed in his 1877 novella by the correspondingly feminised constraint of 'respectability' – but this also reflects the changing condition of office work: from one that allowed for a degree of autonomy and relative privilege, even gentility (at least in Trollope's terms), to widespread routine and subsistence. Trollope portrays these shifts in the ambiguously interrelated themes of autonomy and constraint, morality and livelihood, throughout *The Telegraph Girl* – but these themes also reflect the aesthetic tensions that the author may encounter in portraying office life.

The novella follows an episode in the lives of two flatmates and telegraphists: the protagonist, Lucy Graham, about whom 'there was a pervading brownness', and her slightly younger colleague, Sophy Wilson, who was 'wedded to bright colours and soft materials'.[732] After Trollope rather reductively establishes the flatmates' mutual disparities, a change in telegraphic practice midway through the novella effects a shift in their balance of fortunes: while Wilson is quick to adapt and is promoted, Graham's skills are made increasingly obsolescent. When Wilson takes ill and goes to recuperate in Hastings, she leaves Graham to fend for herself on her low wages, and her living conditions accordingly decline. As she grows more impoverished, the pressure upon Graham to accept handouts from her neighbour, the printing engineer, Abraham Hall (to whom Graham suspects Wilson is soon to be affianced) increases – but she accepts immiseration over the possibility of a dubious reputation. Soon, Wilson writes to inform Graham that she is engaged to a Hastings hairdresser, while it of course transpires that Hall had his eye on Graham all along: the story ends with her quitting her job and becoming 'as good a wife as ever blessed a man's household'.[733]

Insofar as its romantic storyline is in large part governed by various misconceptions and anxieties that eventually resolve themselves, Trollope's novella might almost read like a lower middle-class Jane Austen novel. However, it is not merely that Lucy Graham reserves judgement on Abraham Hall as a love interest because of his uncertain relationship with Sophy Wilson – this sense of a tight-knit comedy of manners is inevitably complicated by the office, itself ambiguously portrayed.[734] If, Graham, like all Victorian heroines, Young writes, 'must always return in the end to the domestic

[732] Anthony Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl* (1877), *Later Short Stories,* ed. John Sutherland (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 354-385 (pp. 357-358).
[733] Ibid., p. 385.
[734] Trisha Banerjee, in 'Austen Equilibrium' (2018), employs neoclassical economic methods to explain the workings of the self-regulating 'marriage market' in Austen's novels. Perhaps in this light Trollope's 'Telegraph Girl' represents an instance of bureaucratic interference in otherwise self-organising structures decried by the likes of Ludwig von Mises. Banerjee, 'Austen Equilibrium', *Representations* 143:1 (August 2018), pp. 63-90; Ludwig von Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944).

hearth', Trollope's sense of the virtues (and shortcomings) of the civil service casts this conclusion in an ambivalent light.[735] That is, it is less in the sense that Graham's return to the domestic sphere feels like the snapping shut of a 'sexual trap' – that she ultimately has 'to marry to survive' – but more that her (and, it seems, Trollope's) sense of work itself as an escape from such a trap was already compromised, and subject to disillusionment.[736] The tendency of later 'New Woman' works to try to collapse a divide between feminine domesticity and a masculine public sphere is therefore here anticipated – if only in the most pessimistic way possible.[737]

Graham, like Trollope, idealises the nature of her job: she is 'fond of the idea of being a government servant' because it is a rare position in which a woman can be at once 'independent, respectable, and safe'.[738] Where Graham therefore accords with Young's observation that 'the low pay and numbing routines that make clerical work soul-destroying for male characters […] do not discourage female characters, who find in such work the exhilarating means of escape from the even more restrictive confines of the Victorian domestic sphere', Trollope contrasts this idealism with Wilson.[739] Wilson 'hated the telegraph office, [because she] lacked the strength of mind for doing that which was distasteful to her', Trollope writes; indeed, she 'looked upon her employment simply as a stepping-stone to a husband', a 'doctrine' that 'almost disgusted' her flatmate.[740] Trollope's two heroines therefore anticipate the tendency of later nineteenth-century 'New Woman' novels to portray doubles, to pair 'the "pure" with the "impure".'[741]

This tension between Graham's high ideals and Wilson's naively portrayed cynicism underpins much of the novel's drama: where Wilson is happy to go out courting and to receive gifts from potential suitors, oblivious to any apparent lapse in 'decency', Graham is ever-anxious of the threats to respectability (and presumably therefore independence and safety) that such behaviour might entail.[742] In keeping with other works by Trollope, Graham's handwringing over her respectability takes up much of the novella: the unspoken implication underlying her fears being that, while clerical work was framed, Thomas writes, as a 'way for women to avoid both prostitution and the sexual

[735] Young, p. 120.
[736] Ibid., p. 124.
[737] Anne-Marie Beller, 'Collapsing the courtship plot: the challenge to mid-Victorian romance in New Woman short stories of the 1890s', *Victorian Popular Fictions,* 2:2 (2020), pp. 28-40. On the late nineteenth-century cultural phenomenon of the 'New Woman', aside from the secondary sources included in this chapter, see: Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: MUP, 1997); Angelique Wilson and Chris Willis (eds.) *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001).
[738] Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 355
[739] Young, pp. 128-129. See Janet E. Courtney's autobiography, *Recollected in Tranquillity* (1926) for an account of the incredible boredom experienced by a *real* nineteenth-century female office worker.
[740] Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 371, pp. 358-359.
[741] Mullin, p. 67.
[742] Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 359.

exploitation to which women working in private households could be vulnerable', Graham's relative personal autonomy, or atomisation, as a wage labourer means that the onus of maintaining feminine respectability rests solely on her shoulders.[743] Unlike Trollope's more aristocratically focussed novels, this anxiety over decency is subject to harsh economic pressures; thus does the changeable character of late nineteenth-century bureaucratic labour, indicated by the story's midway change in fortunes, form an additional threat to Graham's imagined equilibrium.

Graham's triad of stability – conceiving the telegraphist to be 'independent, respectable, and safe' – is thus not in practice corroborated: as soon as one facet has been preserved, another threatens to be undermined by pressures emanating from her personal and professional life alike. Indeed, it is less the elements of this triad than the threats to it that seem pegged to one another: the 'double freedom' attributed by Marx to waged work (that is, free to work, and free to starve) is further complicated in *The Telegraph Girl* by the double *standard* of maintaining feminine respectability in spite of fluctuating working, and therefore living, conditions.[744] Graham's mistaken idealism about her position as a telegraphist does not quite convey a sense of tragic irony, however: so too does Trollope himself, in 'The Young Women at the London Telegraph Office' (1877), equally extol the civil service as a 'rock of safety' upon which both the 'stronger', and now also the 'weaker sex', can support themselves.[745] In idealising civil service employment, while actually portraying its many pitfalls, these two texts thus highlight the ambivalences underlying Trollope's conception of bureaucracy and the position of its employees.

Despite his best efforts, Trollope undermines his and Graham's idealised sense of stability and independence in his descriptions of the work of a telegraphist. The 'customary dullness' of pen-and-ink labour in *The Three Clerks,* and the offices, whose 'rooms are dull and dark, and saturated with the fog that rises from the river' (conditions that apparently allow for clerical wantonness) are replaced in Trollope's two telegraph texts by an almost factory-like environment.[746] That is, a sense of habit, even ritual, to be half-heartedly maintained, is replaced with the fixed laws of a machine to which a worker must accord, just as a rambling, warren-like ministry is substituted with a huge holding pen: 'eight hundred female companions, all congregated together in one vast room'.[747] In both telegraph texts, Trollope wants to stress that the fixed rules that govern this space – a 'surveillance [of] the most tender' kind – are reflected in the personal and financial security of its inhabitants: from the routines

[743] Thomas, p. 107. For other Trollope 'hand-wringing' novels see: *Doctor Thorne* (1858), *He Knew He Was Right* (1869), *Cousin Henry* (1879).
[744] Marx, *Capital, Volume I,* p. 272.
[745] Trollope, 'The Young Women at the London Telegraph Office', p. 28.
[746] Anthony Trollope, *The Three Clerks* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), p. 56, p. 10.
[747] Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 355.

and organisation of labour, to telegraphists' salaries and working day (he even remarks on the excellent canteen).[748] Indeed, the climax of *The Telegraph Girl*, when Hall approaches Graham's office to propose to her, is temporarily stymied because 'it is a rule that the staff of the department who are engaged in sending and receiving messages, the privacy of which may be of vital importance, should be kept during the hours of work as free as possible from communication with the public.'[749] While this episode, Katherine Mullin suggests, tethers 'public value' to 'private virtue', this sense of security is evidently also double-edged: aligning professional discretion to Graham's moral continence on the one side, it also suggests discipline on the other – as an exasperated Hall pleads to the intransigent office doorkeeper, 'she is not a prisoner!'[750]

Not only does the ostensible security of telegraphy in practice exhibit a disciplinary character, Trollope's sense of the workplace in 'The Young Women' article is also in large part one of bewilderment. While he knows it to contain an 'area of very nearly two thousand feet', he struggles to gauge these dimensions fully because, grasping for a figurative equivalent, it is 'divided, something like a church, into transepts and naves'.[751] Similarly, he reports that while 'the masters of the place […] have used their skill and science in concentrating so much that is useful in one place', he continues that 'the stranger, if he be at all such a stranger as I was, will think a great deal more about the young women than the telegraphy'.[752] There is no tentative equivocation between impressions and specialist knowledge here, as there was for Kit Mark in Chapter Two: even for an ex-Post Office official – hardly a 'stranger' – the technical specificities upon which the telegraph office is predicated are totally obscured by the impression it gives. Indeed, Trollope's avowal that his ignorance of telegraphy will be counterbalanced by a greater focus upon the women engaged in it is in keeping with the transition to more naturalistic sensibilities in the portrayal of office workers that I outlined in Section 1.2. above. It is less that the telegraph office is *not* governed by fixed or knowable processes, but that these laws do not manifest themselves in the experience of the space – and, by extension, any connection between the formal system of the institution and personal stability in the lives of its inhabitants, to which Trollope and Lucy Graham both subscribe, is therefore revealed to be illusory.

Trollope severs the parallel between clerical personhood and clerical work that he periodically tries to stress, and, by focussing all the more heavily on the telegraphists than telegraphy, the abstract structures of latter, the practice and its governing institution, are even harder for Trollope to convey. This alienation is at its most apparent with the reversal of fortunes, midway through the story, that

[748] Trollope, 'The Young Women at the London Telegraph Office', p. 28; *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 258.
[749] Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 378.
[750] Mullin, p. 55; Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 378.
[751] Trollope, 'The Young Women at the London Telegraph Office', p. 29.
[752] Ibid.

results from a change of telegraphic practice, with Trollope suddenly announcing that 'telegraphy is an art not yet perfected among us and is still subject to many changes. Now it was the case at this time that the pundits of the office were in favour of a system of communicating messages by ear instead of by eye': not by reading 'little dots and pricks', but listening instead to 'little tinkling bells'.[753]

Rather than appearing as an emergent property of telegraphy as it has so far been portrayed, the character and the timing of this shift is framed as almost random, even if its possibility is not disputed. With this *machina ex machina*, we move from the eternal intrigues of Balzac's bureaucratic 'seraglio', run by an incompetent (and therefore manipulable) Oriental despot, to a caste system subject to the whims of a febrile mysticism unintelligible to all but the pundits who constitute its highest echelon. If there *is* a link between the structures of an automated bureaucracy and its employees in *The Telegraph Girl*, it is thus not one of security or stability. Rather, because it is flighty Wilson, and not steadfast Graham, who can 'catch and use the tinkling sounds', and will therefore 'rise more quickly to higher pay than the less gifted ones', an association is made, as Mullin points out, between the caprices of technology and femininity – or a certain *brand* of femininity, with that of 'sexy, fickle, wavering, variable Sophy Wilson', whose 'fluent translation of ephemeral messages [is] indexed to her distressing promiscuity.'[754]

Such parallels are not new. An 1856 *Punch* article, 'A Female Functionary', predicts 'inextricable confusion' resulting from the well-meaning organisation of documents by a newly appointed female clerk in the State Paper Office; Eliza Lynn Linton writes, in 'The Modern Revolt' (1870) that women should get their own (literal) house in order before encroaching *en masse* into a working world dominated by men endowed with 'stronger organization'; and, in a similar vein, Mr. Brooke, in George Eliot's 1830s-set *Middlemarch* (1872), presumably in a deliberate moment of historical irony, remarks that 'young ladies are too flighty' to 'meddle' with documentation and pigeon-holes.[755] But the agenda behind such parallels starts to shift with the onset of office automation, after which it is precisely *because* of the supposed lightness and decorousness of the telegraph, and later the typewriter, that office work was considered 'a promising field' by the Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women (founded 1859).[756] Indeed, contemporary comparisons made between telegraphy or typewriting and pre-existing female domestic tasks and activities – needlework and piano practice – invite the same paradoxes of causation as Balzac's 'no

[753] Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, pp. 365-366.
[754] Ibid., p. 366; Mullin, p. 56.
[755] 'A Female Functionary', *Punch*, 30 (London: 1856), p. 63; Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Modern Revolt', December 1870, *MacMillan's Magazine,* 23 (London: November 1870-April 1871), pp. 142-149 (p. 142); George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 21.
[756] Mullin, p. 20.

office without *employé*' and vice versa: no flighty Sophy Wilson without fickle telegraphy, no telegraphy without Wilson.

What *is* new is the sense, Mullin writes, that stolid Lucy Graham mirrors Trollope himself: 'superseded by her young colleague's pioneering expertise […] behind Lucy stands Trollope, aware that younger rivals in the literary marketplace were snapping at his heels – as they had in the Post Office.'[757] From this perspective we can further gauge the ambiguous character of Trollope's bureaucracy: it shifts from his idealised balance of independence and restraint, to an exaggeration of both poles – a capricious technocracy, assured of its own security, but cavalier with that of its constituents. In narrative terms this shift manifests itself as a complication of the novelistic precepts discussed in the last chapter: where office presentism once struggled to give way to resolution, now the present is itself to be characterised by constant and unintelligible change – the kind of flux and insecurity, but also transpersonal structurality, to be associated with modernity – while resolution is attained only through a transition to the rather different, and more traditional, institution of marriage. Indeed, Mullin's parallel between Graham and Trollope-as-author, as well as that with him as an official, is stressed by her association 'more with old media than new' (Graham is framed as bookish, comes from a family of booksellers, and marries a printworks engineer) and one might equally observe that it is in this allegiance to older forms that Graham's narrative fate is ultimately channelled toward the conventional resolution of marriage.[758]

This sense of an older world bowing out to the new, framed in bureaucratic terms, that lies behind Trollope's novella is not unique to it in the works of these later decades. From evading prudish landladies, as in Ella Cheever Thayer's romantic comedy, *Wired Love: A Romance of Dots and Dashes* (1880), to literally collating an ancient evil out of existence, as in *Dracula* (1897), office-working 'New Women' were portrayed as 'charismatic embodiments of social, cultural, moral, and emotional change.'[759] But, in keeping with Trollope's increasingly ambivalent sense of the values of the civil service, these texts' triumphantly literalised portrayals of Weberian disenchantment do not fully map onto *The Telegraph Girl*. Neither, however, does Trollope's story fully resonate with the conservative message of Linton's own 'New Woman' novel, *The Rebel of the Family* (1880), in which Perdita Winstanley's foray into the office, and her 'proud consciousness of participating in the conduct of the Imperial Government' (a feeling that 'made her routine business letters and dry rows of figures essentially poems') errs more toward 'silly Quixotism' than Graham's legitimately-framed dream of

[757] Ibid., p. 57.
[758] Mullin, p. 56; *The Telegraph Girl*, pp. 354-355.
[759] Mullin, p. 57. See also Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897) whose protagonist even has a stint on an anarchist commune.

being 'lord, – or lady, – of herself'.[760] In contrast to Linton's satire, modernity in *The Telegraph Girl* is a real force – but an irreversible and rather alien one, one against which personal, bureaucratic, and also literary, ideals may founder.[761]

Walter Kendrick in *The Novel-Machine* (1980) writes that despite Trollope's 'innocence of theory', his implicit conception of his own style was one of metonymy – of an unmediated connection between the 'enclosed world' of the novel and the 'outside world' that is reality itself.[762] Writing, for Trollope, Kendrick adds, 'does not represent, it transmits', it is 'pure conveyance'; as Nathaniel Hawthorne famously remarked, his novels are 'just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their business, and not suspecting that they were being made a show of.'[763] Of course, this sense of mimetic transparency, indeed, continuity, is an illusion, which Kendrick describes as 'a metarhetorical trick – a metaphor disguised […] as metonymy.'[764] But the terms of this illusion – enclosure, surveillance, and transmission – resonate closely with the world of telegraphy that Trollope describes in his short story. In this light, Trollope's apparent ambivalence regarding these terms in his portrayal of telegraphy – the evasive and capricious character of its transmission methods, and the impersonally disciplinary character of the office itself – becomes a problematisation of his own style. Just as Graham's own disillusionment stresses the true limits of her comprehension of modernity, so too does Trollope, in his mixed portrayal of the telegraphic career, and his outright disinclination to portray telegraphic mechanisms concretely, delimit the power of his style, while also exposing the complexities that underlie its ostensible transparency.

