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1

In Which an Object Is Proposed for Analysis

WHAT IS A CHAPTER that we might study it? The very object itself is difficult to conceptualize. Countless are the world's narrative forms, we know; how much more beyond counting the segments known to us as chapters that so often organize, interrupt, and in various ways mark them: chapters in histories, textbooks, memoirs, children's stories, sacred writings, guides, theories, manifestos, pornographies, realist novels, and yes, academic monographs.[1] They pullulate; they spawn. Yet they are almost never an object of notice as such.

An opening comparison, then: two pages from almost five hundred years apart. The first comes from the second volume of an unexceptional manuscript Bible of the late thirteenth century produced in Bologna and held at the British Library (Add MS 18720); the second is from the middle volume of Charlotte Lennox's 1752 novel *The Female Quixote* (figure 1.1). They share neither physical material, size, mode of production, genre, conventions of authorship, nor many operating assumptions of page design, although neither was particularly unusual for its time and genre. The word "chapter" is not present in any form in the Italian Bible, and its chapter openings—here, Luke 13 and 14—are not titled. Instead a colored initial begins each chapter, as well as Roman numerals indicating the chapter number, rubricated in alternating red and blue and inserted in the line space remaining at the end of the previous chapter. These numbers correspond to no table-of-contents-style list (or "capitula list") elsewhere in the volume; they exist alone. A running head, spreading across the volume's facing pages, announces the name of the book only, while slender borders on the left of each column trail off into thin winding scrolls.[2] The British novel, on the other hand, has a thirty-two-word chapter heading and a "drop cap" for the chapter's first letter, the weight of segmentation falling on the heading

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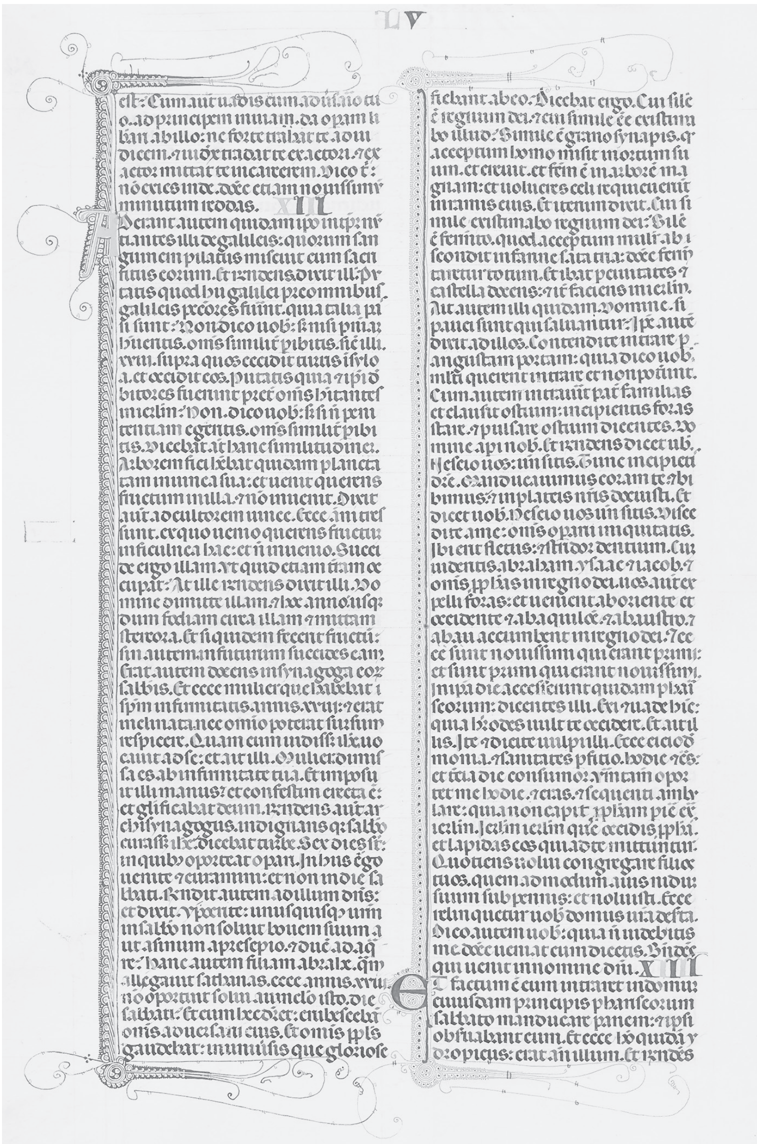

FIGURE 1.1 Two varieties of the chapter: *left,* chapter openings of Luke 13 and 14 in British Library Add MS 18720/2, fol. 438v; *right,* the opening of book 5, chapter 5, of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote: or, The Adventures of Arabella,* volume 2 (London, 1752), page 32.

Left courtesy of the British Library; *right* courtesy of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

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CHAP. V.

In which will be found one of the former Miſtakes purſued, and another cleared up, to the great Satisfaction of Two Perſons; among whom, the Reader, we expect, will make a Third.

ARABELLA no ſooner ſaw Sir *Charles* advancing towards her, when, ſenſible of the Conſequence of being alone with a Perſon whom ſhe did not doubt, would make uſe of that Advantage, to talk to her of Love, ſhe endeavoured to avoid him, but in vain; for Sir *Charles*, gueſſing her Intentions, walked haſtily up to her; and, taking hold of her Hand,

You muſt not go away, Lady *Bella*, ſaid he: I have ſomething to ſay to you.

Arabella, extremely diſcompoſed at this Behaviour, ſtruggled to free her Hand from her Uncle; and, giving him a Look, on which Diſdain and Fear were viſibly painted,

Unhand me, Sir, ſaid ſhe, and force me not to forget the Reſpect I owe you, as my Uncle, by treating you with a Severity ſuch uncommon Inſolence demands.

Sir *Charles*, letting go her Hand in a great Surprize, at the Word Inſolent, which ſhe had uſed, aſked her, If ſhe knew to whom ſhe was ſpeaking?

Queſtionleſs, I am ſpeaking to my Uncle, replied ſhe; and 'tis with great Regret I ſee myſelf obliged to make uſe of Expreſſions no way

FIGURE 1.1 (*continued*)

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more heavily than the initial words of the unit; the word "chapter" is present but abbreviated, as if too informal to bother with the full label one already knows; and a moderate amount of white space, equivalent to one line of text, separates title from chapter proper. Lennox's chapter number competes with other location devices at the page's head—both a page and a book number—and therefore is nested within one finding scheme while overlapping with another. Both the chapter number and title are recapitulated in a list of "Contents" at the start of the first volume. The chapter breaks of both Bible and novel hail a reader, but they do so with a wide tonal difference: the tacit expectation of the Biblical chapter number, that it will be used as a finding aid or citational marker, contrasts with the occasion Lennox seizes to playfully address the reader directly—this despite the fact that her novel has a more elaborate finding apparatus, its table of contents. Finally, Lennox's chapter is self-evidently understood to have authorial sanction; the division here is intrinsic to the text. Could a differently chaptered version of *The Female Quixote* possibly exist? Quite the opposite with the thirteenth-century biblical page: its chaptering is, as of the likely date of the manuscript, a fairly new scheme of division developed in the first decades of the thirteenth century, inserted into a text that had been divided quite differently over the preceding eight hundred years. One would seem to be essential and unalterable, the other provisional.

Are these chapters at all the same? What do two such things share other than a name, which might seem just a flag of convenience? What, to extend our thought experiment further, of other frequent variations—the "chapter" that is not even announced as such, marked only by a number, if that? Can these instances be said to belong to a category that could become an object of analysis?

