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### Author

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### Publication Date

2017

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Artless: Ignorance in the Novel and the Making of Modern Character

By

Brandon White

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor C. D. Blanton, Chair

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Spring 2017



Abstract

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Two things tend to be claimed about the modernist novel, as exemplified at its height by Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) — first, that it abandons the stability owed to conventional characterization, and second, that the narrow narration of intelligence alone survives the sacrifice. For *The Waves*, the most common way of putting this is to say that the novel contains “not characters, but *characteristics*,” “not characters[,] but voices,” but that the voices that remain capture “highly conscious intelligence” at work. Character fractures, but intelligence is enshrined.

“Artless: Ignorance in the Novel and the Making of Modern Character” argues that both of these presumptions are misplaced, and that the early moments of British modernism instead consolidated characterization around a form of ignorance, or what I call “artlessness” — a condition through which characters come to unlearn the educations that have constituted them, and so are able to escape the modes of knowledge imposed by the prevailing educational establishment. Whether for Aristotle or Hegel, Freud or Foucault, education has long been understood as the means by which subjects are formed; with social circumstances put in place before us, any idea of independent character is only a polite fiction. In fiction itself, this process is built into the form of the *Bildungsroman*, where the narrative ends only when socialization is secured, with fit elements absorbed into the social structure, and unfit elements expunged. With the passage of the Elementary Education Act of 1870, the British government was for the first time able to assert this influence explicitly, establishing secular state control of education and creating an enormous class of newly literate readers. Modernism's signature style — its baroque locutions, its obscure references — has most often been read as the attempt of educated elites to alienate these inexperienced readers by making literature intelligible only to the eminently intelligent. But when facing the state's newly acknowledged role in socializing subjects, novelists as otherwise antagonistic to one another's work as Henry James, Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, and the aesthetes of the Bloomsbury group, from Lytton Strachey and John Maynard Keynes to Virginia Woolf, all commonly responded, I contend, by resisting education's role in forming character in the first place. The figures who would go on to shape the modernist movement used their narratives to escape this pedagogical construct, imagining an alternative to the *Bildungsroman* model capable of chronicling an incremental divestment from social authority.



This reversal of modernism's priorities offers to reorganize not only our understanding of the period, but of the function of character in structuring a reader's experience. Critics seldom imagine "modernist character" as a category deserving further definition. Gerard Genette famously suggested that there are no characters in Proust, because all are subject to the author's totalizing style. Recent inquiries, like Philip Weinstein's, Gregory Castle's, or Jed Esty's, entertain the very notion of modernist character only to suggest that it was sacrificed in favor of form. As this project uncovers, however, many of modernism's signature formal gestures — from stream of consciousness narration in James to minimalist depictions of the Great War in Lawrence — were first tested and contested as strategies for abetting artlessness in characterization. At root, "Artless" makes a case for the almost perfect convergence between a work's unraveling and its reader's reception; the works it considers aspire towards complete readerly accessibility, ultimately effacing any interference from intermediate authorities, even their authors.

My first chapter, "The Educations of Isabel Archer," makes character's precedence over form explicit through comparison of a single scene in the two versions of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, the original 1881 edition alongside the New York Edition of 1906. Isabel, James's heroine, has long been read as the prototypical *Bildungsroman* protagonist, one whose intelligence is so penetrating that her education is achieved instantaneously when a mere glance arrests the history of her husband's onetime affair with her close friend. In the original 1881 edition, Isabel observes that "Madame Merle sat there in her bonnet," and when mere sentences later we find her "standing on the rug," the reader's shock can only be commensurate to Isabel's own. With the original sequence, James had in fact produced stream of consciousness narration, well before its recognized first appearance in Edouard Dujardin's 1887 *Les Lauriers sont coupés*. Yet with a single change to the New York Edition, James cancels a formal effect that had captured Isabel's intelligence at its most potent and immediate. What readers witness in the New York Edition is not Isabel's awakening knowledge, but her sudden ability to exorcise all that she has thus far been taught. When forced to choose between his character's independence from social constraint and the formal innovation of "sat," James chooses character. Isabel's passage from intelligence to ignorance between 1881 and 1906 thus signifies a reevaluation of the role of education in fiction across the period itself.

Subsequent chapters track the role of formal and narrative structures in allowing readers to recognize — and ultimately embrace — artlessness. In the case of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), as described in my second chapter, "Educational Epidemiology," the story of the "Fawley curse" provides a model for narrative's pedagogical potential: to have learned the story is to share in its misfortune. This model multiplies relentlessly, almost epidemiologically, so that the party at greatest risk becomes Hardy's own reader. By extending the pedagogical production of narrative beyond its own pages, *Jude the Obscure* frames the ease with which education entangles individuals in a social fabric, even against their will. We ourselves face a choice: between sympathy to Sue and Jude's characters, or obedience to the narrative form that has infected us. As the following chapter, "Knowing War in *Women in Love*," suggests, the curiously repetitive characterizations and tautological phrases that riddle D. H. Lawrence's 1920 novel capture how thoroughgoing artless representations must be to escape the pedagogical system entirely. In response to then contemporaneous changes to libel law and to philosophical disputes over the definition of personhood, Lawrence essentially removed the entire field of referential definition from the

novel between drafts, excising the very connection between words and reference that allows a set of phrases to single out a person in particular. Lawrence's characters remain uncompromised by convention because their circumstances can never be named. *Women in Love* carries artlessness to a new extreme, marking the moment when the stakes of character became compelling enough to organize all else around it. Lawrence's characters operate in a world so thoroughly desocialized that they — with Lawrence's original readers — are able to overlook that even the most mobilizing social event of their lifetimes, the First World War, is unfolding on the novel's every page without ever being referenced.

Artlessness's elaboration thus gives us a different way of accounting for the interests that informed the modernist moment: character in fact predominated over form, ignorance over intelligence. But in the high style of the Bloomsbury group, by which modernism is best known, these values appear obviously inverted. My final chapter, "Time Passes: How Bloomsbury Civilized Ignorance," concludes by alternating between early and late moments in Bloomsbury's collective career to uncover what became of modernist character. Early expressions of artlessness, such as Strachey's portrait of the headmaster of Rugby, Dr. Thomas Arnold, in the briefest, most withering, and most personal sketch of *Eminent Victorians* (1918), have simply grown to exaggerated proportions by the time of *Queen Victoria* (1921). So total there is Strachey's tone that all of *Queen Victoria* becomes an encounter with ignorance, refusing to allow intelligence to penetrate for even a moment. Alternatively, the assertions of old age cast prior achievements in a new light. Through John Maynard Keynes's 1938 essay "My Early Beliefs," where he regrets his Cambridge contemporaries' blithe indifference towards time, Keynes's efforts in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) can be freshly read not as a send-up of the stupidity that had marred the Paris Peace Conference, but as an attempt instead to force an alternative treatment of time. The graying heads of state have read Europe's recent past with the complacent quiescence owed to a completed *Bildungsroman*, and by animating the temporality of what he repeatedly calls "the character of the Peace," Keynes endeavors to unlearn that assumption. This chapter concludes by considering Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), a novel that in its pivotal section, "Time Passes," seems to fragment character in favor of style just as much as contemporary critical accounts of modernism have alleged. Yet I argue that the central figure of "Time Passes" is not Lily Briscoe or Mrs. Ramsay, but Mrs. Bast, the unschooled and ostensibly unimportant housekeeper, whose sole attestation is that she "never knew the family." Mrs. Bast, I suggest, is in fact Jacky Bast, the wife of E.M. Forster's Leonard in *Howards End*, the clerk whose fatal flirtation with education forms the basis of many charges of modernism's intellectual elitism. Yet by amending Forster's story, a coherent concept of character, rooted in ignorance, survives even "Time Passes," and better still, is responsible for putting it into order.

If modernism maintains no interest in alienating the masses, this dissertation ultimately allows us to consider who *is* meant to read modernist texts, and for what purpose. As critics, I contend, we have potentially long been engaged in *overreading* modernism. The widespread puzzlement of *Women in Love's* every critic is proof alone that it is not intended to reward the intellectual efforts of professional scholars. "Artless" then not only names a particular historical phenomenon, a teleology by which modernism was made, but also supplies a theory of reading practice. For all the intelligence ascribed to Henry James or to the Bloomsbury set, what we witness in James's revision of "sat," or in Keynes's willingness to undermine the certainty of even his own economic forecasts, is an essential effacement of

authorial authority. Artlessness finally amounts to a conviction that characters are capable of spelling their own terms, free from even the interference of their authors. The process is obvious, even automatic. *Any* reader then is capable of seeing artlessness unfold, and of watching the hold of any prior determinant, be it the missteps of one's own education, or officially sanctioned history, or the novel as a genre, gradually lose its influence. By encountering artless texts, it is the reader of the early modernist novel, irrespective of class or background, who comes to unlearn.

*To Devon,  
whose love supported this project  
and sustained its author more  
than words can ever repay.*

## Acknowledgements

I am certain that it has been said often — and more eloquently — that while writing a dissertation is seemingly solitary work, the labor behind it is in fact the product of many hands, from the advisors who oversaw its composition to the enumerable baristas who fueled the production. Anyone who has ever had to write one of these pages surely understands that fact, as must, I would hazard, the overwhelming majority of those who would ever feel compelled to read one. However, it is likely less commonly acknowledged how many people have helped to make pages like these while being utterly unaware, all the while, of their influence.

I am thinking of my college roommate, Kadir Annamalai, who once waited an hour to see me deliver a reading of my own prose that was only a single paragraph of text. I only hope that this longer effort somehow rewards the wait. I am thinking of my other roommate, Scott Carlson, who made coffee dates to discuss *New Yorker* stories with me before scheduling could be done electronically and getting together over coffee was colossally inconvenient. I could not be more honored to have them both as best men at my coming wedding.

I am thinking of my parents, Patti and Norbert White, who have patiently had to explain their son's career ambitions to strangers for the better part of a decade while having only the barest inkling of those ambitions themselves. But for their patience, love, and devotion, it is self-evident that I would not be drawing breath, but moreover would not have had the patience, love, and devotion to bring this project to completion.

I am thinking even of my advisors, who must well know their influence on this project, but may well not quite understand the true nature of their contributions. To David Miller, I am indebted not for the hours spent line editing — although there is that — but for the hours spent over cocktails, in the fullest fellowship I have ever felt. To Kent Puckett, I am grateful not for the willingness to meet me in out-of-the-way places, but for the kindest, most considerate words on my work I have ever heard. To Marianne Constable, I am ever so appreciative for her willingness to recognize other outlets for and inroads to my work; but for her, I am certain that the academic path would have seemed narrower than I finally found it. To Dan Blanton, I cannot even begin to express my gratitude for every “good,” every “beautiful,” every “yes, i’ll buy that” — his running record of affirmation, from ENG 200 to this very day, made him my first, truest, and hardest reader. To you all, I want to share my added thanks for supporting my transition towards a different career than most of you had likely envisioned.

And again, to Devon, my love. I have spent years writing on novelists, so let me close, to you, with one of the few lines of poetry I have ever committed to memory. All these words, and more, were always aired for “nso one’s but your ears.”

*BMW*

Washington, D.C.  
May 2017

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## Introduction. Leonard's End: Unlearning Constructions of Character in the Modernist Novel

*"But here's my difficulty. This outer life, though obviously horrid, often seems the real one—there's grit in it. It does breed character."*  
— *Howards End*, Chapter IV

A boy, whose roots are remote, sets out for experience and wisdom in the wider world. He finds employment, and acquires an education, whether through books or through the several trials that life hands him. This is the plot of *Sons and Lovers* and *Wilhelm Meister*, *Great Expectations* and, with a simple shift in gender, *Jane Eyre* or *Madame Bovary*. Not all need end happily. But whether we here think of Pip and his Estella, or Emma Bovary and her blackened tongue, their trials, their "tests," in something like the academic sense, make up their stories, and in the end our heroes have learned by them, either that their dreams are just in reach or that they are bound to come to nothing. Such, of course, is the double role of the *Bildungsroman*, the genre so capacious that every "novel of education" winds up defined against it, even when that education is a failed one.<sup>1</sup> The story just told could be the story of most novels ever written. In the novel, there is little to do but learn.

This single, shared parable illustrates how often the progress of plot is tied to the formation of character. For E. M. Forster, whose *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) became the twentieth century's most circulated theory of characterization, giving us the terms "round" and "flat," the entirety of a novel, in fact, could be understood as a function of a character's epistemological project. In the nine lectures that would make up *Aspects*, two are given over to "People." It is the only subject to be treated more than once. Plot, story, pattern, prophecy — all are subordinated to it. Authors so often kill off characters not, then, because it is an expedient way of tying up the plot, but because the character's epistemological interest has been exhausted: it is "easier to work from the known towards the darkness," and "[b]y the time his characters die, [the author] understands them;"<sup>2</sup> a character is "real" only "when the novelist knows everything about it."<sup>3</sup> Even a novel as potentially obscure as Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), Forster had found in an earlier essay, was but a circuitous pursuit of knowledge: the "man and woman in it, after many tests, attain to perfect knowledge of each other, and that knowledge entails eternal separation."<sup>4</sup> James's late novel ends, Forster concludes, because Kate Croy's perfect knowledge of Densher, Densher's of Kate, guarantees that nothing more will happen to them; "only those who are dead, or dead to each other,

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<sup>1</sup> This point is made early in Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. Albert Spragia (New York: Verso, 1987), 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Harcourt, 1955), 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>4</sup> "Pessimism in Literature" in *Albergo Empedocle and Other Writings*, ed. George H. Thomson (New York: Liveright, 1971), 137. The collection is packaged as a compilation of Forster's juvenalia, essays and artistic endeavors written from 1900 to 1915 but never subsequently reprinted. It is a curious fact of Forster's non-fiction that the two primary collections that Forster himself issued, *Abinger Harvest* (1936) and *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951), both take their content from 1920 onwards, ignoring, in other words, everything that Forster wrote during his most productive creative period, when all of the novels, save one, were composed.

are unalterable.”<sup>5</sup> The entire operation of a novel, no matter how radical its form, is from beginning to end a search after fuller and greater knowledge for character, author, and reader alike.

Forster’s remarks on *The Wings of the Dove* were published in a 1907 essay on “Pessimism in Literature,” by which point he had already published one *Bildungsroman*, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), and had another, *The Longest Journey* (1907), in press. *A Room with a View* (1908), the story of a young woman who travels to Italy, meets a young man who reads Byron and Housman alongside Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and ultimately learns that he offers greater promise than her stuffy Edwardian upbringing, had long ago been drafted and would be published the following year. Forster’s commitment to this specific form was apparently unwavering, but the diversity of his approaches to the subject suggests how difficult it is to imagine any alternative to the *Bildungsroman*. Rickie Elliot, the hero of *The Longest Journey*, attends Cambridge and learns he has an illegitimate brother before being hit by a train. By contrast, Lucy Honeychurch, in *A Room with a View*, lives happily ever after. The next novel that Forster would write was *Howards End* (1910), which features a plot<sup>6</sup> nearly identical to those sketched above. Yet critics have often been puzzled by what the education enforced by *Howards End* amounts to, particularly in the case of Leonard Bast, the one character who attempts to read his way into high culture and better — if not quite high — society. The life of Leonard Bast, to be clear, is not the only story that *Howards End* sets out to tell. Other plots predominate. But in what follows, I want to take seriously the suggestion that Forster’s novel *could* be exclusively the story of Leonard Bast, even if it means abandoning the Schlegel sisters and their search for a home.

This dissertation is a study of what an alternative to the “novel of education” might look like, and the conditions that would have inspired such an alternative at a particular moment in the history of the novel, just prior to the rise of high modernism. Whereas the novel had traditionally depended on the kinds of continuous educations that Forster had modeled and theorized, the figures that I will consider, from Henry James to D. H. Lawrence and on to the seemingly unrelated formal experiments of Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury group, all maintain an interest less in education than in its opposite: in how the form of the traditional novel might be restructured around ignorance, not learning, in order to create a radically different kind of character. Here the connection between plot and character, so vital to understandings of how novels are staged, including Forster’s, turns out not to be a connection at all. The same plot might now be pressed in service of an expanded sense of what character entails. By rewriting how characters are made, these authors also give us a different sense of how subjects are formed. A novel’s narration becomes a vehicle for unlearning, an alternative to education in its own right.

From James to Bloomsbury — from Forster’s original example, in other words, to Forster’s own coterie. This period is pressing in the history of the novel for being among modernism’s first moments. One might as well then begin with *Howards End*, for Forster’s novel lets us feel the full

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. We will return to another death, a literal death, momentarily.

<sup>6</sup> I have thus far been using the terms “plot” and “story” somewhat loosely, without regard for their narrow technical senses. Even Forster establishes the distinction in *Aspects*, giving each separate treatment (and oddly establishing “story” before “people,” but “people” before “plot”). One consequence of my argument, however, is that where the education of a given character is concerned, story and plot become largely interchangeable. It does not strictly matter that Rickie Elliot’s illegitimate sibling was conceived prior to the story’s beginning; it matters more that Rickie’s awareness of this fact comes at a certain point in the plot, thus forming another incremental step in his journey. In what follows, I will tend to collapse “story” and “plot” under the single heading of “narrative.”



force of two competing pressures, as the tradition of the novel form ran up against new requirements for character. By many measures, *Howards End* appears as wedded to the *Bildungsroman* as the genre's immense influence should demand. But when it comes to Leonard, the novel becomes more conflicted, unable to square its characterization with any educational imperative. As John Edward Hardy insists, *Howards End* might concern "the quest for the wisdom of self-knowledge."<sup>7</sup> We can barely imagine it otherwise. But if "Margaret Schlegel's development" is only "the most instructive example,"<sup>8</sup> then what of Leonard Bast? Is Leonard's story *less* instructive, as critics have universally alleged, or is it a different kind of example altogether?

Leonard Bast, whose roots are in Lincolnshire and Shropshire, sets out for experience and wisdom in the wider world of London, or at least the London symbolized by the studio or the Symphony. When we meet him, he is employed as a clerk in an insurance office, but finds the work unfulfilling, and longs "to acquire culture" through sporadic readings of Ruskin and others.<sup>10</sup> From the first, however, it becomes clear that this process is more difficult than it might seem. Culture entails not only an acquaintance with books (or "the outsides of books," [98] as one of Forster's heroines remarks), but the ability "to pronounce foreign names correctly," "to be well-informed, discoursing at ease on every subject" (34). This "would take one year." And with "an hour at lunch and a few shattered hours in the evening, how was it possible to catch up with leisured women, who had been reading steadily from childhood" (34)? Leonard's lover (and eventual wife), Jacky, does not understand his passion, but he falls in with the Schlegel sisters, Margaret and Helen, who invite him to tea and provide him with a schooling of another sort. Through a bad business "tip," he loses his position, suffers further degradation and poverty, and either seduces or is seduced by Helen. Seeking to confess to Helen's sister, Leonard finds her at home in the titular Howards End, but is confronted by Margaret's son-in-law, who pulls a decorative sword from the wall. Before he can be stabbed or thrashed or cut down in some dramatic fashion, Leonard stumbles into a bookcase, which comes down on top of him. Now showered by books, the things that he could never find enough time for, Leonard dies.

Stylized in this spare fashion, Leonard's life belongs unequivocally to the *Bildungsroman*. From his first appearance, Leonard has been animated by a single aim: his origins, his efforts, not only mimic the genre, but have actively *aspired* towards the place of a Wilhelm Meister. But what of his death? Is it nearer the end of Wilhelm or of Emma Bovary? When a character dies, Forster had held, its author knows everything about it. But the final state of Leonard's education seems to run contrary to everything that we have read before. Over hundreds of pages, Forster's reader has followed Leonard's progress. We have read Ruskin with him. Pathos has been wrung from his poverty. But if the reader is meant to sympathize with Leonard's attempts at self-betterment, it seems curious that he would be sacrificed to a cheap irony. Is the pathos Leonard elicits actual pathos, or is it too only part of the irony, less pathetic than bathetic? That Leonard's education has come to this would seem, in retrospect, to suggest that the whole enterprise was not even worth attempting.

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<sup>7</sup> *Man in the Modern Novel* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 34.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 34. Subsequent citations from the novel will refer to this edition parenthetically.

<sup>10</sup> For a compelling anatomy — or rather, autopsy — of Leonard's reading of Ruskin, down to the specific volume Leonard has in hand, see Kevin J. H. Dettmar, "Bookcases, Slipcases, Uncut Leaves: The Anxiety of the Gentleman's Library," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 39.1 (Fall, 2005): 11-14.

