SPECIAL CLUSTER: COMMITMENT

Introduction

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> The abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting. . . . [I]t is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it.
>
> —Theodor Adorno, "Commitment" (1962)

"WE saw no issues," reports the Department of Homeland Security in a self-study of its practices for detaining children at the US–Mexico border, "except one unsanitary bathroom." The system is working as it should; all is well. "CBP [Customs and Border Protection] facilities we visited," the report summarizes, "appeared to be operating in compliance with the 2015 National Standards on Transport, Escort, Detention, and Search."[1] A footnote on page 2 of the September 2018 document defines the prisoners at these facilities, the "unaccompanied alien children," as "aliens under the age of eighteen with no lawful immigration status in the United States and without a parent or legal guardian in the United States 'available' to care and [provide] physical custody for them." Available is in scare quotes. This tic of punctuation discloses to us that the parents of these children have been arrested and removed. They are *not available*, and cannot take physical custody of their children, because they themselves are in physical custody. In a further typographical error, the word "provide" has been omitted: the children are *without a parent or legal guardian in the United States "available" to care and physical custody for them*. The dropped word turns "physical custody" into a verb and sets this new action, *to physical custody*, in tense relation to "care."

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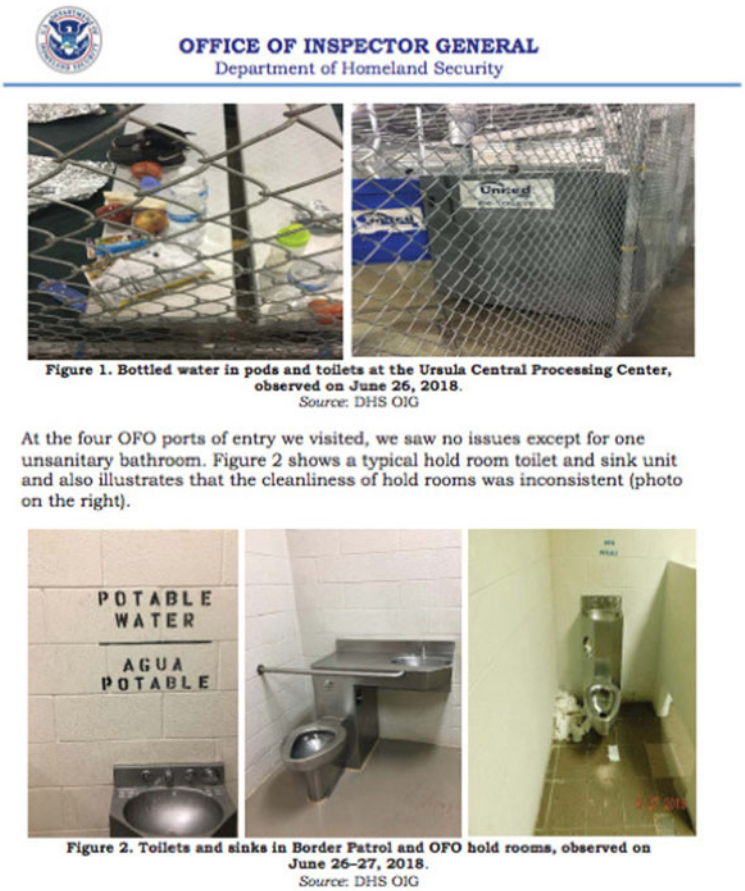

Figure 1. Department of Homeland Security, "Results of Unannounced Inspections of Conditions for Unaccompanied Alien Children in CBP Custody," 5.

What should concern us? For what or whom do we care, and why? It is a truism that questions of value remain central to that suite of disciplinary practices known as the humanities. If that's the case, then this term, *humanities*, does not name just the spectrum of intellectual techniques concerned with cataloging and understanding the history of emotive gestures, aesthetic artifacts, and expressive performances made by the species *Homo sapiens*. It also means exercising judgment over that history, taking a stand. There is empirical knowledge to be gained in these domains, of course. But if the humanities are to mean anything now, they should likely go beyond the merely descriptive or putatively disinterested investigations into fact and detail and historical context, and instead make inquiries into the domain of value. They should evaluate,

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hierarchize, and, in ways that exercise a faculty beyond simple moralism, judge. They should probably go beyond even the inevitable judgments baked into putatively "descriptive" methods to touch, even if just implicitly, on the yet more difficult question of why anyone should care in the first place. And they might then ask, as we try to do here, what *care* is, anyway, and in what mechanisms—affective, cognitive, psychosocial, political—such primary concern might originate.[2]