Where Jean-Gilbert Ymbert, in Chapter One, wrote *Mœurs administratives* in the epistolary medium of the bureaucracy he described – thereby ventriloquising what he deemed to be the ministries' epistemic limitations – Trollope does the reverse: by portraying an episode in the lives of communications workers, he demystifies the pretence of unmediated transparency in his style. In the 'pen and ink' world of *The Three Clerks,* this paradox is bypassed with a playful *mise en abyme*: the Trollope stand-in, Charley Tudor, is himself an author of office literature – and *his* fictional clerk-alike,

[760] Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Rebel of the Family,* ed. Deborah T. Meem (Tornoto: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002), p. 175, p. 280; Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 355.
[761] Linton does allow some nuance in her satire, mind, similarly highlighting the peccadillos of the rest of the Winstanley family: their snobbishness, and cynical attitude to the marriage market, coupled with their apparent naiveté toward everything else. In keeping with this two-way perspective, Constance Harsh writes that 'Linton's unique contribution to the New Woman novel lies in the continuous intellectual self-immolation that reveals the instability of her anti-feminist ideology.' Harsh, 'Eliza Lynn Linton as New Woman Novelist', *The Rebel of the Family,* p. 456-474 (p. 472).
[762] Kendrick, p. 1, p. 7.
[763] Kendrick, p. 6; Trollope cites Hawthorne's letter in his *Autobiography*, p. 144.
[764] Kendrick, p. 7.

'Macassar Jones', carries in turn 'a wonderful representation of himself […] a little *alter ego'* of an umbrella, which he subsequently confuses with his new-born son.[765] But Trollope's whimsical nod to the metafictional potential of clerical autofiction in *The Three Clerks,* shifts with *The Telegraph Girl*, rendering the office the site of a disturbing aporia between art and life, representation and reality. Trollope portrays telegraphy simultaneously as, like all office work, a 'symbolic reflection' of its object, in this case world communications (the office is organised as a schematic representation of the world with its hemispheric, or perhaps only metropolitan, 'east end and west end'), but it is also a channel for these same communications, a participant rather than mere figuration.[766] It is because telegraphy thus maintains both a metaphorical and metonymic relationship with the outside world that it simultaneously reflects (but also complicates) and repudiates the terms of Trollope's own realism.

We might thus say that Trollope's story embodies the predicates *and* the conclusions of Naturalism, insofar as 'an attempt to describe life exactly as it is […] ends, by the very logic of that attempt, in pure irony'.[767] However, if we are, by Mullin's reading, to map Trollope's own aesthetic aporia onto Graham's sense of disillusionment, it is important to note that the key episode of this breakdown is framed in in terms of a transition from visual to aural language: from a printed code to a 'musical' symbolism.[768] The story's portrayal of a transition in the practice of telegraphy from a textual form into a privileged (economically) but unintelligible sonorous language simulates the limits of Trollope's own realist pretensions as much as it exposes Graham to her own precarity. In subordinating the 'old' textual form of telegraphy to a 'new' phonic one, Trollope thus performs a 'logocentric' sleight of hand: he '[confines] writing to a secondary and instrumental function', but he also stresses the alienness of this new form by associating it both with a denuded cynicism *and* a near-mystical unintelligibility (both of which are related in turn to Sophy Wilson's feminine cunning).[769] It is less therefore that Trollope's own style has been 'exposed', but more that he is framing it as the *absolute* limits of textuality: all that lies beyond it is the alien sonority of reality itself, knowable only to an unthinking feminine caprice. The aesthetic contradictions of Trollope's story are thus evaded by his dubious conception of Sophy Wilson's particular brand of femininity: just as Lucy Graham's self-

[765] Trollope, *The Three Clerks*, p. 245 – 'He looked down pryingly into her arms, and at the first glance thought that was his umbrella. But then he heard a little pipe, and he knew that it was his child.' p. 261.
[766] Marx, *Capital, Volume II*, p. 211 ; Trollope, 'The Young Women at the London Telegraph Office', p. 29 – 'Though it is all one room, it has its well-marked divisions, its east end and its west end; and thus the Indian telegrams and the foreign telegrams are no more mixed up with the Liverpool and Glasgow business, or those with the internal metropolitan telegrams, than is Grosvenor Square with the Victoria Docks, or Regent's Park with Kensington Oval.'
[767] Frye, p. 49.
[768] Trollope, *The Telegraph Girl*, p. 366.
[769] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 8.

regard as an independent telegraphist is doubly undermined, both by Wilson's knack for the new phonic language *and* by her dismissal of telegraphy as a mere stepping stone to matrimony rather than an end in its own right, so too does Trollope, by virtually denuding his style, reassert its workmanlike innocence in the face of a cynical and alienating modernity.

4. Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907): À vau-l'eau (1882) and 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran' (1888/1964)

The lives of Trollope and Huysmans are comparable inasmuch as both juggled literary careers with lifelong bureaucratic ones: Huysmans's thirty-two-year tenure as an *employé* at the Ministry of the Interior provided him with an endless supply of ministry-headed paper on which to write his fiction.[770] However, where Trollope's aesthetic conceit superficially appears unchanging, Huysmans *oeuvre* is conventionally split into three mutually antagonistic periods.[771] Huysmans started as confirmed Naturalist: as an acolyte of Zola, and a contributor, alongside fellow bureaucrat, Guy de Maupassant, to the 1880 short-story collection, *Les Soirées de Médan* (traditionally considered to be the movement's 'founding event').[772] But he broke from Naturalism, because, Huysmans writes, 'this school, which had rendered the unforgettable service of situating real characters in precise settings, was condemned to repeat itself, to tread water', famously shifting thereafter from the earthly pessimism of the former to a more spiritual variety with the archetypal Decadent works, *À rebours* [Against the Grain] (1884) and *Là-bas* [Down There] (1891).[773] The Satanic themes in the latter of these Decadent works anticipates in turn the character of Huysmans's next 'break': his eventual conversion to Catholicism, represented in later novels that include *La Cathédrale* [The Cathedral] (1898) and *L'Oblat* [The Oblate] (1903).[774] This tendency to split Huysmans's career belies the clear parallels between these 'periods', and the degree of alignment between Naturalism and Decadence in particular speaks directly to aesthetic tendencies in *fin-de-siècle* office literature.

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[770] Marcus Waithe and Claire White, 'Literature and Labour', *The Labour of Literature in Britain and France, 1830-1910,* ed. Waithe and White (London: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 1-22 (p. 13.) For a great deal of detail on Huysmans's civil service career see Guy Thuillier, 'Huysmans et « 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran' »', *La Revue administrative,* 205 (January, February, 1982), pp. 17-27. For more on Huysmans's life in general see Robert Baldick, *The Life of J.K. Huysmans* (Oxford University Press, 1955).

[771] Farrant, p. 202.

[772] Baguley, p. 16.

[773] Joris-Karl Huysmans, 'Préface écrite vingt ans après le roman' (1903), from *À rebours* (1884), ed. Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: Flammarion, 2004), pp. 320-333 (p. 321) – 'On était alors en plein naturalisme ; mais cette école, qui devait rendre l'inoubliable service de situer des personnages réels dans les milieux exacts, était condamnée à se rabâcher, en piétinant sur place.'

[774] Farrant, p. 202.

Thuillier suggests that, despite initially having shown interest, Huysmans never produced a full bureaucratic novel because of the confidentiality rules associated with his civil service job.[775] If the caustic satire in *Les Employés* and *Bleak House* is anything to go by, the production of a grand bureaucratic narrative (by a sometime acolyte of the righteous Zola, no less) would have certainly made Huysmans a *persona non grata* in the corridors of administrative power (Trollope similarly writes that his comparatively benign *Three Clerks* had 'given official offence by [its] publication').[776] Contrastingly, Huysmans's probably best-known work in the English-speaking world, *À rebours*, appears to be a total retreat into fantasy and artifice: obliquely described in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) as a 'poisonous […] book without a plot', the novel amounts to the musings and sensations of the aristocratic aesthete and recluse, Jean des Esseintes, and it confirmed its author as more an otherworldly bohemian than a chronicler of bureaucratic triviality.[777] Indeed, just as *À rebours* was considered a major break from Naturalism, at least as envisaged by Zola (as the objective portrayal of ordinary life and society), so too, Marcus Waithe and Claire White write, does its 'rejection of the prosaic' seemingly belie 'the mundane, office-bound conditions of its composition.'[778] However, neither of these ruptures is quite as clean as it may appear.

While des Esseintes's decadent tastes and his 'experiments with the possibilities of synaesthesia' certainly run counter to the everyday misery conveyed by Zola's novels, there are clear aesthetic parallels between Naturalism and its successors – there is a 'very real *technical* debt which the new style owed the old'.[779] Gail Finney argues that, in the extent to which Huysmans and his erstwhile master share the habit of obsessively 'anatomising experience' in their works, aestheticising the sensations of both miners and dandies alike, and in their shared preoccupation with the profane (and the desire to escape it), the two authors, despite their ostensible rift, highlight the parallels between Naturalism and Decadence.[780] It is similarly because the themes of artificiality, alienation, and pessimism in *À rebours* also appear in its immediate predecessor, the novella *À vau-l'eau* [Downstream, or With the Flow], that Waithe and White's contention that Huysmans's most famous work was an instance of office escapism also appears overstated. Indeed, it is furthermore insofar as *À vau-l'eau* is generally conceived as Huysmans's last conventionally Naturalist work before his

[775] Thuillier, 'Huysmans et « La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran »', p. 23.
[776] Trollope, *An Autobiography*, p. 134.
[777] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Simkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, and Co., 1891), p. 141.
[778] Daniel Grojnowski, Introduction to *À rebours*, pp. 5-31 (pp. 8-9); Waithe and White, p. 13.
[779] Melvin J. Friedman, 'The Symbolist Novel: Huysmans to Malraux', *Modernism,* pp. 453-466 (p. 454); Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 'Movements, Magazines and Manifestos', *Modernism,* pp. 192-205 (p. 197).
[780] Gail Finney, 'In the Naturalist Grain: Huysmans' "A Rebours" Viewed through the Lens of Zola's "Germinal"', *Modern Language Studies*, 16:2 (Spring, 1986), pp. 71-77 (p. 73).

apparent about-turn into Decadence, that the office and office workers assert themselves as potentially liminal literary subjects, perched between movements and conventions as they were otherwise held to subdivide and solidify during this period.

À vau-l'eau reads almost like a caustic response to Dickens's rather sentimentally melancholic sketch, 'Thoughts about People', from Chapter Two: with no small degree of black humour, Huysmans portrays the thwarted existence of one Monsieur Folantin, a poor *employé* whose attempts at attaining contentment are met with constant disappointment.[781] Folantin's career has stalled long ago, his meals are 'execrable' and his wine '[tastes] of ink', the middlebrow literature and drama to which he has access bore him, past sexual experimentation left him with 'a souvenir of which he took some pains to cure himself' (that is, a sexually transmitted infection), his friendships are abortive: his whole world – Paris, the office, and his flat – is inhospitable, filthy, and banal.[782] Thus does Folantin end the story resigning to *aller à vau-l'eau*, to go with the flow – to allow himself to degenerate.

Huysmans, in a 1903 preface to *À rebours,* himself stresses the transitory character of *À vau-l'eau* in his career, writing that

> I saw [*À rebours*] as a counterpart to *À vau-l'eau* transferred to another world; I imagined to myself a more learned, more refined, and richer Monsieur Folantin, one who has discovered in artifice a distraction from the disgust he derives from the hassle of life and the American manners of his time.[783]

The attention *À vau-l'eau* pays to destitution exhibits its Naturalist credentials – as do the terms of its characterisation: C.G. Shenton writes that 'the socio-economic forces of [Folantin's] environment [complete] the determinism of a hereditary psycho-physiological constitution which is itself in accordance with the character's social identity'.[784] Conversely, the irony inherent in the vividness by which the novella portrays a sensually dissatisfied protagonist anticipates Decadence: Huysmans aestheticises a world of soapy Roquefort, grotesque sexual encounters, and the 'gummy prose' of

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[781] Daniel Grojnowski, in the introduction to *À vau-l'eau*, writes that Huysmans actually coined the term 'black humour': 'ce qu'il a lui-même dénommé « humour noir ».' This tonal tendency relates also to the apparent parallelisms with English literature: 'Huysmans caractérise la marque de ses oeuvres [comme] « une pincée d'humour noir et de comique rêche anglais ».' Grojnowski, Notice, *Nouvelles*, ed. Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: Flammarion, 2007), p. 77-83 (p. 77).

[782] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À vau-l'eau*, from *Nouvelles*, pp. 85-135 (p. 87) – le diner était execrable et […] le vin sentait l'encre' ; p. 92 – 'lui laissant un souvenir dont il eut de la peine à se guérir.'

[783] Huysmans, 'Préface écrite vingt ans après le roman', *À rebours,* p. 323 – 'Il m'était d'abord apparu, tel qu'une fantaisie brève, sous la forme d'une nouvelle bizarre ; j'y voyais un peu un pendant d'*À vau-l'eau* transféré dans un autre monde ; je me figurais un monsieur Folantin, plus lettré, plus raffiné, plus riche et qui a découvert, dans l'artifice, un dérivatif au dégout qui lui inspirent les tracas de la vie et les mœurs américains de son temps'.

[784] C.G. Shenton, '"A vau-l'eau": A Naturalist "Sotie"', *The Modern Language Review*, 72:2 (April, 1977), pp. 300-309 (p. 302). Shenton also describes Folantin as a 'carefully delineated social type', but this more overtly scientific and sociological focus is evidently quite distant from 'types' of the physiological writing of the 1840s.

popular literature for our delectation, if not for that of Folantin himself.[785] Meanwhile, it is the social message *and* appeal to pessimism embedded in the story's conclusion – Folantin's resolution to give up – that *À vau-l'eau* stresses the parallels between both movements:

> [M. Folantin] understood the uselessness of all changes of direction, the sterility of ardours and efforts; one must let oneself go with the flow. 'Schopenhauer was right' he said to himself, '"the life of man oscillates like a pendulum between sorrow and boredom"'[…] the better things do not exist for the penniless; only the worst arrives.[786]

The story's hybrid literary allegiances point to the sense of facetious contrariness that underlies its plot; and it is in the similarly paradoxical character of its ending – that it concludes with Folantin's resolution to continue suffering, to give up trying to make a change – that Huysmans circumvents the problem of narrativising the continuous tedium of a clerk's life encountered in previous chapters.[787]

That is, the Naturalist-Decadent preoccupation with sensation tends, as Huysmans identified before breaking with Zola, to a problem of formulaic or arbitrary narratives: as Jameson writes, the 'multiplication of these sensory onslaughts raises the question of their succession in time, […] the gradual autonomization of the various affects slowly begins to release them from their relationship to plot as such'.[788] However it is insofar as the plot of *À vau-l'eau* consists in a presentism that continuously denies but must ultimately recognise itself that it creates a facetiously devised loophole out of Jameson's antinomy of sensation and plotting. This sleight of hand that Huysmans achieves is reflected in the novella's characterisation of office work.