It “may seem strange” that writers of Forster’s period “had such difficulty with the poor,” Frank Kermode observed.<sup>11</sup> “It has truly been remarked that they are always with us, and novelists are supposed to have the skills necessary to the representation of persons.”<sup>12</sup> Given that character is so central to Forster’s own conception of the novel, taking priority over all else, the case is perhaps stranger still, for although Leonard’s story imitates the traditional *Bildungsroman* plot, his end has long been held up as a spectacular failure of characterization. In Leonard, the reciprocal bond tying the form of the *Bildungsroman* to the formation of character seems no longer commensurable. Leonard’s death, C. B. Cox found, “is not tragic simply because his character has been insufficiently realized.”<sup>13</sup> By the end of *Howards End*, Leonard has learned for neither good nor ill. He has learned, apparently, all for nothing. This criticism of Forster has remained consistent since the novel was first published.<sup>14</sup> Even Virginia Woolf, a close friend of Forster’s, found the portrait unsatisfactory: “The bookcase which falls upon Leonard Bast in *Howards End* should perhaps come down upon him with all the dead weight of smoke-dried culture... We qualify these statements, for indeed we are not quite sure whether we have guessed right;”<sup>15</sup> in great scenes like these, Forster “makes the change from realism to symbolism,” but we must now “doubt both things — the real and the symbolical.”<sup>16</sup> As Daniel Born usefully inventories, “[c]ommentators have called Bast ‘one of the most interesting and least convincing characters in the book,’ ‘an inspired guess at an unknown class,’” and “Forster’s one outstanding failure.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Concerning E. M. Forster* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 101. Kermode, we might recall, was also a critic of ends and endings, whether literal or figurative.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *The Free Spirit: A Study of Liberal Humanism in the Novels of George Eliot, Henry James, E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Angus Wilson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 77. Cox’s inquiry should be consulted for a more synthetic reading of Forster’s political sympathies across the novels, even if the precision of his reading of those novels is occasionally suspect. (Henry Wilcox, for instance, is throughout called “Herbert.”) His conclusions, however, can be found on that same page: “There is nothing in Forster’s work to compare with James’s *The Princess Casamassima*... He is a lesser novelist than George Eliot or James because he lacks their abundance and vitality” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>14</sup> One of the earliest reviews, from the *Daily Telegraph*, sensed that Leonard “did not ring true” (“Current Literature,” *Daily Telegraph* [Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1910]: 14.). The reviewer for *The Spectator* traced the problem explicitly to Leonard’s death, concluding that “the sudden elimination of the wretched Leonard Bast is grotesquely contrived” (“Novels,” *The Spectator* [Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>, 1910]: 757.). The *Morning Post* echoed both concerns, finding that “Leonard’s death” was “unreal, or only half real” (“Connect!,” *Morning Post* [Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1910]: 3.).

<sup>15</sup> Virginia Woolf, “The Novels of E. M. Forster” in *The Death of the Moth and other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942), 169.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 168, 169. Woolf goes on to offer a parallel example, Mrs. Moore of *A Passage to India*, who is presented as “Mrs. Moore, the nice old lady, and Mrs. Moore, the sibyl. The conjunction of these two different realities seems to cast doubt upon them both.” (*Ibid.*) Like Leonard, the symbolic weight that Forster would invest in Mrs. Moore contributes to a failure of character.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Born, “Private Gardens, Public Swamps: *Howards End* and the Revaluation of Liberal Guilt,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 25.2 (Winter, 1992): 148. The quotations are attributed to Wilfred Stone, John Colmer, and H. A. Smith, respectively. Charges like the above are more recently echoed by Kim Shirvani, who nevertheless attempts to reinterpret Leonard’s place in the novel based on the

It is not unusual for characters to be killed by irony, or to see their core endeavors come to nothing. But what makes Forster's treatment of Leonard Bast unique, distinguishing it from the similar fates of an Emma Bovary or Lawrence's Paul Morel is that the only plausible route out of Leonard's hardship — an education — is capriciously denied by Forster's imposed ending. In the earliest parts of the novel, Forster appears somewhat sympathetic to Leonard; his "loyalty to Jacky," notes John Carey, arguably Forster's fiercest critic, "verges on the tragic."<sup>18</sup> "But what Forster cannot condone is Leonard's attempt to become cultured."<sup>19</sup> For all the ready symbolism surrounding Leonard's end — the ceremonial sword, unsheathed by a man who would see himself as virtue's champion; the intimations of a public school "thrashing;" the antique steel ready to meet urban flesh<sup>20</sup> — it is by books that Leonard dies. Where tradition or class or mere bluster might have contributed, Forster ensures that we understand Leonard's education alone as fatal: "[s]uch are the dangers of higher education, we gather, when it is pursued by the wrong people."<sup>21</sup> Had we sympathized with Leonard earlier (like the well-intentioned women in the Schlegels' circle, who at one point debate showering his kind with imagined millions), Forster's sudden corrective makes us conclude that our sympathies had been misplaced. Even so supportive a critic as Kermode finds that the "fact is that Forster could not bear [Leonard] or his wife, and made sure they were pitiable, indeed repulsive."<sup>22</sup> "The sordid scene that Forster sets in the Bast house — a scene with which he expresses his satisfaction — is persuasively wretched, but it makes no provision for other possibilities, for relationships between men and women of this class that were not so hopeless and so wretched."<sup>23</sup> It is in that same scene that Leonard first opens Ruskin, only to be interrupted by his future wife, Jacky, a woman that Forster's narrator will later call "bestially stupid" (192). Ruskin is no refuge for Leonard. But Forster goes further, turning him into an active threat. Leonard is killed by the very thing that anywhere else — in *Sons and Lovers*, in *Great Expectations*, perhaps, we'd like to imagine, in *life* — might have offered even limited opportunity for advancement.

The peculiar end of Leonard Bast illustrates a problem at the heart of modernism, a problem that Forster and his contemporaries from Cambridge and Bloomsbury have come to exemplify. "It is not too much to claim that by his early twenties, and by the criteria prevailing a century ago," Forster "was a very well-educated man."<sup>24</sup> Forster and his closest friends — Leonard Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Bertrand Russell, Maynard Keynes — all came from Trinity or King's College, Cambridge, and those who would go on to careers in the arts would participate forcefully in the period now known as modernism, whether in the products of the Hogarth Press or the pages of *Eminent Victorians* (1918). (Even those whose concerns were in other fields, like Russell or Keynes, joined

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distinction between recognition and redistribution in political economy. See "The Economy of Recognition in *Howards End*," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 54.2 (Summer, 2008): 193-216.

<sup>18</sup> John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligensia, 1880-1939* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2002), 18.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> I will work through the textual specifics of this scene momentarily.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Concerning E. M. Forster*, 99.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

their intellects to the aesthetic atmosphere.)<sup>25</sup> After 1924, Forster famously would publish no further novels; *A Passage to India* was to be his final offering for nearly fifty years. All the same, he would spend those years in residence at King's.

The makers of modernism, in short, were largely not men like Leonard Bast. But more than that, it has become common practice to think that their educations, their intellects, played a significant part in the emphasis that they placed on formal experiment and difficulty. The maxim, most plainly put in a 1921 essay on "The Metaphysical Poets" by T. S. Eliot (another Forster acquaintance) that "poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*," stems directly from Eliot's contention that the "possible interests of a poet are unlimited; the more intelligent he is the better; the more intelligent he is the more likely that he will have interests: our only condition is that he turn them into poetry, and not merely meditate on them poetically."<sup>26</sup> Insofar as Eliot upholds the verse of the metaphysical poets as models for contemporary practice, what he means by "difficulty" is likely nearest to what he finds in Donne or Herbert: "the language of these poets is as a rule simple and pure," but the "*structure* of the sentences, on the other hand, is sometimes far from simple."<sup>27</sup> Difficulty, as characterized by Eliot's own "The Waste Land" (1922), means difficulty of form. But these formal innovations are the direct evidence of intelligence — an intelligence that the poet possesses, and that he demands of his reader as well, without which the poem will come to nothing.<sup>28</sup> (Forster himself acknowledged as much. In a nevertheless favorable account of Eliot's work, Forster wrote that whereas "[m]ost writers sound, somewhere or other in their scale, a note of invitation," providing some "hint to the layman to come in if he can, and participate," Eliot preserves a note of "inhospitality" in his writing: "Mr. Eliot does not want us in.")<sup>29</sup>

Changes to the intellectual demands of literature of the kind that Eliot desired, and that his peers, from Ezra Pound to Virginia Woolf, would put into practice, paralleled changes in the composition of the literate public occurring across the country. Just decades prior, men like Leonard Bast might not have received any such education. The concept of schooling for the masses did not take root until the middle part of the nineteenth century. "In England and Wales there was

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<sup>25</sup> The best study of Russell's role here likely remains Ann Banfield's *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell, and the Epistemology of Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Keynes's involvement, while often invoked in passing by other critics, will be addressed more specifically in my final chapter.

<sup>26</sup> "The Metaphysical Poets" in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 65. Eliot's italics.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 62; Eliot's emphasis. It is the complex structure, we are to imagine, that differentiates their poems from "mere[ ] meditat[ion]."

<sup>28</sup> Even Eliot's later *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), which proposes as egalitarian an understanding of cultural transmission as one is liable to find from Bloomsbury, describes an unjust society as one where individuals occupy "situations in life for which neither their character nor their intellect qualified them;" while Eliot can overlook the benefits of "nominal education, or birth or consanguinity," intellect is the one commodity that he apparently cannot do without (see "Notes Towards the Definition of Culture" in *Christianity and Culture* [New York: Harvest, 1968], 109. *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* is a full volume in its own right; the text quoted from here includes Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society*). That Eliot offhandedly collapses "character" and "intellect" into a similar qualification demonstrates how intimately the two concepts tend to be associated.

<sup>29</sup> E. M. Forster, "T. S. Eliot" in *Abinger Harvest* (New York: Harvest, 1964), 95.

unquestioning acceptance among the dominant classes that the education of working-class children should be distinct from that of their betters, but no consensus on the kind of schooling which the lower orders should receive” — “[t]otal opposition to any education for the lower orders” at all “had not disappeared even by 1840.”<sup>30</sup> The 1861 report of the Newcastle Commission found that children in England and Wales “attended school on average for 5.7 years,” although in many regions “workers’ children were attending only for three years at the most.”<sup>31</sup> Since schooling was not compulsory, hard numbers are hard to come by, but national figures reported only 6.6% of the total population attending day school in 1818, a figure that was barely improved to 9.3% by the next attempted count in 1833, or 11.9% in 1851.<sup>32</sup> These numbers only reflect percentages for the total population — including grown men and women — but the slow rate of growth gives a sense of how many children went unschooled over the entire period. In the fifteen or more years between reports, by which point one full set of students would now be adults, only about another 2.5% of the population had been added to the rolls. Even these numbers are subject to considerable overestimation. What counted as a pupil at any one moment was far from a homogenous unit.<sup>33</sup> Some children attended schools for weeks, others for years; some were taught to read but not to write.<sup>34</sup> Just 69.3% of men and 54.8% of women in the full population were literate in 1851, and this at a moment when the test of literacy was whether an individual could sign his or her name in the marriage register.<sup>35</sup> That number would swell, however, to 97.2% of men and 96.8% of women by 1900.<sup>36</sup>

Certainly this story would be familiar to the family of Leonard Bast. Leonard’s “parents, who were dead,” we are told in summary fashion, “had been in trade; his sisters had married commercial travellers; his brother was a lay-reader” (202). His grandparents, Leonard confesses, “were just nothing at all... agricultural labourers and that sort” (202). From “nothing at all” to “trade,” the generations preceding Leonard’s mark a moment where literacy alone would have been an advancement.<sup>37</sup> The several decades before Leonard’s birth, however, would see widespread changes both to the opportunities for education offered, as well as to schooling’s assumed goals and emphases. Education at the time of Leonard’s grandparents, in the first half of the nineteenth

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<sup>30</sup> W. B. Stephens, *Education in Britain 1750-1914* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1998), 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 170-171. Altick elaborates that “[i]t is generally assumed, and justly so, that the ability to write was less common than that of reading, that the former presupposes the latter, and that literacy percentages thus obtained must be substantially increased if ability to read alone is in question. On the other hand, numbers of men and women who could sign their names, and therefore were enrolled among the literate, probably could write nothing else” (*Ibid.*, 170).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> What exactly Forster means by “trade,” whether Leonard’s parents were unschooled local butchers or rather shop owners in the spirit of Arnold Bennett’s *The Old Wives’ Tale* (1908), does not entirely signify.

century, had been organized around religious or strictly utilitarian lines, so that improvements to schooling were motivated always by the instrumental uses of education rather than any personal benefit to the pupil.<sup>38</sup> That such a thing as an intellectual life was possible, let alone to be encouraged, would have been difficult to deduce from available educational materials; “[n]ot until after mid-century were materials relating to the broader world—great legends, characters of mythology, basic facts of geography and history, facts, even, that would assist in reading the newspaper—introduced to the attention of lower- and lower-middle class children.”<sup>39</sup> But the passage of the Reform Bill of 1867, which enfranchised all householders and thereby more than doubled the electorate, “gave a fresh urgency to schools for the masses” who had now been entrusted with the ballot.<sup>40</sup> Such urgency culminated in the Elementary Education Act of 1870, a bill that, in the words of its sponsor, another double-initialed but completely unrelated Forster, W. E. Forster,<sup>41</sup> targeted the “vast number of children badly taught, or utterly untaught, because there are too few schools and too many bad schools, and because there are a large number of parents in this country who cannot, or will not, send their children to school.”<sup>42</sup> The Forster Act, as it is often and will be hereafter called, is generally “spoken of as a great landmark in the history of the reading public” in England if only because it for the first time established secularized state control over education.<sup>43</sup> With its passage, the Education Department<sup>44</sup> was authorized to create additional

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<sup>38</sup> The Factory Act of 1833, for instance, which established facilities in many factories for children whose employment foreclosed any other possible education, could be seen as a major moment in the extension of education even to the working poor, but those children put to school under the Factory Act found themselves in a coal hole school room for only two hours a day (Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 148). What’s more, the Factory Act was motivated not by the desire for any “possible cultural improvement of the nation at large or the inner satisfaction of the individual,” but from the understanding that better educated workers would produce “more intelligent handling of machinery” (Ibid., 143).

<sup>39</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 155.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Although unrelated to E. M., William Edward Forster was, incidentally, the son-in-law of Thomas Arnold, and consequently brother-in-law of Matthew. Both Arnolds’ involvement in the educational policy and theory of the period will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

<sup>42</sup> “Elementary Education Act, 1870: Speech by Mr. W. E. Forster Introducing Elementary Education Bill. House of Commons. February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1870” in *Educational Documents: England and Wales, 1816 to the Present Day*, ed. J. Stuart Maclure (London: Methuen, 1973), 99.

<sup>43</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 171. As Altick notes in a footnote to the same page, its unilateral success is more debatable, but the fact remains that the Forster Act was the first to signal the state’s expanded role. For a comparison of the compromises the bill carved out between its sponsors and its opponents, see Stephens, *Education in Britain*, 79.

<sup>44</sup> The name for this administrative body would undergo several changes during the period in question. Created in 1839, the Education Department would become the Board of Education in 1899, which itself became the Ministry of Education in 1944. The Ministry, in turn, would undergo several additional reclassifications (as the Department of Education and Science, the Department for Education and Skills, and the Department for Schools, Children, and Families) before becoming the Department for Education that exists as of 2012.

schools, funded by local taxes and overseen by locally elected school boards; these boards could compel attendance, and by 1880 attendance was universally obligatory until age ten.<sup>45</sup>

It is difficult to do justice to a century's worth of reforms in so short a space, but it is more difficult still to enumerate the steps taken towards expanded schooling and literacy without seeming to amplify the gains, hearing in each step the inexorable tread of progress, for what progress was made at each stage was inevitably minor. Yet the gradual emergence of education as a right rather than a privilege did force opponents of reform to abandon earlier assumptions, so that it is in the terms of resistance rather than the reforms themselves that we can most readily register a shift in education's ambitions. As Richard Altick summarizes,

[a]fter the first fifteen years or so of Victoria's reign, as a rule only the anachronistic ultra-Tories of the 'farming interest' denounced the spread of reading on political or social (and, beneath it all, economic) grounds. Instead, people worried chiefly about the dangers of moral corruption associated with popular reading... [Then w]ith the fading of the moral concern, the problem of the mass reading public became predominantly one of literary culture... What positive good was the reading habit once it had been acquired by millions whose schooling had been confined to a few years?<sup>46</sup>

At every stage, the state assumed an ever greater responsibility for (and oversight of) the education of the nation. But as that responsibility mounted, so too did concern for education's effect on a child's character. A question originally of literacy at its most basic became eventually a question of the proper applications of "the reading habit." The "problem of the mass reading public," as Altick puts it, laid finally in the fact that a mass reading public had for the first time even been created. Reformers and opponents alike would have to contend with what kind of men or women that mass would be made out to be.

This last stage, which calls into question the ability of the newly literate or working poor to acquire culture, is where we are left with Leonard Bast. The generational history of the Bast family has passed from "nothing at all" to a clerk, a lay-reader, and the wives of commercial travelers. But when confronting Ruskin, Leonard's efforts seem to encounter an impossible hurdle. The scene where Leonard takes up *The Stones of Venice* records his attempts to "form his style on Ruskin," recasting the language of the "master of English Prose" to suit his experience (42). Where Ruskin describes a church by begging us to "consider a little each of these characters in succession, and first (for of the shafts enough have been said already), what is very peculiar to this church, its luminousness," Leonard supplies his own equivalent, but "the words for him" reduce only to "My flat is dark and stuffy" (42).<sup>47</sup> What is lost in Leonard's version is precisely form, structure, the very kind of difficult writing that Eliot had championed. (It was an acquaintance with Ruskin, after all, that would influence the style of Proust.) There is no elaborate subordination in the prose meant "for" Leonard, no parentheticals; it is as though Leonard's thought cannot hold itself in suspension longer than noun, verb, adjective.

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<sup>45</sup> Stephens, *Education in Britain*, 79.

<sup>46</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 367-368.

<sup>47</sup> Forster's narrator does suggest a Ruskin-esque alternative — "Let us consider a little each of these characters in succession; and first (for of the absence of ventilation enough have been said already), what is very peculiar to this flat, its obscurity" (42) — but he quickly qualifies that "[s]omething told [Leonard] that the modifications would not do; and that something, had he known it, was the spirit of English Prose" (42). That Leonard *does not* "know it," and yet that the omniscient narrator does, suggests that even the interpretation of the alternative is beyond Leonard's understanding.

Little good comes from Leonard's encounter with difficult prose. Whatever the possible claims one could make for education's merits, Leonard cannot master its form, he cannot deploy it in conversation, and in concentrated enough doses it is literally enough to kill him. Leonard's inability to benefit from Ruskin appears symptomatic of the resistance towards the "reading habit" that the late Victorians had entertained. Although initially devoted to the trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, Leonard's struggle with Ruskin establishes education's outer limits. It is at the doorstep of formal difficulty that Leonard stumbles. But this, as John Carey contends, would become the explicit "purpose of modernist writing" — "a hostile reaction to the unprecedentedly large reading public created by the late nineteenth-century educational reforms."<sup>48</sup> Difficulty becomes the byword of modernism to frustrate those like Leonard Bast; "intellectuals could not, of course, actually prevent the masses from attaining literacy[, b]ut they could prevent them from reading literature by making it too difficult" for the newly literate to comprehend.<sup>49</sup> "Realism of the sort that it was assumed the masses appreciated was abandoned," Carey continues. "So was logical coherence. Irrationality and obscurity were cultivated."<sup>50</sup> This charge is only most pronounced when it comes to the intimate circle of Bloomsbury. One need not mind the masses if one is writing for one's friends, or if one, like the Woolfs, owns an independent press.<sup>51</sup> Virginia, Forster maintains in a 1942 lecture, was the consummate esthete: "neither the desire for money nor the desire for reputation nor philanthropy could influence her."<sup>52</sup> Who was she speaking to but Forster? Where was Forster speaking that day other than — where else? — Cambridge?

All of this, however, was to await Forster and his friends in the future. If it was "on or about December 1910," in Woolf's famous estimation, that "human character changed" and modern art and literature were swept into being,<sup>53</sup> for *Howards End*, released on October 18<sup>th</sup>, there was still more than a month left to go. The *Bildungsroman* tradition, as Forster had inherited it, permitted character and the novel's form to travel, untroubled, together. Leonard's death suggests that this symmetry is no longer tenable, yet most accounts of modernism conclude that authors of Forster's moment made a clear choice between the two, electing to celebrate form, to sanctify style. *Howards End* captures a moment, however, when other options remained available. Character might yet have a chance to flourish — for where would we even find high style in Forster? Across six novels and a

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<sup>48</sup> Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, vii.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> Carey himself invokes Virginia Woolf often but only in passing, in discussion of other figures like Joyce and Clive Bell, before returning to her in his postscript. Her association with the intellectual avant-garde, apparently, is enough to go without saying.