In an essay entitled "Commitment" (1965) that gives us the title of this cluster, Theodor Adorno attacked Jean-Paul Sartre for his belief that art should engage directly with the political world. As Adorno witheringly describes, Sartre had, in his 1948 *What Is Literature?*, called for a literary practice that would address the contemporary world head-on—and in its own terms—with a view to changing it. For Adorno, Sartre's frankly instrumentalist view of literature reconstrued aesthetics as activism: its central presumption was that artworks should be "committed" in the sense that they avow their political and social projects outwardly, directly—as content or theme. Sartre's concluding chapter, "The Situation of the Writer in 1947," explained that "we have to produce a literature of *praxis*."[3] It went on:

> We no longer have time to *describe* or *narrate*; neither can we limit ourselves to *explaining*. [. . .] [I]f perception itself is action, if, for us, to show the world is to disclose it in the perspectives of possible change, then . . . we must reveal to the reader his power, in each concrete case, of doing and undoing, in short of acting.[4]

Recent calls for "engaged humanities," strategic presentisms, and other allied approaches arguably resurrect this suite of presumptions insofar as they presume the capacity of art or thought—indeed their responsibility—to speak in direct terms to the conditions of the present, to set terms for what Sartre calls "action." And the "present situation," Sartre explains, is one of crisis, "revolutionary by virtue of the fact that it is unbearable."[5]

Where Sartre had called for an engaged literature or politicized thought, a writing aimed at confronting openly—so as to intervene concretely into—a fallen present, Adorno counseled remove. Separated from Sartre's essay by more than a decade, Adorno's reply was scathing. (A German translation of Sartre's text had appeared in 1962, occasioning Adorno's riposte.) In mocking tones, Adorno heaped derision on what it styled as Sartre's naïve notion that art should speak back to the present. For Adorno, the instrumentalist presumption of "thesis-art" ensures that

such work unfolds "in accordance with the tenets of commitment but also with the demands of philistine moralism."[6] Chained to the moral-political framework of its moment (recall that Sartre had dated his intervention specifically to "the present" of 1947), such art is not really art at all—and is not really thought either. It is, rather, for Adorno, ideology, a kind of cartoon righteousness that paradoxically ratifies the terms of the world it purports to critique. Any direct engagement with a broken world, Adorno argues, is condemned to repeat the ideological and political coordinates of the world it engages.

Rather than speak back to the world in the language it offers us, art and thought should turn away from this compromised idiom. Instead of talking politics, art should obsess over its own internal laws, become something like pure structure. "It is not the office of art to spotlight alternatives," Adorno wrote in a famous line, "but to resist by its form alone the course of the world, which permanently puts a pistol to men's heads" (180). But how? The misty and arguably mystified term *form* is key to Adorno's solution to the dialectical relation of commitment and refusal he works to sketch in response to Sartre's advocacy of *littérature engagée*. Adorno does not simply refuse the idea that art should be, or even can be, political; instead, he proposes that the notion of the political be, as it were, rescued—recovered at a more densely mediated, even "higher" level, in negation or refusal, as ghost. For this unashamed propagandist of modernism, difficulty was the key to this complicated effect. Where "eulogists of 'relevance'" demand direct engagement (179), Adorno called for "works that swear allegiance to no political slogans" and generate "the shock of the unintelligible" (179, 180). The stunned or noncomprehending affective response that accompanies the refusal to resolve into lessons makes "hairs start to bristle" (180) and generates a state of blasted unknowing in which Adorno locates a glimmer of possibility beyond the moral: the "uncompromising radicalism" and "terrifying power" of work that cannot be "willingly absorbed" back into the world that produced it (188, 189). Works eliciting this feeling "point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just life" (194). Despite the almost comedic masculinism of Adorno's evaluative lexicon—all terror, hardness, and the refusal of compromise—it will be clear from the short sketch of this debate that its key questions are newly important in our own catastrophic present. Those questions are whether and how thought can be political; what art is and might do, in relation to concrete social processes; and how our own ideational projects—our writing—might intervene in the present, if at all.