Further confusions abound: what, in each instance, looking for a "chapter," are we supposed to see? For the literary theorist Gérard Genette (perhaps encouraged by the fact that *chapitre* or *chapter* derives from a diminutive of *caput* in Latin, or "little head"), chapters are essentially their titles, or *headings*—the labels or "intertitles" that, like the other "paratexts" Genette studies, such as prefaces, epigraphs, or dedications, exist in a space auxiliary to the text itself.[3] In the case of the biblical chapter here, these are minimal; in Lennox's novel, lavish. In both cases these are largely conventional for their time. Yet what of the unit of text so marked off, the stretch more commonly referred to as a "chapter," which is far less conventionally—perhaps even somewhat casually, or idiosyncratically—measured? In not being quite sure whether a chapter is a unit of a text or a way of marking off that unit, a label or

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the textual contents so labeled, we are accordingly uncertain how much freedom it permits. In either case a suspicion lingers that only half the story is being told. The writer of a chapter feels constraint, no doubt; the very fact of writing in a chapter is less chosen than expected, and the appearance it will take, its length, the extent to which it will be set off by blank space on the page, how or if it will be titled, tends to be far more conventional to a time and a genre than freely manipulated, and in any case not often completely within authorial power. Yet a massive freedom exists in between. What a chapter is meant to do—how it must begin and end—is nowhere codified. Is such a composite thing any kind of "form"?

A "form," stretching back to the term's uses in Kant, is an identifiable feature that negotiates between limitation and invention; it realizes itself by adhering to, if not a rule, at least a pattern or external constraint, and yet it cannot seem entirely rote or predetermined.[4] The chapter violates that balance. It seems at once infinitely various and wholly routine, both too weak to be any constraint and so ubiquitous that it can be nothing but a passively acquired constraint. As a result, the chapter has almost never been accepted in the range of elements that constitute a literary form.[5] But it will not do to be too nice about what we allow into that category, if only because of what it prevents us from seeing—here, the durable consistency and manifold variations of the chapter's segmenting work. In this I am following the call of literary critics Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian for a pragmatist understanding of form, one that resists any totalizing definition in favor of a flexible usage that is largely ostensive: to use the term "form" is to point to something, and by doing so isolate it among a host of overlapping and competing phenomena.[6] (As we will see, this approach is appropriate for the chapter, which is itself a kind of pointing.) To designate a "form" is not necessarily to posit something objective about what one points to, but instead, in the philosopher Rodolphe Gasché's phrase, to name "a subjective condition concerning the representability" of that object or category of objects; to call the chapter a "form" is above all to make it visible.[7] This is no small thing. There are many reasons not to see chapters: their dull, even remedial ordinariness, their omnipresence across so many kinds of prose documents, and also, across the millennia of their existence, what can look like their deep unlikeness from one another.

Those obvious dissimilarities, and the chapter's oddly composite status between text and paratext, have tended to restrict the historical and generic scope of the few studies of the chapter that do exist, which by and large concentrate on the logics of chapter form in specific genres or even particular

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writers, usually those locations where chapters are within authorial control.[8] In the foremost instances, the sophisticated and broadly synthetic work of Georges Mathieu and Ego Dionne, the result is something closer to taxonomy than history. This book proposes a more drastic kind of abstraction and a longer genealogy: to move across the difference between the authorial chapter and the kind produced by editors, scribes, and scholars at other points in the lifecycle of the text, and to move therefore across almost two millennia of textual production. It means thinking of the thirteenth-century medieval Bible, not to mention much older material, and the novelistic chapter, even many newer such examples, together. It means often adopting an uncomfortable or embarrassing literalism: if the unit was at any point called a chapter, it is a chapter, however it looks and however it was made.

I want then to propose a highly abstract object of analysis, and as a result a fairly new one, and so I began with a comparison meant to suggest a level of abstraction sufficient to gather together two such disparate instances. Where that abstraction will take us is primarily toward the question of time. The difference between medieval Bible and satirical eighteenth-century novel is of course vast, and the idea that the chapter develops slowly with every shift in genre and technology of publication will be fundamental to this study. Equally fundamental, however, is that the object of analysis is bound together and given its cultural weight by one quality every instance shares: the chapter is a form of textual segmentation that articulates time. That function is not, as we will see, one of its original purposes. It is to some extent an accident occasioned by its migration from informational to narrative genres in late antiquity. But even in its earliest instances it is present, and as the chapter spreads into an inevitability of almost any codex, it is what gives chaptering a cultural purchase not afforded other kinds of segmentation. To the extent that this mess of individual objects belongs to a class, it does so because each chapter participates in the project of imagining a temporal experience, one that is organized into flexible yet regular units, punctuated by breaks, and loosely, at times very loosely, tied in a developing sequence. It is this kind of temporal experience that gives the metaphor of the chapter—the "chapter of my life," the desire to "start a new chapter"—its power. The claim my following pages will press is that this innocuous, ubiquitous device, not just a format but not quite a genre, has a purchase on one of the grander claims of written narrative: to be capable of representing, and even structuring, what it feels like to have an experience in time. Chapters locate a reader. They fit us into a scheme that is at the same time chronological and topical; they "commensurate" our lived time, to use Nan Da's

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term, to textual time.[9] As such this book is a study of the gradual diffusion, long preexisting the novel but flourishing in it, of something that can be called *chapter time*.

The distinction I am making here is between what might seem like the chapter's most obvious function—its ability, particularly when indexed to a table of contents or other tabular representation, to produce a synchronic map of a text—and how chapters segment, interrupt, and articulate a diachronic or linear process through a text. By emphasizing diachrony, I am alluding to a historical argument that this book will make: the chapter, more swiftly than has been understood, outgrew its initial function of mapping or outlining and became a caesura or temporal measurement, an implicit evaluation of what is possible in the time given us by a chapter. I am also making here an argument as to essential function. Insofar as the chapter has meaning—a meaning that can become a metaphor—it is because it speaks of a sort of time analogous to, but crucially different than, the other time units we live in: hours, days, months, years; eras, periods, epochs, phases. In fact, the charged tension that seems to inhibit us from calling the chapter a "form," the tension between something that seems so abstractly conventional and yet so free to be filled in so many distinct and personalized ways, is exactly the tension of any unit of time. That is the "form" of this particular form: it marks time. And it marks time in ways that absorb and compete with other ways of marking time, at different historical moments stretching or compressing in a constantly elastic relationship to other, often more rigid, temporal concepts.

Ten Premises

From this initial comparison, I want to move to some hazarded generalizations: a list of ten premises about the chapter, an abbreviated overview of aspects of chaptering that later parts of this book will illuminate more fully. These are general observations, closer to sociological norms than ironclad distinctions. Quite often they present features that cry out, at particular moments and for particular writers, to be resisted. Yet they are surprisingly durable across a long historical stretch, and together they define a practice that, however different in material appearance or authorial intent, remains recognizably similar.

1. *The chapter is stylistically distinct; it is not fully explicable by analogy to units in other media or to psychological models. It is only loosely like a*

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musical phrase, a dramatic scene, or what cognitive scientists call "event perception," however tempting the analogy becomes. It is its own practice, peculiar and peculiarly useful.

"A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play," begins chapter 11 of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.[10] Sketching out chapter plans in his notebooks, Henry James had frequent recourse to similar language. On *The Spoils of Poynton* (1896): "I seem to see the thing in three chapters, like 3 little acts"; on *What Maisie Knew* (1897): "Each little chapter is, thereby, a moment, a stage." Ruminating in late 1914 over the project that would be *The Sense of the Past,* James considered the means by which he "ended my chapter, or dropped my curtain."[11] The comparison between chapter and scene is recurrently appealing, just as other such comparisons tend to offer themselves as suitable explanations of how chapters operate. In *Jane Eyre,* the comparison seems motivated by embarrassment: so much has happened in the preceding chapter break, so much more than ordinarily occurs in that space—a complete change of life, from years spent at Lowood School to a new life among strangers—that the typically more modest interval of a chapter break seems scarcely capable of accommodating it. Too much has changed, as if in that space stagehands were busily arranging a new set.

Chapters exist, then, in a matrix of different temporal units, comprising the vocabularies of other aesthetic media, such as the "scene," as well as a more diffuse vocabulary of time measurement. The ingredients of daily time, from social to physiological or circadian rhythms, like a day, an hour, a visit, an event; the human political units of reigns and revolutions, wars and careers, and the periods in which an ideology dominates; the abstractions of small and large time, from minutes to geological eras: the chapter is not only porous to all these, potentially, but often explained with reference to them, depending on the particular speed and scope of the individual text. Similarly, the chapter exists in a matrix of different marks of punctuation.[12] It is often grouped with the page, the paragraph, and even the separation between words as a protocol for parsing text into distinct entities.[13] Yet by existing within *both* matrices, the chapter remains stubbornly, if partially, independent of either, and maintains its difference. It can absorb other units while not being reducible to them.