While much of the novella recalls physiological literature, and its predominating focus on public life, insofar as it portrays the clerical 'type' abroad, wandering the streets of Paris, Huysmans also takes care to stress that the unmitigated futility of Folantin's life is mirrored in his work. Upbraided by the boss for arriving at the office slightly later than usual, Folantin's labours themselves exhibit an atemporally Sisyphean quality:

> The workday, which had started badly, continued to be unbearable. In a gloomy light that made the paper murky, he had to copy interminable letters, plot voluminous tables, and listen at the same time to the chatter of a colleague, a little old man who, hands in his pockets, liked to hear himself talk.
>
> This old man would recite the entirety of the newspaper, drawing it out yet further with his own commentary, or else he would criticise the phrasing of his

[785] Huysmans, *À vau-l'eau*, p. 103 – 'gluante prose'.
[786] Ibid., p. 132 – 'il comprit l'inutilité des changements de routes, la stérilité des élans et des efforts ; il faut se laisser aller à vau-l'eau ; Schopenhauer a raison, se dit-il, « la vie de l'homme oscille comme un pendule entre la douleur et l'ennui » […] le mieux n'existe pas pour les gens sans le sou ; seul, le pire arrive.'
[787] For an English portrayal of clerkly pessimism, see George Gissing's short story, 'The Pessimist of Plato Road' (1894), which is less an account of lower-middle-class existential dread, than a portrait of an embittered autodidact and fraudster.
[788] Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism*, p. 65.

> superiors' draft letters, and would cite alternatives that he would have been happy to see replace those that he was engrossing; and he intermixed these observations with details of the poor state of his health, which he declared was improving a bit, however, thanks to constant use of poplar unguent and to repeated cold-water ablutions.
>
> Listening to these interesting remarks, M. Folantin ended up making mistakes; the lines of his tables were bunched up and the figures thrown into disarray amongst the columns; he had had to scratch out pages and squeeze in new lines, all in vain in any case because the chief had returned his work to him with the order to redo it.[789]

This passage certainly recalls prior portrayals of office life: Lamb's short sketch, 'A Character' (1825) also plays on one's annoyance at sharing an office with a 'self-important babbler', and so too does Folantin's colleague's obsession with the newspaper recall Henry Monnier's *Scènes de la vie bureaucratique,* as well as its various closet drama-style spiritual successors, including Maupassant's short story, 'Opinion publique' (1881).[790] However, this passage differs from the above inasmuch as it is neither straight character sketch nor dialogue – these aspects of the narrative are stressed as being (painfully) incidental to the ostensible matter at hand, Folantin and the old man's labours. That said, it is also precisely these ancillary sensations of the office that Huysmans aestheticises (it is later described as a 'room permeated with the stink of dust and stuffiness exuded by box files, bundles and inkpots') while their labours, the actual *telos* of this space, copying and drawing up tables, are themselves more alien: it is only once the work *fails* to reach its intended ends that it attains a sensuous materiality, 'bunching up' in 'disarray'.[791] That is, it is only via the *detrimental* incursion of earthly 'reality', the poor lighting of the office, the chatter of the old man, and the bad style of his superiors, that the otherwise ideal constructions of the *employés*' labours become tangible – and therefore portrayable.

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[789] Huysmans, *À vau-l'eau,* p. 87 - 'La séance, mal commencée, avait continué d'être insupportable. Il avait fallu, sous un jour louche salissant le papier, copier d'interminables lettres, tracer de volumineux tableaux et écouter en même temps les bavardages du collègue, un petit vieux qui, les mains dans les poches, s'écoutait parler.

Celui-là récitait tout entier le journal et il l'allongeait encore par des jugements de son crû, ou bien il blâmait les formules des rédacteurs et il en citait d'autres qu'il eût été heureux de voir substituer à celles qu'il expédiait ; et il entremêlait ces observations de détails sur le mauvais état de sa santé qu'il déclarait s'améliorer un tantinet pourtant, grâce au constant usage de l'onguent populéum et aux ablutions répétées d'eau froide.

A écouter ces intéressants propos, M. Folantin finissait par se tromper ; les raies de ses états godaient et les chiffres couraient à la débandade, dans les colonnes ; il avait dû gratter des pages, surcharger des lignes, en pure perte d'ailleurs, car le chef lui avait retourné son travail, avec ordre de le refaire.'

[790] Charles Lamb, 'A Character', *Selected Prose,* pp. 259-260 (p. 259).

[791] Huysmans, *À vau-l'eau*, p. 107 – 'sa pièce empuantie par cette odeur de poussière et de renfermé que dégagent les cartons, les liasses et les pots d'encre.'

As Huysmans, and later Jameson, alike point out, plotting in Naturalism is undermined by its heightened attention to empirical factors – indeed, it is only because 'plotting' (here, in translation, literalised) is itself profaned in Huysmans's story that it can gain an empirical, sensuous, aspect. The implication is, conversely, that were these labours successfully completed, such an instance of conceptual coherence would conversely appear abstract and arbitrary in a world such as this – indeed, Huysmans's overall pessimistic message suggests that such structures are so alien to Folantin's existence that its attainments are impossible. Plotting in both senses thus feels like an arbitrarily formal imposition on a chaotic world, as Folantin's favourite philosopher remarks in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), such 'representations […] remain eternally strange to us, [standing] before us like hieroglyphics that are not understood.'[792] Thus is the *experience* of paperwork (rather than its aims) predicated upon what Dean de la Motte calls the 'eschewal of teleology' – a spirit he argues is in keeping with the aesthetic spirit of this period.[793] *À vau-l'eau* in this regard conveys a sense of anti-mimeticism: while not suggesting that the mimetic content of fiction is unreal, Huysmans questions rather the causal chain that underpins its formal structures. Of course, the fact that such arbitrary structures are themselves (at least theoretically) a governing force in Folantin's working life – embodied in his stickler of a boss – stresses the paradoxical character of the story's own presentist resolution.

À vau-l'eau, like other office narratives, invites an implicit tension between the office worker as fungible 'type' and as individual – M. Folantin, like Kit Mark, or Balzac's Castanier, suffers a crisis between the impersonal conditions of his existence and his personal desires (and unlike Castanier there is emphatically no supernatural realm to escape to, only the blunt fact of terrestrial decay). But Huysmans also compounds this dialectic: the novella is not only another episode in this selfhood-'typehood' dilemma, but also one in which plotting as literary teleology comes up against an entropic sense of dissipation and futility. Huysmans crystallises the poles of this formal tension in the bureaucratic world of his subject: the former is represented in the ends of office work, the latter in its means. It is in this double sense that *À vau-l'eau* appears as a precursor to *À rebours*: Huysmans's subsequent novel reads like both a logical extrapolation from the structural underpinnings of his novella, while also an escape from its social constraints.

Where *À vau-l'eau* subtly anticipates Huysmans's turn to Decadence, his later short story, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran' [Monsieur Bougran's Retirement], was smothered by it. Rejected by its commissioner in 1888 because it did not reflect the reputation Huysmans had developed in the wake of *À rebours* (as an 'art critic and a slightly perverse aesthete') the story was only published in

[792] Schopenhauer, p. 62.
[793] de la Motte, p. 25.

1964 – however here too does Huysmans's portrayal of bureaucracy exhibit some resonances with his most famous work.[794] Like the 'Superannuated Man' or Duval's *employé* in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (who yearned for the verdure of box files rather than that of his rural retreat) Huysmans's story covers the neuroses that follow a clerk's retirement – in this case, forced.[795] Unlike Chapter One's 'Elia' who learns to deinstitutionalise himself, or Duval's *employé*, who is only satisfied when he is dead, Huysmans's M. Bougran, unjustly forced into early retirement on the ambiguous grounds of 'moral disability', does not accept this rite of passage, and decides to enter into a fantasy world in which he has never really retired.[796] Like a bureaucratic des Esseintes, Bougran meticulously reconstructs his flat to resemble an office (and walks around the block first thing in order to simulate his former commute) even going so far as to hire an office boy (whom Bougran's domestic servant considers to be impinging on her territory) in order to replicate the bureaucratic experience at home. The rivalry between office boy and maid bubbles behind Bougran, who is focussed not only on perfecting his ersatz office, but also on reconstructing and improving his old work practices – his main bugbear being official style (the ambiguous mode of expression that enabled his unjust removal). His fantasy proves to be fatal, and he eventually dies of apoplexy, leaving only an unfinished, *pro forma,* appeal letter as a final testimony of his bizarre experiment.

Daniel Grojnowski describes Bougran's quest as 'veritably heroic', if absurd (he points out that the name of Huysmans's protagonist reads like a concatenation of '*bougre*' [imbecile] and '*grand*' [great]).[797] In this sense of grandiose stupidity, the story compares well to Gustave Flaubert's unfinished novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881): another of the more ambitious attempts to portray the phenomenon of the clerical retiree since this this tradition's emergence with Lamb. In contrast to Huysmans's story, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* extends the hobbyism of Duval's aged *employé* to the whole world, with Flaubert's titular retired copyists applying their positivistic dilettantism to a whole

[794] Grojnowski, 'Notice' to Joris-Karl Huysmans, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran', *Nouvelles*, pp. 201-206 (p. 201.) – 'De Huysmans, [Harry Quilter, fondateur du journal, *The Universal Review*] attend moins un récit de coloration naturaliste qu'une galanterie « parisienne », un texte qui illustrerait sa réputation de critique d'art et d'esthète un tantinet pervers, dans la manière qu'on prete à des Esseintes, le héros décadent d'*À rebours.'* Grojnowski also writes that the novella's title was devised by its twentieth-century rediscoverer, Maurice Garcon, rather than Huysmans himself.

[795] Duval, p. 508.

[796] Huysmans, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran', *Nouvelles*, pp. 207-227, (p. 207) –

'– Mais je n'ai pas d'infirmités, je suis valide !

– Sans doute, mais je n'apprendrai rein à un homme qui possède aussi bien que vous la législation sur cette matière ; la loi du 9 juin 1853 sur les pensions civiles permet, vous le savez… cette interprétation […] que les employés de l'État pourront être mis à la retraite, avant l'âge, pour cause d'invalidité morale, inappréciable aux hommes de l'art.'

[797] Grojnowski, 'Notice' to 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran', p. 204. Robert Ziegler similarly compares 'Bougran' to *baragouin*, 'gibberish' in *The Mirror of Divinity: The World and Creation in J.K. Huysmans* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 203.

picaresque series of blunders through the arts and sciences, until they eventually resign to the 'pleasure that there is in the material act of recopying' at a specially constructed double desk.[798]

Where Flaubert's copyists initially imagined that their clerical power to assimilate data would translate readily into real-life ambitions (they quote *ad nauseum* from textbooks on agronomy, architecture, literature, history, and so on, while disastrously engaging in these same disciplines) Bougran is to be characterised by his self-awareness. He is one of those rare fictional clerks who is benumbed by years of office routine, but maintains enough reflexivity to recognise himself *as* benumbed. Indeed, whatever the recognised shortcomings of office life in general, Bougran is rather proud of his role in France's bureaucracy, 'believing himself to be in effect of a superior caste' to the *employés* of businesses and banks – his elitism and his alienation are coextensive.[799] Upon retirement, Bougran is worried by 'the question of time to kill', but he does not frame this, Like Folantin, via the Schopenhauerian dichotomy of desire and boredom.[800] Rather, he asks himself, with a kind of bitter wistfulness,

> How to break overnight with the habit of an office enclosing you always in the same room, for identical hours, with the custom of exchanging conversation every morning with colleagues? Without a doubt, these exchanges varied little; they all revolved around how much or how little of a promotion one could expect at the end of the year, working out probable retirements, even anticipating possible deaths, speculating upon imaginary bonuses, and only deviating from these fascinating subjects to expand into interminable reflections upon the events related by the newspaper. But this lack even of the unexpected was in such perfect agreement with the monotony of faces, the platitude of pleasantries, the uniformity even of the rooms![801]

Huysmans recalls both Lamb's frustration at seeing the same 'pestilential clerk faces' every day, and Balzac's satirical portrayal of the *employés*' obsessive commentary upon retirements, deaths, and promotions – indeed, he also directly recalls the old man that so irritated Folantin with his

[798] Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* ed. Stéphanie Dord-Crouslé (Paris : Flammarion, 1999), p. 389 – 'Plaisir qu'il y a dans l'acte matériel de recopier.' Bureaucracy and clerks have a place in Flaubert's broader *œuvre,* although, as with *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* not with the degree of focus on office life exhibited by my chosen texts – see Baron's 'La bureaucratie flaubertienne, du Garçon aux deux cloportes' (1994).
[799] Huysmans, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran', p. 217 – 'M. Bougran se croyait, en effet, d'une caste supérieure et méprisait les employés des commerce et des banques.'
[800] Ibid., p. 211 – 'la question du temps à tuer l'inquiéta.'
[801] Ibid., pp. 211-212 – 'Comment rompre, du jour au lendemain, avec cette habitude d'un bureau vous enfermant dans une pièce toujours la même, pendant d'identiques heures, avec cette coutume d'une conversation échangée, chaque matin entre collègues. Sans doute, ces entretiens étaient peu variés ; ils roulaient tous sur le plus ou moins d'avancement qu'on pouvait attendre à la fin de l'année, supputaient de probables retraites, escomptaient même de possibles morts, supposaient d'illusoires gratifications, ne déviaient de ces sujets passionnants que pour s'étendre en d'interminables réflexions sur les événements relatés par le journal. Mais ce manque, même d'imprévu était en si parfait accord avec la monotonie des visages, la platitude des plaisanteries, l'uniformité même des pièces !'

commentary on the newspaper. However, for Bougran, these are not alienating phenomena or the raw material of his wry observations, but essential and ingrained features of his existence, their uniformity is in perfect resonance with the grand character of the institution. Indeed, it is when Bougran later wanders around the Jardin de Luxembourg, and he sees himself in the old nursery – in trees that 'no longer had the form of trees', '[murdered] under the pretext of extracting better fruits from them' – that his folly gains shape.[802] Just as Huysmans's Naturalistic tendencies led him into the alienatingly denatured, it is in the contorted and denatured state of these trees that Balzac's adage, that 'nature, for the *employé*, *is* the office', recurs: Bougran realises that he is only his true self while at his desk and resolves to reconstruct his former existence at home.[803]

This tension between the natural and artificial underlies Huysmans's style. Where Baron pinpoints the 'grand importance bureaucratic "para-literature" attaches to office décor' in general – indeed, we have seen many a reference to desks, box-files, stoves and so on in these texts – Huysmans takes this to an obsessive extreme, providing an exhaustive survey of office furniture and equipment, probably the most detailed of the whole literary tradition:

> [Bougran's] plan, which had so cheered him up, was easy to carry out. […] He bought a black-painted wooden desk with drawers on top […] Along the walls he had white wooden pigeonholes installed, and he filled them with green box-files that had copper handles. […] He threw a mat and a wastepaper basket under his desk, and, taking a step back, he exclaimed with delight to himself: '*Voilà,* I'm there!'
>
> On his desk, he arranged, in methodical order, his many penholders and pencils: his club-shaped, cork penholder, his copper-plated penholder, mounted on a rosewood shaft that tasted good when chewed, and his black, blue, and red pencils, for annotations and references. Then he placed, like always, a porcelain inkwell encircled with sponges to the right of his blotter, and a pounce pot filled with sawdust to its left; in front, a case that contained sealing wafers and pink string under its pin-studded, green velvet lid. Yellowish paper folders were [distributed] all over […] He found himself, without having left his flat, returned to his former desk, in his former office.[804]

[802] Ibid., pp. 214-215 – 'Ces arbres n'avaient plus forme d'arbres.' 'cette façon d'assassiner les arbres, sous le prétexte de leur extirper de meilleurs fruits'.

[803] Cf. Watson on *À rebours*: 'Des Esseintes is constructed not as a subject which creates an object world, but rather as a subject created *by* an object world' (my emphasis), p. 140.