This cluster of essays raises the topic of engagement at a moment when what Adorno calls "the abundance of real suffering" bears down with special, even "unbearable" heaviness—to use Sartre's term. It is a moment when our most vulnerable colleagues, friends, and students feel the pistol of the world pressing against their skin. Immigrants, people of color, queer and trans people, the nonwhite and nonmale, the contingently employed and the casualized, the indebted. All these demographic subsets and more find themselves on the receiving end of an unlivable present, exposed to the logics of resurgent ethnonationalism, unrepentant patriarchy, militarized anti-intellectualism, and a postliberal kleptocracy untethered from the strictures of what used to be called civil society. What resources might the Victorian period, and Victorian studies, offer to this diminished contemporary? What might the great era of public moralists, capitalist accumulation, and collective resistance say to the abyssal moral emptiness of our present, its perfect dark yawning wider every day? And as scholars of the emergence and flourishing of the bourgeois world, how might we best address—directly, at a slant, or (as Adorno suggests) by negation—its perverse and unceasingly violent unwinding?

The 2018 DHS document notes that children cannot by rule be held longer than seventy-two hours in holding facilities like the one pictured above. But the *Washington Post* found that hundreds had been detained, without access to baths, for as long as twenty-five days. Precarious, in many cases preverbal, all inhabiting what John Stuart Mill once called the state of "nonage": these surplus bodies have been made extraneous and therefore disposable to a state apparatus designed to exclude and abandon—if not directly to kill—them.[7] The *Post* explains that children too young to speak their own names were not given wristbands for identification; their family connections were not written down. They have simply been lost.

Although this story is ultracontemporary, its themes and forms and routes to pathos are importantly Victorian. The nineteenth-century British Empire was a theater, of course, for early experiments in state racism, the early liberal state a laboratory for testing systemic mechanisms of human abandonment and selective reclamation—"In Darkest England, and the Way Out," as William Booth's 1890 treatise put it.[8] As Sumit Guha has noted, the British Empire's tactics included what we could now call family separation, a practice intended among other things "to limit the development of a local power elite with any genealogical depth" in unruly holdings like India.[9] This technique had long since

been perfected in the administration of chattel slavery, of course, a system from which even a putatively free England profited massively far beyond the abolition of the trade in 1807.[10] Perfected abroad, such racialized schemes of subjection only further radicalized domestic practices of deracination, erasure, and gender-based depersonalization like those fictionalized in Oliver Twist's Mudfog workhouse, Brontë's Lowood School, or the entire plot of Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859).[11] The Victorians, we might say, invented the lost child.

Formally, too, the labored neutrality and clipped syntax of the DHS report read like any other internal document from the great age of imperial bureaucracy.[12] In that sense, the acronymic agencies of DHS and OIG should be considered tragic replays of Dickens's farcical Circumlocution Office, where "minutes," "memoranda," and "ungrammatical correspondence" pile up in a sea of dehumanizing paperwork where "[n]umbers of people were lost." In similar fashion—and as the DHS report cited above reveals—the neofascist agencies of today are discourse-generating institutions that, in Mary Mullen's words, "delimi[t] political possibilities" by "actively extend[ing] present social arrangements into the future."[13] The social arrangements extended here are coercive in their basic structure, more obscene for having been stripped so perfectly clean of the political convictions animating them. Cleanliness is in fact the DHS document's governing theme, order its central motif. The photos show buffed surfaces, fridges full of food, shelves jammed tight with clothing, towels, "hygiene items"—all arrayed in displays of healthful bounty. ("Unaccompanied alien children we spoke with did not complain of hunger and said they had enough food.")[14]

I take this bureaucratic language, so committed to denarrating both the virulence of its motivating animus and the human suffering it conceals, to essentially undermine itself. But the act of exposure I've hinted at by merely citing this administrative jargon is also, in its way, Victorian. Like nearly every available critique of current U.S. border policy, romances like *Hard Times* (1854) and *Mary Barton* (1848), alongside any number of blue books, sanitary reports, and accounts by evangelical reformers, recoil from the desubjectification they describe primarily because of the threat it poses to a supposedly natural heteronormative domestic sphere. (For Dickens, recall, immiserated workers are "an *unnatural family*, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death.")[15] In our day too it is the rupture of this "natural" and allegedly apolitical unit—the family—that moved observers even so unradical