The occasional comparisons of chapters to other temporal segmentations are just that—comparisons, catachreses. The chapter is tied to the materiality of text, yet can float free of it; it can help shape more notional units of narrative, such as the "episode," without remaining beholden to them either. A

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chapter can be "scenic"—limited to one continuous scene or action—or pure summary; more usually it is a combination of both, only obliquely related to either, making it difficult to parse through one particular narrative speed.[14] The chapter's relation to other kinds of temporal or narrative measurement is constituted by fleeting and changeable kinds of mimicry, making it, necessarily and paradoxically, ever more itself. More prosaically: it can encompass, at times, something like an episode, an era, a scene; and it can take on other documentary forms, such as the testimony, the affidavit, the letter; but it absorbs these within its own rules and tends to violate, or reshape, their boundaries. To echo Laurence Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759), the chapter will observe other kinds of time measurement, like the pendulum, while rejecting "the jurisdiction of all other pendulums whatever."[15]

If the chapter is not reducible to some other unit, either specifically aesthetic or more generally cultural, a suspicion remains, familiar in our moment, that it might be explicable with reference to properties of the human brain: that the chapter satisfies, or can be derived from, ways in which time is cognitively processed. A large body of work within cognitive science has been devoted, for the last four decades, to the question of how stretches of time are segmented in ways that either make them amenable to coding as memory, or simply reviewable as coherent experiences. Such experiments have focused on the ordinary perception of events as well as the special case of reading. The basic claim of this work seems important for any theory of the chapter: boundary making is a ceaseless activity of the brain in its encounter with time, and is essential for any recall or experiential coherence. As one of the earliest such studies insisted, "ongoing behavior is perceived in units."[16] The initial and still-popular term "chunking" described exactly that aspect of perception: the spontaneous, automatic division of temporal experience. Later work in what is now known as event segmentation theory (or EST) has described some of the specific mechanisms by which the data of continuous temporality are parsed, and from the standpoint of a literary theorist, the workings of event segmentation are surprisingly Aristotelian. EST argues for a ceaseless cognitive labor of marking time into basic plot units characterized by actions and the intentions of the actor; that is to say, we scan for completed actions, where "action" is defined as a goal-driven human act.[17] Our default cognitive template for the shape of a narrative unit, which becomes the basic unit of our temporal experience, is according to logic of EST the inception and completion of a human intention, however fleeting. Simply put, the history of the chapter is inconsistent with this theory. Human intention is not the inevitable, or even a particularly

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frequent, grammar of chapter boundaries.[18] Or perhaps EST has a merely negative relation to the chapter: if, as is the contemporary consensus of research in the field, our episodic memory—that is, our narrative memory—is organized by the activities of event segmentation, we would have some help in understanding how difficult it can be to remember the events of any one particular novelistic or scriptural chapter.

The chapter, in other words, does not fit with current accounts of cognition the way a tool fits with an intended use. As a tool, its original purpose was never perfectly aligned with the task of chunking temporal sequence into memorable units, and it has outlived that tool-purpose in any case. As an artifact, it is best thought of as addressing virtual states of affairs—as an experiment in imagining different kinds of temporality than those spontaneously or habitually produced by our cognitive acts of segmentation.[19] Theories of other modes of dividing time can be at best suggestive in any account of the chapter, and at worst will be misleading. We will need to respect its strange, stubborn autonomy.

2. *It is so ubiquitous as to be almost invisible: the essence of conventionality.*

It is hard to *see* chapters, such is their banal inevitability. The chapter possesses the trick of vanishing while in the act of serving its various purposes. In 1919, writing in the *Nouvelle revue française,* Marcel Proust famously insisted that the most beautiful moment in Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* was not a phrase but a *blanc,* or white space: a terrific, yawning fermata, one "sans l'ombre de transition," without, so to speak, the hint of a transition.[20] It is the hiatus, Proust explains, that directly ensues from a scene set during Louis Napoleon's 1851 coup, in which the protagonist Frédéric Moreau watches the killing of his radical friend Dussardier by Sénécal, a former militant republican turned policeman for the new regime. After this sudden and virtuosic blanc, Frédéric is in 1867; sixteen aimless years elapse in the intervening silence. It is, Proust argues, a masterful change of tempo, one that liberates the regularity of novelistic time by treating it in the spirit of music. And yet this blanc is not entirely blank. What Proust neglects to mention, whether out of forgetfulness or disdain for such editorial and typesetting detail, is that the hiatus he is praising here is a chapter break.[21] However masterful and unprecedented its handling of time, it is also to some extent procedurally typical—a blanc like countless others in the history of the novel, dully routine in visual terms, simply the transition between the fifth and sixth chapters of the novel's third part, marked in the early editions published by Michel Lévy Frères not just by the

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Roman numeral that prefaces the new chapter but by a change of page between the two units, an arrangement most subsequent editions followed. It was an arrangement already present in the novel's manuscript, where across six different rewritings Flaubert indicated this transition with a horizontal line and a carefully, even dramatically, indited "VI." The blanc has more than a shadow to indicate it; it has conventional marks. Flaubert was writing a chapter break. It is easy to see, but also, apparently, easy to forget, or too common to be worth mentioning.

This is the chapter's usual fate, to be considered dully expedient but embarrassingly common, the musty old furniture of the book. We cannot entirely forget chapters because we do not ever really have to learn about them. The conventionality of the chapter places it in the middle of a spectrum of form: too ordinary to be easily apparent as a particular aesthetic method or choice, too necessary to eliminate in the name of an antiformal freedom that claims to speak on behalf of pure "life." That intermediate position is a place, we might say, where form's deliberate artifice and life's unruly vibrancy mix most intimately. The chapter has one foot in both restriction and freedom, diluting the force of both: a not very severe restriction, a somewhat circumscribed freedom.

Put another way, the chapter, like any pervasive conventionality, feels natural. It is old-fashioned, but that old-fashioned aura nonetheless does not need to rise to the level of a conscious reference to its history. To write a chapter is to be aware of working within the preferences or norms of a genre, to think of its vaguely usual length, to be conscious of the reader's need to pause. In fact, that weak but persistent inevitability, that which we often mean when we speak of the conventional, is one of its determining characteristics, and something that any account of the chapter will have to bear in mind. Recovering what chapters do, and a history of their changing shapes and uses, should not tip into a psychoanalytic account that imagines readers as excessively, even if unconsciously, aware of their presence.[22] An essential element in how chapters have developed is toward a functional innocuousness, an insistence, in fact, on their own vagueness, flexibility, and resistance to rising to any flagrant notice. As a result chapters escape the structure/ornament distinction; in their long, slow history, they become ever more tacit and recessive, ever farther from their initial structural purpose as an indexical device, and as a result ever more indispensable, something that cannot be removed without damage to the whole.

Put in a more dismissive vein, we might say that a chapter is usually, in fact possibly always, "just" a chapter. Its claims on our attention are marginal. This is not the whole story, but neither is it something to be ignored. In an attempt

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to keep the chapter's ubiquity and innocuousness from sliding into something more vivid and unusual, my instances of chapters in what follows will more often come from a range of ordinary, typical, customary examples than from those that seem to call for our attention through intense self-consciousness or experimentation. My bias is toward the example that just barely calls out for notice, that takes part in the chapter's usual near-invisibility. Although even these examples will have intriguing lessons for us, beyond providing the ground against which more experimental instances could be understood.