[804] Bijaoui-Baron, 'Le thème bureaucratique chez Flaubert et Maupassant' p. 54 – 'Essentiellement descriptive, la para-littérature bureaucratique attache une grande importance au décor des bureaux' ; Huysmans, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran', p. 218 – 'Ce projet qui l'avait ragaillardi était facile à réaliser. D'abord M. Bougran courut chez les marchands de papiers de tentures, acquit quelques rouleaux d'un infâme papier couleur de chicorée au lait qu'il fit apposer sur les murs de la plus petite de ses pièces ; puis, il acheta un bureau en sapin peint en noir, surmonté de casiers, une petite table sur laquelle il posa une cuvette ébréchée et un savon à la guimauve dans un vieux verre, un fauteuil canné, en hémicycle, deux chaises. Il fit mettre contre les murailles des casiers de bois blanc qu'il remplit de cartons verts à poignées de cuivre, piqua avec une épingle un calendrier le long de la cheminée dont il fit enlever la glace et sur la tablette de laquelle il entassa des boîtes à fiches, jeta un paillasson, une corbeille sous son bureau et, se reculant un peu, s'écria ravi : « M'y voilà, j'y suis ! »

Although the story was rejected for lacking the requisite degree of perversion, Huysmans here describes the furnishing of Bougran's office with an almost fetishistic eye – indeed, the near-antiquity of this office, with no speaking tubes or typewriters (although Bougran does have metal pens) also hints toward the conservatism Thuillier attributes to *employés* in general. As Farrant points out, this practice of 'cataloguing' is a defining feature of Naturalism and Decadence alike: but in the latter case it becomes 'so exaggerated [as to] produce a fantastical, hallucinatory experience of reality that loosens our hold on any firm external truth.'[805] Indeed, in keeping with Huysmans's Decadent sensibilities, it is as if it is only in this context of heightened artifice that such a description can take place: for those portraying 'real' offices, the clash of (im)personalities soon gets in the way (Bougran himself acknowledges that his 'solitary office [is] not, in sum, a true office', before hiring his own 'office boy').[806] The irony here is that, just as Ymbert and Balzac's offices seemed almost to deviate from earthly 'reality' insofar as they erred into becoming a textual-hierarchical microcosm, the artificiality of Bougran's office is stressed by its purely (exhaustively) empirical aspect.[807]

Bougran's obsession does not stop in the 'material realm' of office life, however – to do so would undermine the character of his folly. The old man begrudges his youthful successors, remarking that 'they think of nothing but of escaping the office, banging out their work, without a care for the administrative language that their elders would wield with such ease; they all write as if they were writing their own letters!'[808] This last point in particular stresses Bougran's warped sense of his own selfhood: having no letters of his own to write, he is 'happy to wade through juridical *chinoiseries*' instead, and immerses himself accordingly in perfecting the complexities of administrative style.[809]

'Sur son bureau, il rangea, dans un ordre méthodique, toute la série de ses porte-plume et de ses crayons, porte-plume en forme de massue, en liège, porte-plume à cuirasses de cuivre emmanchés dans un bâton de palissandre, sentant bon quand on le mâche, crayons noirs, bleus, rouges, pour les annotations et les renvois. Puis il disposa, comme jadis, un encrier en porcelaine, cerclé d'éponges, à la droite de son sous-main, une sébille remplie de sciure de bois à sa gauche ; en face, une grimace contenant sous son couvercle de velours vert, hérissé d'épingles, des pains à cacheter et de la ficelle rose. Des dossiers de papier jaunâtre un peu partout ; au-dessus des casiers, les livres nécessaires : Le *Dictionnaire d'Administration* de Bloch, Le *Code* et les *Lois usuelles*, le Béquet, le Blanche; il se trouvait, sans avoir bougé de place, revenu devant son ancien bureau, dans son ancienne pièce.'

[805] Farrant, pp. 138-139.

[806] Huysmans, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran', p. 220 – 'Ce bureau solitaire n'était pas, en somme, un vrai bureau.'

[807] Watson identifies a reading of *À rebours* in postmodern criticism that redoubles this irony: whereby the objects 'catalogued' by Huysmans 'are obliterated […] in his textualization of them. The text affirms itself at the expense of the concrete.' Watson, pp. 135-136.

[808] Huysmans, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran', pp. 209-210 – 'Ils ne songent qu'à s'échapper du bureau, bâclent leur travail, n'ont aucun souci de cette langue administrative que les anciens maniaient avec tant d'aisance ; tous écrivent comme s'ils écrivaient leurs propres lettres !'

[809] Ibid., p. 219 – 'Heureux de patauger dans les chinoiseries juridiques.'

As with the furnishing of the 'home office', Huysmans here overloads us with a list – no longer of material objects, however, but meaningless stock phrases, the kind of 'protocol' that Ymbert so deplored. For Bougran, however, the onslaught of such 'protocol' attains a kind of intoxicating sensuousness:

> The many 'pleading tos', the 'In response to the letter that you kindly addressed to me, I have the honour to inform you thats', the 'In accordance with the view expressed in your dispatch concernings…' The many customary phraseologies: 'The spirit if not the letter of the law', 'not to ignore the importance of the considerations that you invoke in support of this contention…' And finally those formulas destined for the Ministry of Justice in which one spoke of 'the view promulgated by the Chancery', all those evasive and attenuated phrases, the 'I would be inclined to believe', the 'it will not escape you', the 'I would highly appreciate', these many turns of phrase, dating back to the age of Colbert, made M. Bougran's head ring.[810]

Bougran recognises that the bureaucratic language with which he has engaged is 'a specialised perversion of language', that its precepts are not pertinent to 'real life' – even if it is precisely by the shady subtleties of such hieroglyphs that he has been cast unwillingly back into the world.[811] But it is *in spite of* his first-hand knowledge of the strange nature of such phrases – which at first seem safe enough, but, 'bit by bit, would ramify, leading to gloomy corners, black dead-ends', and ultimately to the 'pitfall' of 'moral disability' that ended his career – that Bougran cannot turn away from the virtual world of *la langue administrative*.[812] Bureaucratese assaults Bougran's consciousness like the Baudelairean '*idéal artificiel*', inciting in Huysmans's *employé* the same 'morbid pleasures' and the 'inevitable punishments that result from prolonged usage' that Charles Baudelaire identifies in hashish and opium in *Les Paradis artificiels* [Artificial Paradises] (1860) – indeed, it is the over-indulgence in such phraseologies that ultimately appears to kill Bougran off.[813] Herzfeld argues that bureaucracy is predicated in part upon a 'language fetish', a sense that legal-bureaucratic discourse is imbued with

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[810] Ibid., p. 224 – 'Ces « exciper de », ces « En réponse à la lettre que vous avez bien voulu m'adresser, j'ai l'honneur de vous faire connaître que », ces « Conformément à l'avis exprimé dans votre dépêche relative à… ». Ces phraséologies coutumières : « l'esprit sinon le texte de la loi », « sans méconnaître l'importance des considérations que vous invoquez à l'appui de cette thèse... ». Enfin ces formules destinées au ministère de la Justice où l'on parlait de « l'avis émané de sa chancellerie », toutes ces phrases évasives et atténuées, les « j 'inclinerais à croire », les « il ne vous échappera pas », les « j'attacherais du prix à », tout ce vocabulaire de tournures remontant au temps de Colbert, donnait un terrible tintouin à M. Bougran.'

[811] Ziegler, p. 204.

[812] Huysmans, 'La Retraite de Monsieur Bougran', p. 209 – 'il scrutait les routes de cette prose, tâtait ses passerelles jetées entre chaque article ; au premier abord ces voies semblaient sans danger, bien éclairées et droites, puis, peu à peu, elles se ramifiaient, aboutissaient à des tournants obscurs, et de noires impasses', 'des chausse-trapes.'

[813] Charles Baudelaire, *Les Paradis artificiels* (Paris: Maxi-livres Profrance, 1998), p. 20 – 'Parmi les drogues les plus propres à créer ce que je nomme l'*Idéal artificiel* […] sont le haschisch et l'opium. L'analyse des effets mystérieux et des jouissances morbides qui peuvent engendrer ces drogues, des châtiments inévitables qui résultent de leur usage prolongé, et enfin de l'immoralité même impliquée dans cette poursuite d'un faux idéal, constitue le sujet de cette étude.'

an 'immanent authority' that absolves its wielders and misdirects service-users: but with Bougran this quasi-autonomous being is also conceived of as a virtual self in which the *employé* immerses his own ego.[814] In the same manner, Huysmans's story thus stresses the degree to which the 'aesthetic solipsism' associated with Decadence, and the images of social alienation associated with Naturalism, are, for the clerk at least, coterminous.[815]

5. Georges Courteline (1858-1929): *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* (1893)

Guy Thuillier writes that it was 'surprising that Maupassant never drew from his experience as an administrator to write a novel on the ministries', but that this is because Maupassant himself 'judged the enterprise too mediocre': he deemed what Thuillier calls 'the Folantin solution' ('to take the *employé* out of the office') the only feasible means of portraying office workers in fiction.[816] Of the other major figures of late nineteenth-century French literature mentioned so far, we have seen that Flaubert took 'the Folantin solution' *avant la lettre* with *Bouvard et Pécuchet*; Zola, too busy documenting the lives of the downtrodden or exposing elites, rarely paused halfway to portray the *employé* (other than re-treading some old physiological jokes in his portrayal of clerks in *Thérèse Raquin*); and while it is after Huysmans's Folantin that the 'solution' of taking the *employé* out of the office is named, Huysmans's subsequent suggestion, with Bougran, that you cannot take the office out of the *employé*, failed to be published. Of course, the 'Folantin solution' as a phenomenon reflects the greater complexity, particularity, and autonomy of the clerk as literary subject during this period, but it also paradoxically therefore situates the clerk beyond the bounds of office literature. Georges Courteline, meanwhile, exhibited no such qualms about novelising ministerial life.

Courteline's novel, *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* (a 'rond-de-cuir' is a toroidal leather cushion, intended to alleviate suffering from haemorrhoids, and the term became a pejorative metonym for bureaucrats during this period), shares with Huysmans's office novellas a degree of black humour: its otherwise aleatory plot culminates with the murder of the office chief by a psychotic *employé*.[817] However, *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* also lacks the stylistic and narrative inventiveness of Huysmans's two stories: where the tales of Folantin and Bougran appear to us almost as the fellow travellers of a

[814] Herzfeld, p. 118.
[815] Farrant, p. 137.
[816] Thuillier, 'Maupassant, Commis au Ministère de la Marine', *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates au XIXe Siècle,* pp. 3-33 (pp. 32-33) – 'On peut s'étonner que Maupassant n'ait pas tiré de son expérience d'administrateur un roman sur les ministères […] il semble qu'il ait jugé l'entreprise trop médiocre. 'La solution Folantin – prendre l'employé hors du bureau – est la seule possible à ses yeux'. For examples of such stories by Maupassant, see *Les Dimanches d'un bourgeois de Paris et autres nouvelles,* ed. Catherine Botterel (Paris: Gallimard, 2020).
[817] 'Rond-de-cuir' is a term, Francis Pruner writes, that Courteline popularised, if did not coin. Francis Pruner, introduction to Georges Courteline, *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966), pp. 11-24 (p. 21).

Decadent *avant-garde*, Courteline's comic tableaux of office life read like a congealment of the generic order of 'types', relationships, settings, and sentiments (largely frustration and boredom) that Baron identified as a 'bureaucratic mythology' in nineteenth-century French literature.[818] Of course, it is in keeping with the stereotypically intransigent character of bureaucracy – indeed, the relative *stagnation* in areas of France's civil service – and the tedious nature of office work in these institutions, that the portrayal thereof should similarly start to appear repetitious; but equally, this rehashing of old jokes takes on a peculiar malignity in Courteline's hands – almost as if from sitting for too long in one place, office literature itself starts to discomfit.

Like Ymbert, and Monnier (if his claim to have been an *employé* is to be believed), or indeed like Balzac's 'Cumulard' [Moonlighter] *employé* in his 1841 *Physiologie*, Courteline (real name, Moinaux, or Moineau), was both a clerk and comic dramatist – writing plays in the same vein as other *farceurs* of the period, such as Georges Feydeau.[819] Courteline became an *employé* at the *Direction des Cultes* [Department of Religious Affairs] of the Ministry of the Interior in 1881, and remained a copyist for thirty-three years. The *Direction des Cultes* was noted, Thuillier writes, for its 'archaic practices': in particular, hiring everyone into entry-level positions from which there was little chance of progression, thereby 'condemning […] young men to carry out mechanical, uninteresting jobs' for the foreseeable future.[820] Inspectors and theorists of administration in France had criticised the continuation of such practices since the 1850s, but *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir,* suggests how little such advice had been heeded: Courteline's fictional clerks are driven to 'madness, senility, excessive zeal, or absenteeism' by years of repetitive toil.[821]

In keeping with this sense of stagnation, Courteline's 1893 novel, amounting, over six 'tableaux', to a relatively nonlinear narrative that depicts office 'types' engaged in various comic set-pieces, at times reads as if it could have been written in the 1830s or '40s.[822] And, indeed, like many of these earlier texts, its first incarnation was as an unamalgamated series of sketches in the *L'Écho de Paris* newspaper.[823] Courteline's novel is set at the fictional *Direction des Dons et Legs* [Department of Donations and Legacies], home to the usual round-up of cranks and eccentrics, collectively

[818] Bijaoui-Baron, 'Le thème bureaucratique chez Flaubert et Maupassant', p. 53.
[819] Farrant, p. 101, p. 198; Balzac, *Physiologie de l'employé*, pp. 72-72. For a biography of Courteline, see Emmanuel Haymann, *Courteline* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), see p. 14 for the puzzle of Courteline's real name.
[820] Thuillier, 'Courteline Bureaucrate', *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates en France au XIXe Siècle*, pp. 34-44 (p. 42) – 'ces pratiques archaïques', 'en effet la Direction recrutait exclusivement des expéditionnaires, ce qui condamnait, quels que soient leurs titres, les jeunes gens à accomplir des besognes mécaniques sans intérêt.'
[821] Pruner, p. 23 – 'les inférieurs n'ont d'autre issue que la folie, le gâtisme, l'excès de zèle, ou l'absentéisme.' For critiques, see Thuillier, 'Courteline Bureaucrate', p. 42.
[822] Félicien Marceau even writes rather anachronistically that Balzac's novel 'is the same book as Courteline's' later work. Marceau, p. viii.
[823] Pruner, pp. 11-12.

constituting the titular '*ronds-de-cuir*' – these include the idler, Lahrier, his doddery colleague, père Soupe, the pompous boss, M. de La Hourmerie, the gnomic archivist, Van der Hogen, and the psychotically delusional Letondu, who has the habit of leaping up and down violently in his office.[824] Despite its episodic quality, a plot starts to accumulate as the tableaux roll by: in particular when a curator comes to the ministry regarding the ongoing case of some antiques that had been bequeathed to his provincial museum, a donation contested by the testator's family. The curator plays a lighter antecedent to Kafka's Joseph K., insofar as he struggles to excite the attention of the various incompetent bureaucrats of the department regarding his case, but he also serves to tether together (rather loosely) its comic scenes – at least until he gets completely lost in the department's labyrinthine building. The *employé*, Letondu, also gives the novel some continuity as he becomes more and more mentally disturbed, and starts calling for an 'inquest', an ostensibly bureaucratic procedure reframed here in vaguely eschatological terms.[825] These two narrative courses converge as the lost curator eventually chances upon M. de La Hourmerie, lying on the floor of his office in a pool of blood – murdered by Letondu. In light of this event, the largely nonsequitous series of episodes leading up to this moment temporarily acquire a degree of retrospective continuity, if only because we see the many failures that led up to it, but de La Hourmerie's murder ultimately consolidates the novel's sense of anti-climax: the final tableau depicts his funeral, after which the surviving *ronds-de-cuir* go on a night out, their lives apparently continuing unaltered.