<sup>52</sup> Forster, "Virginia Woolf: The Rede Lecture, delivered in the Senate House, Cambridge," in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), 244. Forster is indeed more specific about *why* Woolf needn't desire these things than can be integrated comfortably into the primary text: "Money she had not to consider, because she possessed a private income, and though financial independence is not always a safeguard against commercialism, it was in her case. Critics she never considered while she was writing, although she could be attentive to them and even humble afterwards. Improving the world she would not consider, on the ground that the world is man-made, and that she, a woman, had no responsibility for the mess" (*Ibid.*).

<sup>53</sup> Woolf, *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 4. It is notable, of course, that Woolf attributes a change not to "humanity" or "human nature," but "human *character*."



more than sixty-year career, Forster would maintain the same basic narrative form. *A Passage to India*, the last novel he published, was put out a year before Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, and his one posthumous work, *Maurice* (1971), although revised in 1932 and again in 1959, resembles the style of its predecessors in everything but its explicit homoerotic content. *Howards End* more closely shares the free indirect narration and omniscient attributions of a Jane Austen novel. The brio brought to Leonard's reading is owed to Ruskin's formal syntax, not Forster's. The sheer paucity of high style in Forster's work, in other words, means that we have a fresh opportunity to judge what these techniques were truly taking on whenever they do appear. The only evidence of Forster's high style comes at the site of a single experimental risk, at the very moment we have thus far been circling — the scene of Leonard's death.

[Leonard] entered a garden, steadied himself against a motor-car that he found in it, found a door open and entered a house. Yes, it would be very easy. From a room to the left he heard voices, Margaret's amongst them. His own name was called aloud, and a man whom he had never seen said, 'Oh, is he there? I am not surprised. I now thrash him within an inch of his life.'

'Mrs Wilcox,' said Leonard, 'I have done wrong.'

The man took him by the collar and cried, 'Bring me a stick.' Women were screaming. A stick, very bright, descended. It hurt him, not where it descended, but in the heart. Books fell over him in a shower. Nothing had sense. (277)

I have until now treated this sequence entirely in paraphrase, because any actual quotation from the novel gives a limited picture of what takes place. Missing from this scene are all of the particulars: the sword, the man speaking, how much time elapses, that death has even occurred. Not until the following chapter, when Charles Wilcox explains matters to his father, are the details plainly presented. This is a reproduction of life and death as Leonard might have seen it. Leonard hears a man — later identified as Charles — call for a “stick,” and so mistakes the “very bright” object that ultimately strikes him. Nevertheless, the narration shares and sustains Leonard's assumption. As Mary Pinkerton has observed in a study of the revisions to the novel, Forster is sure to keep this perspective anchored to Leonard; Forster's earliest draft of the scene holds that Leonard “entered *the* garden... steadied himself against *the* motor-car... found *the* door,” an assertion that the omniscient narrator might well have offered — but Leonard, who has never been in Howards End before, of course does not know one door or motor-car from another.<sup>54</sup> In the final version, Forster reverts to indefinite articles. Thoughts are rendered without quotation marks. Misconceptions are never corrected, whole moments go missing. Were these events to run for another fifteen pages and to include an inadvertent racing tip, we would not be that far off from the voice of Leopold Bloom in the “Lotus Eaters” section of *Ulysses*. In its sequencing, in its provisionality, here Forster has captured something like Leonard's stream of consciousness.

Forster's early recourse to this device, one of modernism's signature experimental techniques,<sup>55</sup> should strike us as only the fullest instance of the kind of difficult prose that Carey would attribute to modernist animosity. It is fitting, by this measure, that Leonard dies through the same discourse that will bury him. Yet the prose here is not the rhetoric of Ruskin, or even fully Forster's.<sup>56</sup> The

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<sup>54</sup> See Mary Pinkerton, “Ambiguous Connections: Leonard Bast's Role in *Howards End*,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 31.2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 1985): 243.

<sup>55</sup> I will provide a more proximate dating of stream of consciousness's origins in the English novel in just the next chapter.

<sup>56</sup> Lest we think Forster's prose patronizing, compare the passage above to Leonard's first reflections about culture: “Her speeches fluttered away from the young man like birds. If only he could talk like

language is spare, and plainly presented. Its nearest equivalent is to Leonard's earlier attempt at "the spirit of English Prose" — "My flat is dark and stuffy" (42). When himself projecting forward to *Ulysses*, Carey holds that although Joyce's treatment of Leopold Bloom demonstrates a certain regard for the common man, the novel could never be read by Bloom, since its "avant-garde technique, its obscurity, rigorously exclude people like Bloom from its readership."<sup>57</sup> But we cannot apply this principle here. Surely this is formal experiment, but experiment in a different direction from what troubles Carey. Rather than rendering Leonard's consciousness impenetrable, this scene gives his own private expression its most prominent place. There is no need for the elaborate syntax of Ruskin. High style, in this sense, is set aside. Whatever new techniques Forster happens to discover are used only to grant Leonard's character the cohesion and coherence that he has been denied at every other moment.

As we have plotted Leonard's path through the novel, his inability to make it through the rigors of Ruskin, or to turn his education towards more productive ends, have struck us as failures to live up to the *Bildungsroman's* ideals. The aggregate pressure of the plot can be blamed for squeezing the life out of Leonard. Yet in this moment, it is that plot, not Leonard, that seems to falter. A character's epistemology propels a novel, we will recall Forster had found in *Aspects of the Novel*, because it helps to animate everything else around it. In this scene, however, Forster actually seems to lose sight of his plot in a manner that can never be fully reconciled. Leonard's own immediate impressions are captured clearly enough. Readers, even novice readers, can find Leonard's thought eminently intelligible. Yet if we attempt to consider the scene unfolding outside of Leonard for even a moment, we must come away puzzled. For who exactly is it that hands Charles Wilcox the Schlegels' sword? Charles demands that someone "[b]ring [him] a stick," and because Leonard mistakes the object that strikes him, we imagine that Charles has lashed out with the first object placed in his hand. Yet the only parties present are Margaret, Helen, and the caretaker Mrs. Avery, none of whom would be in a hurry to see Leonard skewered. Is it credible, however, that having issued his command, Charles would fetch the sword himself? (Conceivably Charles could call for a stick, receive no response, and then pull down the sword from the wall. But we already know that due to Mrs. Avery's decorating sensibilities, the sword is unsheathed; if there is enough time for Charles to select an appropriate implement, presumably there is enough time for him to find one that is non-lethal.) The only remaining solutions are ones that cannot be attractive to Forster: either Charles is more culpable of outright homicide than the narrator will ultimately impute, or else one of the other characters has directly contributed to Leonard's end. In the next chapter, Charles will explain how Leonard died to his father. (It is notably the man of business, not the man more likely in his employ, that needs matters spelled out in full.) He will explain again when a coroner's tribunal is convened. But this matter is never entirely clarified, and I do not know that Forster himself could offer an answer. Even the most basic facts of the plot have lost interest for Forster. The crafting of Leonard's conscious processes have absorbed all of his attention. Forced to make a choice between the formal requirements of the *Bildungsroman* and his character, Forster sides unambiguously with the latter. Only Leonard's individual impressions are afforded any integrity. It is the pedagogical imperative of the *Bildungsroman*, not Leonard's specific place in it, that cannot be pushed further. The plot breaks down at the very moment that Leonard's character is most fully expressed.

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this, he would have caught the world. Oh to acquire culture! Oh, to pronounce foreign names correctly! Oh, to be well informed, discoursing at ease on every subject that a lady started!" (34). Are we really to attribute each "Oh" to Leonard, along with each exclamation? It is more likely there that Forster can be found in an open act of ventriloquism.

<sup>57</sup> *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 20.

Unable to be Wilhelm Meister, not quite able to be Emma Bovary, Leonard Bast has not entirely failed — it is merely that the entire model of education offered by the *Bildungsroman* has proved inadequate. If the best that the novel can achieve is an expression of Leonard’s original voice, what then have all the stolen hours with books contributed? The resolution of Leonard’s story reveals a desire for a third choice between Wilhelm or Emma, for a kind of character that could exist apart from any need for additional education. Rather than gathering together discrete objects of knowledge as a *Bildungsroman* hero or heroine might, Leonard will not be brought into closer contact with some guiding truth. In fact, every education that Leonard has taken on over the course of the novel, like his attempt to walk the countryside by moonlight in emulation of E. V. Lucas’s *The Open Road* anthology, has been met with a shrug simply because Leonard finds the reality impossible to reconcile with his inflated expectations. (“But was the dawn wonderful?” Helen asks, and though we might be primed for a revelation, Leonard’s response is a concise “No” [102].) At novel’s end, it is not that Leonard has learned nothing from his cultural education — it is that he has *unlearned* his original reliance on Ruskin and Lucas alike. Leonard is never so much himself as when his thoughts can be put directly, in a manner that is “modern,” but that needn’t be any less accessible or intelligible for the effort.

“Unlearning,” as that process is tentatively outlined by Leonard Bast, will emerge as one of this project’s central concepts. What does this process require? (And does it always, perhaps more importantly, require death beneath a heap of books?) We tend to accept the *Bildungsroman* as the archetypal tale of character development primarily because we understand education itself as essential for creating character. Education, whether for Aristotle or Hegel, Freud, Foucault, or Althusser, has long been understood as the cornerstone of subject formation. “The education and instruction of a child aim at making him actually and for himself what he is at first only potentially[,] and therefore for others,” holds Hegel; through education, the child “becomes conscious that the goodness, religion, and science which he had at first looked upon as an outward authority, are his own nature.”<sup>58</sup> Education is the means by which subjects are socialized, by which outward authority — parents, teachers, the state — becomes consubstantial with the self. Only in the wake of the Forster Act and its successors was the British state able to assert this claim explicitly. The “question of the reading habit,” with which the late opponents of education were concerned, was, put differently, a question primarily of *character*: what materials would help make better subjects? (E. V. Lucas’s *The Open Road*, which includes pastorals from Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, Shelley,

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<sup>58</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel: Translated from the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), 254. My singling out of Hegel among the other figures mentioned is not entirely arbitrary. Of prior thinkers, Aristotle’s assertion that “the education of a citizen in the spirit of his constitution does not consist of his doing the actions in which the partisans of oligarchy, or the adherents of democracy, delight; [i]t consists of doing the actions which make it possible to have an oligarchy, or a democracy” would certainly find endorsement in Hegel (see *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 208). And it is perhaps with Hegel’s thoughts on education in mind that Alexandre Kojève’s re-writing of the master-slave dialectic, in the influential introduction to his lectures on Hegel, holds that the slave’s work in service of the master is how he “educates himself” (see “In Place of an Introduction” in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James. H. Nichols, Jr. [New York: Basic Books, 1969], 24). Consistently Kojève translates Hegel’s “bilden” as “forms-and-educates” (“forme-et-éduque”); not one or the other, as a compromise term, but both. These are the lectures that would later influence Lacan, Sartre, Foucault, Derrida, Althusser, and others.

Wordsworth, and Tennyson, would not be a bad choice, for starters.) Yet endemic of this understanding is the assumption that there is no way *out* of an education: we are always already constituted by the educations that have formed us.<sup>59</sup> There is no such thing as individual character, strictly speaking, because our culture has always been put in place before us.<sup>60</sup> Leonard Bast's problem is not, as Carey has it, that his "attempt to become cultured" is looked down upon.<sup>61</sup> It is that culture comes too easily to Leonard, is already all around him, and it is everything that Leonard can do to set even a single anthology entry aside. Culture, in its totality, is everything that Leonard has taken on before the novel begins. Everything that follows — everything that goes into the novel itself — is only an extended unraveling, an attempt, contrary to the convictions of theorists from Aristotle onward, to turn back the education that had created Leonard.

We might now define "unlearning" as how a novel makes this attempt. For if learning is the process by which an individual becomes socialized as a subject, unlearning is the sequence through which a subject sheds that education to become, again, an individual. This process, however, aspires towards a near impossibility. An education cannot be unwound, just as form and character cannot be easily disentangled. Leonard's example is perfectly illustrative of this difficulty, if only because in Leonard's particular case, the process proves fatal. His character finally asserted, Leonard can find no further form. Forster's dispatching of Leonard Bast can safely be read as an act of deep desperation, an attempt to find some foothold for character whatever the costs. Novels in the storied tradition of the *Bildungsroman* had long advanced an unproblematic understanding of education. Character and form worked in concert, such that for Goethe and Flaubert, the convergence would be final — a plot could come to an end, whether for good or ill, only when socialization had done its work. Yet as authorities at the end of the nineteenth century took credit for every citizen's acculturation, the concept of character itself came under threat. Where every education is taken easily and automatically in hand, the failures and triumphs of the *Bildungsroman* begin to look senseless. What for Goethe and Flaubert had been a destination, now for Forster and his friends would have to be assumed up front: character is always first owed to some other source. The artists and authors to come after these reforms responded, critics including Carey would contend, by simply retreating further into form.<sup>62</sup> Only the high style of modernism offered a

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<sup>59</sup> Thus Louis Althusser's contention that the "dominant ideological State apparatus[] is the educational apparatus, which has in fact replaced in its functions the previously dominant ideological-State apparatus, the Church" (see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster [London: New Left Books, 1971], 146.).

<sup>60</sup> A similar synthesis between Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, Foucault, and Althusser is suggested by Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (1997).

<sup>61</sup> *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 18.

<sup>62</sup> In the late pages of his study of the *Bildungsroman*, Franco Moretti finds something similar. Even as early as George Eliot, the "cognitive or ethical[] maturity" to which the *Bildungsroman* aspired began to be transferred from the characters' actions to the narrator's ironizing reportage: "the more devastating the characters' failure, the more impressive the narrator's self-mastery" (*The Way of the World*, 222.). "But once maturity is no longer entrusted to actions, but only to the awareness of their meaning, then a wholly new paradigm has been created," one whose interests are best advanced by "Henry James" and, of course, "T. S. Eliot" (Ibid.). I will respond to this characterization of James in particular in my next chapter.

sanctum from which culture could be criticized. Character in the traditional sense was no longer a concern.

It is thus not surprising that high modernism, as we know it from its later incarnations in Woolf or Joyce, Beckett or Proust, is seldom celebrated for its commitment to character. Gerard Genette famously suggested that there are no characters in Proust, because all, subject to Proust's totalizing formal discourse, give the impression of always caricaturing themselves.<sup>63</sup> Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) is often said to contain "not characters, but *characteristics*,"<sup>64</sup> "not characters[,] but voices."<sup>65</sup> The forms pioneered by modernism's master texts work to divide character, to refract it.<sup>66</sup> We thus seldom think of "modernist character" as a subject worthy of greater definition. Recent inquiries, like Gregory Castle's *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (2006) or Jed Esty's *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (2011), toy with the very concept only to unsettle it, whereas Philip Weinstein's *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (2005) maintains that modernism is distinguished from "nineteenth-century realism" chiefly by its willingness to forsake "the subject-centered, subject-moralized world," "seeing past the drama of character."<sup>67</sup>

Yet if *Howards End* marks the moment when the educational imperative of the *Bildungsroman* came to crisis, a retrenchment of form is notably not the path that Forster pursues. Characterization becomes more crucial, more concentrated, than ever. (After all, it is only a conviction that Forster's sense of characterization remains stable that has allowed generations of critics to claim that he handles it badly.) The story of Leonard Bast thus become representative of another option once open to modernism, an approach to the novel that would refashion character, unfettered by any education, into its core concern. With the *Bildungsroman* displaced, this project tracks how a new kind of character, unschooled and artless, was found to replace it. For Leonard himself, the attempt could endure only briefly. But as in Forster's attempt to find an outlet for Leonard's autonomous expression through stream of consciousness, an appreciation for the merits of artlessness helps us to see where even the formal strategies for which modernism is more typically prized are owed to the interest of character. It is perhaps because Forster's characterization remains so conventional — taken in hand by an ironizing omniscience, owing more to Jane Austen than Virginia Woolf — that I have never seen *Howards End* numbered among those works noted for flirting with stream of

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<sup>63</sup> See Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 183-185. "Legrandin talks like Legrandin (in other words, like Proust imitating Legrandin)" is Genette's primary example (185). "This circularity," he goes on, "perhaps explains why a technique of 'characterization' as effective as stylistic autonomy does not, in Proust, result in the composition of substantial and well-defined *characters* in the realistic sense of the term" (Ibid.).

<sup>64</sup> Eric Warner, *Virginia Woolf, The Waves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 47; his italics.

<sup>65</sup> Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 201.

<sup>66</sup> The earlier enumeration could go on. Beckett's titular character in *Molloy* (1951) is the product of a formal riddle; what we assume of his identity in the first half is unwound by the second, which it appears is actually a prequel to what came before. The *Bildung* of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) is marked by the evolution in style brought to each new chapter.

<sup>67</sup> *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 63.

consciousness. Works where such strategies predominate, however, whether in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) or in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), might in this light be reconceived as attempts to push further down Forster's path, to animate artlessness on a fuller scale. The romance of Lawrence's Ursula Brangwen and Rupert Birkin is, among other things, an attempt to let characters like Leonard live, from first paragraph to final page, even if it means forsaking the basic form of grammar. Taken together, the period spanning the first breaths of the Forster Act to the waning moments of modernism's high style can be freshly understood as a collective attempt not to produce impenetrable prose, but to find the prose that would provide character with a more permanent place.

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*Howards End*, produced at the midpoint of the period stretching from Henry James to Virginia Woolf, offers a snapshot of what was at stake as the educational imperative of the *Bildungsroman* gave way to experiments in ignorance. My first chapter looks to the two versions of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* — the original 1881 edition, alongside the 1906 revision for the New York Edition — to dramatize the shift from education to ignorance staged even in the evolving interests of a single work. The novel's heroine, Isabel Archer, has long — if not always — been read as the epitome of the *Bildungsroman*'s educational imperative, a protagonist so discerning that her education is achieved in an instant, when a single penetrating glance helps her arrest the whole history of her husband's onetime affair with her close friend. This scene is among the more famous in literary history, and it is the moment that critics turn to when establishing how vital the pedagogic process is to James and to the Master's many followers. "James's fiction is full of visual shocks which constitute crucial turning points for his heroes and heroines;"<sup>68</sup> the "critical moment [when] Isabel glimpses Gilbert Osmond sitting while Madame Merle is standing next to him"<sup>69</sup> is only the best example of an intelligence emblematically achieved. Such indeed would have been the experience of Isabel's every reader from 1881 to 1906. Yet with a single crucial change to the New York Edition at the very moment of Isabel's recognition, James annuls what had been the most intimate access to Isabel's intelligence. In the scene's early version, James had in fact pioneered stream of consciousness, well before its recognized first appearance in Edouard Dujardin's 1887 *Les Lauriers sont coupés*. By 1906, however, even at a time when his style had become increasingly abstract, it is this signature modernist gesture that James is eager to efface. As the consequences of that amendment ripple throughout the novel, as the scene of Isabel's vision is revisited again and again, James's changes accelerate, so that Isabel becomes a figure for the exorcism of intelligence, for securing what Isabel calls her "personal independence" through unlearning.

Unlike in the chapters to follow, Isabel's passage from intelligence to ignorance will not presuppose the terms "artless" or "unlearning" so vital to this project. Instead, this chapter will use Isabel to arrive at those definitions inductively, giving them a more secure foothold, a more rigorous definition, and a potentially more pressing motive. For while we can debate the degree of sympathy demanded by Leonard Bast, James's profound investment in Isabel simply cannot prove otherwise, and by examining the altered terms of his interest between 1881 and 1906, we are given a window into the revised imperatives of the period itself. That James comes to this appreciation by resisting stream of consciousness, and Forster does likewise only by embracing it, is in fact more appropriate than it might appear. In all the chapters to follow, unlearning has no monolithic form of expression; in every case, as characters' independence from education was afforded a yet greater and greater place, authors labored to extend the opportunities for ignorance provided by the techniques of their

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<sup>68</sup> Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax* (Boston: Little, Brown 1976), 133

<sup>69</sup> Weinstein, *Unknowing*, 87.

predecessors. Where stream of consciousness will prove worth refusing for James, due to the closeness it affords to a character's comprehension, Forster is comfortable mobilizing Leonard's consciousness if it can signal education's ultimate atrophy. Each of the following chapters thus traces a different aspect of artlessness, placing it as part of a common concern for character that, together, further inflected the novel's possible forms.