3. *As a result, the chapter has no explicit canons of construction, no theory of its own.*

Like any paratext, as Genette defined the term, the chapter is "constrained."[23] It is a place where norms are obeyed more often than flouted, a space of repetition rather than innovation. But the fact of obedience does not mean that there are explicit rules being obeyed. Obscure norms do the work of regulating the chapter's shape rather than anything like a set of hard prescriptions. There is not even a canon of illustrious examples to be followed, parodied, or rejected—so diffident is the chapter's demand to be noticed. A few landmarks of metacommentary rise to the surface across the centuries, clustered in particular places and times: the "chapter on chapters" in *Tristram Shandy*, the chapter titled "Of Divisions in Authors" in Henry Fielding's 1742 *Joseph Andrews*, the "Table of Instructions" to Julio Cortázar's 1963 *Hopscotch*. But these do not function as models so much as places to explore metaphors or possible alternate uses for chaptering, and they are not widely emulated. The chapter has no foundational or primary instance, no explicit tradition, no set of guidelines; it is in this sense that Ugo Dionne, speaking of the novelistic chapter, calls it "*informalisable*," resistant to any grammar.[24]

Such resistance gives the chapter its durability. Its shape is never so hard as to become brittle. This suggests that the chapter is most itself when least self-conscious, most habitual or automatic, when its elastic norms are most taken for granted and not pressed into the mold of a specific metaphor or function. No small part of that elasticity is that the chapter allows for a considerable confusion as to the question of agency. If a chapter is a shaped object, who shapes it?[25] The question is never easily settled, even in the cases where it becomes most apparent. "The division of the novel into parts, parts into chapters, chapters into paragraphs—the book's *articulation*—I want to be utterly clear," Milan Kundera insists in the interview with Christian Salmon collected as "Dialogue on the Art of Composition." But such clarity is a somewhat

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diffuse responsibility: "I also want each of the chapters to be a small, self-contained entity. This is why I insist that my publishers make the numbers prominent and set the chapters off sharply from each other. (Gallimard's solution is best: each chapter starts on a fresh page.) Let me return to the comparison between novel and music. A part is a movement. The chapters are measures. These measures may be short or long or quite variable in length."[26] Without quite acknowledging the dilemma, Kundera nonetheless points it out: the chapter, even at its most consciously shaped, is at least in part a collaboration, an effect of typography as well as of composition, a paratext as well as a form. As a result the ensuing musical metaphor expresses nothing so much as the wistfulness of the novelist in regard to another medium; composers, after all, do not thank their publishers for setting off the measures with sufficient distinctness.

In its will-to-metaphor, its implicit admission of the limits here of an author's agency, and its veering from a statement of intent ("I want . . . I insist") to something that takes the form of a definition ("chapters are measures"), Kundera's explanation is a model of how the conventions of the chapter are muddled, if productively so. Like any convention, it exists whether or not anyone wants to participate in it, but one is free—as Kundera does here—to invest in the convention, even imagine a way to transform or rationalize it. But this is not the same thing as obeying a rule. Nor is it even something like constructing a theory. It is closer to finding a way, a compromise with one's will, to live with a norm.

4. *And yet for all its unformalized conventionality, the chapter is also, perhaps inevitably, metafictional; it cannot help but attempt to explain itself.*

To say that the division of a narrative must in some way become a comment on that division is true in multiple senses. It is of course most notable in the category of statements that dot eighteenth-century fiction in which a narrator refers to the chapter itself, as in this characteristic chapter ending from Fielding's *Amelia* (1751): "That we may give the Reader Leisure to consider well the foregoing Sentiment, we will here put an End to this Chapter."[27] Those closing tags need not be so explicit, as the following selection of chapter-ending clauses from Eliza Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, published the same year, demonstrates:

the reader shall presently be made sensible.

the reader will presently be informed of.

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how she was amused will presently be shewn.

as will hereafter appear in the progress of this story.

will in due time and place appear.

Although such comments cluster at chapter endings, they can appear anywhere as useful cross-referencing. Haywood, for instance, has recourse to this phrase: "as related in the sixth chapter of this volume."[28] These are obvious examples, culled from two novels published within months of each other, but by no means peculiar, and they reveal that the very presence of a break in the action tends to occasion a shift in which the break becomes the subject of the discourse. Genette has called these "advance notices and recalls"; Monica Fludernik refers to them as "metadiscursive."[29] It might be more fruitful still to turn to the branch of linguistics known as pragmatics, where such a reference is understood as a deixis—technically a "discourse deixis," a gesture that locates an utterance within a surrounding discourse, lifting figure from ground. Such deictic moments tend to blur temporal and spatial registers: "presently" and "hereafter" can merge with demonstratives such as "this" or "that," "later" can also be "below."[30] Like any deixis, these moments refer to anchoring points in both space and time, pointing from the relative viewpoint of the now toward some larger temporal scheme: like proprioception, but for time.

All chapter titles, in this sense, are essentially deictic, and therefore metafictional, no matter their individual styles. The shift from a seventeenth-century heading—"How Simplicissimus Was Changed from a Wild Beast into a Christian" (Simplicius wird aus einer Bestia zu einem Christenmenschen)—to an early twentieth-century one like "Initial Inquiry" (Erste Untersuchung) is stylistically large but functionally minor.[31] Both point outside of the story world to a reader, situating the "now" of narrative within some broader and usually sequential context. (Grimmelshausen's title tells us we will be left with a Christian protagonist in what follows; Kafka's promises at least a second interrogation, and possibly several.) In fictional prose where the presence of an implied author is for whatever reason illicit, the chapter heading nonetheless refers to a world occupied by that author. "Who speaks the chapter heading?" is an unavoidable question. In more openly metafictional novels, that question can become explicit, and chapter heading can cross over into narrative (figure 1.2). In others, devices such as epigraphs signal an exterior world commenting on the world of the narrative.[32] Yet even that most discreet of

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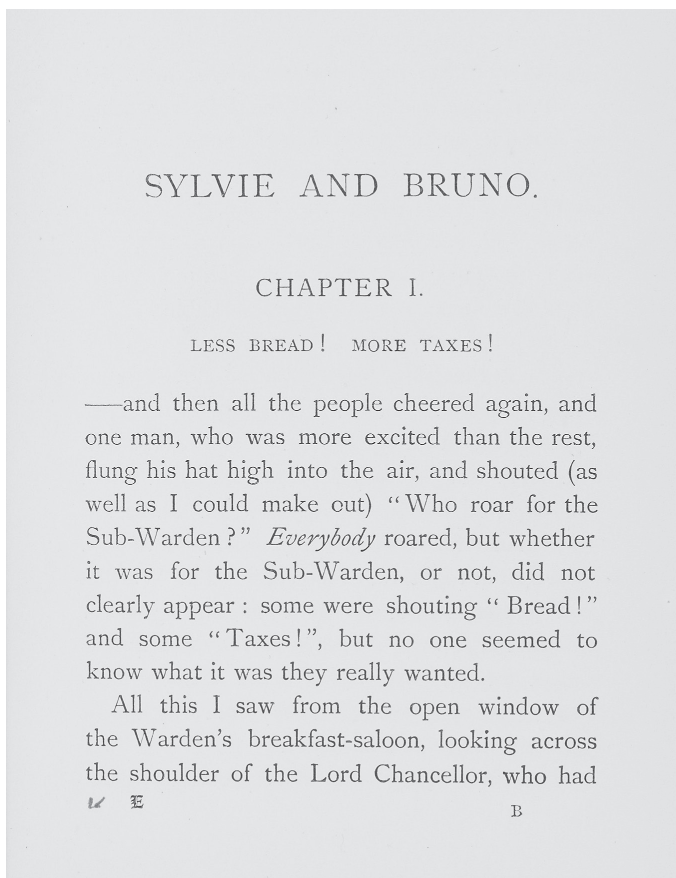

SYLVIE AND BRUNO.

CHAPTER I.

LESS BREAD! MORE TAXES!

——and then all the people cheered again, and one man, who was more excited than the rest, flung his hat high into the air, and shouted (as well as I could make out) "Who roar for the Sub-Warden?" *Everybody* roared, but whether it was for the Sub-Warden, or not, did not clearly appear: some were shouting "Bread!" and some "Taxes!", but no one seemed to know what it was they really wanted.

All this I saw from the open window of the Warden's breakfast-saloon, looking across the shoulder of the Lord Chancellor, who had

B

FIGURE 1.2 The cross-contamination of chapter head and narrative: Lewis Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno* (London: Macmillan, 1889), page 1. Courtesy of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

chapter headings, a simple number, points to an outside order and sequence as well as an attitude—mocking or reluctant—toward that order.

Of course, the metafictional dimension of the chapter can be handled with varying degrees of willfulness and explicitness. Take one eventful chapter from Elizabeth Gaskell's 1854 *North and South*, "Home at Last," in which Margaret Hale's mother dies shortly after the clandestine arrival from abroad of her brother Frederick, a naval mutineer who had been living in a Spanish refuge.