In erring between an episodic and a continuous narrative, Courteline's novel speaks to the ongoing problem of representing Dickens's 'no variety of days'. Although it compares to Balzac's *Les Employés* in terms of length and use of clerical 'types', *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* avoids the complex political intrigues that push Xavier Rabourdin, Balzac's ambitious office chief, to his ignominious fall, instead making use of the blunter instrument that is the clerical Angel of Death, Letondu. *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* compares in similar manner to more contemporary works like André Theuriet's *L'Affaire Froideville* (1883): while Courteline's audience-seeking curator is largely a background figure, in Theuriet's novel the usual assortment of office stereotypes and scenes are drilled into supporting a rather mawkish story involving a villainous aristocrat impeding the rightful claim of his unjustly disowned niece to her inheritance. Despite its relative lightness of plotting, *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* similarly avoids the kind of narrative and aesthetic experimentation undertaken in Huysmans's two office novellas, or in Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, whose mutual 'eschewal of teleology' mirrors the seemingly continuous, inconclusive nature of paperwork: instead Courteline focusses on the clash

[824] The vaguely mystical character of Van der Hogen, and the surname of Dutch origin, suggests perhaps an avatar of Huysmans.
[825] Courteline, *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir*, p. 93.

of office personalities and the irrational character of the ministry, reflected in its building.[826] Finally, there is little overlap with the *Bildungsroman*-style narratives of the previous chapter, or indeed with Trollope's portrayal of Wilson and Graham as would-be careerists in the present: in keeping with Thuillier's remarks regarding the 'archaic practices' of Courteline's employers, his fictional ministry is no place for ambition, or for promotions that are anything other than arbitrary – it is more an amalgam of 'monastery' and 'barracks' than modern workplace.[827] As suggested in Section 1.2., however, this institutional and generic sense of ossification also exhibits an anticipatory character: Francis Pruner, while pointing out its 'journalistic' elements, also argues that the nihilistic spirit of Courteline's novel evokes the Literature of the Absurd.[828]

In keeping with his theatrical background, many of Courteline's funniest scenes amount to dialogues between his clerks. Recalling a range of doddery clerks from over the decades, from Balzac's Poiret to Folantin's newspaper-reading colleague in *À vau-l'eau*, Courteline's père Soupe is a familiar 'type' – here at the mercy of his spiteful co-worker, Lahrier. Soupe is described as

> stupid, of such screaming stupidity that it is insulting, he would spend three quarters of his time napping in his armchair, the rest giggling all by himself, for who knows what reason, while rubbing his hands, loudly bursting into laughter, his head rattled by the approving nods of a little old dotard, contented with life.[829]

Lahrier, meanwhile, 'hardly liked the office, [and] despised père Soupe all the more, regarding his company as an aggravation of his sentence', Courteline writes – he is one of 'these beings that are all nerves, for whom irritation has quickly degenerated into hateful animosity'.[830] Recalling the vaguely Socratic office prankster, Jean-Jacques Bixiou in *Les Employés* (although without any philosophical pretensions) Lahrier spends most of his time picking fights with his aged colleague: by 'scandalising' him, or by disputing the old man's beliefs with 'extravagant theories', some days going so far as to frighten Soupe out of the office and into the streets, thus (echoing Bougran) '[amputating him] of his habits'.[831] Facetiously described as 'little scenes of family life', Courteline writes that these arguments

[826] De La Motte, p. 25.
[827] Courteline, p. 48.
[828] Pruner, p. 12, p. 24.
[829] Courteline, p. 62 – 'Stupide, de cette stupidité hurlante qui exaspère à l'égal d'une insulte, il passait les trois quarts du temps à faire la sieste en son fauteuil, le reste à ricaner tout seul sans que l'on pût savoir pourquoi, à se frotter les mains, à pouffer bruyamment, la tête secouée de hochements approbatifs d'un petit gâteux content de vivre'.
[830] Ibid., p. 63 – 'Certes, René Lahrier n'aimait guère le bureau, mais plus encore il exécrait le père Soupe, tenant sa société pour aggravation de peine. Il était de ces êtres tout nerfs, chez qui l'agacement a vite dégénéré en animosité haineuse.'
[831] Ibid. – 'Il scandalisait ses pudeurs, bouleversait de théories extravagantes sa foi aveugle de vieil ingénu […] amputé de ses habitudes.'

are of 'no consequence' – that Soupe's senility in particular means that, even after a bad row, he '[is] to be found faithful at his post' the next day.[832]

In keeping with this reuse of 'type', the clashes Courteline depicts are determined by temperamental disparities:

> 'Three o'clock!', announced père Soupe, who had the splendid digestion of one with an immaculate conscience, 'I'm going to go and do my business.' […]
>
> Dumbfounded for a moment, Lahrier looked up and said: 'What happy news, of prodigious interest! Engrossing indeed! You must telephone it to all the foreign courts. […] [Do] you imagine that you cannot go to the loo at this time without feeling the need to make a preface? […]
>
> 'You don't pretend to stop me from doing my business and going to the loo when I please?'
>
> […] 'No, I don't mean that. […] If anything, I'd rather that you elect to live there once and for all! That you spend your life there! That you never leave it! I would have at least the relief of no longer having to see your grubby head. I'm simply telling you this: that you would certainly not compromise yourself by going to the loo like everyone else, discretely, like someone well brought up, without proclaiming "I must go and do my business" with the air of a young rascal.'[833]

The argument continues in this vein for some more pages, predicated entirely as it is upon Lahrier's prickliness and Soupe's misconstrual of Lahrier's reproach. Indeed, we can see here why Pruner sees Courteline's novel as prefatory to twentieth-century absurdism: there is something of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos* [*No Exit*] (1944) about the two clerks' constant misunderstandings and arguments with one another. Equally, while the satirical character of rooting absurdity (literally conveying a sense of being 'contrary to reason') in the heart of France's ostensibly rational bureaucracy is all too clear, the fact that Courteline roots the argument in questions of personal temperament, upbringing, and bodily functions also stresses the absurdist sense of the 'human condition' as the site of an unresolvable conflict between ephemeral physical needs and transcendental constructs.[834]

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[832] Ibid. – 'ces petites scènes de famille ne tiraient-elles point à conséquence ; Soupe avait courte la rancune s'il avait l'irritation lente, et le soleil du lendemain le retrouvait fidèle au poste'.

[833] Ibid., pp. 66-68 – '— Trois heures ! annonça le père Soupe qui avait les belles digestions des gens de conscience immaculée ; je vais aller faire mes petits besoins. […]
Abasourdi un instant, Lahrier leva le nez et dit : — Voilà une heureuse nouvelle, d'un prodigieux intérêt ! Oui, palpitant, en vérité ! Vous devriez le téléphoner à toutes les cours étrangères. […] À cette heure, vous ne pouvez plus aller aux lieux sans vous croire dans l'obligation de faire une préface ? […]

— Vous n'avez pas la prétention de m'empêcher de faire mes petits besoins et d'aller aux lieux quand cela me plaît ? […]

— Non, je ne parle pas de ça. […] si, même, je souhaite quelque chose, c'est que vous y élisiez domicile une fois pour toutes ! que vous y passiez votre vie ! que vous n'en quittiez jamais ! J'aurais au moins le soulagement de ne plus voir votre sale tête. — Je vous dis simplement ceci : que vous ne seriez point compromis pour aller aux lieux comme tout le monde, discrètement, en homme bien élevé, sans proclamer : « Je vais aller faire mes petits besoins » avec des airs de jeune espiègle.'

[834] Joanna Gavins, 'The Literary Absurd', *Reading the Absurd* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2013), pp. 1-9 (p. 1, p. 4.); cf. Albert Camus, 'L'espoir et l'absurde dans l'œuvre de Franz Kafka', from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), pp. 49-60 (p. 56).

If there is an absurdity to this passage, however, there is also a kind of cruelty – perhaps not quite as raw as it could be insofar as it largely sticks to the same old physiological conventions, but, equally, it is also against such well-worn conventions that this malignity stands out in relief. Over the course of this thesis we have seen that physiological literature dealt purely with the 'type' as a persona abstracted from any one person, that Balzac in turn concatenated such 'types' with characterisation as a means of sustaining a tension between structural and individual factors in his narratives, and that this tension was subsequently re-employed as a means of *problematising* such narratives in Huysmans's stories' play of plot against sensation. But, just as the course of *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* wavers between a novelistic narrative arc and a more episodic, feuilleton-like style, so too is its similarly individualised characterisation (the 'realistic particularity' that Watt ascribed to the novel as a form) shored up against preestablished physiological schemas.[835] While Soupe might appear to be more or less a clone of Huart's 'Oyster', Balzac's Poiret, and Huysmans's irritating old man, it is in the detail with which Courteline fleshes out Soupe's character – in particular, by very explicitly associating Soupe's 'typological' resonances with the physical debilities of old age – that the generalised mockery of the *physiologies* becomes strangely mean-spirited and invective. Indeed, the more Soupe is fleshed out, the more his 'flatness' as a character is painfully reinforced: it is because the specificities of Soupe's senility are such that they renew his consciousness each day, refreshing his potential for consternation and his reactions thereto, and thus entrapping him in a strangely timeless realm of contentment punctuated by humiliation, that Courteline replicates the abstract existence of the 'type' by means of the *character*'s very personal debilities.

The writer and critic, Marcel Schwob, in his introduction to the first edition of Courteline's novel, suggests that the egalitarian and disenchanting character of modernisation will ultimately wipe out laughter because laughter is *only* at home amidst the cruelty of pre-modern society: 'to laugh is to feel superior', Schwob writes, and Courteline's works, he continues, represent a last vestige of uneradicated humour.[836] Schwob's introduction, and the apparent cruelty of the père Soupe episode in *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir,* recall Friedrich Nietzsche's remark, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), that, where the 'malice and cruel teasing' of Don Quixote leaves a 'bitter taste' in the mouth of nineteenth-century readers, it would have been read 'in the best of all consciousness as the most cheerful of books' in Cervantes's day.[837] Like Schwob, Nietzsche argues that humanity has almost 'grown out' of a particular brand of festive cruelty as part of its broader moral development; unlike

[835] Watt, pp. 17-18.
[836] Marcel Schwob, 'Essai sur le paradoxe du rire', *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* (Paris : Gallimard, 1893), pp. 3-7 (p. 4) - 'Rire, c'est se sentir supérieur.'
[837] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. Douglas Smith (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 48.

Schwob, he moreover remarks that such moral development (however flawed) reflects an increasingly nuanced, complex culture – humanity has developed into an '*interesting animal*.'[838] But Courteline complicates Schwob and Nietzsche's theses alike: the portrayal of père Soupe suggests that as a generic convention congeals and develops – as the tropes associated with a 'type' are able to grow beyond one-dimensionality and attain a degree of particularity and nuance – the hitherto latent implications of a convention become manifest. The 'type' in physiological literature evades directly mocking any one individual by mocking an abstract collective; but, even if purely resulting from compounded usage, as this formal device achieves any degree of naturalistic particularity or complexity (when the 'oyster' becomes an 'interesting animal') the suspended tensions underlying the joke can no longer remain in suspense – they collide and confront us, exposing a sense of malignancy.[839]

In keeping with Courteline's sense of the repetitious nature of office life, and of Soupe's own debilitated memory, the scene is more or less relived some tableaux later: this time Soupe starts washing his feet in the office basin, upon which a disgusted Lahrier throws the old man's shoes out into the corridor.[840] Of course, it is insofar as this workplace bullying, ostensibly a means of dishabituating Soupe from his various workplace peccadilloes, becomes itself a habit, that its sense of cruelty is counterbalanced with that of absurd tragedy. As in texts from prior chapters, Courteline suggests a continuity between the constant patterns of office life and a tendency of its inhabitants to ritualise behaviour in general – and, ironically, the more such nonofficial behaviour is ritualised, the more it is enfolded into the office experience from which these inhabitants want to escape (while simultaneously undermining their productivity). With this sense of irony, as with *Les Employés*, Courteline invites us to ask whether the peculiar hybrids of 'type' and character that inhabit his fictional office are the creations of *literary* convention, or the products of mind-numbing labour. Indeed, very explicitly echoing Balzac, Courteline asks 'which of the two, the *employé* or the office, was the natural fruit of the other, its forced secretion?'[841]

Perhaps it is insofar as Soupe and Lahrier alike are trapped in this cycle that Courteline's ostensibly comic scene can claim to evade a sense of premodern sadism, but it is equally because it

[838] Ibid., p. 18.
[839] See Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905): hostile humour '*will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible*' (Freud's emphasis) – it sublimates genuine violence or retribution. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious,* tr. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), p. 147.
[840] Courteline, pp. 104-108. This episode is notably comparable to the stapler-wrangling scenes in Ricky Gervais's *The Office* (2001-03).
[841] Courteline, p. 62 – 'Lequel des deux, de l'employé ou du bureau, était le fruit naturel de l'autre, sa sécrétion obligée ?' Cf. Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 148 – 'il est difficile de décider si ces mammifères à plumes se crétinisent à ce métier, ou s'ils ne font pas ce métier parce qu'ils sont un peu crétins de naissance.'

evokes the office literature of the 1830s and '40s that its cruelty has a bit of that old-fashioned 'sense of torture' that Nietzsche identifies in Cervantes.[842] Indeed, this continuity with the past gives Courteline's offices a sense of atemporality (embodied in the unvarying character of their labour as copyists, and reinforced by Soupe's senility) that artificially sets them apart from the manners and morals of their epoch. The only indication that we are in the last decade of the nineteenth century is Lahrier's sarcastic suggestion to telephone the world's various royal courts to announce the news of Soupe's bowel movement: an allusion to an activity (diplomacy) not only far above the two *employés*' pay grade, and therefore alien to the realities of their daily life, but whose character is framed as itself conveying an uneasy coexistence of archaic and cutting-edge institutions and structures (aristocracy and telephony respectively).[843]

This sense of backwardness, or even of being 'out of time', is complemented by the alienating manner in which the space of the *Direction des Dons et Legs* itself is conveyed. As with Ymbert and Balzac's ministries, the building is a large, palatial structure, one that is rather past its prime. Courteline writes: 'it gives off the desolation of an abandoned house, or one that is just coming out of an abrupt attack of cholera' – riddled with 'administrative catacombs', 'the glacial solitude of its interminable corridors' harbours the 'non-life of thirty *ronds-de-cuir*', as well as the usual gamut of dusty documents and pungent box-files.[844] But Courteline's tendency to re-tread such stereotypical observations shifts during the episode in which the museum curator gets lost in the ministerial building. Starting with him leaving his hotel that morning to solicit the help of the *Direction des Dons et Legs*, the curator soon finds himself haplessly wandering the corridors of officialdom:

> Now he went down an interminable corridor, with right-angled breaks that opened suddenly onto new perspectives of silent, closed doors. [He was] unsettled and fearful – and irritated that his boots should thud so, as if on the resonating slabs of a cathedral. […] A white wall running to his left [was] punctured every ten paces by high, locked windows. As he walked, through these windows he could distinguish other, identical, windows on the farther side of the void-like courtyard. [These windows were] closed, and on exactly identical walls – [so alike were they] that his uncertain heart was erring between the vague terror of having fallen into an unending circle, and the hope that a day would come when he would nonetheless get out of here!

[842] Nietzsche, p. 48.

[843] On this tension between the retrograde and the modernising, see, C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World – 1780-1914*, pp. 469-473, where a '"great acceleration" – the dramatic speeding up of global social, intellectual, and economic change' alongside 'more than 100 years of uneven social change' lead to the 1914-18 War (pp. 472-473). And also Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire*, pp. 276-279, whereby aspects of the international order appear 'like some prehistoric survival into the nineteenth century.' (p. 278).

[844] Courteline, pp. 47-48 – 'elle répand une désolation de maison abandonnée ou que viendrait de visiter une brusque attaque de choléra', 'catacombes administratives', 'la solitude glaciale de ses interminables corridors', 'la non-vie des trente ronds-de-cuir'. Like Courteline's *Direction des Cultes* during this period, the *Dons et Legs* is one of the smaller bureaucratic institutions in France's civil service, Thuillier, 'Courteline Bureaucrate', p. 41.