Modernism might have begun "on or about December 1910," in Virginia Woolf's famous phrase, but it is commonplace to conclude that the Great War inaugurated its high phase, begetting *To the Lighthouse* and *Parade's End*, or, for the other side of the Atlantic, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises*. Even in advance of these innovations, however, as my second chapter considers, D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) would carry artlessness to a new extreme by making the immense reality of the Great War merely another thing for his characters to unlearn. *Women in Love* is the first of the works considered here to not leave its characters' fates problematic. Isabel Archer, Leonard Bast — both offer cases where the very merit of the depiction comes into question. In Lawrence's case, however, what does prove problematic is whether the novel contains characters at all. Lawrence's critics have often been puzzled by how his characters are supposed to function: they appear "impersonal," demanding "imperceptible distinctions" between apparently crucial but scarcely delineated features, refusing to "admit individuality as we understand it."<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, Lawrence insists that character is the key to his method, supplying the only available solution to a prevailing paradox — that although *Women in Love* "took its final shape in the midst of the period of war,"<sup>71</sup> although characters in it actually quote from Kaiser Wilhelm's remarks on the first anniversary of the conflict, the War itself appears nowhere in the novel, not even slowing down the trains that whisk Lawrence's characters across Europe. Lawrence instead suggests "that the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters."<sup>72</sup>

How can something so sweeping as the First World War be "taken for granted?" How can Ursula Brangwen or Rupert Birkin be blind to it? How can we? Taking the war for granted "in the characters," however, becomes only a way of making character all the more crucial. Ursula and Rupert operate in a world so thoroughly desocialized, so utterly artless, that even the most mobilizing social event of their lifetimes lays no claims to them. Lawrence's characterization seems incoherent to critics only because of the rigor with which his attempts at unlearning are applied. His system has deep roots — from a theory of character sketched in a study of "the people in Thomas Hardy's novels," to the author's philosophical disputes with Bertrand Russell, to then contemporaneous changes to libel law, which would have just barely permitted *Women in Love* to escape prosecution. When these separate influences are charted against Lawrence's revisions to the novel, what must be excised at every occasion is the whole field of referential definition, the very connection between words and reference that allows a set of phrases to single out a specific person. Ursula and Rupert and all their ilk read so bafflingly because they emblemize what, in the Hardy study, Lawrence calls purely "spiritual" characterization, refusing to be constituted by any knowable category, even any expressible phrase. The novel's often impossible locutions, which call on

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<sup>70</sup> These quotations are owed to Pierre Vitoux, Leo Bersani, and John Middleton Murry respectively, representing a full range of criticism from the novel's publication to the near present. Since I will enlarge on these quotations in the chapter itself, their entire context is not treated here.

<sup>71</sup> "Preface," in *Women in Love* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), ix. This preface, written to accompany the original American publication of the novel, was only published in an advertising leaflet during Lawrence's lifetime.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

contradictions like one's "physical mind" or "mystical-physical" satisfaction, emerge from attempts to unlearn even the grammar in which these experiences are set down. This chapter thus presents *Women in Love* as artlessness's apex, the moment when characterological ignorance became such a pressing preoccupation that it offered to organize all else around it. The locutions that Lawrence invents, the obscure scenes he must resort to, even the War that he allows to recede — all could be considered early experiments in the modernist style that critics like Carey attribute to intellectual elitism. Yet by seeing each of these innovations as only accessories of character, *Women in Love* comes to clarify and consolidate the tradition of artlessness from which it emerged.

Artlessness's elaboration, as it developed from James to Forster and Lawrence, thus gives us a different way of accounting for the interests that informed the modernist moment: character in fact predominated over form, ignorance over intelligence. This study concludes by evaluating the legacy of artless characterization for high modernism itself, as given by the collective achievements of the Bloomsbury group. For in Bloomsbury, the values just enumerated appear obviously inverted. High modernism is synonymous with high style; the prose of a Lytton Strachey or a Maynard Keynes is more often than not devoted to eradicating ignorance, whatever its form. This chapter, however, alternates between early and late instants in Bloomsbury's collective career to trace what became of modernist character. Early expressions of artlessness, such as Strachey's portrait of the headmaster of Rugby, Dr. Thomas Arnold, in the briefest, most withering, and most personal sketch of *Eminent Victorians* (1918), have simply grown to exaggerated proportions by the time of *Queen Victoria* (1921). So total there is Strachey's tone that all of *Queen Victoria* becomes an encounter with ignorance, refusing to allow intelligence to penetrate for even a moment. Alternately, the assertions of old age, like Keynes's reflections in "My Early Beliefs" (1938) about his Cambridge contemporaries' blithe treatment of time, let us appreciate an aspect of ignorance that had laid dormant all along. In this light, Keynes's efforts in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) can be read not as a send-up of the stupidity that had marred the Paris Peace Conference, but as an attempt instead to force a new treatment of time. The graying heads of state have read Europe's recent past with the complacent quiescence owed to a completed *Bildungsroman*, and by animating the temporality of what he repeatedly calls "the character of the Peace," Keynes endeavors to unlearn that assumption.

Where the analyses of the preceding chapters have offered synchronic slices of an author's thought, arresting convictions that informed a work at the time it was revised or went to press,<sup>73</sup> this chapter is deliberately diachronic to capture the consequences as individual aspects of artlessness were fit to different forms. Neither Strachey nor Keynes, of course, are novelists, but the treatment of tone, in Strachey's case, and time, in Keynes's, both instill ignorance into what we now think of as "Bloomsbury style." My conviction is that although Bloomsbury style is a style, ultimately, of ignorance, this late stylization of what was once a characterological concern, its dispersal into separate elements like "time" or "tone," is what ultimately allowed Bloomsbury's intellectual and aesthetic priorities to be so widely misconstrued. In Bloomsbury, artlessness was transformed into, precisely, an *art*, one with its own rules and patterns and idiosyncrasies. The chapter concludes by considering Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, an emblematic instance of high style, and a novel as much concerned with dispersing character through space and time as prevailing accounts of modernism could require. Yet in its pivotal section, "Time Passes," the novel grounds itself as a spiritual — if not wholly literal — sequel to another novel, the novel with which I began: *Howards End*. The central figure of *To the Lighthouse* is thus not Lily Briscoe or Mrs. Ramsay, but the

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<sup>73</sup> It is for this reason that my chapter on Lawrence does not pursue his thought past *Women in Love* to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), or indeed, even to the essays "Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious" (1921) and "Fantasia of the Unconscious" (1922) that explicitly consider education in the abstract.



unschooled and ostensibly unimportant housekeeper, Mrs. Bast, whose sole repeated attestation is that she “never knew the family.” But “not knowing the family,” in these terms, could be considered a byword for the better appreciation of Bloomsbury itself. Not knowing the family, forgetting the formal unity binding Woolf and Forster and Keynes and Strachey, allows us to appreciate the central presence of artlessness that Bloomsbury style conceals.

As a whole, this study thus suggests a symmetry of characterization shared, across the period, from James to Forster to Lawrence to Bloomsbury. One of the perhaps puzzling elements of this constellation of authors is that although all are renowned figures of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature in their own rights, we would be hard-pressed to find any other common interest on which these authors could agree. E. M. Forster found James’s late novels stultifying; in a 1916 letter to his aunt, he wrote that *What Maisie Knew* (1897) was his “very limit—beyond her lies *The Golden Bowl*, *The Ambassadors*, and similar impossibles.”<sup>74</sup> Although Forster would one day claim that Lawrence had praised him for his depiction of Leonard Bast,<sup>75</sup> in print, Lawrence certainly committed to nothing similar. After Forster sent him a copy of *Howards End* in 1915, Lawrence and his wife, Frieda, jointly wrote back to diagnose that “what ails you modern men is that you put too high a value on ‘consciousness’ on the revealed things; Because you cannot utter the unutterable, you are inclined to say that it does not exist;” inserted before the word “consciousness” in these lines, which are written in Frieda’s hand, is Lawrence’s one amendment — “ready-made ‘consciousness.’”<sup>76</sup> Lawrence’s own run-ins with Bloomsbury — with Strachey,<sup>77</sup> with Keynes,<sup>78</sup> with, even as above, Russell and Forster — are too extensive to require further remark. Artlessness’s credentials as a legitimate literary phenomenon can only be underscored, however, by the animosity

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<sup>74</sup> *The Selected Letters of E. M. Forster, Vol. I, 1879-1920*, ed. Mary Lago and P. N. Furbank (London: William Collins Sons and Co., 1983), 240.

<sup>75</sup> See Forster’s interview with Angus Wilson, “A Conversation with E. M. Forster,” *Encounter* (November, 1957): 54. It is from this interview, one imagines, that Kermode concludes Forster was “pleased” with Leonard’s portrayal. Resorting to Lawrence’s approval — one of Forster’s few contemporaries to hail from a similar background — seems Forster’s way of countering Wilson’s accusation that he has “only ever detected cruelty in the author towards his characters. Your [Forster’s] attitude towards Leonard Bast has always shocked me” (Ibid.).

<sup>76</sup> *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, Vol. II: June 1913 — October 1916 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 277. As my reader shall see in my chapter on Lawrence, these statements, specifically about “utter[ing] the unutterable,” are perhaps the nub of Lawrence’s artistic interests. In a comment on *A Passage to India* years later, Lawrence would make what will prove to be a related complaint: “E. M. does see people, people, people, and nothing but people: ad nauseam.” (See *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. James T. Boulton and Lindeth Vasey, Vol. V: 1924–1927 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 81.)

<sup>77</sup> “I’ve rarely seen anyone so pathetic, miserable, ill, and obviously devoured by internal distresses,” Strachey wrote to David Garnett in 1915 (quoted in Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* [New York: Norton, 2005], 334). Strachey’s close attachment to Ottoline Morrell — whose role in *Women in Love* will be discussed in my second chapter — likely precluded any further friendship.

<sup>78</sup> Keynes’s reflections on Lawrence, based on an episode that took place at Cambridge in 1915, is treated by Keynes as an introduction to “My Early Beliefs,” and will be touched on in my final chapter in turn.

each author directed towards the others. In all, eventually, but character they disagreed. What was advanced throughout the period was only a shifting sense of how artlessness should be achieved, how it could be brought to mean something more.

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Where then does Leonard Bast lie, between Isabel Archer and Ursula Brangwen, between the caricatures of Thomas Arnold and Georges Clemenceau? Garrett Stewart has referred to Forster's tendency to dispatch characters without warning, often in the space of a single sentence, as "the first distinctively 'modern' treatment of death in British fiction."<sup>79</sup> But we could instead think of Leonard's death as the last moment of an older tradition of living and learning, the instant at which an alternative characterization was outlined, but not achieved. When characters die in fiction, we will recall that Forster had found in his essay on "Pessimism in Literature," it is because they have arrived at the end of their epistemological interest.<sup>80</sup> "Perfect knowledge" comes only to "those who are dead, or dead to each other." Leonard dies. But the closest he can come to "perfect knowledge" is learning that this whole system is unworkable.

Earlier I had insisted that *Howards End* could be read entirely as Leonard's story, setting aside the Schlegels and everything else. As the culmination of that conceit, Leonard's death marks the last breaths of the *Bildungsroman*. But just as Leonard's end cedes new possibilities for character, whether indirectly in Lawrence or directly for Woolf, *Howards End* does continue, for just mere pages, in Leonard's absence. With the *Bildungsroman* plot disassembled, a new type of plot is briefly permitted to persist. The final pages of the novel, with reapers merrily mowing hay outside a repopulated and revitalized Howards End, strikes an awkward counterpoint to the crushed hopes of pages before. "The field's cut!" Helen exclaims in the novel's last words, "the big meadow! We've seen to the very end, and it'll be such a crop of hay as never!" (293). Perhaps it is this sudden optimism, as much as Leonard's specific failings, that has disappointed critics.<sup>81</sup> Forster has insisted upon some solution,

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<sup>79</sup> "Forster's Epistemology of Dying," *The Missouri Review* 2.2-3 (Spring 1979): 103.

<sup>80</sup> Ironically, given the class controversy that would haunt Forster's depiction of Leonard starting just a few short years after this essay was written, the essay itself was printed first in *The Working Men's College Journal*, the publication of an institution founded to educate lower-level office workers — men just like Leonard Bast — where Forster himself had worked as an instructor in 1902. Because there is little record of Forster's time there, this period in Forster's life has received comparatively little attention. With Leonard clearly in mind, Wendy Moffat, Forster's most recent biographer, concludes that students at the Working Men's College "demanded more practical subjects;" "wanting to *get on* in the world," there would be "no reading of Ruskin" for them (see *A Great Unrecorded History: A New Life of E. M. Forster* [New York: Picador, 2010], 64.). (Although, in an added irony, Ruskin had been among the college's early supporters.) Given Ruskin's role in encumbering Leonard's character, this might not have been a bad thing. But Forster's essay specifically concerns Tolstoy, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Wings of the Dove* — not exactly light reading. Insofar as the essay serves, however, as a guide to reading *The Wings of the Dove*, its discussion of the epistemology encountered in novels should be of significant interest.

<sup>81</sup> I. A. Richards summarized the scene as a "willfully" "peculiar" "confession of faith" that Forster "will not let die" despite having "Leonard himself[,] being worthless," "killed violently" (see I. A. Richards, "A Passage to Forster," *The Forum* 78.6 [Dec. 1927]: 20). K. W. Gransden, who grasps the national resonance of Forster's theme, nevertheless calls such a "happy" ending "rather contrived" (see *E. M. Forster* [New York: Grove Press, 1962], 79.).

but it remains “an incommunicable idea.”<sup>82</sup> The only thing to come to pass in the intervening pages, however, is the very culmination of Forster’s whole concern: the creation of a new character. The “we” that makes it to “the very end” includes a subject only produced in Leonard’s absence, his child, fathered with Helen. With the Wilcox residence turned over to Margaret and her sister, the parting scene on the meadow is the single sequence in which the eventual heir to Howards End appears, in the form of Leonard’s son. The class drama staged between Schlegels and Wilcoxes and Basts has proved a contestation over “what shall become of England,”<sup>83</sup> and with the place of education in early twentieth-century Britain in mind, this is as much a characterological question as a conceptual one. What comes after Helen and Charles and Leonard? What comes after the *Bildungsroman*? But as John Edward Hardy notes, as much significance as Leonard’s son is made to bear, he is invested with little else: he goes unnamed, and “is referred to, repeatedly, just as ‘baby.’”<sup>84</sup> Educations, like the one pursued by Leonard, can be credited with making subjects, but this is the subject that will succeed the *Bildungsroman*. Forster’s “incommunicable idea,” England’s heir, is the product of ignorance. He remains a character, but one so radically reconfigured that he has no further form, not even a name.

My title, *Artless*, is meant to gesture towards this particular (and possibly peculiar) state of affairs. For while on one hand simply supplying a synonym for “ignorance,” one less pejorative in its accepted meaning, the suffix of “artless,” its “—less,” suggests, on the other, the quality of being stripped of something. (I will more rigorously define the elements of this title in the following chapter.) Unlearning requires ridding oneself of culture. Ignorance, put differently, is *art* unfurled. But carried to an extreme, artlessness would imply a freedom from all prior determinants, including the very story in which one’s subjecthood had been set down. The closest that Leonard Bast can come is recognizing the inadequacy of Ruskin, the inadequacy of the generic conventions of the *Bildungsroman*. Yet Leonard’s son is free even from *Howards End*. The baby is finally “presented as no one’s in particular — not Leonard’s, not even, exclusively, Helen’s.”<sup>85</sup> “Who will inherit England?,” *Howards End* had originally asked, “Schlegels or Wilcoxes or Basts?” The novel resolves by canceling out even the original terms of the question. The difference between Schlegels and Wilcoxes and Basts is a set of assumptions that have been learned, instilled, socialized. For the child, who is all three, the distinction is simply irrelevant.

This new sense of subjecthood, of course, endures only after *Howards End*, in its blank back pages, in its afterlife. It is the form that Forster could not find, the reality that he did not write. Its aspirational outline is limited to only a few brief pages. But the efforts of figures like Lawrence or Woolf — or even, indeed, of James<sup>86</sup> — can be seen as attempts to grant a greater and greater

<sup>82</sup> Richards, “A Passage to Forster,” 20.

<sup>83</sup> Gransden, *E. M. Forster*, 55.

<sup>84</sup> *Man in the Modern Novel*, 49.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Commentators critical of Leonard’s portrayal have often remarked that Leonard’s surname, “Bast,” is immediately suggestive of “Bastard.” Leonard, however, seems to have only too acute an understanding of his parentage. It is his son who, at root, will never know his father.

<sup>86</sup> Although James’s revised version of *The Portrait of a Lady*, where Isabel’s insistent intelligence becomes replaced by ignorance, would have been published in 1906, a few years prior to the composition of *Howards End*, Forster seems to have only ever read the novel in its earlier 1881 edition. His one recorded remark on the novel comes from an 1899 letter, where he notes that he has “just read” it and finds it “very wonderful[,] but [that] there’s something wrong with [James] or me” (see *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster, Vol. I, 1879-1920*, 31.)

prominence to a figure like Leonard's child, cementing ignorance as the sole organizing concept from first chapter to final page. Like the heir to *Howards End*, Isabel Archer and Ursula Brangwen are of interest not for their social stability and sophistication, but because they tend to bleed between classes as their earlier existence is unlearned. And the degree to which they succeed depends on their ability to exceed even the terms that their authors have put in place for them. In James's case, Isabel's independence means effacing even the formal brilliance of the Master; in Lawrence's, the accomplishments of *Women in Love* require blotting out Ursula's whole history, including even her earlier appearance in Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1914).

If the import of artlessness to the history of modernism has gone largely unnoticed until now, it is perhaps because the novels that bring it to bear end up unlearning even themselves. We are more likely to admire the prose in which a character's consciousness is put than the concept of character that survives the effort, especially when that concept has exhausted everything in the novel there might have been to enjoy. With form entirely exhausted, the efforts at characterization pursued by James or Lawrence or Woolf become themselves mistaken for simply a new type of form. One not only might as well, but *should* then begin with *Howards End*, for it is the moment when it is clearest that form does fail, only to yield to character. Leonard's child need never unlearn the governing terms of *Howards End*, because he need never learn them in the first place. That model of the novel as productive pedagogy simply no longer holds. All that remains is a who, unnamed, undefined, enigmatic, individual. The baby is artlessness, briefly embodied. The rest of this dissertation looks to track how artlessness ultimately grew up.

## Chapter I. The Educations of Isabel Archer

All the antiques, relics, and other “old things” that form the heart of Henry James’s *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) are never enumerated, and all but a few never directly portrayed.<sup>87</sup> Although Adam Verver of *The Golden Bowl* (1904) is an avid collector, one so active that his collection is said to include his son-in-law, the pieces that decorate his home and that will be used to found a museum in his honor go largely uninventoried. Such thorough elision of specific items, even and especially when those items have an immediate impact on the plot of his stories, is a familiar trick in the novels and tales of Henry James. Even after every character of “The Figure in the Carpet” (1896) has rifled through the collected works of the fictional novelist Hugh Vereker innumerable times in search of the supposed theme that unites all of Vereker’s work, not only what the figure *is* but even what the novels themselves *contain* remains fundamentally obscure.

What is resisted in these moments is any specification of the privileged aesthetic object. By avoiding definition, these items become “a matter of aura, not artifacts” — “the ‘things’ at Poynton are not so much objects as they are congealed actions, passionate acts of seeking, selecting, and situating.”<sup>88</sup> Congealed *actions*, passionate *acts*. Against definition, what James offers instead is the way that these objects make their marks upon people. Adam Verver’s passion is not for things, but for acquisition in the abstract; Mrs. Gereth’s interest not in crosses or cabinets, but in arrangement, as in the marriage that she would help arrange.

In these terms, based on the volumes upon volumes of books that she is said to take up, Isabel Archer of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) would seem to commodify *knowledge* in the abstract. What is it that Isabel Archer reads? “Doesn’t [Isabel] care how her rooms are done? Has she no taste?” one character asks, late in the novel. “Oh yes, a great deal; but it’s more for literature,” he’s answered.<sup>89</sup> When we first meet Isabel, she gives this taste an eager — and, we’re to think, fairly naïve — endorsement: “Oh, I hoped there would be a lord,” Isabel exclaims: “it’s just like a novel!” (20)<sup>90</sup> But despite the prevalent impression among critics that Isabel, like Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina, has been “raised on novels,” and so, equally like Emma or Anna, corrupted by them,<sup>91</sup> Isabel’s apparent reading interests run far more widely than fiction. At the moment that she is discovered by her aunt Touchett in her family’s small house in Albany, thereby precipitating the events that will bring her to the land of lords and eligible millionaires of romance, Isabel is said to be “trudging over the sandy plains of a history of German Thought” (29). Her desire “to feel the

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<sup>87</sup> Bill Brown, “A Thing about Things: The Art of Decoration in the Work of Henry James,” *The Henry James Review* 23.2 (Fall 2002): 226.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 225, 226.

<sup>89</sup> Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Köln: Könemann, 1997 [1881]), 400. Subsequent references to *The Portrait of a Lady* will refer to this edition of the original 1881 publication of the novel, and will be abbreviated to “Portrait” in text. Additionally, references to the 1906 New York Edition of the novel will be abbreviated to “Portrait NYE.”

<sup>90</sup> In the later New York Edition alone, Isabel is said to be familiar with “the latest publications, the music of Gounod, the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot” (Portrait NYE I.46). I will return to this very point at the end of this chapter.