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It is a chapter of major transitions: the death of a mother and the dangerous presence of fugitive brother will initiate a more fluid series of events in Margaret's Manchester life as a more unpredictable anxiety replaces another. It ends at the first daybreak of the vigil over Mrs. Hale's body, and with it several "chapters" align simultaneously: "The night was wearing away, and the day was at hand, when, without a word of preparation, Margaret's voice broke upon the stillness of the room, with a clearness of sound that startled even herself: 'Let not your heart be troubled,' it said; and she went steadily on through all that chapter of unspeakable consolation."[33] That "chapter" is John 14, of which we hear Margaret speaking the first verse. As that Gospel chapter begins, "Home at Last" ends, novelistic chapter yielding to biblical chapter in a deftly metafictional gesture that yokes Margaret's recitation within the story world to our temporary release from it in the chapter break. In a novel not at all given to metafiction, the suturing of novel and Scripture through the word "chapter" is unusually sly. It demonstrates the continual pressure upon the framing of a chapter to account for itself, by finding some way to link a hiatus within the fictional world to the exigency of a readerly pause. To go one step further: we can even detect, in the history of the novel, fashions or recurrent styles of such synchronization.

5. *A chapter is a particular kind of segment. It is resistant to wholeness, autonomy, being excerpted; it prefers irregularity and elasticity. Its orientation is linear or syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic.*

A thought experiment: Is it possible to imagine an anthology of famous novelistic chapters? It would be a peculiar exercise, and no more or less compelling than an anthology of paragraphs; the chapter not only tends to be too embedded in the context of a plot to be excerptible but is not often shaped with enough attention to internal coherence to be memorable on its own. Harry Levin, in 1958, on "The Whiteness of the Whale," chapter 42 of *Moby-Dick*: "one of the farthest-ranging chapters in our literature."[34] Who else speaks of chapters in this way? A chapter is an *articulation* of a text, in the sense of the links in a chain, the bones of one's hand, or the interwoven steps of an escalator.[35] Alone, it is shorn of its function and therefore much of its effect.

Those metaphors—chain, skeleton, escalator—are also, however, slightly misleading. The chapter does always exhibit some minimal difference, despite its place within a larger working scheme, and is never quite identical to others, either in length or procedure. It has an uneasy relationship to isometry or any nested, hierarchical, regular structure. It has rhythm rather than architecture.

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One way to understand this resistance to higher-order formalization is by a second thought experiment, along the lines of a quiz: How many chapters are in *Gulliver's Travels, I promessi sposi, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften, Invisible Man*? Any correct answer would be definitionally trivial. Chapters imply numeration but not usually numerology; there is no widely acknowledged numerological tradition proper to the chapter or the chaptered book, unlike the twelve or twenty-four "books" of epic, the three or five acts of drama, or Dante's hundred cantos divided into three canticles.[36] Those texts that adopt a chaptered numerology are deliberately eccentric, such as the unlucky thirteen chapters of Horace McCoy's 1935 noir allegory *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*; the twelve chapters of Malcolm Lowry's 1947 *Under the Volcano*, with that number's Kabbalistic, mythological, and calendrical significances; or the thirteen books of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999–2006), each with thirteen chapters.[37] Where it is not eccentric, such numerology is deliberately countercultural: there is the example of the early sixteenth-century *Book of a Hundred Chapters*, authored by the anonymous Revolutionary of the Upper Rhine during the Peasant's Revolt, although, as if to illustrate the oddity of such totalizing numerical schemes, the book in fact includes only eighty-nine chapters.[38]

The tension the chapter occupies is that between complete autonomization and distinctness—"even the assing girouette of a postfuturo Gertrudo Steino protetopublic dont demand a new style per chapter," Ezra Pound exhaustedly warned James Joyce in 1919, having just struggled through a draft of the "Sirens" chapter of *Ulysses*—and complete totalization, or absorption into any schema that would enforce regularity.[39] It intersects with a more regular material rhythm (the page) and with different kinds of narrative rhythms (the day, the episode), cutting aslant each of them and resisting being wholly incorporated into their order.[40] In this sense, the chapter attunes us to a sense of time as multiple, overlapping, irregular. "Intervals of time," Ricoeur noted, "do not simply fit into one another according to their numerical quantities, days into years, years into centuries."[41] Nor do the slippery cadences of the chapter fit easily into larger, graduated orders. There are different ways of understanding this unevenness, different value judgments and aesthetic terms that could be applied: organic versus mechanical, self-aware rather than externally imposed, embodied rather than abstract and automatic. It is not necessary to choose; and in fact, at various historical moments, chapters may generate their impetus from any one of these vocabularies.[42] What is most important is to recognize the stubborn way in which the chapter, as

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a segment, defies subordination to some master scheme and evades any excessive consistency.

Which is to say that an understanding of the chapter cannot be oriented upward, toward the paradigmatic or the schematic, but forward, to a syntagmatic or linear series. The inescapable relation of chapters to ordinal numbers ("Chapter the Second") suggests how crucial linearity is to its function. This might suggest that the chapter enforces what Elizabeth Freeman has called "chrononormativity" and José Muñoz "straight time," a way of suturing the collective to the personal by enforcing a rhythm of linear, forward-directed sequence, lockstep "progressive" movement, the denial of alternative timelines or the curlicues of other-directed temporalities.[43] But its linearity is not a regular, Newtonian time; it comprises nonuniform leaps or transitions, interrupted flows, voids and blancs, that fissure linearity into an often eccentric modularity. We might now call this time "digital": discontinuous, segmentary, discrete.[44] Both comfort and foreboding can arise from its directionality, its irresistible pull to one more unit, one more chapter, promising escape and dread in equal measure. What order exists for the chapter inheres in the idea of *next, more to come, and yet.*

6. *As a segment, its work is primarily interruptive; it is a caesura, an aeration. Interruption is one of its primary communicative modes—it is a way of talking to a reader. To the reader it says: rest is now permitted. What we are meant to do with that rest, depends.*

For all the attention paid to "closure," we prize the experience that refuses to be firmly end-stopped: the concert-goers humming a tune while heading for the exits, the students who keep discussing after the class is done, the children still possessed by the fantasy game they've been forced to finish. In such cases "closure" is the incorrect term, even if each experience depends on the halt it elides for its force. We would do better to speak of a pleasure in *lingering*. These are not always protests against endings per se; they are more likely to seize the opportunity of an ending in order to allow it to diffuse into the outside air, to permit it to gently haunt us, to let it pass into our preoccupation. Such a pleasure needs the boundary of an ending, and needs that boundary to be a little porous. It desires a respite. Here again the American idiom "chapter book" is suggestive; such a book requires not only the stamina to read for long stretches but the maturity to want to resume it after a pause, which means acquiring a taste for interruption.

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This is not reading, exactly, nor is it quite *not* reading. It poses the question of how we are to understand the role of interruption, usually ignored by literary historians and theorists because of the continuing power of immersion in the value systems that surround reading.[45] The interruption/immersion binary is, however, a false one. Cognitive approaches to literary form have been best at understanding this self-evident, if persistently ignored, fact: attentiveness requires its opposite.[46] The chapter break solicits immersion in ongoing narrative because it permits release. But it does something else as well: it encourages a diffuse resonance, allowing long narrative all the pleasures other aesthetic media possess, like the pianist's fingers lifting while a chord still echoes. It is what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "sonorous time": a not-yet-sense-making willingness to let an experience spread, extend, pass away.[47] That "lingering" of narrative spilling over into the everyday is produced by the pause.

Unlike so much else in the history of the chapter, the function of interruption has long been understood and frequently restated. Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*: "Chapters relieve the mind. . . . [T]hey assist—or impose upon the imagination."[48] Thomas Mann, as Serenus Zeitblom, in *Doctor Faustus* (1947): "It is only out of consideration for the reader, who is always keeping an eye out for places to pause, for caesuras and new beginnings, that I have divided into several chapters what in my own conscientious authorial opinion can really lay no claim to such segmentation."[49] Playful or sententious, the sentiment is nonetheless commonplace, and remains so.[50] The chapter is, to adopt the language of contemporary media, an interface: a space that connects media and user, where a direction is given (here, pause your reading) but where different possible behaviors (put the book down for a minute, put it down for the day, ignore and continue) are possible in response.[51] The direction is merely to rest, pause, suspend in some manner.