He got out.[845]

We have previously encountered depictions in this vein of the perturbed outsider: Ymbert, Balzac, and Leman Rede alike played on the newcomer's experience of the labyrinthine, inscrutable space of bureaucratic institutions. However, from the vantage of this episode, these prior portrayals appear by contrast almost as fantasy worlds – as Balzac writes, the ministries are 'worthy of [E.T.A.] Hoffmann' – they are almost motley in comparison to the stark uniformity of the *Dons et Legs* as it is experienced by the curator.[846] With the corridor's equidistant windows and closed doors, and its apparently contiguous identical twin across the courtyard, Courteline in this instance takes us from a sense of mysterious intricacy to one of total symmetry: the ministry is an abstract space of shapes and voids whose structures are (seemingly) readily inferred, and all the more alien for being so. Indeed, as much as such symmetry confronts the observer as unnatural, it very explicitly also evokes a sense of spatial and temporal enclosure: the ministry transforms from warren-like world into a seemingly self-contained 'impossible object', a paradox with no beginning or end.

Jan Alber suggests that literary portrayals of 'antimimetic spaces' serve as 'metanarrative statements that foreground the power of the omniscient narrator in the context of literary realism', but, with Courteline, we see that such 'satirical exaggerations, distortions, or caricature' of space are less a nod to metatextuality than they serve to convey the alien autonomy of the institution.[847] Of course, as the last sentence of the quoted passage suggests, the 'impossible' character of this space is merely an illusion experienced by the curator: but this reinforces the sense that Courteline's use of spatial distortion is less a question of conveying bureaucratic *power,* corresponding to Alber's sense of narratorial power (the fact that the curator is lost at all indicates that the *Dons et Legs* is functionally useless) and more an abstract device that suggests the institution's total removal from the concerns, or even the sense of spatiotemporal cognizance, customary to the individuals that engage with it. Courteline's novel is not, as with *Bleak House,* the portrayal of a conquering microcosm, but one of its retrenchment: all formerly symbolic or analogical functions that the microcosm may have performed

[845] Courteline, p. 146 – 'Maintenant, par un corridor interminable, aux cassures à angle droit ouvrant soudainement devant lui de nouvelles perspectives de portes closes et muettes, il allait, inquiet et craintif, et très contrarié que ses souliers tapassent ainsi qu'au dalles sonores d'une cathédrale. C'était là, en effet, pour lui, comme une invisible présence dont s'effarait et s'agaçait sa timidité naturelle. Un mur blanc filait sur sa gauche, percé, de dix pas en dix pas, de hautes fenêtres fermées à clef ; par ces fenêtres, au passage, il distinguait, plus loin que le vide de la cour, d'autres fenêtres toutes semblables, fermées sur d'autres murs exactement pareils, si bien que son cœur, partagé, flottait entre la vague terreur d'être tombé dans un cercle sans fin, et l'espérance qu'un jour viendrait où il en sortirait tout de même !

Il en sortit.'

[846] Balzac, *Physiologie de l'employé*, p. 34 – 'on voit des fantaisies dignes d'Hoffmann'.

[847] Jan Alber, *Unnatural Narrative: Impossible Worlds in Fiction and Drama* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), p. 212.

recede, leaving an internal logic that exerts only an alien resonance on the human consciousnesses that perceive it.

This episode is not a sustained exercise in such eerie bewilderment: it is punctuated by comic scenes – soon after leaving these corridors the curator enters a basement in which two clerks are fencing. However, Courteline's periodic use of such alienating devices complements the futility of this episode: the curator's odyssey is ultimately aborted when, having at last found his goal, M. de La Hourmerie, the middle manager is lying dead in a puddle of blood.[848] Again, as with père Soupe, Courteline's novel heightens a tragic sense of humanity by portraying it against (rather than as coterminous with) a highly formalised incarnation of what might be called the bureaucratic chronotope: his sense of spatiotemporal symmetry only exaggerates our conception of Soupe's cognitive decline, Lahrier's abusive frustration, or the mortality of an otherwise punctilious office chief.

In this respect, Courteline's novel contrasts strongly with its closest companion, Balzac's *Les Employés*. Although Balzac played on the dysfunctionality of France's civil service, the concerns of his clerks, and indeed of the narrative itself, were still very much in keeping with bureaucratic structures: narrator and *employés* alike are preoccupied with the all-important promotion to division chief. In *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* meanwhile, we get rather a sense of total alienation from the formal structures of the institution: Courteline's clerks either have little interest in or actively rail against office politics, and yet, by nonetheless being moulded by and subordinated to the total arbitrariness of their workplace, the once unthinkingly donned costumes of clerical 'typehood' appear here as straightjackets. Courteline's novel thus exaggerates many of the longstanding tropes of French ministerial novels, but in so doing it resolves them into their rather disturbing components: the novel's overarching sense of comic nihilism is undermined by the unsavoury blend of pathos and schadenfreude to which this gives rise.

6. Arnold Bennett (1867-1931): *A Man from the North* (1898)

With *The Telegraph Girl,* Lucy Graham's disillusionment regarding telegraphy stands in for Trollope's deconstruction of his own naïve realism; meanwhile, Huysmans's more explicit sense of the artificial or anti-mimetic aspects of office work actively complement his aesthetic experiments with the limits (and limitations) of Naturalism. Courteline in some regards synthesises these two vantages, if only to negate them: aesthetic alienness is used only to portray the confining world of the *Dons et Legs*, rather than expanding into aesthetic experimentation, just as his *ronds-de-cuir* are fleshed out, in keeping

[848] Courteline, p. 152 – 'Etendu au milieu de la pièce, le dos dans une mare de sang, gisait M. de La Hourmerie'.

with an apparent spirit of Naturalism, but only to consolidate the limiting terms of their 'typehood'. Where Courteline's novel develops the longstanding tropes of French ministerial fictions in order to congeal them, Arnold Bennett's first novel, *A Man from the North*, actively explores the relationship between a clerk's life and the by now well-established range of conventions that govern its portrayal.

The manner in which Bennett explores this relationship is exemplified in the course of his novel's plot: where the titular northerner-turned-London clerk, Richard Larch, starts out as an aspiring Naturalist writer, over the course of the novel his aspirations dissolve into the humdrum realities of the suburban world he wants to portray, and he ultimately settles into the relative comforts of lower middle-class anonymity. Bennett, like Zola or Huysmans, anatomises the everyday experience of a metropolis, but Larch's existence is not governed by any pessimistic formula: a valuable office employee, he nestles quite comfortably into the 'non-narrative perceptuality' of Naturalism that he once held at arm's length in order to portray.[849] It is of course insofar as Bennett himself sustains this literary perspective where Larch cannot that the clerk becomes an ironic reflection of the novelist; and, unlike Trollope's *The Telegraph Girl,* in Bennett's novel this correlation between author and protagonist is very much explicit – the perspective of the clerk becomes a subjectivity for the novelist to critique, but also to explore and ventriloquise.

This sense of parallelism between Bennett and his protagonist reflects the semi-autobiographical character of the novel, which forms for Bennett, Carey writes, 'a portrait of the artist as he might have been without that extra bit of luck or determination.'[850] Like Larch, Bennett too was 'a man from the North' – if we are to consider Stoke-on-Trent (fictionalised as the 'Five Towns' in several of Bennett's later novels) as such.[851] Bennett, like Larch, worked in an office in his home town, and he also moved to London, in 1889, to work as a legal clerk.[852] Here though their lives diverge: where Larch is promoted from clerk at the firm of 'Curpet and Smyth' to cashier, and then up to head of costs, enveloping him in the 'delicious self-complacence' that puts paid to his literary aspirations, Bennett left the firm of Le Brasseur and Oakley in 1893 to work on the editorial team of *Woman* magazine, and thereafter became a full-time successful author.[853]

The pair overlap also in terms of literary influences: Bennett, who had 'read widely in the works of Maupassant, Huysmans, the Goncourts, Turgenev', wrote *A Man from the North* as a conscious attempt to 'imitate […] the physical characteristics of French novels' – that is, French

[849] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism,* p. 153.
[850] Carey, p. 162.
[851] Larch hails from 'Bursley', presumably a fictionalised version of the Potteries' own Burslem.
[852] John Lucas, 'Bennett, (Enoch) Arnold (1867–1931), writer.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, 2010) <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-30708> [accessed 9 June 2020].
[853] Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1994), p. 24, pp. 102-103; Lucas.

Naturalism – and he was also therefore explicitly following in the tendency of transposing such methods onto English literature, exemplified by the novelist, George Moore.[854] Similarly (and evoking Huysmans's habit for allusion) Larch's story is littered with references to his reading habits – Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant, Stevenson, and Gissing – who also serve as stylistic models for his own (failed) literary experiments.[855] So too do episodes in the novel read like nods to these predecessors: Larch's visit to 'that little Paris which hides itself in the immensity of London', for example, appears to be a benign reversal of des Esseintes's trip to an English-style pub in *À rebours*.[856]

Conversely, literature also serves to divide Bennett from his creation. Not only does Larch fail to become a novelist where Bennett succeeded, but Bennett's own literary focus on working- and lower middle-class life is reflected ironically in his stereotypically status-conscious protagonist's tendency to view literature as a social shibboleth. Larch is excited that his literarily-inclined office colleague and would-be mentor, Mr. Aked, had met Thomas Carlyle, but he is snobbishly disappointed to learn that Aked's niece, a potential love interest, had just read Mrs Henry [Ellen] Wood's sensation novel, *East Lynne* (1861).[857]

However, *A Man from the North* is not simply an English version of a certain type of French novel – a bathetic answer to the more pathetic *À vau-l'eau.* While it follows similar channel-hopping stylistic experiments undertaken by Moore and Gissing during the '80s and early '90s, *A Man from the North* also portrays this tendency: it can therefore inevitably, and quite explicitly, be seen as a commentary on such stylistic borrowing.[858] Beside this meta-Gallicism, Bennett's novel also follows in a tradition of clerical *Bildungsromane* explored in this and the previous chapter. From the satirical or largely comic mid-century British texts (*Samuel Titmarsh*, *David Copperfield*, and *The Three Clerks*), with the relative massification and immiseration of clerkdom, ambivalently portrayed in *The Telegraph Girl,* this tradition sees a major tonal shift: novels like Linton's *The Rebel of the Family* (1880)*, Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* (1885) by William Hale White, Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) or the anonymous *Story of a London Clerk, a Faithful Narrative Faithfully Told* (1896) portray office work in

[854] Georges Lafourcade, *Arnold Bennett – A Study* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), p. 29; Arnold Bennett, *The Truth About an Author* (1903) (London: Methuen, 1914), p. 62; Wild, pp. 25-26.
[855] Bennett namechecks these authors or their works on the following pages of *A Man from the North*: Balzac – p. 44, p. 47; Flaubert – p. 23; Zola – p. 43, p. 49; Maupassant – p. 23, p. 99; Stevenson – p. 23, p. 104; Gissing – p. 32. However, there are various more subtle literary allusions throughout, leading up to Larch's resolution that 'it would be impossible to write in the suburban doll's house' to which he and his new wife are doomed (p. 113).
[856] Bennett, *A Man from the North,* p. 33.
[857] Ibid., p. 14, pp. 38-39.
[858] Gissing also makes this kind of metacommentary on Naturalism via the obsessively tedious fictional novel, 'Mr. Bailey, Grocer' in *New Grub Street.* Gissing, *New Grub Street* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), p. 398.

large part as a 'sordid grind' for naïve aspirants of both sexes.[859] Bennett's novel also relates to a subcategory of clerical *Künstlerromane,* to be similarly contrasted against *David Copperfield* in their 'informed and targeted' attack on modern office conditions: works like *All in a Garden Fair* (1883) by Walter Besant suggest that the (male) clerk might exploit his artistic or intellectual inclinations in order to escape from the office (although this message should be contrasted to Gissing's *New Grub Street* [1891], whose failed novelist, Edwin Reardon, describes his *return* to the office as a 'blessed deliverance').[860] The topical range of Gissing's *oeuvre* in particular, from typists and hacks to slum-dwellers, and the frankness of their portrayal, indicates that this *fin-de-siècle* tradition of clerical narratives can be seen as part of a constellation of working- or lower-middle class-centric social realist writing, itself informed by the Naturalist aesthetic. Equally, this more social realist trend in clerical writing blurs into the comic or satirical conventions explored in prior sections, ranging from a Naturalistic taste for a detached black humour to lighter texts, like *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), written in 'colloquial clerk's English', that benignly idealise clerical foibles.[861]

It is in the degree that *A Man from the North* absorbs this contradictory range of conventions, and indeed appears to commentate on them, that it performs an important synthesizing role in office literature. At first glance, its plot accords to the Naturalist taste for tragic social realism, insofar as it suggests that aspirations may be precluded by social conditions and temperament. This is suggested from the very beginning: the novel opens with Larch in his home town, where his taste for literature appears to already be compromised by his rather bureaucratic approach to its appreciation. Obliged to perceive the London literary scene vicariously, through what might anachronistically be called metadata, he expresses it similarly:

> [sat] in an office, [he] reads all the newspapers. He knows exactly when a new work by a famous author should appear […] He can tell you off-hand the names of the pieces in the bills of the twenty principal West-end theatres, what their quality is, and how long they may be expected to run.[862]

Thus does Bennett simultaneously introduce his clerk's literary ambitions, while also demonstrating the terms of their eventual abandonment. This continues when Larch starts attempting to write, making use of guides that suggest that 'the craft of words was only to be attained by a regular course of technical exercises', he recalls Flaubert's deluded clerks, Bouvard and Pécuchet, who also attempt to '[learn] the secret of all types [of style]: how to obtain the majestic, the temperate, the naïve, [learn]

[859] Wild, p. 14; *The Story of a London Clerk, A Faithful Narrative Faithfully Told* (London: The Leadenhall Press, 1896), p. 290.
[860] Wild, p. 13; Gissing, *New Grub Street*, p. 184. Cf. Gaborieau's *Les Gens de Bureau* (1862) in which success as a playwright serves as Romain Caldas's eventual escape from office life.
[861] Carey, p. 59.
[862] Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 1.

the phraseologies that are noble, the words that are low' – that is, to realise their literary ambitions through formulas.[863]

Strangely though, Bennett also provides us with the reverse image of this device. Just as Larch enjoys literature schematically, Bennett also, via use of free indirect style, demonstrates the degree to which Larch aestheticises his workaday life, giving it a poetic sense of semiotic palpability: in a rush of literary enthusiasm, Larch looks out the window to see that 'all the phenomena of humble life, hitherto witnessed daily without a second thought, now appeared to carry some mysterious meaning which was on the point of declaring itself.'[864] Similarly, while on the train, Larch observes his fellow passengers, '[finding] a curious, new pleasure in all their unstudied gestures and in everything they said'.[865] As with Larch's clerk-like studying of literary periodicals and his instrumental conception of literary craft, it is similarly through such presentist reveries that Bennett persists in an ironic tension between Larch's fantasies and what transpires to be his fate. It is precisely insofar as 'humble life' is quotidian and unstudied that it paradoxically seems fresh, unformulaic, and awaits literary portrayal – but equally, it is *because* of such subtleties that Larch struggles to do 'humble life' literary justice, and will also so readily sink into its comforts.

Put together, these two devices – a schematic appreciation for literature, and a poetic, almost phenomenological, conception of everyday life – themselves exhibit an ironic tension. And, as suggested above with regard to the novel's semi-autobiographical leanings, such ironic simultaneity underpins *A Man from the North*, governing our sense of Larch himself. Bennett's clerk at times displays an almost narratorial impassiveness in his behaviour and his observations, but he also occasionally expresses judgements that, as suggested above, stress the affectedness of this impassivity, thereby exposing his 'clerkness'. Visiting a seaside resort, Larch observes that its 'summer visitors were an infestive, lower-middle class folk […] the pure accent of London [sounding] on every side from the lips of clerks and shop-girls and their kin' – therefore forgetting 'that he was himself a clerk, looking not out of place in that scene.'[866] Bennett's use of free indirect style gives Larch a privileged continuity with the narrator's voice, while also allowing this voice to plausibly dissociate its observations from Larch's stereotypical brand of hypocrisy: he leaves the clerk to 'typify' himself.[867]

[863] Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 23 ; Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, p. 202 – 'Alors, ils se demandèrent en quoi consiste précisément le style ? – Et grâce à des auteurs indiqués par Dumouchel, ils apprirent le secret de tous ses genres, comment obtient le majestueux, le tempéré, le naïf, les tournures qui sont nobles, les mots qui sont bas.'
[864] Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 48.
[865] Ibid., p. 76.
[866] Ibid., p. 72.
[867] Compare this ambivalence (itself ambivalently voiced) toward seaside resorts to Carey's contention that Bennett was a pure enthusiast in his portrayal of 'seaside trippers', p. 157.