as Laura Bush, for example, to oppose her own party's border policy on the grounds that our whole nation unites in "honor[ing] fathers and the bonds of family."[16] Audrey Jaffe, Lee Edelman, and others have taught us that children were and remain the key trope in such patriarchy-enforcing efforts to mobilize moral sentiment for purposes of political critique.[17] But if much opposition to the current regime's border policy has been driven by heteronormative or patriarchal investments familiar to us from Victorian literature, other commitments—alien to the liberal-sentimental repertoire we inherit from white bourgeois Victorians—might drive our investments too. Commitments, for example, to a life in common with other human beings across race, class, and gender difference; commitments to solidarity with those engaged in a struggle for life against established powers aiming to kill or abandon them; commitments to honoring the human capacity to endure, get on, and make new, "creating possibility in the space of enclosure."[18] These commitments find expression in nineteenth-century literature and culture too.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, an engaged writer if there ever was one, might have been thinking of coal mines, textile mills, or the September 2018 *Times* report of migrant children sleeping twenty to a tent when she dreamed up her famously sentimentalizing call to action, "The Cry of the Children."[19] And her opening line—"Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers / Ere the sorrow comes with years?"—could have headlined ProPublica's account of these other cries, recorded at a DHS detention center in Texas, "in which children can be heard wailing as an agent jokes, 'We have an orchestra here.'"[20] Browning's reformist project threw fuel on the slow-burning fire of discontent at the labor conditions of her moment, even as it confirmed the caesura in the social field by which *our* ears and *their* cries were separated ("They look *up*, with their pale and sunken faces"). This reaffirmation of hierarchy against the threat of solidarity meant that the poem's lachrymose solution was finally inadequate to the political obscenity of its moment. Neo-Victorian sentimentality and difference-affirming calls for understanding seem little better equipped for this one.

In my British novel course, my students and I had already completed an industrial romance, *North and South* (1855), and a violence-fractured female bildungsroman (*Jane Eyre* [1847]), and were in the midst of *Tess* (1892) on the night of the 2016 presidential election. This meant that one day after a confessed sexual predator was elected to our highest office, we were to discuss a novel where a meritless imbecile rapes the novel's impoverished and vulnerable main character, and another, only

apparently more sensitive man casts her aside for trying to tell the story. What would we discuss?

Thus did some version of the otherwise esoteric Sartre-Adorno debate become palpable to me as a dilemma of the lesson plan. Would we address head-on the fact that an accused rapist had just been elected president by making allegories or equations so as to suggest that our novel was *about* the present moment? That Victorian fiction spoke *to* and *about* the present, that it addressed us, for lack of a better term, directly? Such contemporizing gestures would position an artifact from the past (*Tess*) as a kind of source code or analogue for the present, a parallel-making approach I take to be modeled by, for example, the entries in the V21 series on "Presentist Pedagogies."[21] Or would we turn away, avoid that direct confrontation, and (to state it more positively, as Anna Kornbluh does in her contribution here) refuse the lure to instrumentalize the work in this way? Would we counter our temptation to tame this artwork into comprehensibility by, as Adorno might put it, conscripting it into a relation of analogy with the present—however politically urgent such a move might seem? Could we (in other words) *not* treat the novel like Alec and Angel treat Tess, as an "absolute possession" to be "clasped . . . with a renewed firmness of hold" and turned into a tool for our use?[22] Could we (I wondered) avoid turning this vulnerable thing, the novel, to our own uses, objectifying it—and instead allow it (in Adorno's terms) to *be itself*, focusing on local knots in its form, say, its free indirect discourse, its haunting symbolism, the impaled horse or the crushed berries, the turnip-peeling machine?

In the event, I punted: after acknowledging the difficulty of the moment, we broke into groups and tried to think together about the questions I take to animate the Sartre-Adorno debate in the first place: What is literature for? And what is reading it supposed to do for us, if anything, in times of crisis? This cluster restages that discussion in more considered terms. Each essay here spins out from the Adornian provocation that answers to the questions about engagement, care, and values I posed at the outset might be found coded somehow into aesthetic objects themselves. Our objects vary: together we move from what have become canonical examples of major forms like the novel (as in Molly Clark Hillard's essay on *Tess* or Anna Kornbluh's reading of *The Old Curiosity Shop* [1841]); to understudied poetry by official poets like Tennyson (in Grace Lavery's essay), out-for-the-money writers like Adelaide Procter, the *Household Words* contributor examined by Emily Harrington, and 1990s situation comedies like *Friends*. The question of commitment