<sup>91</sup> See, for instance, Elizabeth Sabiston, “Isabel Archer: The Architecture of Consciousness and the International Theme,” *The Henry James Review* 7.2 (1986): 32; Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Conquest of London: 1870-1881* (New York: Avon Books, 1978), 424; or Michael Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece* (New York: Liveright, 2012), 9 and 107.

continuity between the movements of her own heart and the agitations of the world” makes her “fond” “of reading about revolutions and wars, of looking at historical pictures—a class of efforts to which she had often gone so far as to forgive much bad painting for the sake of the subject” (40). “Isabel was fond of metaphysics,” it is mentioned at one point; “Isabel was fond of psychological problems,” we’re told at another (218, 340). By this logic, if Isabel Archer’s eventual disastrous marriage has been a product of what she reads, the fault doesn’t lie strictly with novels. Of all the things that she is “fond of,” Isabel seems simply “very fond of knowledge” (54). Isabel Archer’s library contains nearly everything.

With the Henry James of the early 1880s still engaged in what he himself would call his “realist” mode,<sup>92</sup> we might ask whether this depiction of Isabel’s intellection is in any way realistic, or whether James is having a degree of fun at his heroine’s expense. Surely certain of the items on Isabel’s reading list come across as absurd, and the formulaic manner in which James enumerates them — “was fond of” — would seem to suggest a fondness without finesse, attempted *savoir faire* with a minimum of *savoir*. But several of these moments do convey the sense that Isabel has internalized what she has read. Isabel’s acquaintance with “metaphysics” is mentioned at the moment that she privately recognizes the metaphysical trappings of Madame Merle’s “bold analysis of the human personality,” an analysis that she then, significantly, distances herself from (218). While the “poor girl liked to be thought clever[, ]she hated to be thought bookish; she used to read in secret, and, though her memory was excellent, to abstain from quotation” (39). No one ever quizzes Isabel on her familiarity with Schopenhauer, and what she’s read is kept largely to — and seemingly *for* — herself.

Few readers have left *The Portrait of a Lady* without feeling that the marriage Isabel has found herself trapped in amounts to a peculiarly poignant type of tragedy, for just what Fate or oracle propels her to this end? Isabel herself has chosen her course; she seems only “the victim of her own complacent temperament,” so that “the real determinism of the novel is psychological determinism.”<sup>93</sup> What makes Isabel Archer marry Gilbert Osmond is everything that makes her worth reading about in the first place. But Isabel’s choice is likewise then a product of all her prior experience, including everything that she has read. By refusing to make her reading public, Isabel ensures that her knowledge will benefit her alone. Isabel reads, in other words, only to form her own character. (For the inverse of Isabel’s position, one here wants to think of the empty advertisements of Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, recently and somewhat bizarrely appropriated for use on the British ten pound note: “How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!”)<sup>94</sup> The expansiveness of the effort, and its commensurate impact on making Isabel who she is, seems to be at the heart of Osmond’s complaint with his wife; Isabel simply “had too many ideas,” and the indiscriminate range of all that Isabel has read would suggest all that those ideas might entail (461). “[T]he final tragic horror of Isabel Archer’s situation,” writes Dorothea Krook, citing Osmond’s very accusation, is “that she should be hated not for what is worst but for what is best in her—for her free enquiring mind, for her moral purity, for her desire to uphold, to her capacity, what she believes to be good and right.”<sup>95</sup> But Krook needn’t have carried

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<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Edel, *The Conquest of London*, 254 from a letter to Lizzie Boott. The letter does not appear in Edel’s edition of James’s collected correspondence.

<sup>93</sup> Edel, *The Conquest of London*, 432.

<sup>94</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride & Prejudice*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 55.

<sup>95</sup> Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 56.

on past the emdash, for the novel makes clear that at this late stage that what Osmond hates is not Isabel's mind but only finally *her*. Isabel

knew she had too many ideas; she had more even than he supposed, many more than she had expressed to him when he asked her to marry him. Yes, she *had* been hypocritical; she had liked him so much. She had too many ideas for herself; but that was just what one married for, to share them with some one else. One couldn't pluck them up by the roots, though of course one might suppress them, be careful not to utter them. It was not that, however, his objecting to her opinions; that was nothing. She had no opinions—none that she would not have been eager to sacrifice in the satisfaction of feeling herself loved for it. What he meant was the whole thing—her character, the way she felt, the way she judged. (460-461)

We should read “character” here for all of its possible senses. Osmond only claims that Isabel has “too many ideas,” but Isabel realizes that the specific content of what she thinks isn't what is immediately in question. What Osmond means by “ideas” is Isabel: her ideas have become now all that Isabel is. The tragedy of Isabel Archer seems to be that her downfall was only a product of her character, and that her character was a consequence of all those bits of culture she had herself chosen. But contrary to Krook's reading of the weight and relevance of Isabel's ideas, what we here somewhat surprisingly find is that the ideas and opinions themselves had been “nothing,” that Isabel would eagerly “sacrifice” them to save her character but if only she could. “If there is a thing in the world that I am fond of,” Isabel at one point tells Caspar Goodwood, in an echo of James's favorite locution, and in a phrase that I will have abundant cause to return to, “it is my personal independence” (174).

The lessons of Isabel's experience — her education, its failure, and her belated wish for something somehow different — will be the subject of this chapter and all those chapters that follow. One way of reading Isabel's tragedy is to recognize in her rise and fall the frustrated plot of the *Bildungsroman*, which as glossed by Franco Moretti holds such a firm generic grip on every manner of “novel of education” or “novel of formation” that even its failures wind up defined against it.<sup>96</sup> It would be in this way that Isabel could, as per Leon Edel, Michael Gorra, and others, resemble Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina, in the same way that they two in turn seem trapped between Wilhelm Meister and young Werther. They dreamed, they dared, they died. Yet Isabel's end is not theirs. Isabel has the entire second half of the novel in which to regret her choice, and, given the novel's ambiguous ending, a lifetime in which to change it. Central to Isabel's identity is the hope for what she calls her personal independence, and with it the hope that all those bonds that have ensnared her, even the education that had taught her to freely and yet so wrongly choose, might be severed. Despite James's reputation as the most sociable of novelists (enough so that he could famously accept “no less than 140” dinner invitations in the winter before the novel's composition),<sup>97</sup> Isabel's wish manifests itself as an extreme conception of character, one that would endeavor, if such a thing were possible, to escape the social, gradually unlearning everything that the world at large might have instilled in her.

Rather, then, than the relentless education of the *Bildungsroman* plot, Isabel's attempted “personal independence,” I contend, pursues a process that is education's exact antithesis. For the peculiarity of Isabel's position is that her education is, from the novel's beginning, already complete. Her character is not so much formed by the events that follow as it is *deformed*, with the attendant props

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<sup>96</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, trans. Albert Spragia (New York: Verso, 1987), 15.

<sup>97</sup> Edel, *The Conquest of London*, 325.

of knowledge systematically removed. Character, as the *Bildungsroman* plot would ordinarily establish it, emerges as the product of an ongoing education, which would build towards Isabel's fullest and final knowledge of her self and circumstances. As Moretti observes, the work of a novel like *Wilhelm Meister* "seems to have as its end the *formation of the individual*. It is, in its essence, *pedagogy*."<sup>98</sup> Yet in *The Portrait of a Lady*, this structure undergoes a crucial reversal. The world of books that Isabel has made for herself is not an end but an inhibition. What James has created through Isabel Archer is a novel that maintains the narrative organization of the *Bildungsroman*, but that treats the genre's prototypical "pedagogy" as something that its own form will attempt to overcome. We could suggest several nomenclatures for this process (a taxonomy that will be attempted towards this chapter's end), whether "de-education" or "counter-*Bildung*," but the point of Isabel's "personal" endeavor is that it is a self-affirming project, one that needn't be defined against *anything* (as the prefixes "de-" or "counter-" would necessarily demand). For now I would prefer to think of it as an extension of a particularly Jamesian locution, "artlessness," a quality that opposes knowledge, opposes socialization, opposes external definition altogether. These three components of what Isabel Archer will have to unlearn — knowledge, socialization, and definition — will be the separate aspects of artlessness that this chapter will attempt to trace.

When *The Portrait of a Lady* last leaves her, Isabel is bound back for Rome, and back to her husband. Whatever we think of the novel's uncertain resolution, Isabel's ambition is by no means entirely fulfilled, but we can nevertheless see the same impulse towards artlessness in a variety of moments in the development of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novel. Isabel's heirs are not only Nanda Brookenham and Maggie Verver, but Lawrence's Ursula Brangwen, Virginia Woolf's Pargiters and Lytton Strachey's Queen Victoria. Isabel is thus emblematic of a broader reconceptualization of both character and novel form in the early moments of modernism, and while we might recognize the shift in the later products of Lawrence, and Strachey and Keynes and Woolf, the same change may be seen even in James's very treatment of Isabel Archer herself, as it is reconceived between the novel's original publication and its 1906 revision for the New York Edition.<sup>99</sup>

Education is a source of interest for literary theory (and, we might think, for literary stylists) for the way in which its practices precisely straddle the narratological and the characterological. Far from a static concept, character is a *process*, and the *Bildungsroman* as we ordinarily understand it simply admits to the convergence. To what extent does Henry James admit the positive potential of Isabel's education at all? Although Isabel's lessons begin in Albany, and are carried on across Europe in the various "metaphysic[al]" experiments and "psychological" games that she's eager to pursue, nearly all of the reading that passes for her formal education falls outside of the immediate consideration of the novel. The long sequence over Chapters III and IV, where Isabel's primary curricular interests are disclosed, form the novel's only major deviations from chronology; the chapters are cast as flashbacks, punctuated by individual scenes, but composed largely of iterative summary of Isabel's habits until her arrival at Gardencourt. There we're told that Isabel has been a great reader. But in the subsequent scenes that are actually dramatized, Isabel's enthusiasms seem quite different. Shortly after spurning Caspar Goodwood's proposal in London, Isabel takes "up her book, but without going through the form of opening the volume" (178). At novel's end, just prior to the final appearance of Lord Warburton, Isabel is said to be found "in the library," "but her eyes often wandered from the book in her hand to the open window" (625). Even that early depiction of

<sup>98</sup> Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 29.

<sup>99</sup> It is for this reason that my citations from *The Portrait of a Lady* are uniformly pulled from the Könnemann edition of the original text except where noted.



her struggle with “German Thought” (the only sequence of reading from Chapters III and IV to be explicitly dramatized) is more notable for its frustration than its fulfillment: she “kept her eyes on the book and tried to fix her mind[, but it] had lately occurred to her that her mind was a good deal of a vagabond, and she had spent much ingenuity in training it to a military step... Just now she had given it marching orders, and it had been trudging over the sandy plains of a history of German Thought. Suddenly she became aware of a step very different from her own intellectual pace...” (29). While we are *told* that Isabel is a reader, all that we are *shown* is the abandonment of that process.

Every time Isabel is shown to take up a book, James’s novel impels her to put it down again. It was James’s admirer and friend Percy Lubbock who is credited with boiling down his readings of James into a kind of maxim, one set down in his *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) before becoming a commonplace of the creative writing classroom: show, don’t tell.<sup>100</sup> The practical application of the maxim has long outlived any of Lubbock’s actual phrasing, but Lubbock’s original sense that “the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shown*, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself” seems as much an epistemological principle as an aesthetic one.<sup>101</sup> Sensorial description acts as a superior method not merely of rendering but of *disclosing*. What Lubbock has taken from James is a sense that vision and cognition are synonymous processes, that what is shown thereby makes itself known.

It has been often acknowledged<sup>102</sup> that Henry James’s aesthetic vision is principally *about* vision, whether in the discrimination with which the artist surveys his material; in how his characters come to recognize the reality of their circumstances; or in how his reader might be shown something so subtle as a character’s awakened consciousness. This sense we first owe largely to James himself thanks to the series of prefaces produced for the New York Edition of his novels — and to the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* in particular — which establish each of these types of vision as among his novels’ primary concerns. Despite the nominal division of labor between author, character, and reader just suggested, James’s fiction is distinguished by the fact that all three types of perception are liable to be reduced to one and the same act, as in *The Ambassadors* (1903), where Lambert Strether’s observation of Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet sharing a boat together is the single stroke that allows Strether (and his reader) to comprehend the truth of Chad’s attachment.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> For the long afterlife of the phrase in creative writing, see Mark McGurl’s *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (2009).

<sup>101</sup> Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York, Viking, 1963), 32.

<sup>102</sup> As given in contemporary criticism by, for instance, Leo Bersani, Philip Weinstein, Sharon Cameron, or Kent Puckett in work that will be taken up more closely below, in addition to earlier commentators like Lubbock or R. P. Blackmur.

<sup>103</sup> The same play between the various types of vision suggested in Strether’s single comprehensive gaze is elucidated piece by piece or part by part in James’s preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*. There James famously begins with an account of James’s *literal* initial “vision,” one that we’re meant to think of as the point of origin for the novel itself. See Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Scribner’s, 1937), 42-43. That vision is of “a single character, the character and aspect of a particularly engaging young woman” who would eventually become Isabel Archer, and around whom it was James’s task “to imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favorable to the sense” of the character herself (Ibid., 43). As the Preface continues, however, James’s vision *of* Isabel gradually becomes the view that Isabel provides *into* a

So sweeping in fact is this distinction that it offers to organize the way in which *all* forms of knowledge for James might take shape. What Strether sees is not just an image but a larger story, replete with cause and effect, with beginning, middle, and end, behind it. The entire series of deductions that allow Strether to learn about Chad and Madame de Vionnet is submerged in just that one look. Recognition and cognition capture one and the same process. Where education, as we might understand it through Althusser or Butler, is primarily intended to socialize, it seems fitting then that these glances so often help to arrest the social relationships existing between all parties. Strether learns not only of the affair between his friends, but also where he *himself* stands in relation to either.

Can the same process be extended then to more formal types of education, like knowing Schopenhauer? “How delightful you should know old Schopenhauer!” the Princess Casamassima exclaims to Hyacinth Robinson in the novel that bears her name.<sup>104</sup> The Princess’s elation here captures what it is that makes Hyacinth such a promising potential terrorist: as Kent Puckett has detailed more extensively, Hyacinth’s refinement acts as a kind of social camouflage; knowing Schopenhauer is the very type of thing that allows him to show himself anywhere, even in the halls of the aristocracy. At this moment in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), the Princess has set out to learn the identity of Hyacinth’s confederate, a task accomplished through a chapter of questions and answers, but inaugurated, tellingly, by fixing “her eyes on Hyacinth’s” (286). When mention of Schopenhauer comes, the Princess has her answer: “The gentleman I have in my eye [(the anarchist Diedrich Hoffendahl)] is also German” (290). We might puzzle over how exactly one disclosure would truly provoke the other, but in any event, knowing Schopenhauer (and knowing that Hyacinth knows Schopenhauer, and that she knows both in turn) strikes the Princess as a kind of vision, a prospect “in [her] eye” at the precise moment that her eyes are locked with Hyacinth’s. This exact and unusual locution, to “ha[ve] *in* [one’s] eye” (my emphasis), is, as Puckett notes, the same thing that first brought Hyacinth to Hoffendahl’s attention: the anarchist “recognized Hyacinth as the sort of little chap he had in his eye” (294). Knowing Schopenhauer, as even an abstract body of knowledge, thus doubles as something that can actually be *seen*, written on Hyacinth’s body. What has vanished in this appraisal is any specific content actually owed to Schopenhauer himself. There is no metaphysics, no world as will, no ethics. Knowledge has been reduced to an entirely social function. It takes only a glance from Hoffendahl or a sustained look from the Princess for Hyacinth’s prospects to be exposed. What both see is constitutive of Hyacinth’s entire character, of his function for the terrorist plot and for the novel’s own. Hyacinth’s place in the novel is fixed by the knowledge that helps to place him socially.

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particular problem. “The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will” (Ibid., 46). The “individual vision,” we take it, is now the character’s, looking out from the house of fiction onto some definite vista. The perceptive faculties of the character generally finally culminate in but a single *specific* view, what James is willing to call “the best thing in the book” — Isabel, “under the spell of recognitions,” seated before her fire and “simply” “motionlessly *seeing*” the full history of her tale (Ibid., 57). James’s metaphor has now been stretched not merely to its limit but back to its very beginning, so that the vision *of* a character has produced a view of her own circumstances, which are, in fact, the very circumstances that James had to produce to adorn the original vision.

<sup>104</sup> Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 290.

Knowing a simple fact — knowing why it is, for instance, that your husband hates you — is the *same* as knowing Schopenhauer for James insofar as both types of knowledge are the products of a particular social arrangement. There really is only one type of knowledge in Henry James. Recognition, cognition, and their conflation, could then be seen as the signature gesture for James's concept of novelistic character, and for the work of the novel itself.

This process again might resemble the familiar arc of the *Bildungsroman*. “Whether cognitive or ethical, maturity,” the developmental imperative of the *Bildungsroman*, “always implies a broadening of consciousness,” Franco Moretti notes. “But once maturity is no longer entrusted to ‘actions,’ but only to the awareness of their meaning, then a wholly new paradigm has been created: the paradigm which will later be developed by Henry James and T. S. Eliot, and which places the broadening of consciousness above all other values.”<sup>105</sup> What James has “shown” in Isabel Archer's discarded books, however, is not the awakening of consciousness but consciousness's steady retreat. If showing is knowing, James lets us see only what Isabel still cannot bring herself to see, and thereby lets us know what she doesn't wish to know. By only showing us those times that Isabel cannot read, by capturing Isabel's inability to fix her attention on the printed words before her, what becomes known, even though it seems to have gone almost undocumented up until now, is the means by which discarding her books might act as a way for Isabel to unlearn her original education.

What is understood as Jamesian vision actually malfunctions in these moments, with perception now divorced from further cognition. Rather than forever looking to learn more about her self and circumstances, the progress of Isabel's plot is actually a progress of dropped volumes. If education is of consequence to the critic or stylist for the way in which it captures the narratological and characterological dimensions of the novel all at once, James's interest seems to be in the way that he might turn the former category towards a reconceptualization of the latter, of character. (If objects come to constitute character, in the way that Bill Brown suggests above, I would contend that James's interest lies less in what it means to acquire aesthetic objects than to be *dispossessed* of them, in both senses of the word.) Isabel's pursuit of personal independence is, like the novel of education it mimes, a developmental process, yet one that moves not from ignorance to knowledge, impoverishment to actualization, but instead from education to its opposite, towards artlessness.

I thus want to take up a similar instance of perception's uncoupling from cognition as symptomatic of what is at stake in the education and eventual independence of Isabel Archer. This moment is all the more precious for being the very basis of how the symmetry of showing and knowing in James is ordinarily understood. The case, as made plain in a comparison of the original sequence to James's revision for the New York Edition, might in fact be just the reverse. In so upending the status of vision in the education of Isabel Archer, James's revision inverts our sense of what character implies as a formal element, as a social problem, as a cognitive issue, and as the unrecognized feature upon which the early twentieth-century novel of education depends.

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What is famously referred to as *The Portrait of a Lady*'s “recognition” scene occurs in Chapter XL, about three-quarters of the way through the novel. Isabel, by this point, has married Gilbert Osmond and has come to regret her choice, though both she and we are uncertain of the grounds on which her dissatisfaction is based. The novel has actually managed to keep Isabel somewhat in the background of the narrative from the time of her marriage up until this point; the sudden chronological leap that begins with Chapter XXXVI elides Isabel's marriage entirely, dropping us into Ned Rosier's courtship of Pansy Osmond, and has thus left us in the hands only of secondary characters and secondary plots. Chapter XL is the first time that Isabel, now not as Isabel Archer

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<sup>105</sup> Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 222.

but Isabel Osmond, is allowed to again take center stage. The moment of her recognition coincides with her renewed position as the novel's primary characterological concern.