But it is insofar as Larch is privileged with this kind of complex and ambivalent subjectivity that his 'typicality' as a clerk is also undermined: his social temperament precludes his aspirations but not his portrayal.

Virginia Woolf, in her 1924 takedown of Bennett, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', attacks the author because of his programmatic attention to surfaces – writing that his 'powers of observation' and his 'sympathy and humanity' mask his inability to convey 'human nature.'[868] However, in *A Man from the North,* we see that Bennett's clear debt to Naturalism does not also preclude his engagement in a commentary on Naturalist aesthetics, one that in turn informs our conception of his protagonist. That is, Bennett's descriptions can appear to us as the aestheticisation of everyday experience, but, because these are expressed, via free indirect style, in the consciousness of a Zola-addicted young poser, they also seem like parodies of such observations. There is no real sense that the indeterminate character of this perspective is ever made determinate – we never 'find out' how the book should retroactively be read – but such simultaneity inevitably informs the novel's narrative arc. This is because, however much it may seem tragic that Larch ultimately surrenders himself to suburban mundanity, there is a countervailing sense that the would-be *littérateur* was holding himself at a remove from the reality in which he might otherwise be immersed, a sense that conveys its own futile dissociation: indeed, it is after witnessing the climactic death of Aked, his sometime literary mentor, that Larch recognises that 'art was a very little thing.'[869] This aesthetic ambivalence thus informs a metacommentary on the novel's ostensible social realist narrative arc: the tragedy of Larch's failure as a novelist also appears to us as the comedy of his success as an administrator.

This is an unprecedented degree of sophistication in the novelistic portrayal of a clerk (whatever Woolf's attack on Bennett's artlessness); one against which Bennett's portrayal of the office initially appears rather hackneyed. The rather Dickensian name of Larch's employers, 'Curpet and Smythe', is complemented in the portrayal of their rambling offices: upon arrival, Larch is

> conducted […] along a dark passage with green doors on either side, to a room at the end. It was furnished mainly with two writing-tables and two armchairs; in one corner was a disused copying press, in another an immense pile of reporters' note-books; on the mantlepiece, a tumbler, a duster, and a broken desk lamp.[870]

The legal world in which Larch spends his workday seems lifted from the pages of *Sketches by Boz*, or *The Pickwick Papers*: an image of 'men and boys, grave and unconsciously oppressed by the burden

[868] Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 16.
[869] Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 64. Equally, Carey writes that in Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), he makes a similar ironic doubling of art and life: his protagonist confesses to not having read Zola's Franco-Prussian War novel, *La Débâcle* (1892), but was actually present at the 1870 siege of Paris. 'She does not have to depend […] on Zolaesque realism. She knows reality', p. 177.
[870] Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 10.

of the coming day, […] continually appearing out of the gloom of the [office block's] long tunnelled entrance' recalls the automaton-like clerks in Dickens's 'The Streets: Morning', or Mr. Pickwick's visit to the Temple, just as the rather comic image of the Attorney-General – 'a big man of about fifty, with a sagacious red and blue face, […] followed by an attentive clerk carrying a blue sack' – would not look amiss amongst Dickens's legal grandees.[871] Bennett also employs longstanding tropes regarding clerical hierarchy, observing that 'the articled clerks, though courteously agreeable to everyone, formed an exclusive coterie', while their more menial underlings 'were either old or dull, or both.'[872] Similarly, as texts in prior chapters, the office is governed by its own customs and collective identity: Mr. Smyth is only ever known as 'Bertie dear' amongst the clerks after they overhear his wife address him thus, and 'the whole office [trembles] apprehensively' upon the arrival of a big job.[873]

Larch's desk-mate, the nineteen year-old Jenkins, 'a cockney and the descendant of cockneys', in particular embodies this sense of the Dickensian – as well as the characterisation of the clerical 'type' more broadly.[874] As a clerk, Bennett stresses Jenkins's one-sidedness, backhandedly remarking that he 'was a highly accomplished person, in certain directions', possessing an encyclopaedic knowledge of London transport and the topography of its legal district – presumably honed after years of gofering writs between firms.[875] Similarly, beyond his vocation, Jenkins recalls Young's sense of the diminutively portrayed lower middle-class 'gents' of the mid-century: sallow, scrawny, and fixated on his very small feet ('he often referred to the fact with frank complacency'), he is a proud 'swell', exhibiting a Mr. Guppy-like 'ambition to be genteel' – he dresses dandyishly, and has a tendency to pare his nails that '[interferes] somewhat with official routine.'[876] By contrast to Larch's earnest efforts at self-improvement, Jenkins is a hedonist: he is 'the best billiard-player in the office' ('this game was his sole pastime', we are somewhat disapprovingly told); he is prone to sexual boasting, 'it was a custom to refer to himself as a "devil for girls"' ('whom he usually described as "tarts"'); and he indulges in copious volumes of chops, baked potatoes, and stout during his lunch hour.[877] Jenkins's apparent status as a cultural throwback is stressed by his aversion to French restaurants ('parley-voo shops'), while his scepticism regarding the rather *fin-de-siècle* vegetarian restaurant scene is only mitigated by these establishments' cheapness.[878]

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[871] Ibid. Compare these episodes to very similar scenes in *Sketches by Boz* and *The Pickwick Papers*, cited above.
[872] Ibid., p. 20.
[873] Ibid., pp. 48-49.
[874] Ibid., p. 20.
[875] Ibid., p. 19.
[876] Young, p. 68 – the 'flashiness' of this 'type' is undercut by his comical 'diminutiveness', Young writes; Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 41, p. 19.
[877] Bennett, *A Man from the North*, pp. 19-21.
[878] Ibid., p. 21.

Bennett's recourse to this long slew of stereotypes and conventions in portraying office life initially seems to undercut his more sophisticated sense of Larch as literary subject. This aesthetic disparity can in part be framed in material terms: while Larch's provincial and social provenance, his lifestyle, and his tastes, all speak to the lives of the burgeoning lower middle class, his office labours themselves appear backward – complementing their rather retrograde portrayal. Curpet and Smyth is illustrative of the unevenness of bureaucratic development: its offices are in a 'large modern building' – 'eight storeys high' – and its partners '[deal] impassively with tens of thousands of pounds, [mortgage] whole streets, [bully] railway companies, and [write] familiarly to lords'.[879] However, despite the firm's apparent clout, the labour practices upon which it is based exhibit a real sense of continuity with offices in previous chapters: it is manned by an indeterminate body of 'boys', Larch and Jenkins scriven correspondence, and measure the work week in 'folios', there are no references to telegraphy or telephony, to typewriting, and no female members of staff – and, re-using a metaphor dating back to the eighteenth century, Larch considers himself '*part* of a business machine' (my emphasis), a constituent *of* a bureaucratic apparatus, rather than an a worker for or in one.[880] This 'backward' characterisation may therefore speak to the nature of the law in particular – much is made of the ceremonial or ritualistic aspects of annually mandated tasks – but equally, the intransigent character of the law does not therefore demand a similarly conventional literary portrayal.

Alternatively, just as Bennett's novel seems as much a commentary on the English adoption of French aesthetic practices as it itself engages in such cross-channel borrowing, so too might it be arguable that Bennett's stereotyped portrayal of office life is more than just knee-jerk generic formalism. Where the nuanced portrayal of Larch's subjectivity is conveyed via an ambivalent sense of overlap with the narrator, so too do Larch and Jenkins exhibit a similar sense of ambivalent continuity, in large part fostered by office life. As in Balzac's *Un début dans la vie*, it is precisely because the informalities and the social character of a slightly 'backward' official division of labour foster a collective identity that the pair become friends: 'the fact that they shared the same room and performed similar duties made familiar intercourse between them natural and necessary.'[881] This collective selfhood, as with that between the narrator and Larch, is to be characterised by its sense of internal paradox: while Larch is initially 'nauseated' by 'the gross and ribald atmosphere which attended Jenkins' presence', these very same qualities, Jenkins's 'agile wit, his picturesque use of slang, his facility in new oaths […] endowed him, in Richard's unaccustomed eyes, with a certain

[879] Ibid., pp. 9-10, p. 12.
[880] Ibid., p. 12. Cf. Bishop in 'Middlebrow "Everyman" or Modernist Figurehead?' for a different reading, p. 112.
[881] Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 20.

specious attractiveness.'[882] Jenkins's vulgarity is at once stereotypical and fresh, the subject of Larch's priggish condescension and naïve esteem.

Where the novel's sense of Naturalist metacommentary is predicated upon the ambivalent relationship Larch's voice maintains with that of the narrator, Larch's comparably ambivalent intra-diegetic relationship with Jenkins is potentially also therefore an image of a genre examining itself. If Larch's tendency to 'anatomise experience' appears at once like a genuine application of Naturalist aesthetics *and* the slightly Quixotic replication of a certain kind of over-studied literary style – thereby, in turn, problematising the 'tragic' character of his ultimate abandonment of his literary aspirations – so too is the novel's at once sophisticated (Larch) and stock (Jenkins) conception of clerks and offices potentially also a means of complicating the narrative character of Larch's ultimate career trajectory. While he tried to emulate David Copperfield's escape from office into literature, Larch's eventual status as a 'model clerk', and his just rewards for being such, eventually cements him into the Dickensian idiom – if not the Dickensian narrative arc – of office life: after his promotion, Larch

> watched the firm's welfare with a jealous eye […] He grew more sedate in manner, and to the office boys, over whom he had charge, he was even forbidding; they disliked him, finding him a martinet more strict and less suave than Mr Curpet himself. He kept them late at night sometimes without quite sufficient cause, and if they showed dissatisfaction, told them sententiously that boys who were so desperately anxious to do as little as they could would never get on in the world.[883]

Larch has turned into a Charles Pooterish 'type', or, to paraphrase *Un début dans la vie,* 'in short, he is the modern *petit bourgeois'* – but equally, by contrast to prior clerical *Bildungsromane,* Larch has also resigned himself to the office: abjuring any alternative means of self-validation, thereby undercutting the generally dismissive attitude office literature exhibits toward office work. *A Man from the North* thus represents a confluence of formal styles: Naturalism and Dickensian caricature, both of which are juxtaposed and critiqued from a position of ironical detachment – and it is through these styles' interaction that Bennett offers a commentary on Larch's own story of development. It is not merely the diegetic dilemma of 'getting on' or attaining literary success that governs this *Bildungsroman,* but a sense of stylistic contestation – a kind of formal 'heteroglossia'.

Bennett's sense of the office in *A Man from the North* therefore differs somewhat from previous examples in this chapter. For Huysmans in particular, the office was the site of an alienating contestation between the material and the virtual, mimesis and anti-mimesis – but Courteline, and even Trollope to a degree, also played on this sense of abstraction. The cost of conveying the office in such a way is in the corresponding flatness of its inhabitants: Courteline and Huysmans alike

[882] Ibid., p. 20.
[883] Ibid., p. 102, p. 96.

subordinate the consciousness of the *employé* to bureaucratic intellectual structures – and, while Lucy Graham's illusions about clerical life ironically protected her from this sense of mental subordination, her disillusionment was consolidated in her abandonment of telegraphy. Bennett and Huysmans in particular are comparable insofar as they both actively problematise the same aesthetic conventions – however, they situate this contestation in different spheres of their fictional clerk's existence. Where Bougran's reflexive sense of compromised selfhood manifests itself in his near sensuous conception of official discourse, alongside his recognition of its alienness and abstraction, Larch's somewhat similar dilemma is re-centred around literature: he enjoys French literary stylings for their pleasantly heightened sense of perceptuality, while ultimately conceding to himself that they mediate and prescribe his sensations and self-regard. Larch's ultimate slip into clerical conventionality is mirrored in the corresponding formalism in Bennett's portrayal of the office, however: it is ultimately less that he has sacrificed his literary Quixotism for 'real life', and more that one illusion has been eroded by another.

In many ways *A Man from the North* appears to be a radical step in the development of office literature: at least insofar as it can sustain an extended narrative surrounding a largely de-'typified' clerical protagonist, while still employing similar aesthetic devices to those in Huysmans's teleology-eschewing thought experiments. Equally, however, the ironic simultaneity of narrative voice that underpins the novel's 'radical' character goes all the way back to Lamb's 'The Good Clerk' – where writing a literary portrayal of a 'model clerk' on company time served to defetishise the clerk's peculiar knot of autonomy and deference. Similarly it is inasmuch as Bennett's ironic interrogation of Naturalistic stylings, on the one side, and of 'traditional' bureaucratic caricature on the other, resonates with a nascent modernism's many 'subversions of the realist impulse' that his novel looks forward to the twentieth century.[884] But it is because this 'subversion' is in part predicated upon a long history of nineteenth-century satirical portrayals of the office (including this literature's own tendency to subvert a 'realist impulse' through the portrayal of bureaucratic abstractions) that *A Man from the North* feels very much like a continuation of this tradition. The formalistic character of office literature as a genre mirrors the seeming endlessness of the office day, and the pseudo-ahistoricism of bureaucracy as a concept.

7. Conclusion

If the previous chapter represented a point of consolidation in the history of office literature, the present, superficially at least, appears to be one of fragmentation. The sociological ambition of

[884] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', *Modernism*, pp. 19-55 (p. 49).

Dickens and Balzac's works becomes untenable in the face of massively expanded bureaucratic structures (which also, by extension, functionally render such literary panoramism unnecessary), just as these structures' relative uniformity and intelligibility precludes these earlier novels' thematic range; and this series of processes forces authors to refocus on narrower aspects of office life. Fragmentation does not return us to the kinds of works to be found in Chapters One and Two, however – in which the clerk, office work, and bureaucracy formed a tendentious whole, and were subject to varyingly imperfect conceptual registers: economic, political, social, or taxonomic. Rather, for the works of the present chapter, the nature of bureaucracy, that of clerkdom, and their relationship (however accurate) are taken as given. Instead, we see a more focussed attention upon the social conditions of clerks, female and male, and an experimentalism that readily aligns itself with the ever-heightening rarefaction of bureaucratic systems.

In aesthetic and thematic terms, however, we have seen that this fragmentation of perspective does not quite effect a wholly sequestered aesthetic. And, again, this dynamic of fragmentation and affinity in late nineteenth-century office literature in large part derives from its workplace subject-matter. Marx writes that all labour is at once a material process, one 'between man and nature', and an ideal one: the realisation of one's 'own purpose' in the material in question.[885] Office work, especially as the nineteenth century went on, might facetiously be described as a *reversal* of this dialectical relationship – rather than effecting the material incarnation of an ideal, it sustains an ideal system through material procedures: that is, the office figures as a concrete site in which the abstract aspects of the labour process are overt rather than implicit. It is through the hardening of bureaucratic forms and the increasingly precarious experience of office work that the focus and aesthetic character of office literature are reconfigured, but it is therefore equally from these historical factors' ultimate co-dependence (however reconfigured or polarised), that an author's tendency toward social realism or abstract experimentalism results in the conjuration of the other – inadvertently or deliberately.

This is not to say that there are no disparities between purveyors of office literature during this period, however: Trollope, Huysmans, Courteline, and Bennett, in focussing either on technology or living conditions, clerical ambition or cynicism, tragic or comic themes, each represent distinct approaches toward the new thematic and aesthetic demands required for the portrayal of office life. Nor do their works ignore issues already inherent to office literature, with each exploring from different perspectives the legitimacy of office work, the relationship between individual and institution, and anxiety around bureaucratic reform and stagnation alike (this last theme evoking also

[885] Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, p. 284.

the differing cultural and social character of bureaucracy between France and the UK at this time). Rather, it is more that the newly predominant aesthetic tendencies of this period, social realism and abstraction alike, become new vehicles for exploring office literature's timeworn preoccupations, while also evoking and anticipating modernistic developments in literature during this period more broadly.