is turned around and asked of Adorno's own essay (in Kornbluh's and Lavery's essays), a reversal that signals our shared understanding that "aesthetic" artifacts and "critical" ones might not be so different after all. Our affective relations to these diverse objects are themselves various and remain in some cases strategically unresolved. Clark Hillard sees tangled, rather than direct, political engagement in Hardy, a slanted politics legible in allusions to subjugated and nonwhite bodies in places like Brazil and Blackmoor Vale. For Clark Hillard, these signals or traces suggest that Hardy's novel generates a "long, layered history, not just of bodily violation, but of . . . racialized, globalized processes of recovery, endurance, and survivorship." Harrington also takes Adorno's warnings of overexplicitness seriously, even while inverting that thinker's amusingly single-minded obsession with white male modernism. For Harrington, the seemingly wooden and commercial work of Procter ("philistine," Adorno would have surely called it) in fact resolves into layered maps of temporal dislocation and allusion to enslavement, all wobbling in the ambiguous ballad-form of poems that track how, in Adorno's terms, "genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage." Kornbluh follows the Adornian emphasis on inversion, turning this device, as it were, against him to recuperate realism against Adorno's own dismissal. For Kornbluh, the Victorian period's most frankly self-commodifying author, Dickens, nevertheless enables deinstrumental and anticapitalist knowledges—countermodern forms that are, for Kornbluh, ciphered in *The Old Curiosity Shop* as a phantasmagoria of objects: a haunted archive of surfaces, materials, and bric-a-brac, all whirling through what Adorno himself terms the "Hell space" of the Dickensian city. For her part, Lavery discloses how Adorno's own argument for form and withdrawal—all angles, withering judgment, and dialectical reversal—emerges and draws motivation from a yet more primary defense against the feminine, a concern with the gender dynamics of knowledge-making also tracked by Clark Hillard and Harrington. Lavery's disobedient reading considers how "the shock of the sexed body," particularly the trans female body, unwinds not just the gendered presumptions of Adorno's critique but also the very structure of commitment as such. That's because if, for Adorno no less than Sartre, commitment requires something like stable subjects holding steady positions over extended durations, what if, in simple terms, we change? And what if that change—what Lavery calls the "material negation" of our former subject position—is a key feature of that "self" in the first place, and a good one?

These short glosses will have already shown how these essays unfold the linked problems of commitment, care, engagement, and fidelity

across multiple registers and to different effects. What they all show, I think, is how the methodological dyads now current in literary studies —reading "with" or "against"; reading formally or for content; reading historically or in light of "presentism"—fall down in the face of the challenges commitment poses today. At least part of what we hope to model here, then, is how these and related binary options, each now risen to the status of critical cliché, might fracture and disperse into more complex tangles of affiliation and counteraffiliation, affirmation and negation. Such ensembles of affective relation and readerly identification run counter to the commodifying logic of methodological self-branding. They also show how the vectors of our interest or care (now moving beyond Adorno's conceptual repertoire) mix up and get strange: how readerly projects might become "coassembl[ed]," in the terms Eve Sedgwick borrows from Silvan Tomkins, "with an affect system described as encompassing several more, and more qualitatively different, possibilities than on/off." The nonbinary affective logic Sedgwick develops from Tomkins opens up to what she calls "[a] repertoire of risk—a color wheel of different risks—a periodic table of infinitely recombinable elements of the affect system."[23] All this generates new, varying shades of attachment and connection, disaffiliation, temporary avowal, and partial engagement. The twist we add is to show the multiple, often overlapping or conflicting ways in which partisanship and fidelity are performed not only by *us* but by our objects—or by us and our objects together. How under a certain form of readerly attention, a given work might itself model, perhaps at micro- or formal levels most of all, and sometimes even in negation, varieties of attachment.[24] As several of our essays suggest, this line of inquiry necessarily opens up to modes of perverse, queer, or even antisocial affiliation—and to an awareness of how those affiliations might change.

Our sense is that by revisiting, under an aspect of care, artifacts from an amplified, and still ongoing, nineteenth century, we might discover in them new possibilities for debating commitment now. What motivates our reading practices? With what or whom are we in solidarity, and why? Why do we care? Emerging from encounters with past objects, the problematics guiding this cluster thus take us back to some of the baseline questions of literary criticism. They do so at a moment when a burning world calls us to consider questions of political engagement and readerly procedure, not as professional poses or moves in a chess match of academic prestige, but as sincere provocations to understand directly what our work does and why.

One hope for the critical practices that might result from this effort to reanimate "Commitment" is that they take marching orders from neither Adorno at his most politically quiet nor Sartre at his most aesthetically naïve. Perhaps they will see commercial verse as theory; Tess Durbeyfield as knowledge-maker; Dickens as diagnostician; Ross, from *Friends*, as unwitting coconspirator in "the creation of a just life" (Adorno 194). What these papers presuppose and performatively argue for, then, is not just that commitment as such be reconsidered as a priority in Victorian studies. We also hope to show how this readerly affect or performance of fidelity—call it solidarity or partisanship, a standing shoulder-to-shoulder with friends—might be modeled in our own practice. Such lateral kinship, making common cause with the past and with one another, is never more urgent than in a present so fallen and unrepaired as this one. Adorno writes in "Commitment" that "the abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting" (188). Our acts of attention unfold here in league against the suffering that continues around us still.