Isabel has come home from a drive and walk with Pansy when, in the version of the scene given by the New York Edition of the novel,

[j]ust beyond the threshold of the drawing-room [Isabel] stopped short, the reason for her doing so being that she had received an impression. The impression had, in strictness, nothing unprecedented; but she felt it as something new, and the soundlessness of her step gave her time to take in the scene before she interrupted it. Madame Merle was there in her bonnet, and Gilbert Osmond was talking to her; for a minute they were unaware that she had come in. Isabel had often seen that before, certainly; but what she had not seen, or at least had not noticed, was that their dialogue had for the moment converted itself into a sort of familiar silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. Madame Merle was standing on the rug, a little way from the fire; Osmond was in a deep chair, leaning back and looking at her. (Portrait NYE II.164)

Nothing is obviously amiss in the impression that Isabel receives other than the described qualities of the impression itself. Nevertheless, it is in the "relative positions" of the two ("Osmond seated, Madame Merle standing")<sup>106</sup> that Isabel is able to comprehend "something new." Her single glance forms "an act of recognition" that will "give Isabel her first glimpse into their intimacy."<sup>107</sup> For Madame Merle and Osmond had once been lovers, and that a gentleman would sit while a lady stands betrays a familiarity that can only be too familiar. ("Didn't he ask you to sit down?" Isabel asks, "smiling," once Madame Merle has attempted to flee the room.)<sup>108</sup> Through this single arresting impression, Isabel learns all about her husband's undisclosed relations to others that she ever really needs to know. It emboldens her, warps her ties to Madame Merle, and finally drives Isabel to the fireside reverie that James had called "the best thing in the book."<sup>109</sup>

The recognition scene is famous in contemporary criticism for precisely this reading: because the scene itself seems to make explicit the way in which perception and comprehension are made to work together in the novels of Henry James. "Apparently nothing is more stimulating, more exhilarating for James's characters than an act of recognition which they constantly and somewhat breathlessly confirm," writes Leo Bersani in providing part of the gloss above. "James's fiction," he continues,

is full of visual shocks which constitute crucial turning points for his heroes and heroines. Isabel's 'sense of accident' dies on the day she enters her drawing room and, in 'a sudden flicker of light,' sees her husband and Madame Merle in an attitude of 'familiar silence'; the way they have of being together in private strikes her as 'something detected.'<sup>110</sup>

Philip Weinstein uses the same scene, the "critical moment [when] Isabel glimpses Gilbert Osmond sitting while Madame Merle is standing next to him," as the prototypical example of "realist"

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<sup>106</sup> Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 133.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>109</sup> James, *The Art of the Novel*, 57. The import of the recognition scene for and even beyond the fireside sequence itself will be returned to shortly.

<sup>110</sup> Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 133.

recognition.<sup>111</sup> What Peter Brooks calls the melodrama of consciousness in James similarly “derives from the characters’ own dramatized apprehension of clashing moral forces,” which makes mere “recognition” “the stuff of heightened drama;” Brooks first locates this impetus both in *The Portrait of a Lady* and its Preface (as, we might infer, in Isabel’s first hint of an evil between Osmond and Madame Merle).<sup>112</sup> Writing as an attempted corrective to Bersani’s account more generally, Sharon Cameron matches Bersani’s moment of recognition with its shadow version: not a vision that somehow provokes a conscious knowledge, but an image of Madame Merle that swims up before Isabel while she’s already thinking about her.<sup>113</sup>

It should be noted that all of these critics privilege this single scene as representative of James and of the realist novel’s synonymy of vision and cognition more generally. But it should moreover be noticed that all understand this recognition as an intrinsically suspect thing. What for Bersani or Cameron or Weinstein seems artificial about Isabel’s intuition — Bersani’s chapter is called “The Jamesian Lie” — is that it amounts to a kind of epistemological overreach on James’s part.<sup>114</sup> James, as in my invoked example of Lambert Strether, does this kind of thing constantly, does it so casually that the effort to recover individual quotations seems almost beside the point.<sup>115</sup> But the apparent consistency of the effort alone would seem to establish these moments of recognition as what, for James, brings both art and intelligence together. You look, you know: and it is this very equation of aestheticism with epistemology that Bersani and Weinstein deplore.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 87-88. The second set of quotation marks around “realist” are nominally my own. Weinstein’s book depends throughout upon an opposition between modernist and realist modes of consciousness, and it is clear that Weinstein’s consideration of James places him in the latter context. I will have abundant cause to return to Weinstein’s book in what follows, but it is in part this characterization of James in this moment that I’d most vociferously wish to challenge.

<sup>112</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 6.

<sup>113</sup> Sharon Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 55-56.

<sup>114</sup> Cameron is less clear about her methodological investment in the original of Isabel’s “recognition,” but her claim is that while her understanding of Jamesian consciousness is “indebted” to Bersani’s, she objects to the “meaninglessness” of what Bersani recognizes there. Her proposed counterexample then would be offered as a mode of recognition *more* meaningful, one that does “not imply a single or sustained picture but rather connotes associations that make the image a disjunctive one,” or that, put differently, is not a more realist but a more *realistic* one (Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James*, 55.)

<sup>115</sup> Examples might be found, however, in *The Spoils of Poynton*, as Fleda Vetch disembarks from her train at the end of the novel and finds, “by the face of the man advancing to let her out,” that Poynton is no more. (See Henry James, *The Spoils of Poynton* [New York: Penguin, 1983], 190.) Almost the entirety of *What Maisie Knew* would make a similar case.

<sup>116</sup> Kent Puckett has somewhat differently tracked the altered perception of Jamesian vision, holding that whereas early critics like Lubbock understood the dynamics of showing over telling as abidingly essential “to the success of the novel form in general,” it would “seem inevitable” that more closely contemporary critics increasingly “suspicious of the complicity of vision and power” would “grow equally suspicious of Henry James.” See Kent Puckett, *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 121-122. Whereas the key shift for Puckett

Isabel's recognition of something amiss in her husband's relation to Madame Merle would thus seem to exemplify Isabel's intelligence at its most penetrating. There is something there, Isabel recognizes it, and the weight of her realization shapes the remainder of the novel. But we might wonder why, with a wealth of possible examples, James's critics would look to just *this* moment in particular. Perhaps the meaning of Isabel's gaze simply seems so transparent that there can be no mistake about its intended effect. It is James's Preface to the novel, after all, that so often mixes metaphors of vision and cognition, so Isabel's moment of reckoning would only be the natural apotheosis of the aesthetic.<sup>117</sup>

This, in short, is the version of the scene that we, as readers and critics, all think we know. But we know it so only largely through the New York Edition. The New York Edition text, quoted above, is the edition used by the Norton, Oxford, Dover, and Modern Library publications of *The Portrait of a Lady*; it was the text used by Penguin until 2011. (When Michael Gorra, in his study of the novel's genesis and revision, states that "For my classes I order the New York Edition," it is harder to imagine how he could order anything else.)<sup>118</sup> Even critics like Cameron who are invested in the "massive textual emendations" that James made to "the first three novels in the [New York Edition] series[,] *Roderick Hudson*, *The American*, and *The Portrait of a Lady*," recognize "conventional practice" as requiring citation of "an early text for *Roderick Hudson* and *The American* and the New York Edition for James's subsequent novels," thus dropping only *The Portrait* from the original trio of novels distinctly different between versions.<sup>119</sup>

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comes in terms of power rather than knowledge, the difference is not so great as the mere variance between terms would suggest. When Puckett holds that post-Foucauldian critics (among which we well might want to number Bersani) would object that "the form of James's novels" "enforces through a dictatorship underwritten by surveillance a very specific and very judgmental sort of vision," (Ibid., 122.) what renders the surveillance state suspect is its apparent panoptic omniscience: not only the ability to know, but the ability to know deeply and on demand. Discussion along these lines is pursued across a number of registers in the edited collection *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (University of California Press, 1993) edited by David Michael Levin.

<sup>117</sup> Dorothy J. Hale has most directly tackled the seeming polyvalence of James's strained metaphors of vision within the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, locating in the "house of fiction" an early understanding of alterity, whereby James is seen to insist upon a "negotiation between viewer and viewed that relies as much on the worthiness of the view as on the viewer's capacity to 'see'." See Dorothy J. Hale, *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 28-29. In these terms, "the artist can know his subject fully only by instantiating that subject; objective knowledge is achieved through artistic materialization" (Ibid., 35). The stakes of Jamesian vision thus remain epistemological, or in fact, more nearly pedagogical. What keeps "artistic vision" (to appropriate a phrase) in equilibrium is a mutual incomprehension that must work its way towards greater clarity. If we take James's series of metaphors seriously, the suggestion would be that James must use his first vision of a character to learn the "right relations," "the situations," "the fable" (James, *The Art of the Novel*, 43, 43, 44) that will account for her existence, while the character then must look back through those circumstances to learn of all that James has fashioned for her. The moment of "recognition" — in a phrase already laden with meanings as either vision or comprehension — should thus mark a decisive moment in James's novelistic practice, the moment when the reality of author and character comes into closest contact.

<sup>118</sup> Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel*, xix.

<sup>119</sup> Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James*, 181-182.

The reading of the scene advanced by Bersani, Cameron, and others is thus difficult for contemporary readers to avoid. In these terms, the only way to understand the scene is to see Isabel's recognition as a simultaneous instance of perception and coherent cognition. This understanding disappears, however if we look not to the New York Edition, but to James's original version of the same scene. What these readings of the recognition scene overlook is the degree to which a single editorial change made by James in 1906, at the same time that he was preparing his prefaces, actually leaves Isabel's gaze less potent than it was originally. Seeing only one version of what James has Isabel see without considering the relationship between the revision and its original, critics assume that it is here that James has brought showing and knowing to their finest point. Yet if this is what James had wanted from Isabel's recognition, he could well have left the scene as it was. Rather, James's one revision seems to suggest a different possibility for what this sequence offers Isabel — one that leaves her access to knowledge less open, but that makes her personal independence all the more assured for just that reason. Personal independence, in this later understanding of it, requires not recognition but blissful ignorance.

The version of Isabel's apprehension of something untoward in her husband's relationship with Madame Merle that would have appeared in nearly every instance prior to the New York Edition is almost identical to the passage quoted above. Between 1881 and 1906, an emdash becomes a comma and a single word is substituted. But it is worth replaying the passage in full if only to emphasize its very different effect.

Just beyond the threshold of the drawing-room [Isabel] stopped short, the reason for her doing so being that she had received an impression. The impression had, in strictness, nothing unprecedented; but she felt it as something new, and the soundlessness of her step gave her time to take in the scene before she interrupted it. Madame Merle *sat* there in her bonnet, and Gilbert Osmond was talking to her; for a minute they were unaware that she had come in. Isabel had often seen that before, certainly; but what she had not seen, or at least had not noticed—was that their dialogue had for the moment converted itself into a sort of familiar silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. Madame Merle was *standing* on the rug, a little way from the fire; Osmond was in a deep chair, leaning back and looking at her. (439, my emphasis)

“*Sat* there in her bonnet,” not “*was*,” as the New York Edition has it. Here that one word would threaten to reorganize the meaning of the scene as we've always understood it. With Madame Merle seated, no code has been broken; both Osmond and Madame Merle have comported themselves perfectly, and no intimacy is betrayed. And yet, in just the span of two sentences, we then find that “*Madame Merle was standing* on the rug.” Was she sitting at first, but *then* standing, we might wonder? Surely things like this happen often in literature; characters get up and move around without their every action being articulated. But no — for Isabel, “stopped short” in the doorway, seems to receive but a single impression of a moment frozen in time. What we've witnessed is Isabel's continual impression, but with Madame Merle in different places from one sentence to another.

How this impression unfolds, however, is crucial for any understanding of the scene, for it is by Madame Merle's posture alone that Isabel is able to adduce the impression's meaning. The very word that is most wrong here, “*sat*,” is the sole thing about this scene that readers need to be the most invested in. So much is at stake for this sequence that we have to wonder whether the word is simply an isolated misprint or typographical error. “*Madame Merle sat* there in her bonnet” is found, however, in the earliest serialized installment of the novel that ran in *Macmillan's Magazine* in July 1881.<sup>120</sup> It was through James's arrangement with Macmillan & Co., in fact, that all of James's

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<sup>120</sup> *Macmillan's Magazine* XLIV (July 1881): 175.

subsequent corrections must date; James sent the manuscript to the publisher's printer, who sent "two sets of proofs back to James, who revised and corrected them" before returning one set of proofs to *Macmillan's Magazine* and the other to the *Atlantic Monthly* for simultaneous serialization.<sup>121</sup> It was from sheets of *Macmillan's Magazine* that James subsequently worked while preparing the first book-length manuscript of the novel for Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, making another set of minor "stylistic" changes and "corrections of typographical errors" along the way.<sup>122</sup> Among these corrections are the kinds of fastidious changes that we expect from James; the eventual Houghton, Mifflin edition of October 1881 nevertheless still prints "sat."<sup>123</sup> Alone among early editions, the *Atlantic Monthly* serial installment for August 1881 has "Madame Merle stood there in her bonnet," but given that this precise locution appears nowhere else, not even in the New York Edition, it is in fact more likely that *this* correction over any of the others marks the intervention of an enterprising editor (likely James's friend William Dean Howells) who had caught the change in Madame Merle's positioning and had felt, rightly, the inevitable awkwardness.<sup>124</sup> It is more difficult to imagine James himself making this change without realizing the magnitude of its meaning, and without then being sure to correct subsequent proofs to both Houghton, Mifflin and to Macmillan for the 1883 book-length British publication.

This same text, in other words, with "sat there in her bonnet" prominently featured at the most pressing of moments, had passed before James's eyes not just once but any number of times, escaping no less than two separate sets of corrections. James's eventual revision of "sat" to "was" for the New York Edition is not the mere rectification of a misprint, but a more foundational change in how consciousness can be portrayed. For what the 1881 edition offers, with Madame Merle sitting at one moment and standing at the next, is immediate access *to* Isabel's consciousness. Stopped short in the doorway, Isabel "take[s] in the scene," and seems to see "Madame Merle [sitting] there in her bonnet." Continuing to scan the room, she sees Osmond talking to Madame Merle, but only then does she realize that she must modify her original impression: no, Madame Merle *isn't* sitting, but has been standing all along. The change in Madame Merle's posture captures a recorded change in Isabel's comprehension at the moment of perception. Isabel first saw nothing wrong with the scene, but then, turning back, realized "something new." The effect is the nearest literary equivalent to a double-take, one that never makes Isabel's shock explicit, but that captures her cognition through her sequence of impressions alone. Here, in the original, would be the ultimate convergence of showing and knowing, letting knowledge take shape *solely* through the enumeration of what is perceived. In staging Isabel's mounting awareness, James further makes the shock of what Isabel takes in most palpable to his reader, for surely our only possible reaction to finding Madame Merle in different places from moment to moment is a surprise commensurate with Isabel's own. By giving us Isabel's thoughts in motion, James has, as early as 1881, produced stream of consciousness narration.

To have Madame Merle sitting "there in her bonnet" from the first, only to have her standing a moment later, is to introduce something odd into James's depiction of Isabel Archer, but also into the history of the novel more generally. If Michael Gorra can call *The Portrait of a Lady* "the most searching account of a moment-by-moment flow of consciousness that any novelist had yet

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<sup>121</sup> "Note on the Texts," *Henry James, Novels: 1881-1886* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 1239.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *The Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1881), 357.

<sup>124</sup> *The Atlantic Monthly* XLVIII (Aug. 1881): 217.



attempted,”<sup>125</sup> it is perhaps because the very notion of “stream of consciousness” narration, as we know it best from Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, has so much characterized the work of fiction *after* Henry James that his admirers are eager for the Master to receive what credit could be his due.<sup>126</sup> For if “stream of consciousness” as a concept seems to have been *suggested* by James (through his various prefaces, and through their eventual subsumption by those like Percy Lubbock), and seems too to have been developed *around* him (with William James’s 1890 *Principles of Psychology* generally receiving credit for the first use of the term), there is the assumption that stream of consciousness was at least never quite *written* by Henry James. Yet Madame Merle’s sudden shift from sitting to standing in the 1881 version of *The Portrait of a Lady* can really only be motivated as a shift in Isabel’s understanding as that understanding develops. Isabel’s recognition scene ought, in these terms, to be seen as James’s earliest experiment in stream of consciousness, as the first moment in what we’ve come to think of as modernist narrative style.<sup>127</sup> But it was this reading of the scene that, despite its immediacy, despite its originality, James would efface come 1906.

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<sup>125</sup> Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel*, xvi; my emphasis.

<sup>126</sup> As, in fact, is Gorra’s eventual claim; see *ibid.*, 235-236.

<sup>127</sup> Stream of consciousness as a formal device is more frequently first attributed to Edouard Dujardin’s *Les Lauriers sont coupés*, published in 1887, a short novel read some years later by a young James Joyce. See, for this last, Vladimir Tumanov, *Mind Reading: Unframed Interior Monologue in European Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 55. Others are willing to attribute *something* of the same technique to Henry James, but again, more in spirit than in practice. Katharine Gerould mentions that James “introduced the method into English fiction,” but without supplying a specific instance. See Gerould, “The Stream of Consciousness,” *Saturday Review of Literature* IV (Oct. 22, 1927): 233. In his *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams, in fact, singles out a different moment from *The Portrait of a Lady* as approximating the method, Isabel’s famed fireside reverie of Chapter XLII, which is “given over to the narrator’s description of the sustained process of Isabel’s memories, thoughts, and varying feelings.” See Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Thomson, Wadsworth, 2004), 308. While I will argue against even this reading of Isabel’s reflection as an animation of the “waking mind” (*Ibid.*, 307) in what follows, the key difference between Abrams’s distinction and what I am imputing to the 1881 version of the recognition scene is betrayed in Abrams’s own phrase, “the *narrator’s* description” (*Ibid.*, 308; my emphasis). Although the fireside scene seems to present something of Isabel’s thoughts, the chapter is still taken in hand largely by the narrator. While we could impute much of Chapter XLII directly to Isabel’s conscious thoughts simply by converting the *nto* first-person present tense, certain phrases would resist the attempt; when the narration notes that Isabel “asked herself with dismay whether Lord Warburton were pretending to be in love with Pansy” the sentence contains a verb phrase, “asked herself,” announcing an action that Isabel would apparently already be undergoing (*Portrait* 455). If we have thus far been in Isabel’s mind, the phrase “asked herself” announces the narrator’s intervention anew.

What the 1881 version of the recognition scene uniquely offers then is an understanding of Isabel’s consciousness as perceived *by* Isabel. The achievement of the earliest version of Isabel’s recognition scene is that it offers untrammelled access to a character’s thoughts as those thoughts are perceived. It is this understanding, I am contending, that James recognizes and contests in his revision to the New York Edition.

Despite its generally accepted provenance, stream of consciousness goes by a variety of different names depending on how the access it affords is relayed (whether direct or indirect, first person or third, quoted or narrated, and so on). The unpacking of these various distinctions has been

In the 1881 edition of the recognition scene, James anticipates a modernism that he subsequently retreats from. And it is in tracing what would warrant that retreat that we can begin to perceive James's investment not in knowledge or intelligence, but in artlessness. Here especially art would *seem* as much a show of intelligence as critics have alleged, for the novel's culmination of its art would show nothing *but* the workings of intelligence. Isabel sees, she knows, and we see Isabel's mind at work. In this context, recognizing Isabel's impression as stream of consciousness would only tie her capacity for "being and seeing" to her "intelligence"<sup>128</sup> more tightly, for James would have perfectly paced the movement of Isabel's mind at work to the sweep of her gaze across the drawing room. Leo Bersani's observation that "James's fiction is full of visual shocks which constitute crucial turning points" in what his heroes are made to know would only be the more potent,<sup>129</sup> for the scene would have formally enacted Isabel's mounting awareness, showing us her rejection of one perceived item of knowledge and its replacement with a truer one.

Appropriately, as a depiction of education's socializing function, what James shows in the 1881 edition is both a cognitive process *and* the way in which that process has been prepared by certain social norms. In capturing Isabel's stream of consciousness, we are given immediate insight not only into Isabel's thoughts, but also into the degree to which those thoughts have been shaped by her education. Coming onto the scene, Isabel witnesses what all her education has prepared her to see: if a lady is standing, then a gentleman must also stand. In effect, it is Isabel's expectation for what proper conduct would require that *produces* the original vision. Madame Merle seated there in her bonnet is what Isabel has been trained to expect. But of course that education has not prepared her for the reality of the scene, which Isabel comprehends at the next moment. What the recognition scene here narrates is education from the inside, with its required forms presumed, pulled apart, and then reassembled as new knowledge. James's narrative technique gives his reader access to every aspect of Isabel's epistemological imputations.

This distinction would stand, undisturbed, for twenty-five years; in the same way that the New York Edition is now almost impossible for us to escape, it is the force of "sat," when almost anything else would read more naturally, that would have proved inescapable to any of James's original readers. Isabel's recognition, as the original printings from 1881 to 1906 would have it,

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attempted most rigorously by Dorrit Cohn in *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Cohn's project, in essence, is to locate formal antecedents and extensions for Dujardin's method that might do something *like* stream of consciousness in different ways. For my purposes, however, it is the broadest definition of what the technique requires, not the more specific, that is of greatest value. The definition of stream of consciousness that I would offer is closest to that advanced by Lawrence E. Bowling: "the stream of consciousness technique may be defined as that narrative method by which the author attempts to give a direct quotation of the mind — not merely of the language area but of the whole consciousness. Like the kind of direct quotation which is applied to the spoken word, the stream of consciousness technique may be applied exclusively throughout a whole book or section of a book, or intermittently in short fragments. The only criterion is that it introduce us directly into the interior life of the character, without any intervention by way of comment or explanation on the part of the author." See Bowling, "What is the Stream of Consciousness Technique?," *PMLA* 65.4 (June 1950): 345. It is the wild disjunction of "sat" and "standing" in the 1881 edition of *The Portrait of a Lady* that most accurately captures this dynamic.