Indeed, late nineteenth-century office literature therefore presents us with two trajectories of development going forward. The office evidently served *fin-de-siècle* authors who were looking to test the limits of naïve mimesis as a site in which the potential autonomy and palpability of language might be subjected to exploration and experiment. In this respect office literature (and its analysis), as de la Motte suggests, 'historicises, even thematises' the emergence of modernistic stylings during this period.[886] Equally however, the works of contemporary Symbolist poets like Stephane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry, and their modernist successors, indicate that overt formal experimentation need not be confined to portrayals of the office, and nor that the office is the only 'site' in which the aesthetic of a virtualised linguistic '*idéal artificiel*' might be explored.[887] In this regard, to engage in literary experimentation by way of office structures often *confines* such experimentalism *to* these structures – as well as to the often tired stereotypes of office literature itself – thereby anticipating *avant-garde* aesthetic developments without directly engaging in them.

[886] de la Motte, p. 29.
[887] Although Valéry was himself an *employé*: see Guy Thuillier, 'Paul Valéry au Ministère de la Guerre', *Bureaucratie et Bureaucrates en France au XIXe Siècle*, pp. 70-82.

Conclusion – Words and Deeds

The overarching aim of this thesis was to explore 'bureaucratisation and the rise of office literature' – indeed, it suggested a relationship between the two. Of course, to suggest a tie between a society's historical development and its literature is as recurrent in literary studies as it is contested, and ambivalent conceptions of the relationship between word and deed go at least as far back as Plato. The appeal of bureaucracy and office work in this light lies in the fact that these subjects also provide a model for the relationship between idea and action, word and deed – indeed, one in which 'deeds' are composed of words. As we have seen, however, the precise terms of this model are changeable and often go unresolved – especially within and between each instance of its portrayal.

Where the ties between society and culture may be contested, the material effects of bureaucracy appear to be manifest – even if they were sometimes unintended. Rather than positively evoke bureaucracy as the rational conjunction of ideas and processes, I have wanted to stress throughout this thesis that, however much bureaucracy may effectually meet the aims of its instigators, it also *changes* social praxis in often unforeseen ways through its own historically contingent mechanisms. Bureaucracy mediates at least as much as it facilitates – and these two tendencies inform its literary portrayal. Conversely, and countervailing upon this sense that abstract bureaucratic forms cause a range of concrete effects, the office as a physical site of bureaucratic activity comes to figure as the *negative* image of those other canonical workplaces of capitalist civilisation: the plantation, the factory, the ship, or the mine. This is because the physicality of office work is ancillary to the intellectual processes it is replicating and supplementing. Rather than producing commodities that are exoterically material, and only esoterically abstract, offices churn out endless reams of abstractions – processed data whose substance, the paper upon which it is inscribed, appears secondary (albeit necessary) to its utility. It is from the contradictory relationship between bureaucracy and the office that clerks, workers whose labour figures as the physical vehicle for an intellectual structure about which they are often partially if not wholly ignorant, convey a sense (as Balzac's Socratic *employé,* Jean-Jacques Bixiou puts it) of living 'between two negations'.[888]

Although Balzac is perhaps the most explicit in his attempts to theorise these kinds of epistemological and sociological convergences in his portrayal of bureaucracy in *Les Employés* (1844), they recur throughout office literature's development, shifting in accordance with their cultural context and the developing historical character of bureaucracy. From the British tradition, portraying a decentralised network of offices and institutions that eventually coalesced into a quasi-industrial

[888] Balzac, *Les Employés*, p. 163.

'cognitive infrastructure', William Leman Rede's Kit Mark abjures the 'senseless absurdities' of the law upon recognising his mechanical, and subordinate, relation to an intellectual system.[889] Charles Dickens plays up the inadvertent materiality of bureaucratic data (as well as the implicit abstraction latent even in agricultural produce) with his allusions to the 'bushels of minutes' in which his protagonists' futures are suspended.[890] Even Anthony Trollope pits medium against message in his portrayal of telegraphy, a relationship that in turn forms an interrogation (however inadvertent) of the naïve fidelity of literary realism itself. Focussing more often upon the at once rarefied and highly politicised administration of the centralised French state, the French tradition frames the office's epistemic-social character more often in terms of the strange community that springs up within bureaucracy's interstices: the obsessive attention Jean-Gilbert Ymbert's *employés* pay to 'protocol' at once obtrudes upon the efficient execution of administrative tasks, and is yet strangely continuous with the rarefaction of the bureaucratic medium. So too are the *employés* portrayed by Henry Monnier, Paul Duval, and Georges Courteline somehow the products of a world that ostensibly produces nothing, natives of a country that is formally oblivious to its own topography and culture in favour of abstractions whose focus lies elsewhere. Once cast out of this country, as Joris-Karl Huysmans suggests in his portrayals of Messieurs Folantin and Bougran, the clerk leads an empty unfulfilling life, a form devoid of content. The office thus figures between all of these texts as both the physical gateway to, and material by-product of, a profaned intellectual system, a system that is itself the reflection of a profaned world; a nested cosmology rendered all the more confusing by clerks' relative ability to move between its various spheres (and their concomitant tendency to exhibit aspects of each).

This is not to say that office literature presents an unmediated window onto nineteenth-century society, however. While it certainly deals in orders and systems, knowledge and substance, it does not convey this world uncritically, and nor is this world portrayed as a coherent totality. Rather, office literature is quite overtly bound to the constraints and conventions expected of literature, as well as to the developing and often contested conceptualisations of those phenomena it depicts. The texts of this genre are not purely attempts to exposit the world of clerks, offices, and bureaucracy – instead, office literature also marks an attempt to embed these phenomena into a changing aesthetic system (however much more informal than bureaucracy itself), and to interrogate in turn the relationship between this system and the object it portrays. Rabourdin's plan in the opening chapter of *Les Employés* posits that, with bureaucracy, 'everything [takes] literary form'; but, as we have seen, although both bureaucracy and literature operate largely within the textual medium, to portray

[889] Leman Rede, 'The Lawyer's Clerk', p. 32.
[890] Dickens, *Little Dorrit,* p. 119.

bureaucracy *in* literature in part requires that it be forced to accord to the demands expected *of* literature.[891] Literature in this light appears almost as procrustean as a bureaucratic schema (although with less immediate social ramifications).

Equally, however, just as bureaucracy inadvertently produces its own strange world, so too does literature end up warping itself to accommodate its object. The rhythms of the workday, the artificial character of the office space, the evolving forms and systems of bureaucratic knowledge all seem to leave their mark on those texts that portray them. Office literature as a genre thus emerges as a synthesis of competing forms, thereby producing often rather peculiar or experimental content. As much as the clerical 'type' figures in nineteenth-century literature as a social chimera – a proletarian in middle-class dress, a courtier on a *petit-bourgeois* scale – so too do the texts that portray this 'type' themselves exhibit a similarly alienated hybridity: we have seen *Bildungsromane* of arrested development, 'anatomies' of monotony, social problem novels set amidst hermetic communities. To understand the development of this complex literary-social relationship, office literature needs a history of its own as much as bureaucracy and the office do – a history whose outline I hope I have successfully sketched.

In Chapter One, the character of an emergent office literature was in large part informed by the equally emergent character of bureaucracy itself. Although 'bureaucracy' had been coined in the eighteenth century, it did not quite form a distinct category in the societies from which it developed. In this light, the respectively commercial and political characterisations of office work outlined by Charles Lamb and Jean-Gilbert Ymbert reflect distinctions in the process of bureaucratisation and its theorisation between the UK and France. Equally, the sense of idiosyncrasy and interiority conveyed by Lamb's 'familiar essay' form, and the at once drier but also more chaotic character of Ymbert's supposed 'course in administration', do not only illustrate points of disparity between early nineteenth-century French and English literature. Rather, these authors' largely one-sided focus on distinct aspects and experiences of bureaucracy, offices, and clerks speaks to the relatively diffused appearance of these phenomena's interrelation, thereby also illustrating the aesthetic problem of conveying the interplay of both abstract structure and personal experience to which office work gives rise.

Chapter Two saw an alignment in many of the formal conventions of office literature between France and the UK: despite theoretical and practical distinctions between bureaucracy in these countries, the clerk joined a cross-Channel constellation of urban 'types' in the popular literature of the 1830s and '40s. This resonance between the popular literature of the two societies in large part

[891] Balzac, *Les Employés,* p. 45 – 'tout prenait la forme littéraire.'

emerges out of large-scale secular trends in both information management and civil society in Europe more generally – factors whose influence is to be read in the largely public character of the clerical 'type', thereby delimiting the characterisation of office work and bureaucracy primarily toward iconic superficialities. That said, these deeper trends in nineteenth-century Europe resonate with bureaucratisation as much as the rise of the *physiologie* craze: a kinship often evident in the *form* of 'physiological' literature if not always in its depiction of office life. Aside from large-scale impersonal forces, it is also in this chapter that a culture of direct influence, even plagiarism, develops between office literature's growing authorship: this is particularly apparent in the French tradition, starting with Henry Monnier's own *Mœurs administratives*, but Lamb's stylings are also evident in Charles Dickens's sketches.

In Chapter Three I explored early- to mid-nineteenth-century efforts to portray the office in the novel. The office often figured as a secondary or supplementary sphere in these works, but one that also served to link action taking place in broader civil society with the more transcendental structures of bureaucratic knowledge itself – the latter presented in a manner that was often compounded with the supernatural. However, it is insofar as the novel and bureaucracy alike retained relative degrees of conceptual and formal contingency during this period that the many often contradictory tropes identified over the prior chapters could be consolidated into individual works. Balzac and Dickens's shared focus on society at large and upon a wide range of particular social issues simultaneously enables and accommodates this heterogeneous portrayal, while equally, the panoramic scope of their output also works to stabilise the character of bureaucracy and its various appendages in society, further cementing it as a social category.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I argued that the late nineteenth-century standardisation and relative industrialisation of bureaucratic structures – and their saturation throughout society – resolved the need for these structures' conceptualisation in office literature. This standardisation (or sometimes merely entrenchment) instead effected a reconfiguration in the terms of office literature's aesthetics: at once focusing more narrowly on individual aspects of office life, but also employing a greater aesthetic diversity in these aspects' portrayal than in the more holistic novels of the mid-century. Firstly, the increasingly solidified character of abstract bureaucratic systems effected a twofold influence on office literature: at once resonating with, and informing, aesthetic experimentation, while also reflecting a simultaneous literary recourse to stereotypes – a dual tendency often exhibited within individual works. Moreover, the reified character of bureaucracy enabled a corresponding focus on an increasingly precarious and massified clerical workforce – figures (now both male and female) whose lives and experiences appeared increasingly separate from the bureaucratic structures that their labour supports. This aesthetic fragmentation nonetheless found its points of convergence:

the use of naturalistic devices in the portrayal of poor clerks exhibits an unnerving continuity with this literature's more abstract tendency – the reconfigured understanding of bureaucracy and clerical life during this period thus figures as more dyadic than disconnected.

While, as I outlined in the Introductory Chapter, I consider it advantageous to have covered such a long period of time and to have engaged in an explicitly comparative investigation, the present work can only have served to sketch out the shape and historical logic of nineteenth-century office literature and the issues to which it gives rise. Aside from particular works whose role in this genre's development was sadly omitted, such as Ymbert's dramatic works, Émile Gaboriau's novel *Les Gens de Bureau* (1862), or even the Grossmiths' *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892), I was also unable to apply a concerted focus to this genre's specific tropes. For example, the recurrent and rather crass analogy of clerkdom with slavery, the narrative device of clerical retirement, and the shifting relationship between *Bildung* and what might be called '*Beförderung'* [promotion], all deserve deeper investigation. Neither have I been able to cover more tangential issues in detail, such as the intellectual provenance of the quasi-metaphysical characterisation of bureaucracy and bureaucratic knowledge in these works, nor the way nineteenth-century portrayals of office work in turn often appear to anticipate later cultural conceptualisations of information technology. Of course, however, the purpose of developing a history of nineteenth-century office literature was precisely to highlight these connections between otherwise disparate works, to identify emergent tropes and themes for future research.

Beyond the confines of my study's focus, the links between office literature and modernism need to be more fully fleshed out: charting the development from James Joyce's extended treatment of alcoholic copyists and reclusive intellectual clerks in *Dubliners* (1914) to his later, more overtly experimental works, for example. So too could, in broader terms, a history be told of office literature's development beyond nineteenth-century Britain and France – across the world, as well as into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Aside from the clear resonances between my chosen texts and contemporary works that come from beyond France and Britain – most notably Gogol's 'The Overcoat' (1842), Herman Melville's 'Bartleby' (1853), and Henry James's *In the Cage* (1898) – one might readily argue that there are germs of Lamb and Ymbert alike in Georges Perec's single-sentence *L'art et la manière d'aborder son chef de service pour lui demander une augmentation* [The art and manner of approaching one's line manager in order to request a payrise] (1968), or in B. S. Johnson's *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973); and there are certainly strong resonances of *Messieurs les ronds-de-cuir* in *The Office* (2001-03), and of *Les Employés* or *Bleak House* in David Foster Wallace's *The Pale King* (2011). The 'office worker with artistic ambitions' subgenre whose history ended in this study with *A Man from the North* has a whole slew of successors, ranging from E.M. Forster's *Howards End*

(1910), via Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* (1962), to Halle Butler's *The New Me* (2019) (indeed, the degree to which America has strongly taken up the baton of this variety of office literature in recent decades also needs investigating.)[892]

That said, a counter-argument is to be made against the case of simple continuity from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. The comic clerical 'type' is endemic in nineteenth-century literature (even if it is only in a minority of texts that he receives close attention), whereas those trends outlined in the final chapter – diversification, hierarchisation, and the increasingly mainstream character of 'white-collar' work – entrench themselves in the twentieth-century Western world, thereby effecting a dilution of this once-canonical figure, just as the events of twentieth-century history eliminate the office's once almost picturesque aspect. Of course, Lamb had already recognised 'the good clerk' to be a jumble of ideas and stereotypes, but, even so, the turn in twentieth-century satirical novels toward 'institutions and systems […] and extensive infrastructural or technological networks' – to 'huge amounts of data' – thereby often bypassing the personas that once embodied them, reflects a structural shift in bureaucracy and office work that in turn represents the dissolution of office literature (at least if we are to consider this genre as defined by its fairly unified focus on bureaucracy, office, *and* clerk).[893] While elements of office literature certainly survive, and are scattered across the twentieth century, even periodically reuniting in certain texts, there is a decreasing interest in these elements' co-dependence – if only because by absorbing *everything* they have lost their former specificity.

Of course, I don't want to overstate the demise of office literature: the observation in *The Pale King* that, rather than a 'parasite', 'bureaucracy is really much more a parallel world, both connected to and independent of this one, operating under its own physics and imperatives of cause' evokes Ymbert or Dickens as much as it appears to commentate implicitly upon them.[894] Whatever the impetuses of change, it is because the office remains so explicitly a site of epistemic and socio-economic convergence that its portrayal should present the continual interpenetration of formal and historical concepts. One might even suggest that it is *only* in a world of information technology and 'big data' that we can attain sufficient perspective upon those aspects of nineteenth-century society and culture – often obscured by revolution and reaction, by rain, steam, and speed – that contributed to office literature's development. That said, I would argue that socio-economic, epistemic, and ideological structures are *always* intertwined in *all* fields of society – and it is in turn the job of literary

[892] On this last topic, see Nikil Saval, 'Bartlebys All!', *Dissent Magazine* (Fall, 2014) <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/bartlebys-all> [accessed 02/02/2021].
[893] Greenberg, p. 214, p. 222.
[894] David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King – An Unfinished Novel,* ed. Michael Pietsch (New York, Boston, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2011), p. 86.

criticism to outline how this conceptual jumble projects itself onto an aesthetic plane. Nonetheless, within the context of the nineteenth century, the emergent sphere of the office figured as a site in which the confusions and contradictions of this conceptual entanglement were at their rawest and most exposed – and this is reflected in turn in the heterogeneous and interrogative character of office literature.

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