

Remembering Analogy:
Comparative History in Nineteenth-Century Retrospective Fiction

“What connexion can there be,” the narrator of *Bleak House* demands, “between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom?” The question poses at least two problems. First, what is it that connects the profuse places, people, and objects that inhabit *Bleak House* and other nineteenth-century novels? And more generally, how do our answers affect our understanding of the nature of connection itself? *Remembering Analogy* describes a radical transformation in nineteenth-century social understanding, as questions of connection were answered through a new historical perspective rooted in comparative inquiry and organized through innovative narrative forms. Extant modes of historical understanding, from Christian eschatology and civil and dynastic chronicles to liberal progressivism and stadial history, emphasized conserved and universal patterns. The crisis of the French Revolution, combined with increasing secular disenchantment with claims to a higher order for natural and mundane events, produced a crisis for traditional perspectives on historical coherence. Taking up the thesis of a nineteenth-century break with Enlightenment historicism recently advanced by James Chandler, among others, I demonstrate a broad and coordinated effort to recast the question of historical continuity in comparative terms. Comparative history argued that historical ruptures and differential national trajectories could only be analyzed through forms of juxtaposition and analogy. I examine a constellation of writers, poets, and naturalists, particularly Walter Scott, Alfred Tennyson, George Eliot, and Charles Darwin, who advanced these new comparative disciplines of history, organizing them beneath a variety of literary and scientific banners, from comparative anatomy and geology, to elegy, biography, and the historical novel.

The formal and linguistic principles that articulated the new comparative disciplines must be placed in the long philosophical tradition of analogy. I approach analogy both historically and technically: it was both a widely-influential discourse of explicit comparison, closely associated with biblical hermeneutics and Christian theology, and it was an implicit and often unmarked element of literary form. I show that the close of the eighteenth century was critical in the tradition of analogy, as Enlightenment skepticism and rhetorical critique challenged analogy’s methodological credibility, particularly in scientific writing. As the nineteenth century unfolded, retrospective fiction recast analogy as comparative historicism, a methodology suited to the narrative features of Victorian natural science – a strategy perhaps most famously exemplified by the juxtaposition of Vich Ian Vohr and Edward Waverley at the close of Scott’s *Waverley* (1814). While the cultural influence of Victorian natural and social science has received substantial critical attention, my research extends the work of a range of scholars, including Gillian Beer, Mary Poovey, and James Buzard, by reversing the direction of influence; it examines the representational and methodological dependence of mid-century naturalism upon earlier innovations in the literary forms of retrospection. My central claim is that the translation of analogy into comparative historicism founded a newly historicized interpretive practice articulated through new

representational strategies, particularly historical juxtaposition and generational analysis. And these strategies, in turn, grounded the broad comparative synthesis of historical observation produced by mid-century naturalism, notably Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859).

Neither a study of transformational figures, nor a history of intellectual formations, *Remembering Analogy* defines comparative historicism as a collaborative practice of inquiry and communication, both as it coordinated networks of investigation and textual production, and more broadly, as it provided a model for productive collaboration across time and among distinct perspectives. For each of the writers I consider, the act of comparison is eminently social and personal, allowing them to conceive new models for thinking about society and common histories, and giving imaginative access to counterparts, interlocutors, and lost loved ones. Each author wrote in genres of imaginative biography, in which the desire to recover personal histories drove comparative efforts to recollect and memorialize. The practice of "analogical creation" – to borrow George Eliot's term – allowed each of the writers I consider to resurrect friends, family, and interlocutors and to secure intellectual sympathy across the gap of time.