<sup>128</sup> Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness*, 15.

<sup>129</sup> Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 133.

would give us direct access to Isabel's process of coming to learn. "Showing," from Percy Lubbock to R. P. Blackmur, had been offered as a means of making "knowing" most plain. And yet James's final revision of "sat" to "was" in a single stroke uncouples the heightened access we'd have had to both processes.

This is not exactly to say that James has, in 1906, made his novel objectively worse by abandoning the more experimental technique, but only that by doing so, he altered the way in which his novel could be read and understood. So far as I am aware, no critic has yet noticed James's amendment or supplied a motive for it; even Michael Gorra, who is sensitive to the minor changes to *The Portrait of a Lady*, approaches this particular sequence only in its later rendition. If James is willing to strip his novel of what would be the strongest possible description of one of its most notable features, it would seem that the amendment speaks to a different understanding of the novel than even James's immediate commentators, like Lubbock, had assumed. "*Was* there in her bonnet" offers not only a different kind of access but a different kind of education, an education that *isn't* education at all. Where "sat" had given us immediate insight into the expectations that Isabel's education had prepared her to see, here Isabel makes no such presumption. In the later edition, Isabel never sees her way wrongly. Without the abrupt revision to Madame Merle's posture, "was" shows the social convention already severed. Isabel sees something there, she recognizes it, but the scene is never filtered through what Isabel once knew or thinks she knows. *Whether* a gentleman should sit while a lady stands is immaterial to the reality that Isabel witnesses. The New York Edition's version of the scene has provided a way for Isabel to unlearn her education — a term that will be taken up more fully below — in two ways at once: by revising her relationship to Osmond and Madame Merle while simultaneously casting off the understanding that had taught her what proper conduct she should expect to see. What is betrayed in the original reading of the recognition scene would be the thought that existence is or ought to be a teleological accrual of impressions that can be counted as knowledge. It isn't unthinkable that James would have come to this conviction by 1906. The insistence upon ignorance that James's revision to the New York Edition supplies only emphasizes an understanding that Isabel Archer attests to even in the novel's original edition. It is only the New York Edition that formalizes Isabel's ideal.

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Along with Isabel's perfect willingness to "sacrifice" her "ideas" if only she could gain "the satisfaction of feeling herself loved for it" (461), one of the novel's further surprises is Isabel's apparent indifference to appearing ignorant. When Isabel is first asked to meet Gilbert Osmond, she finds herself enervated by "the effort to appear as intelligent as she believed Madame Merle had described her, and from the fear (very unusual with her) of exposing—not her ignorance; for that she cared comparatively little—but her possible grossness of perception" (285). Isabel simply sees too much, and she'd hate for her host to think that she saw the wrong things. If we were ever to think that Isabel's intellection and her capacity for vision were identical attributes, we'd here need to revise the appraisal, for it is Isabel's "ignorance" that is even offered as something that might be confused with her expansiveness "of perception." Yet of the two, it is ignorance that is the lesser of the two evils. Although the sentence is evidently meant to capture Isabel's first anxieties on meeting Osmond (anxieties that will only sharpen after the two have married), what can be easily missed is the boldness of Isabel's "comparatively little" care for her ignorance at this moment. Isabel is willing to compromise on her "grossness of perception" — she "was very careful, therefore, as to what she said, as to what she noticed or failed to notice[,] more careful than she had ever been before" — but her ignorance is the one curious commodity that her would-be-lover must either take or leave.

Even if Isabel is to be ignorant, in whatever sense we take it that she understands the word, her ignorance is, at the very least, her own. Strange though it seems, the "effort to appear as intelligent" as Madame Merle had made her out to be is not still incompatible with her remaining ignorant in

private. Isabel strains to appear intelligent, worries over it, but whether her ignorance shows is of no concern. Appearing intelligent is a production, something put on because the social situation demands it, whereas ignorance is a silent soliloquy, only for one, and that even all the rest of the public performance may not wholly betray. “If there is a thing in the world that I am fond of,” Isabel had told Caspar Goodwood, “it is my personal independence” (174), and while we can struggle to square this sentiment with her willingness to perform for Gilbert Osmond, it is her ignorance alone to which she can now remain independently indifferent.

What Isabel means by “my personal independence” is given some clarification when her American friend Henrietta Stackpole demands a reason for her rejection of Goodwood some pages later. Henrietta asks if Isabel knows where she is going, to which Isabel responds, “No, I haven’t the least idea, and *I find it very pleasant not to know*. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can’t see—that’s my idea of happiness” (180, my emphasis). These are the lines seized upon by Leon Edel and others as evidence of Isabel’s Bovaryism, and indeed, in response Henrietta contends that Isabel sounds “like the heroine of an immoral novel,” but even before Henrietta can make the comparison explicit, she makes another, ostensibly more obscure argument: “Mr. Goodwood certainly didn’t *teach you* to say such things” (ibid, my emphasis). Henrietta, however, seems to have missed the point. It is just because no one *taught her* where to go that Isabel so enjoys her — sightless — ride. For all her early attempts at self-education, whatever had compelled Isabel to “trudg[e] over the sandy plains of a history of German Thought,” the impulse assuredly wasn’t her own (29). Once reluctantly schooled in Schopenhauer, Isabel now simply “find[s] it very pleasant not to know” or, to put it slightly differently, to not to *have* to know (180). The carriage, after all, is already rattling along. And books, from even before this moment, will keep falling from her hands.

Isabel’s desire for “personal independence” is again and again cast as an attempt to distance herself not only from the claims of others, but specifically from the systems of expected knowledge that they might impose. Even in her original discussion with Goodwood, Isabel holds that she wishes “to choose her fate and know some thing of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me” (175). This same notion is captured in advice that Osmond gives Isabel in their first conversation, advice that we could think bad because Osmond gives it had Isabel not already made it clear that she more or less lives by it. “Don’t mind anything that anyone tells you about anyone else. Judge everyone and everything for yourself,” Osmond suggests, to which Isabel replies “That’s what I try to do, but when you do that people call you conceited” (271). There’s an oblique lesson about marriage buried somewhere in this anecdote. Osmond, possibly taking the two-become-one marriage union at its most literal, doesn’t see himself as a part of the “everyone else” that Isabel should ignore. But Isabel’s ideal world would be one that excluded the influence of people precisely like Osmond, one where the idea of independence hadn’t already been tarnished by what “other people” had chosen to “call” it.<sup>130</sup>

Others might call Isabel’s ideal conceited; should we, in turn, call it anti-social, in something like the colloquial sense? The practical consequences of what such an existence would entail are suggested in Isabel’s late reflection on Ralph Touchett’s fragile health, which had seemed to Isabel “not a limitation, but a kind of intellectual advantage; it absolved him from all professional and official emotions and left him the luxury of being simply personal” (364). Here we catch an echo of Isabel’s preferred “personal” independence. But it is worth further noting that what Ralph seems “absolved from” is, precisely, the influence of his schooling. Although he remains one of the most

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<sup>130</sup> This, of course, is the ultimate revelation about Osmond’s character: that while he feigns not to care for the world, he is totally consumed and constituted by it.

likable characters in the novel, we know almost nothing about Ralph Touchett's life apart from his education:

Ralph spent several terms in an American school, and took a degree at an American college... Oxford swallowed up Harvard, and Ralph became at last English enough. His outward conformity to the manners that surrounded him was none the less the mask of a mind that greatly enjoyed its independence... [A]t Oxford he distinguished himself, to his father's ineffable satisfaction, and the people about him said it was a thousand pities so clever a fellow should be shut out from a career. (42-43)

Ralph does briefly take a position "on a high stool in his father's bank," but "at the end of some eighteen months he became conscious that he was seriously out of health... He had to give up work and embrace the sorry occupation known as taking care of one's self" (44).<sup>131</sup> A sorry occupation, but one for which Ralph is not, finally, sorry. What Ralph loses by his poor health is only the kind of exercise that his father and his Oxford friends had intended for him, exercise that up until that point had been entirely academic. (One of these Oxford friends is Mr. Bantling, who after following Henrietta Stackpole to the United States seems principally confounded by "the [American] school-system; it seemed really too much for him" (528).) Ralph's "independence" characterizes his original nature, and it is this ("personal") quality that Ralph's renunciation of his Oxford training permits him to enjoy. That it was Ralph's father who had urged him on from Harvard to Oxford (and on to the bank) in the first place but again affirms Althusser's truism about the way in which social subjects are first constituted. Ralph's schooling is not only about being educated, but about being *English*, "at last English enough" in the happy estimation of Daniel Touchett. National character and familial character come together to form Ralph through one and the same process. Only when he has left his education behind does Ralph have the opportunity to become "simply personal."

Ralph, Isabel sees, is at once simply personal but also still *personable*. In coming to a conclusion about Ralph, Isabel then has only developed her own notion of character, one that would be not anti-social, but merely anti-socialized. One of the particular challenges of writing about Henry James is that his characters all seem to have their own conceptions of character, so that where James himself comes down, between one character and another, is difficult to impute. It has already been mentioned that Madame Merle too has her own sense of character, one revealed in the "bold analysis of the human personality" that produces the reflection that "Isabel was fond of metaphysics" (218). But what the confusion over the state of Isabel's intellection would suggest is that Isabel's understanding of character remains an unsettled one, the elaboration of which constitutes the very work of the novel. That Madame Merle's "bold analysis of the human personality" can even be so judged shows that it can be stated, defined, summed up and weighed. Isabel's own position, however, is never anywhere so clearly spelled out — it would in fact seem to fall short of a coherent "conception" of character at all, for it lacks the ideational clarity of anything that could be concretely known.

It is the clarification of Isabel's motivating mode of character than I am proposing forms the major narrative operation of the novel. The many modes of knowledge that have made Isabel Archer — her itinerant education in Europe, her extensive readings in her childhood library, her expectations for her future — are the things that the novel's portrayal of her will finally attempt to unlearn. To the extent that education is of interest in fiction for its tendency to capture the

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<sup>131</sup> The account given of Ralph's education in the text proper is far longer than what can be excerpted here. In fact, even the mention of Ralph's "eighteen months" of employment is offered as a counter-point to the length of his education: at least enough time to earn "a degree at an American college" in addition to "three years in residence at Oxford."

narratological and characterological at once, *The Portrait of a Lady*'s narration becomes a way of disassembling the grounds for what Isabel Archer's character is or ought to look like. Narrative (rather than any "bold analysis") becomes an alternative to definition, working its way towards a prospect that is real because witnessed, but that is expressly not cognizable. It is thus only the more fitting that the stakes of this prospect should be traced back to Isabel's recognition scene, or rather, to James's revision of it, for Isabel's personal independence develops through the continued uncoupling of cognition and perception. What remains in James's final understanding of Isabel Archer is not even *James's* understanding of Isabel Archer, but the way in which Isabel Archer's sense of herself comes to be expressed without ever being formally defined. Rather than stating what an ideal model of character might be, rather than leaving it readily cognizable, the novel itself becomes an exercise purely in perception: of *showing* Isabel's character take shape at the constant and conscious expense of what about that process might be *knowable*. Reading *The Portrait of a Lady* is thus a record of mounting ignorance, showing us a subject's attempts to sacrifice the qualities of her education to leave her character alone thereby intact.

Isabel, in other words, must choose: whether between Ralph or Madame Merle or Schopenhauer. Insofar as notions of character can be stated outright at all, Madame Merle's analysis forms a particularly useful one, for it gives us a window onto the field of possibilities from which Isabel may select, reject, or simply not choose. "When you have lived as long as I," Madame Merle offers in her "bold analysis," "you will see that every human being has his shell, and that you must take the shell into account... There is no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we are each of us made up of a cluster of appurtenances. What do you call one's self? Where does it begin? where does it end?" (218). Madame Merle, in other words, simply resists the thought that such a thing as a wholly "personal independence" is even possible. But this is the first of many avenues along which Isabel "was unable to accompany her friend" (218). Just pages earlier, Isabel had identified Madame Merle's single flaw in the fact that "her nature had been too much overlaid by custom and her angles too much smoothed. She had become too flexible, too supple; she was too finished, too civilised. She was, in a word, too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are supposed to have been intended to be" (208). That final locution — "are supposed to have been intended to be" — is particularly dense and particularly choice, for it sums up the multiple degrees to which Madame Merle's existence is socially imbricated: "supposed" by whom? "intended" by whom? So little does a specific answer even seem to matter that we can understand Madame Merle as the social product of simply everyone and of everything. But like for Isabel herself, Madame Merle's mode of character was not one that she simply donned from whole-cloth; rather she had actively "*rid herself*" of any manner that didn't belong to the age of "country-house life" (208, my emphasis). Isabel's final thought here briefly anticipates Madame Merle's later "metaphysical" analysis of her own condition: she "found it difficult to think of Madame Merle as an isolated figure; she existed only in her relations with her fellow-mortals" (208). (Later, Osmond will say that he "never knew a person whose life touched so many other lives" (257).) The progress of Madame Merle's plot, as understood in her own bold analysis, should seem fairly familiar by now. Madame Merle's self-conception would understand herself as, in fact, the product of the *Bildungsroman* plot: little by little, she has been schooled in what social graces to adopt, and having done so, her story is essentially over, her place in the world secured. This last phrase, "her place in the world," might seem allegorical, but it is in fact only too literal, for one further thing we know about Madame Merle is that she is forced to flit from country house to country house, depending upon her many relations with her associates to sustain her existence. If the hero of the successful *Bildungsroman* finally finds himself at home among his neighbors, Madame Merle has only taken this ambit one step farther, finding a home that exists in entirely relational terms, not among but *as part of* her neighbors. Serena

Merle is assembled from her appurtenances; she has learned, from Brooklyn to the ballroom, only how best to define herself through others.

Ralph Touchett and Madame Merle, the one who provided her with money as a kind of experiment in how she would use her independence, the other who provided her with the marriage that would limit that independence as much as it ever could be — these are the two figures who “made” Isabel Archer, as suggested in Madame Merle’s final dialogue with Isabel: The comparison between the two is only, in a turn of phrase that seems to prefigure the final exchange of *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), made obliquely. Ralph “made you a rich woman,” Madame Merle reveals, to which Isabel responds “*He* made me—?” (600). The emdash keeps Isabel from ever fully articulating her thought, but the word that her italics seem here to want is the phrase’s natural complement: “*You* made me.” It would be reductive to call these two characters “positive” and “negative” examples for Isabel respectively, for having been “made” by anyone *at all* is a prospect from which Isabel recoils; Isabel’s personal independence seems to depend upon dispensing with examples to begin with. But no sooner has Madame Merle made the disclosure than, months and pages after her recognition scene, Isabel again “stood staring; she seemed today to be living in a world illumined by lurid flashes” (600). In Madame Merle, Isabel has only a further education to endure; each “lurid flash” but lets her know that what she had thought had sprung from herself was instead a product of her circumstances.

Here again is a moment where knowledge, in the sense of knowing why your husband hates you, seems to come closest to an understanding of knowledge in its more nearly pedagogical sense. The “illuminations” that Isabel is subject to might be the work of a particularly malicious schoolmistress, for what lesson Madame Merle would have Isabel learn is only that she too might be assembled from her appurtenances. Like Hyacinth Robinson’s “knowing Schopenhauer,” the exposure of how Isabel has been “made” would serve only to fix Isabel into a precisely defined (and precisely managed) characterological function.

Ralph at least never seems to burden Isabel with anything more to know. Having left his own education behind to become simply “personal,” Ralph’s entire plan in willing his father’s inheritance to Isabel depends upon her never learning that he has done so. When asked by his dying father why he cannot simply marry Isabel, and so use his own fortune to influence her, Ralph reminds him that “[s]he’s entirely independent of me” (Portrait 198). And so, presumably, would he like it to remain; rather, it will be enough for Ralph simply “*to see* what she does with herself” (ibid, my emphasis).<sup>132</sup> Where Madame Merle’s is an investment in blind knowledge, Ralph’s is the interest in sight alone.

Shortly before his death, Isabel tries to impart something of her story to Ralph, taking it as the one thing that “mattered now,” “the only knowledge that was not pure anguish—the knowledge that they were looking at the truth together” (619). *All* knowledge but this knowledge is torment, we’re told, but whatever kind of knowledge this is — “she wished to say everything” (ibid) — Ralph will not let her say it. “I only want you to understand,” Isabel says, “I always tried to keep you from understanding; but that’s all over,” to which Ralph interjects that he has “always understood” (619). As the chapter concludes, the same formulation recurs again, with Isabel now adding that “We needn’t speak to understand each other” (620). In Ralph’s final moments (in a sentiment that I will take up below), there is thus barely even language left that would let anything further be known. The

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<sup>132</sup> Ralph’s sentiment is true to the last. When, after her marriage to Osmond, Ralph risks his health to see Isabel again, Lord Warburton warns him that Osmond will not tolerate the intrusion, but Ralph notes that this is precisely “what [he] want[s] to see” (429). This, Warburton reminds, may well lead to Ralph’s own death, but nevertheless Ralph protests that “there are things I’m curious to see... I’m not much interested in my health, and I’m deeply interested in Mrs. Osmond” (ibid).

“only knowledge that was not pure anguish” needn’t be communicated, but only looked at.<sup>133</sup> “If you have been hated,” Ralph tells Isabel, in his last lines of dialogue, “so you have also been loved” (621). Loved, we imagine, for all that Ralph has let himself see of her character. To “understand” Isabel’s character, her story, as Ralph suggests that he does, only requires that he see her, independent of any conscious knowledge. For Isabel to form her own character requires only that she do the same.

What is privileged in these moments is Isabel’s own faculties, a kind of impressionism free from additional comprehension. Isabel herself would come to see without recognizing anything, owning her own perceptions without requiring any further cognition. Only “a kind of” impressionism, particularly troubled as this phrase is, of course, by its association with slightly later figures in novelistic history like Joseph Conrad or Ford Madox Ford. Yet if an emblematic instance of literary Impressionism is given by a moment from Conrad’s “Youth” (1898) quoted by Ian Watt, where the “text gives a chronological sequence of momentary sensations in the protagonist’s mind[,] and the reader finds it quite natural that there should be a delay before Marlow’s brain finally decodes his impressions into their cause” (that what Marlow has just narrated is his experience of a series of explosions), then the kind of cognition that Impressionism with a capital “I” invites is in fact the furthest thing from what I mean.<sup>134</sup> Rather, what I mean is a privileging of impression in the sense that James himself uses the term when he notes that Isabel, entering her drawing room, “receive[s] an impression” of something amiss between her husband and Madame Merle (Portrait NYE II.164). There is a perception there, but one that is not, after the New York Edition, readily cognizable. It has in fact escaped mention thus far that even my original account of this passage in the New York Edition relies on a patchwork of critical paraphrase, for the very suspicion that Isabel’s impression communicates is nowhere so directly supplied by the text. What it is that Isabel has taken in is indeed a “glimpse into [Osmond and Madame Merle’s] intimacy,”<sup>135</sup> but all that the novel itself records is the *glimpse*, with any ideational content, any interpretation, any cognition, entirely absent.

That it is Madame Merle who herself is in question in our two versions of the recognition scene, between the original publication and the New York Edition, is thus eminently appropriate, because it is through Madame Merle that Isabel’s identity is made, and against Madame Merle that her ideal is constituted. (We might recall too that it was Madame Merle who had made it necessary for Isabel “to appear as intelligent as she believed Madame Merle had described her” (285). The need for a public display of intellect, and Isabel’s comparatively private indifference towards her ignorance, was itself of Madame Merle’s making.) Such a notion, given Isabel’s desire to be defined by no one, almost threatens a paradox. But that is why it seems all the more pressing that the conditions that Isabel would have to unlearn are only insisted upon formally, and never seem to come to Isabel’s conscious knowledge. Isabel’s own concept of character can be narrated, but never defined. “I am not, and will not be, Serena Merle” is a phrase that never comes to Isabel’s lips. And yet if Isabel is able to understand her independence in anything at all like these terms, Serena Merle’s example has nevertheless proved instructive. The tragedy of Isabel Archer is not that she must be hated for her

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<sup>133</sup> We could read this scene, in fact, only by its glances: when at first Ralph “lay with his face turned to Isabel and his large unwinking eyes open into her own” (617) and then “gazed at her a little, and for the first time his fixed eyes lowered their lids[, b]ut he raised them in a moment” (619), all while Isabel “crie[s] through her tears,” (621) until, finally, the chapter closes with Isabel in a pose of “still deeper prostration,” (ibid) which is to say, face down.

<sup>134</sup> Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 176.

<sup>135</sup> Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 133.



intellect, but that she has already, in tragic style, lost her struggle before it has begun. But the novel can nevertheless begin to model what her process of unlearning might look like.