Notes

1. Department of Homeland Security, "Results of Unannounced Inspections," 5, 1.
2. This truncated effort to describe the challenges of ethical and political judgment now leaves to the side recent efforts to resuscitate the category of aesthetic judgement. These include Michael Clune's attempts to reclaim "submission to the expert's judgment" (926) as a positive value in the service of a restored, because frankly acknowledged, "aesthetic hierarchy" (910). This debate forms the topic of a 2020 ACLA panel, "Aesthetic Education," and includes John McGowan's succinct response, "Fuck Submission" (9).
3. Sartre, "What Is Literature?" 291, emphasis original.
4. Sartre, "What Is Literature?" 291, emphasis original.
5. Sartre, "What Is Literature?" 291.
6. Adorno, "Commitment," 182, 193. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
7. In *On Liberty* (1859), Mill offers the celebrated maxim that "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign," but adds an immediate proviso: "It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to say that this doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in

the maturity of their faculties. We are not speaking of children, or of young persons below the age which the law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood. Those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others, must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury. For the same reason, we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage" (13).

8. On biopolitical abandonment in the Victorian period, see Steinlight, *Populating the Novel*, and Mufti, *Civilizing War*. See also Poovey, *Making a Social Body*.
9. Guha, "British Empire," n.p.
10. On the centrality of chattel slavery to the features of mainstream mid-Victorian experience that we term "industrialization," see (canonically) Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, and more recently, Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*. For the global entanglements of "Victorian" life, see Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Given that the cotton embargoes of the Civil War period had yet to take effect, it is safe to assume that the "fluff" choking Bessy and her father in Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) is the product of enslaved labor in the American South, a detail linking the necropolitical economy of the slave power (as John Elliott Cairnes called the Confederacy in his 1862 treatise) and the "wage slavery" of England's coal-fired industrial centers, as Williams describes. Elaine Freedgood has charted the importance of *Indian* cotton to the period using *Mary Barton* (1848), noting too that the 1860s saw a "'cotton famine' that occurred in Manchester during the U.S. Civil War, during which there was an acute shortage of cotton available for import into Britain" (*Ideas in Things*, 65–66). Slavery, empire, and industrialization come together as peasant death in Margaret's scene of sympathy:

> "Fluff?" said Margaret, inquiringly.
>
> "Fluff," repeated Bessy. "Little bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up. Anyhow, there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff" (chap. 13, n.p.).

11. Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1839); Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847); Collins, *The Woman in White* (1859).
12. I offer a reading of one such item of imperial bureaucracy—banal, depersonalized, hyperformalized—in *Forms of Empire*, 1–3, 13–17.

On the mismatch between this gathering technorationalist idiom and indigenous knowledge practices in the context of racialized domination, see C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*.

13. Mullen, *Novel Institutions,* 1.
14. Department of Homeland Security, "Results of Unannounced Inspections," 8, 6.
15. Dickens, *Hard Times*, chap. 10, emphasis added.
16. Laura Bush, "Separating Children."
17. Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy*; Bersani, "No Future."
18. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 33.
19. Dickerson, "Migrant Children Moved."
20. Thompson, "Listen to Children." For a detailed investigation of these resonances, see Baylor University undergraduate Calle Coleman's "'The Cry of the Children.'"
21. These interventions focus on "[h]ow . . . we teach Victorian literature in the age of Trump" and answer the question with variations on the idea that "the age of Trump" should be included as specific content in "Victorian" course modules. See V21's "Victorian Teaching Now."
22. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 248, 247.
23. Sedgwick and Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," 8, 20.
24. Here we could follow "Sara Ahmed's thinking on attachments as inherently political and potentially transformational: attachments, in her words, 'open up different possibilities for living,' and they are foundational for constructing and sustaining collectives: they form a 'we,' however tentative or provisional, that imagines and antagonizes for more just and livable futures" (Davis, "Pipelines, Water, and Attachments," 2). Lauren Berlant explains how "all attachments are optimistic" because they open us beyond the enclosure of self (*Cruel Optimism*, 1–2).

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