But not—it must be repeated—end. The chapter break is not a unit of closure but of hiatus. It is not a division *of* so much as a division *within*, a caesura within an ongoing experience, an internal bracketing.[52] We might think of the chapter in this sense as the enjambment of narrative prose. Prose, as so many of its theorists insist, is defined by its lack of enjambment, its continuous, blocklike quality; the chapter break is among the oldest techniques to provide prose what it otherwise resists, the space of a breath.[53] That space can have particular aesthetic qualities. It can vary in frequency across a text, in predictability or regularity, and in its relation to the narrative it articulates. It can also have particular cultural qualities. The "one chapter a day" habit of biblical

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reading in Protestant societies can and did often lead to an idea of any narrative reading being meted out similarly; in certain regimes of labor and leisure, this might mean the association of the chapter break with a longer pause, that for sleep, the end of day. The matching of chapter break with nightfall will then in turn have a feedback effect upon the shaping of the novel, as chapter 7 of this book will explore. But these particularities, however numerous, all stem from a structural condition of the chapter's interruptive work: the chapter break synchronizes, however temporarily, a reader's time with story time. Pause matches pause. Like a conductor's baton, the break signals a rhythmic coordination of worlds.[54]

7. *It is both material and immaterial; tied to the book, it nonetheless has no physical, three-dimensional referent.*

Many kinds of textual division are based in distinctions between discrete objects or material practices, even if those distinctions have become merely figural. Dramatic "acts" are normally marked by a pause or curtain fall. The division of long texts—epic poetry most notably—into "books" refers to the separate *bibloi* of papyrus scrolls, even if the size of scrolls may not have been directly responsible for the length of these divisions.[55] Then there are the tablets, or *tuppu*, of Babylonian cuneiform, such as those that compose what is left of the epic of Gilgamesh, which would be numbered and listed in a colophon tablet. These *tuppu* are now often called "chapters" as well as tablets, in an attempt to naturalize them for Western audiences.[56] One can then begin to imagine that all textual divisions have some physical referent, a constraint borrowed from some previous technology that time has rendered invisible to us.

It is a persuasive idea and often justified. Yet as Bonnie Mak has argued, even a textual unit like the *page*, which seemingly is defined by its tactile qualities, may be at least partially independent of its usual objecthood.[57] So it is, even more emphatically, with the chapter—like the page, older than the codex with which it is so often associated. Its physicality is ghostly, inaccessible. It is not amenable to the hand: one cannot ordinarily hold, grasp, or clasp a chapter. It is not even susceptible to the eye, given how rarely a chapter is visible in one glance. The result is the extreme difficulty in imagining its materiality at all. Even its relationship to the page is historically contingent; the fashion for starting a chapter at the top of a new page is a relatively modern one, and for much of its history any coalescence of page and chapter would have been accidental. A common kind of chapter heading, beginning with the playfully locative "in which," alludes to a container or position while committing itself to no fixed

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spatial concept—"in" may simply mean "during the next period of reading." While tied to the book as part of its "bibliographic code"—its format—it is also a "linguistic code," a form, not wholly identifiable with the particular typographical norms that articulate it and the material container in which it exists.[58] As a result it can float free of the book—both films on DVD and podcasts alike can have "chapters"—while providing, in these newer media, a whiff of bookishness.

The chapter is what the sociologist Erving Goffman called an "episoding convention," a frame that marks out a particular temporality, and such a frame, Goffman reminds us, is "neither part of the content of activity proper nor part of the world outside the activity but rather both inside and outside," a paradox that is both familiar and hard to grasp conceptually.[59] No one material element completely defines the chapter, not its heading or label, not the (minuscule or lavish) white space that surrounds it, not even the stretch of text between those spaces. It is all of those things, text and paratext both, in a gestalt that perceives the segment and its apparatus against the ground of the text as a whole. The materiality of the chapter is no more or less palpable than the materiality of time itself.

8. *Its long history is that of a shift from utility to aesthetic form, or from indexicality to significance—but it never quite sheds its relation to utility, which remains available for use in either sincere or parodic modes.*

The chapter is an intersection—at times a collision, at others a negotiation—between two kinds of reading: one that is continuous and immersive, and one that is informational and consultative. The halt a chapter break permits and even encourages is a place where the "tabularity" of reference intrudes directly into the text, far more directly than a page number, which remains literally marginal; it inserts the discontinuous directly into the flowing.[60] Originally a method for citation and nonlinear access, the chapter evokes partial reading, excerpting, and scanning, even in texts (like narrative fiction) that do not otherwise invite such a use. It is a reminder that our books are not just narratives but also, however slightly or vestigially, reference books. A chapter heading and a chapter number are both memories of an indexical function, even when they have been shorn of any accompanying apparatus like a table of contents. Yet that function has been largely replaced by a wider repertoire of uses that we can call formal, among them being: composing a rhythmic alternation of immersion and aeration; providing occasion for metafictional comment; sculpting a temporality that modulates between story time and readerly time.[61]

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The key point here is that one of those two forces existed before the other, so that the collision in reading modes evoked by the chapter points to a past that has been (largely) superseded and can be (occasionally) recovered. The chapter begins its life, even before the full development of the codex, as a technology produced by scribes and editors for discontinuous access; only gradually will it become a "form" of its own, produced by writers as part of the compositional process and not afterwards by various others in the communications circuit. That is the story this book will tell, and it is why this book must in fact take the form of a story—of a history, not a taxonomy or map. The lesson could be put as follows: The chapter's history is ancient, preceding the norms of continuous, solitary reading. It means that a turn to the indexical or citational function of chapters will present itself usually as self-consciously antique. In the case of the novel, it means that the chapter serves as a reminder of the novel's historical lateness; the apparatus of chaptering is older than the form that is being segmented. "The novel," Peter Stallybrass put it with polemical force, "has only been a brilliantly perverse interlude in the long history of discontinuous reading."[62]

A further consequence is that the original citational function of chaptering is vestigial and largely irrelevant. It is of course peculiar that we now use page numbers to cite texts rather than chapter numbers, given that chapters are not as susceptible to change, via new editions, translations, or formats, in the way pagination must be.[63] We simply use chapters differently than their originally intended function; we have adaptively reimagined them, taking a tool and applying it to new materials and tasks. Some of those new tasks, such as the "sample chapter" beloved by literary agents, publishers, job and prize committees, are still purely functional rather than aesthetic. The chapter has not shed every practical use. Yet the original "infrastructural context" of format often persists, as Jonathan Sterne argues, as a "style" long after the initial purposes of a format have vanished.[64] The memory of that original use of the chapter—citation or discontinuous access—lingers as part of the chapter's significance, and is available for homage, parody, and even, perhaps, resumption.

9. *Its history, for writers and readers both, is deep, demotic, passed by anecdote, rediscovered anew in each moment. A recurrent amnesia turns the chapter's history into a series of long silences and strange repetitions.*

The chapter's history operates at a scale broader than literary history tends to adopt. It cannot be situated in any one recognizable "period," and moves through such periods often without any long-term or consequential

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alterations. Like any story told at a broader scale, it will have long silences, dips into routine and sudden rises of some new development; it will fall into abeyance somewhere and then erupt somewhere else; the chains of causality are not always evident. It will involve recurrence and persistence as much as progression.[65] It will look strikingly stable at the broadest scale, while seeming unpredictable, and amenable to human creativity, at the smaller scale. It isn't located in any one period, while being a model, demotic and widespread, for time's periodization. In fact, the chapter is a practice of segmentation already far more self-conscious than the segments into which the historical gaze habitually falls.[66]

It is therefore a history marked by amnesiac recurrence, as a cento of citations might suggest. The earliest is from the *De re rustica* of Columella, a first-century CE compendium of agricultural lore, in regard to the list of chapter headings that prefaces the text:

> Since it generally happens that the recollection of the things which we have learned fails us and must be renewed rather often from written notes, I have added below a list [*argumenta*] of the contents of all my books in order that, whenever necessity arises, it may be easily possible to discover what is to be found in each of them.[67]

A century later, Aulus Gellius prefaces his *Noctes Atticae* with a similar disclaimer:

> Summaries of the material [*capita rerum*] to be found in each book of my Commentaries I have here placed together, in order that it may at once be clear what is to be sought and found in each book.[68]

Discontinuous, consultative reading is the rationale here, identified with the summary work of the heading rather than the divisions of the units themselves, although the latter is implied by the former. This is still the stated rationale in the sixth century, when the Ostrogothic textual scholar Cassiodorus clarifies, in his *Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum*, why the Bibles produced by his scriptorium include chapter headings at the start of each individual book:

> To make the text of the Octateuch available to us in a summarized version, I thought that the chapter-headings [*titulos*] should be set down at the beginning of each book, chapter-headings that had been written by our ancestors in the course of the text. The reader might thus be usefully guided and made

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> profitably attentive, for he will easily find everything he is looking for, seeing it briefly marked out for him.