My first chapter demonstrates how eighteenth-century historical and scientific practice precipitated a crisis of analogy. While analogies continued to drive scientific innovation, scientists such as Erasmus Darwin and Sir James Hall struggled to justify analogy's role in their work, even as analogy receded from literary representation (a case famously made for Romantic poetics by M. H. Abrams and Earl Wasserman). The second chapter then takes up Walter Scott's close collaboration with a network of antiquarians and collectors, particularly the sensational "Monk" Lewis, the linguist and early ethnologist John Leyden, and the infamous bibliomaniac Richard Heber. These journeyman years of collection, coauthorship and publishing, particularly in the *Tales of Wonder* (1801) and *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3), conditioned the comparative textual imagination of Scott's later historical fiction, and underpinned the famous "many-sidedness" coordinated by the influential persona of the author of *Waverley*. By affirming authorship as a coordination of textual labor and plurality of perspective, I foreground the comparative texture of historical fiction in the nineteenth century and indicate its deep continuity to other retrospective genres. Retrospective fiction, as I define it, is a mode of historical representation that includes biography and elegy, as well as the historical novel. The disparate genres of retrospective fiction collaborated in the nineteenth century by placing imaginative comparison at the center of modern social analysis, and drove what Mark Phillips has termed "the historicization of everyday life." In my third chapter, I then show how Scott's fictionalized efforts at anthology and commemoration find a tortured counterpart in Alfred Tennyson's attempt to collect and memorialize his dear friend Arthur Henry Hallam in the 1830s. Initial failure prompted Tennyson's multi-year composition of *In Memoriam* (1850), an effort that succeeded through the formal innovation of an insistently comparative and historiographic verse form. While not strictly "fiction," Tennyson refashions elegy as a capacious retrospective genre that secures social, scientific, and personal trauma through imaginative acts of comparison and integration.

For both Tennyson and Scott, formal innovation shapes modes of retrospective writing that address personal loss through historical reassembly and recuperation. The final two chapters examine the moderation of this synthetic aim in favor of sharpened epistemological certainty in the works of two of Victorian Britain's most influential writers, George Eliot and Charles Darwin. Eliot's initial work as translator and critic, both in her participation in the Rosehill Circle and as *de facto* editor of the *Westminster Review*, produced an extraordinarily broad perspective on comparativism as it functioned in linguistics, biblical criticism, biology and astrophysics, and put heavy emphasis on comparison's commitment to uncertainty and fallibility. Personal knowledge in Eliot's fiction, particularly as produced in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1871-2), is found in failed dramas of reconciliation that emphasize the tenuous gains of sympathetic understanding. My fourth chapter revisits the obscure term "disanalogy" to articulate a reading of Eliot's sympathetic understanding that is rooted in productive error. Eliot exploits analogy's strong potential to be *disproven* in order to formulate a mode of representational realism that prefigures Popperian falsifiability. In this way, her fiction locates the "real" predominately in the experiences of difference between self and other, reflexive experiences that mark the gap between perception and apprehension, representation and reality. Similarly, the epistemology of reflexive comparison, as deployed by Eliot's contemporary, Charles Darwin, inaugurated a new species of narrative naturalism rooted in "just so" stories that emphasize the necessarily contingent patterns disclosed by comparative history. *On the Origin of Species* (1859) provides the solution to the essential organizational problem of Victorian natural history: the contrast between marked similarities and unstable distinctions among contemporary and antecedent species. I show how comparative history was shaped by nineteenth-century retrospective fiction into a narrative tool that explained similarity and difference in terms of historical process; a narrative technique that Darwin employed to rework the speculative legacy of his grandfather Erasmus. In answering the longstanding question of Erasmus Darwin's influence over Charles Darwin's work, I secure my argument for the intimate function of literary forms within scientific inquiry.

Remembering Analogy advances our understanding of the 19th-century by uncovering the formation and influence of comparative history – a form of historical understanding that has gone generally unremarked in modern historiographies of the period. Moreover, it emphasizes the function of literary form in shaping this comparative historical understanding, and secures our sense of the broad influence of literary production within the contemporary social and scientific imaginations. My work sketches the forms of connection and interrelationship that would later be consolidated through the vastly influential thesis of "culture," perhaps the most important legacy of nineteenth-century thinking for modern social inquiry. Analogy, reworked by nineteenth-century writers into comparative history, provided a naturalistic synthesis of experience and meaning. Revitalized in historical fiction, this legacy of analogy gave to Darwin's "tangled bank" and Eliot's "tempting range of relevancies" a logic of organization and a vantage from which to survey the extensive relation between similarity and difference that underwrites the nineteenth-century historical imagination.