Similarly, on the Solomonic, or wisdom, books, Cassiodorus remarks:

> With the Lord's aid I have taken care to mark the chapter-headings [*capitula*] on these books so that in such indispensable reading, as I have often said, the inexperienced beginner may not be left in confusion.[69]

Jump ahead again, this time five hundred years, to the middle of the twelfth century, and one can find this, from the prologue to Peter Lombard's *Four Books of Sentences*, one of the first medieval compilations of patristic wisdom:

> Again, so that what is sought might appear more easily, we have begun by providing the titles [*titulos*] by which the chapters [*capitula*] of the individual books are distinguished.[70]

Something has changed here—the terminology of heading versus unit has been settled, "title" and "chapter" differentiated; but the rationale is recognizably the same. Yet another four hundred years elapse, and the 1560 preface to the Geneva Bible will argue that its elaborately subdivided presentation, including chapter headings and prose summaries or "arguments"—along, now, with verse numeration—are necessary "that by all meanes the reader might be holpen."[71] This recurrent historical amnesia, which discovers in the chapter a potentially needless encrustation that must be described in terms of a consultative reader's convenience, then migrates into the novel, where the argument is recognizably the same despite a tonal difference. There is, famously, Henry Fielding in *Joseph Andrews*:

> Secondly, What are the Contents prefixed to every Chapter but so many Inscriptions over the Gates of Inns (to continue the same Metaphor), informing the Reader what Entertainment he is to expect, which if he likes not, he may travel on to the next: for, in Biography, as we are not tied down to an exact Concatenation equally with other Historians, so a Chapter or two (for Instance, this I am now writing) may be often pass'd over without any Injury to the Whole.[72]

Less famously, and now delivered into the voices of characters, from *The History of Charlotte Summers* (1750), often attributed to Sarah Fielding, in which a Miss Arabella Dimple, lying half naked in bed, calls to her

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maid to fetch "the first Volume of the Parish Girl I was reading in the Afternoon":

> —Pray, Ma'am, where shall I begin, did your Ladyship fold down where you left off?—No, Fool, I did not; the Book is divided into Chapters on Purpose to prevent that ugly Custom of thumbing and spoiling the Leaves; and, now I think on't, the Author bid me remember, that I left off at the End of—I think it was the 6th Chapter. Turn now to the 7th Chapter, and let me hear how it begins—[73]

Discontinuous reading has gradually been redefined as the interruption of a sequence rather than nonlinear access, but the essentials are recognizable, despite local differences of tone or terminology, across 1,700 years: the chapter is a solicitation of the reader's convenience. Each instance here treats the chapter as an innovation, then proceeds to rationalize it along similar lines, with little consciousness of the long rhetorical tradition of that rationalizing. Only Fielding notes, unusually, that chapters "have the Sanction of great Antiquity."[74]

We can then speak of a continual rediscovery of a fact that never disappears long enough to seem to need rediscovering. The tendency extends to scholars as well, who have sometimes insisted, with pardonable pride, that it is in their own chosen period in which chapters arise. The feeling of novelty associated with its continually recurrent defenses has perhaps misled them.[75] It is as if the memory of the chapter's justifications resides somehow in the form itself, which bears its marks despite, or without, the intentions of its users. As a result amnesia is accompanied by a tenacious implicit memory: no resource, technique, or rationale associated with the chapter is ever wholly forgotten, and each is always available for reuse.

10. *Long as the chapter's history is, the novel is where the creative potential of that history culminates, the place of its flourishing. But the chapter's role in the novel is troubled, ironic, part of the novel's inevitable tension with discontinuity.*

Perhaps the most significant moment in the chapter's history is its insertion into narrative genres. The chaptering of narrative, rather than texts intended for informational or consultative use where the chapter is originally developed, assigns to the chapter a new purpose: segmenting time. It begins the process by which the weight of the chapter falls ever more decisively on the unit of text, and the amount of time the narrative (and the reading experience)

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within it occupies, rather than the label or heading. Many notable early examples of chaptered narrative—from some early chaptered Bibles to the chaptered prose narratives published by William Caxton—omit descriptive headings entirely, demonstrating the gradual etiolation of the chapter's indexical function. It is a history that will be recapitulated by the novel itself, in which the garrulous headings common to early realist fiction give way to tactfully restrained headings or simple numeration. Tables of contents pegged to chapter headings begin to vanish in novels, and where they remain, they are more ornamental than functional, telling us nothing that we can know without having already read the novel, and possibly not much even then; they are a hollowed-out index, often perfectly useless.

The shift in the chapter's purpose inaugurated by its application to narrative texts, from index to rhythmic rest, may have initially been accidental, but quickly becomes in the novel a series of deliberate effects, often to the point of self-parody. In the novel, *chaptering becomes itself a narrative technique*. That is, it becomes a "form." Format becomes form when intentionally adapted for some artistic purpose.[76] While not entirely relinquishing its status as a paratext with a defined range of possible *functions*, it develops into a tool with a wider range of possible *meanings*; meanings that are, however, not entirely divorced from those initial functions. The meanings the novel accrues around the chapter cluster around the subject of time. This is a reinvention of the chapter—or, perhaps, the discovery and display of something latent in it from the beginning.

In general, the *functions* of the chapter in the novel do not easily relate to the purposes for which it was originally *designed*, or at least as that design was recurrently described.[77] But that design, in the form of a paratext's ability to permit discontinuous access, cross-reference, and tabulation, lingers, even if ironically, playfully, or begrudgingly. And so the chapter's place in the novel, while entirely conventional, is never wholly comfortable and at times acutely irritating. It is from the beginning a slight embarrassment, announced by comedic or otherwise self-conscious headings, modulating gradually into the even deeper and more tacit embarrassment signaled by the absence of headings entirely. The chapter's conventionality must be resisted, denied, partially dispensed with. Its segmentation—governed by outdated norms—does not, so we are often told, reflect the continuous texture of lived consciousness. It is purely linear, so incapable of complexity. John Berger in *G.* (1972): "The relations which I perceive between things—and these often include casual and historical relations—tend to form in my mind a complex synchronic pattern. I see fields where others see chapters."[78] It openly solicits the reader, to allow

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a pause or provide helpful labels, when such solicitations seem insulting to the dignity of the genre. It breaks up what should be continuous, interrupts what should be immersive. If the chapter is an almost inevitable element of the novel, to the point of becoming virtually synonymous with it, a hard kernel of discomfort remains in this otherwise durable relationship.

Chapter Time (the Example of Pym)

If the novel is the place where chapters finally flourish as formal possibilities, it should already be evident that they do so, by and large, quietly. It will take an adjustment of the ear to surface their rhythms. So I conclude these abstract ruminations on chapters by turning to a single, highly innocuous, if no less finely shaped, example: the ninth chapter of Barbara Pym's 1952 *Excellent Women*. This sample chapter comes from a moment and a genre in which the chapter is thoroughly conventional and naturalized, no longer the subject of ironic commentary as in *The Female Quixote*, although Pym's subject is another, more recessive kind of female quixotry. It is an unexceptional chapter in the middle of its novel, without the burdens of originating or concluding. Far more so than in Lennox or the manuscript Bible, it is typographically modest: only "Chapter Nine" sits at the top of its first page, without the heading or corresponding table of contents that British fiction had been in the process of abandoning for almost two centuries. At a little over three thousand words, it is also unassuming in length, calling attention to itself for neither excessive amplitude nor noticeable condensation.

It does not advertise itself as unique or outside its moment's norms. But it is no less a puzzle for all that, however ordinary the puzzle. The question it asks: Why is this chapter—not a single event, scarcely a series of events—a unit of time? What if anything distinguishes it, marks out its boundaries, frames its action? So weak is its framing, in fact, untitled and summarized by neither character nor narration in any obvious way, that we might suspect nothing distinguishes it at all aside from its very ordinariness, a "chapter effect" akin to a "reality effect." But still the fact of its being so distinguished, at least typographically, as "Chapter Nine," calls for an answer, and the answer might be a different route to some useful generalizations about how chapters, that technique of discontinuity, are engineered within continuous narrative.

Pym's chapter opens on a March morning, a Wednesday during Lent in postwar London. Mildred Lathbury, the novel's protagonist spinster and mordantly observational narrator, has the day before—narrated in the previous

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chapter—had her annual lunch with William Caldicote, the brother of a close friend, a confirmed bachelor who greets any hint of Mildred's erotic or sentimental life with alarm; in mutely rebellious response, she drinks a bit too much wine, and impulsively purchases a bouquet of mimosas. Upon returning to her flat, she meets the smoothly ingratiating Rocky Napier, husband of her new upstairs neighbor, Helena. Unlike William, Rocky enthuses over the mimosas and impulsively invites Mildred to tea, an invitation she accepts, stopping only to let Rocky put the flowers in water in the Napiers' apartment. That evening, overhearing Rocky and the returned Helena laughing upstairs, Mildred realizes she has left the mimosas in their flat, and has for compensation "only a disturbed feeling that was quite unlike me" (*EW*, 75).[79]

As Chapter Nine's morning begins, Rocky, in his dressing gown, returns the mimosas; too embarrassed to encounter him in this way, Mildred reaches out her hand for them without looking at him, noting that they had faded in the interval. She heads to work—at an organization for "impoverished gentlewomen"—where a coworker reminds her of their plans to attend a lunchtime church service. A hurried and dispiriting cafeteria lunch precedes the service. The service itself is dominated by a long, uncomfortably febrile sermon on the Last Judgment, which Mildred passes over in summary. Upon departing the church, Mildred encounters Everard Bone, the dryly enigmatic anthropologist and friend of Helena Napier's for whom Mildred has a puzzled curiosity; Everard remarks that he had been moved to laughter by the sermon, and after a short exchange, issues an unenthusiastic invitation to see his upcoming talk at the Learned Society. After work, Mildred visits her friends Father Julian Malory, with whom Mildred shares a perennially baffled near-courtship, and his sister Winifred, only to find them helping to arrange the rooms of the vicarage's new lodger, the clergyman's widow Allegra Gray, a rather younger and "faster" specimen than her status would normally indicate. Mildred is brusquely pressed into the service of helping hang curtains; she notes signs of rapidly acquired intimacy between Julian and Allegra, and leaves abruptly, almost impolitely. As she leaves, Sister Blatt, a member of Julian's congregation and a brusquely observant commentator on parish affairs, comments on Mildred's evident gloom. Back home, Mildred gathers some underclothes to wash, making in the chapter's last sentence its closest approach to metafiction: "Just the kind of underclothes a person like me might wear, I thought dejectedly, so there is no need to describe them" (*EW*, 85).

Something a bit more than a dozen hours, over the course of an unremarkable, if stubbornly dispiriting, Lenten and leaden weekday: this is what

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paraphrase reveals. What seems at first to give it shape is its mood, signaled by the fading of the mimosas during the previous chapter interval. In any adequate summary of a Pym chapter, adjectives loom large; here the quality of wilting, and its attendant disappointment, lingers for the rest of the day. At first this is something like the mystery of how one day can be so unlike another, the Tuesday of the eighth chapter ("suddenly it was almost spring" [*EW*, 66]) switching during the night, and the white space of the chapter break, into a familiarly gray Wednesday. The unaccountability of mood gives the chapter a theme of balked cognition: What made the day this way? None of the proffered possibilities (among them: having missed the short freshness of the mimosas; regret at the previous day's costly and ill-nourishing indulgences; a confusion at the oscillation between the previous day's two differently impossible erotic objects, William and Rocky, as well as their combined mismatch with the ambient longing for which they were insufficient occasions; a shame at solitude accentuated by close, unchosen proximity to so many other couplings, potential or actual; the weather) entirely satisfies. So the chapter—identical with a mood—is constituted by a frustrated relation to event. Whatever happens, and it is not quite nothing while not amounting to much of something, does not seem in an apposite relation to what Mildred feels. Which is a challenge to paraphrase, even in Mildred's narratorial recollection; to retell is not the same thing as to explain, even as retelling seems the only plausible route to explanation.[80]

Along with mood's decoupling from causality is its paradoxical temporal vagueness. How long a mood lasts is both unknowable and yet intimately, rhythmically familiar; it *could* be interminable—a bad mood always threatens to become a lifelong condition, or to seem like the truth of that condition—but experience tells us that, like every other mood that has preceded it, it has a natural duration, if one that seems untethered to any regularly recurring punctuation. It will simply lapse at some future point.[81] The frustration arising from that vagueness requires other, more reliable temporal frames for reassurance. Leaving the vicarage, Mildred thinks: "Today was obviously not a good day, that was it" (*EW*, 84). The diurnal frame, in fact, gives the chapter some of its shape; it is an account of most of Mildred's waking hours in one day's scope, structured by daily social rhythms: waking for work, lunch, tea, washing. But other references to days cut across that mundane dailiness. The Judgment Day sermon that disconcerts Mildred invokes a perspective of ultimate, terminal, emblematic days, and if Mildred's coworker grouses at the subject—"'That talk about the *Dies Irae*,' she said, 'that's Roman Catholic, you know. It ought

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not to be allowed here'" (*EW*, 73)—the suspicion that this particular Wednesday is a day of ruth rather than wrath, typical and typological rather than an accident, is harder for Mildred to erase. At times, if with habitual deprecation, Mildred arrives at something like a cosmic or revelatory sense of the moment in which she is enveloped. Looking around the cafeteria, she remarks on the "hopeless kind of feeling" it inspires:

> "One wouldn't believe there could be so many people," I said, "and one must love them all." These are our neighbors, I thought, looking round at the clerks and students and typists and elderly eccentrics bent over their dishes and newspapers.
>
> "Hurry up, dear," said Mrs. Bonner briskly, "it's twenty past already." (*EW*, 78)

This slightly Vergilian vision of a multitude of souls is, like so much else in *Excellent Women*, only hesitantly epiphanic, but it hinges on a vision of unarticulated, endless time; the remark is prefaced by Mildred's memory, appropriate for a clergyman's daughter, of two lines from Isaac Watts's "Our God, Our Help in Ages Past": "Time like an ever-rolling stream / Bears all its sons away." Another, more circumscribed temporal frame—that of social time, the clock—interrupts and relieves the gesture. It points to a time that is potentially interminable, as well as a moral demand that would be limitless, in precisely the way the *Dies Irae* will shortly do during the post-lunch church service. The collision between these two "days" occasions much of the chapter's perplexity: Is this a passing day or something pivotal, permanent?

Alongside this dilemma sits another temporal crux in this chapter, that between linearity and repetition. Harried by the moving tray belt during her path through the cafeteria line, Mildred's indecision results in "a tray full of things I would never have chosen had I had time to think about it, and without a saucer for my coffee." When Mrs. Bonner explains correct procedure, Mildred makes one of her characteristic self-implicating jokes, of the kind that, by inviting both laughter and agreement, ends up disappointed at receiving one at the expense of the other: "I think one ought to be allowed a trial run-through first, a sort of dress rehearsal" (*EW*, 77). Linearity: if only one knew what was coming. This day will be for Mildred a record of small unpleasant surprises, toward which she feels in a position of keen, unprepared susceptibility. Yet it is also, in its way, entirely expected, a line she has already been through; the chapter ends with her undergarment washing, of which she observes: "It was depressing the way the same old things turned up every week" (*EW*, 85). Repetition:

(continued...)

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