Isabel's recognition of something between Osmond and Madame Merle in the drawing room is revised, in other words, because *it has to be*. What James does in the New York Edition is only to double down on an insistence on ignorance that the original novel had already long developed. On the basis of all of her dropped volumes, of the many kinds of education that Isabel Archer must overcome if she is to *become* the kind of independent character that she wants so badly to be, the level of access to Isabel's awakening consciousness provided by the 1881 edition would amount almost to a violation. Although it robs the reader of access to Isabel's stream of consciousness, although it deprives James of a formally innovative gesture, the effacement of "sat" for "was" is the only version of Isabel's recognition that allows Isabel to see the character that she has been made to be without formal depiction of her coming to that knowledge. Isabel's "impression" in that drawing room, in essence, is that she has been tricked: that all of her education, all of her "appurtenances," have brought her only to this. For her to recognize this fact, she might be able to see it, but her own sense of herself, and James's, in the final reckoning, requires that she now not be made to know anything more.

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If Henry James's revision to *The Portrait of a Lady* foregoes an element seemingly constitutive of modernist practice, we might nevertheless think that James has thus made a no less appreciable contribution to a significant if under-theorized field of inquiry: character. For that James, at the moment of the New York Edition and its prefaces, has come to the doorstep of a modernist sensibility would now go more or less uncontested. It is just this conviction that renders *The Portrait of a Lady* so interesting to Michael Gorra, who notes that the novel today "appears to look backward and forward at once," as "the link between George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, the bridge across which Victorian fiction stepped over into modernism."<sup>136</sup> But no matter what James takes on formally or technically, critics generally understand his style as still wedded to a realist concept of character. When Philip Weinstein isolates Isabel's glimpse of "Gilbert Osmond sitting while Madame Merle is standing next to him"<sup>137</sup> as the emblematic instant of realist recognition, even taking into account the only partial truth of the paraphrase, what he in part is resisting is the suggestion that the recognition remains *Isabel's*. "[I]n the subject-centered, subject-moralized world of nineteenth-century realism—in that unforgiving space of total emplotment—no seeing past the drama of character," Weinstein earlier writes, "is possible."<sup>138</sup> (Even so "formally innovative" a novel as *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) remains "classically realist" in Weinstein's terms because "Kate

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<sup>136</sup> Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel*, xvi. We'll note that Gorra needn't provide any additional citation for this claim, so much is his patently lovely phrase built around a more or less pat understanding. James's own relation to George Eliot is taken up exhaustively in James's own writings (see particularly James's review of *Middlemarch*), and has been discussed in detail by Kent Puckett among others, whereas James's influence on Virginia Woolf has been sketched in *her* own writings, and explored most directly by Leon Edel, the biographer, to varying degrees, of both. One cannot here underestimate the influence of the surprisingly intimate scale of James's social world: that James knew Eliot, and would later fold reference to her back into Isabel's reading list at the time of the New York Edition revision, will be returned to momentarily.

<sup>137</sup> Weinstein, *Unknowing*, 87-88.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

Croy's voyage of becoming is unmistakably launched in [its] first sentence."<sup>139</sup>) By contrast, Weinstein sees the work of modernist fiction (the sub-title to his book) as built on an attempt to "unknow" (its title, stripped of its gerund) the qualities of character identity that we would think to be integral to the realist novel. I will own, to begin with, that I think it paramount to *The Portrait of a Lady*. "Modernist and postmodern narratives," for Weinstein, however, "refuse to endorse the economy of the same that covertly subtends the realist subject's encounter with the other. They do this by attacking realist narrative's constitutive compact joining subject, space, and time."<sup>140</sup> This tripartite division (subject, space, time) structures Weinstein's account.<sup>141</sup>

But James's revision to Chapter XL's recognition scene should suggest a fundamental fragility underlying Weinstein's account of these three sides to the nominally "realist" pact. When Isabel sees Madame Merle sitting, only to find her standing sentences later in the *original* version of the scene, James would seem to be insisting upon the most rigid fixity of space, time, and subject possible; what I've described as a literary double-take would record a moment-by-moment account of Isabel's gaze as it takes in each physical detail of the room. In the revised version of the scene, this unity is sacrificed. Time and space become arbitrary, and only character remains. Yet *what* remains, and *how*, seems all the same to speak to the systematic attempt to unknow post-Enlightenment notions of being that Weinstein describes as the work of modernist fiction. Even by making his single amendment, James has foreclosed the kind of access to Isabel's dawning knowledge that would permit Weinstein to see the scene as representative of realist recognition. Weinstein's concept of "unknowing" could then productively be advanced by a clearer understanding of how character *alone* is made and sustained.<sup>142</sup>

I would thus offer my own critical definition of what James takes on: not unknowing, but "unlearning." For unlearning requires both a specific content and a specific agent. The process begins with a subject whose education is always already complete. The work of the rest of the narrative would thus attempt, little by little, to exorcise the traces of socialization that education requires, leaving behind a transformed and autonomous understanding of character. This process is written into the very grammar of the narrative itself, so that while the experience can be *seen* as it takes shape, it resists the ready definition by which it might be *known*. The formal acrobatics required to keep the novel's cognizable content at bay is what comes to inform modernist narrative technique itself. (To foreshadow my own argument, think here even of the elaborate syntax produced by *To the Lighthouse*, or of the unusual, often hyphenated locutions characteristic of Lawrence — "mystically-physically," "mystic-sure," "unspeakable communication" [*Women in Love* 397, 399, 403] — which offer a paradox in their very presentation.) These are the three aspects of artlessness with which I

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 58-59. This, we might recall from the Introduction, was actually close to Forster's account, although Forster was less concerned with the beginning than the end

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>141</sup> Elsewhere he describes realism's project as permitting "[n]o embodied subjects without immersion in space/time; no absolute space/time indifferent to embodied subjects." See Weinstein, *Unknowing*, 166.

<sup>142</sup> Weinstein nowhere claims that his representative authors, Faulkner, Kafka, and Proust, fail to attend to physical or spatial verisimilitude even as they engage in other formal experiments in unknowing; this *is*, however, the claim that I will eventually make for D. H. Lawrence in a later chapter, where the only thing that seems to structure Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) is an almost fanatical preoccupation with character, and what character would mean if those other elements were removed.

began this chapter — opposition to knowledge, socialization, and definition. What artlessness offers as a concept, unlearning pursues as its formal process.

Character, as a narrative vehicle that attempts to unlearn the attachments otherwise bound up in any attempt at subject formation, could be understood as Henry James's signal contribution to the work of what would become modernist fiction. Far from "pedagogy," the "formation of the individual"<sup>143</sup> can only exist for James in dialectical opposition to education, and the kind of socialization that attends it. James's approach to "modernist character," however, is notable for working in opposition to the way in which *either* category is ordinarily understood. Isabel's progress through the novel, from her first acquaintance with the Touchetts to her first meeting with Madame Merle, *should* only bring her a further range of "appurtenances." Every encounter would simply socialize her further.<sup>144</sup> What the 1906 revisions to *The Portrait of a Lady* help establish is a grammar by which Isabel's attachments might continue to multiply even while leaving Isabel's autonomy itself intact.

Rather than cultivating a style that would keep the uninitiated from accessing his art, Henry James and those figures that I will have follow him instead have constructed a perfectly legible concept of character that *itself* is mobilized to contest the way in which education constitutes character. Nothing is easier to read than the *Bildungsroman*, as Franco Moretti might suggest, because we seem to find it everywhere, even in novels that can only be failed *Bildungsromans*.<sup>145</sup> The real triumph of James's novel might in fact be that it passes so well as a successful installment in the genre that it has proved almost impossible for critics to separate out the ways in which its pedagogy really, willfully fails.

How then is James's model of unlearning practiced? James had famously described the fireside vigil of Chapter XLII, where Isabel merely sits up through the night and contemplates her fate, as "obviously the best thing in the book."<sup>146</sup> The chapter contains virtually no other action. Part of the scene's success, as Kent Puckett puts it, lies in its dramatization of the "possibility of holding a discussion with oneself" as a sustained illusion of consciousness that can "of course only point toward the internal, perform[ing] the impossibility of knowing really what goes on inside another person or, for that matter, inside oneself."<sup>147</sup> The fireside scene, in other words, is the moment where the novel most explicitly performs Isabel's interiority, and as such offers up its fullest exegesis on everything that Isabel now knows. Interiority as a drama should stage knowledge as a process. But James's description of the scene in his Preface, with Isabel "under the spell of recognitions," "simply" "motionlessly *seeing*" her history before her, reminds us of the recognition that motivates Isabel's fireside reflection in the first place.<sup>148</sup> The "best thing in the book" depends upon another thing entirely: the recognition scene that, while cutting Isabel off from conscious apprehension, has brought her to the point where her interiority can be most forthrightly affirmed. The final words of Chapter XLII are the only part of Isabel's vigil that do not place her directly before the fire; instead,

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<sup>143</sup> Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 29.

<sup>144</sup> This is why the conventional "failed" *Bildungsroman* so often ends with its hero's suicide: be it Emma Bovary or Anna Karenina, Werther or Julien Sorel, the novel's final gesture of social acclimatization is to exclude the unfit element from the social climate.

<sup>145</sup> Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 15.

<sup>146</sup> James, *The Art of the Novel*, 57.

<sup>147</sup> Puckett, *Bad Form*, 124.

<sup>148</sup> James, *The Art of the Novel*, 57.

she turns to leave, but “even then she stopped again in the middle of the room, and stood there gazing at a remembered vision—that of her husband and Madame Merle, grouped unconsciously and familiarly” (468). Isabel’s visual recognition continues to recur as “a remembered vision,” and if James’s paraphrase of the sequence holds that the chapter in its entirety consists of Isabel “motionlessly *seeing*,” it is implied that the visual shock that forms its impetus and its end *is* what Isabel actually happens to see for its duration.

The fireside scene itself exists as only another moment where perception and cognition have been severed. For Isabel is “simply” “*seeing*,” not thinking, not knowing. Where the recognition scene had offered Isabel the possibility of learning something new, that opportunity is severed by James’s effacement of “sat” for “was.” Now, before the fire, Isabel replays that same recognition again, still not learning anything more from what she has taken in, but only inventorying the disastrous consequences of everything that she has already been taught. An interiority that pretends to “the impossibility of knowing really what goes on inside another person, or, for that matter, inside oneself,”<sup>149</sup> is the very thing that James’s erasure of stream of consciousness from the novel sacrifices. It is to remain, in fact, an impossibility. The recognition scene as given by the New York Edition produces Isabel’s interiority, but only as something that can be seen, never known. What the fireside vigil offers is not an EEG but an X-ray — not a process that develops over time, but that sums up a single state. Here we see character as it has thus far been captured.

Every time, going forward, that the novel recalls the recognition scene, this same privileging of sight over knowledge recurs. As the novel approaches its denouement, each new treatment of the scene yet again forces Isabel to turn away from new knowledge. Some chapters later, we’re told that “[s]ometimes, at night, [Isabel] had strange visions; she seemed to see her husband and Madame Merle in dim, indistinguishable combination” (520). Here again the recognition is cast as something before Isabel’s eyes, but here again the scene seems to require no necessary purchase on her mind; no further work of cognition accompanies the lines. Showing has ceased to be tethered to knowing. This is a distinction that James’s changes to the New York Edition only further seem to enforce. The persistence of recurring mentions of the recognition scene is in fact matched only by the insistence of James’s revisions. In the New York Edition version of this last sequence, mention of “Madame Merle” is replaced by a different qualification: “Sometimes, at night, she had strange visions; she seemed to see her husband and her friend—his friend—in dim, indistinguishable combination” (Portrait NYE II.278). The apparent ease with which Madame Merle can be distinguished as “her friend” at one moment and only “his friend” at the next would seem to bely the near Freudian condensation that leaves the two figures before Isabel’s eyes “indistinguishable.” But the substitution itself is significant, for in promptly clarifying that Madame Merle is no longer “[Isabel’s] friend,” this echo of the recognition scene provides her with one less relation. Like Isabel’s education itself, the phrase “her friend—his friend” is a clarification that can only be achieved temporally, through the juxtaposition of one wrong phrase with its righter one. (What the phrase achieves would be entirely different if James had merely written “she seemed to see her husband *and his friend* in dim, indistinguishable combination” for while the meaning of the lines would be the same, we would lose the violence of the correction.)<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Puckett, *Bad Form*, 124.

<sup>150</sup> Or, to put the case in Philip Weinstein’s terms, the movement through space and time that the novel here insists upon in the very temporalization of the reading process is, again like Isabel’s education itself, only a wholly negative one. Whatever progress the sequencing achieves is only so that it can be undone, unlearned, by what follows next.

“Madame Merle” is a figure that we, reading the novel, can picture embodied. We can thus reasonably imagine a first-person description of the original version of the lines — “I saw my husband and Madame Merle in dim, indistinguishable combination” — actually coming from Isabel herself. “To see” “Madame Merle” is something that Isabel has done countless times over the course of the novel. But the text’s correction from “[my] friend” to “his friend” is not an amendment that we can imagine Isabel herself formally articulating any longer; for what would it mean to “see” “her friend—his friend” before her? Isabel here is witness to a “vision,” but the distinction that divorces “his friend” from “her friend” is *not* visual, for the figure that Isabel sees would remain the same figure, unmarked by any difference. What was a pictorial distinction has now become entirely textual. Isabel performs the work of seeing, but the cognizable content of the sentence remains separate from that action. Free indirect discourse is like this, of course: free indirect “[n]arration comes as near to a character’s psychic and linguistic reality as it can without collapsing into it,”<sup>151</sup> so that we can nominally never tell how much of any given phrase is motivated from within a character’s psyche or from without. But here the amendment would seem to approximate what D. A. Miller classes as free indirect style’s possible “*third term* between character and narration... a kind of turnstile that helps organize the boundary, and recycle the binary, of an antithesis.”<sup>152</sup> Here what might have been Isabel’s independent thought necessarily becomes the *narrator’s* adjustment, as though he has suddenly made a mistake in his estimation of Isabel’s friendship. James’s revision removes any sense by which the phrase can be ascribed to *Isabel’s* immediate experience. Isabel still “sees” something, returning to the novel’s prevailing sensory motif, but once again now perception and cognition wind up attached to entirely different subjects. The novel’s turnstile of discourse treats us to perception and cognition, but never both at one and the same moment.

In returning to the recognition scene, the novel thus strips Isabel of one of her most damaging social attachments, while again nevertheless refusing to have Isabel directly come by that knowledge herself. As with the conversion of “sat” to “was,” the substitution of “her friend—his friend” for Madame Merle establishes a language by which it would be possible to *think* not knowing, or rather, to unlearn knowing. James’s insistence upon the singularity of Isabel’s character performs what should otherwise be a grammatical impossibility. Like the progress of Isabel’s plot itself, which had earlier been offered as a kind of counter-*Bildung*, “her friend—his friend” can only operate sequentially, narratively — but arrives at just the right moment to keep the force of the realization from registering characterologically.

By continuing to trouble even subsequent mentions of the recognition scene, James, I am suggesting, seems haunted by the formal consequences of a revision so minor but seemingly required as changing “Madame Merle sat there in her bonnet” to “Madame Merle was,” haunted enough that he need worry every ensuing reference to the sequence just to ensure that the thing that he wants the scene to achieve remains consistent throughout. It is as though the text has developed a hypercathexis onto every reference to Madame Merle’s posture, so that whether we think that James cannot recover from the embarrassment of seeing how the lines had originally been published, or whether we think that he’s merely being thorough, we can tell at least that each new revision is a doubling down on the original (authorial, emotional) investment. Sharon Cameron has responded to Leo Bersani’s characterization of the novel’s commitment to prototypically “realist” recognition by identifying, in lieu of a recognition scene, a moment of apparent anti-recognition towards the end of the novel, when Isabel visits the convent where Pansy has been placed and

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<sup>151</sup> D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen; or the Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 59.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

suddenly finds Madame Merle before her at the same moment that her thoughts have also turned towards Madame Merle. In this scene, Cameron contends, it is as though “in distinction to James’s typical passage, the life in the mind and the life outside of it [were to] suddenly come together as Isabel sees animated what the Countess Gemini has made her think.”<sup>153</sup>

But in light of what the recognition scene has allowed us to recognize about the constitution of Isabel’s character, it may yet prove useful to revisit the scene that Cameron describes to determine whether it too isn’t possessed of a similar commitment. The scene that Cameron quotes, from the New York Edition, mentions that the effect for Isabel “was strange, for Madame Merle was already so present to her vision that her appearance in the flesh was like suddenly, and rather awfully, seeing a painted picture move” (Portrait NYE II.375). The original version of the same scene, however, merely notes that Madame Merle’s appearance in the flesh was “a sort of reduplication” (Portrait 590). The difference between these accounts is as crucial as any of James’s other revisions. The former suggests a *single* unified image that has suddenly taken on an unexpected trait; the latter, however, suggests multiple impressions occurring in sequence. This is the *exact* difference separating “sat” from “was,” with the chronologically earlier text depicting an incremental ordering of consciousness, only to have the process effaced in the later edition.<sup>154</sup> The original text depends upon the force of definition — we could almost imagine it mathematically or logically expressed, (Madame Merle x 2); the revised version is narrative. Far from seeing this sequence, then, as a celebration of “consciousness, independent of knowledge or sight,”<sup>155</sup> the amendment to Isabel’s sense of Madame Merle before her seems, even in this late scene, to insist upon an understanding of Isabel’s experience that would keep it in line with her prior recognition. Even consciousness, if it is a conscious reckoning with some new knowledge, cannot be affirmed without compromising the integrity of Isabel’s asserted independence. To put the final contrast in Hegelian terms, Isabel’s experience of Madame Merle as a “reduplication” of her thoughts would be to recognize in Madame Merle another subject, a subject with an agency that endures even outside of one’s own musings. To see her, in the later version of the scene, however, as a “painted picture” moving, is but to recognize an uncanny kind of object, one that is familiar, one that may be loved, but that is no longer quite capable of being a “friend.”<sup>156</sup> Isabel’s independence has unlearned its reliance on this most

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<sup>153</sup> Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James*, 56. Rather than seeing something that helps her to know her circumstances better, Cameron suggests, this image of Madame Merle is one that Isabel’s thoughts actually *create*, thereby demonstrating that sheer force of “consciousness, independent of knowledge or sight, can achieve a transcendent status” (Ibid., 61). Rather too than a single image (person sitting, person standing), the composite appearance of Madame Merle “does not imply a single or sustained picture but rather connotes associations that make the image a disjunctive [and thereby more psychologically sophisticated] one” (Ibid., 56). This last point, however, would be controverted by the revision of the recognition scene from “sat” to “was,” for it is the original version, not the New York Edition (from which, we’ll recall, Cameron exclusively quotes) that would prove maximally disjunctive, striking the reader and Isabel alike with an acute sense of the wrongness in what Isabel has witnessed. What the New York Edition preserves, on the contrary, is a rendering of Isabel’s perception that remains but an impression, with no readily cognizable features to motivate it, and no further access to Isabel’s thought process afforded.

<sup>154</sup> And again it would be the earlier version, “a sort of reduplication,” that would be ideally “disjunctive” in Cameron’s sense.

<sup>155</sup> Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James*, 61.

<sup>156</sup> My allusion in this final quotation is to the distinction made in the New York Edition, II.278.

formative of her attachments. Madame Merle has “made” Isabel Archer; *Portrait*, however, has made Madame Merle a picture.

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Henry James isn’t always an unequivocal narrator, but he is, unfailingly, a confident one. No one explores uncertainty with more certainty than James.<sup>157</sup> It doubtless speaks to the customary self-possession of James’s prose that after finding Madame Merle seated in one sentence and standing in the next in the original description of Isabel’s recognition, we’re more likely to question our own reading of the scene than we are to admit to a possible lapse in the Master’s style. There’s a sense then in which my title, *Artless*, is precisely the wrong word for what James has here attempted. By revising “sat” to “was,” James obscures any access to Isabel’s understanding, but in so doing reestablishes the cogency of the passage. Each subsequent revision to references to the recognition scene insists upon a yet more uniform depiction. The original stream of consciousness description might have proved more interesting, but the artfulness of the scene is nevertheless preserved through James’s systematic amendments.

If the opposed versions of Isabel Archer’s recognition help us to see how an insistence upon ignorance helps to create the novel’s sense of Isabel’s own character, thereby clarifying the separate terms of my sub-title (“ignorance,” “character,” “the novel”) we might yet pause over “artless” to wonder whether, as when we first read or mis-read Madame Merle’s posture, the word we see quite means what we think it must mean. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the earliest definition of “artless” as

1. Devoid of skill or art
  - a. Unpractised, inexperienced; unskilled, ignorant.
  - b. Devoid of the fine or liberal arts; having no desire for or endeavour after artistic effect; uncultured.

The *OED*’s distinction between these uses of the term is characteristically (and, I might say, appropriately) ambiguous. Neither usage is obsolete, but further down the page we find that “2b. Without guile; sincere, ingenuous” is “Now the usual sense.” Clearly Isabel’s ingenuousness isn’t what is at stake in James’s characterization. But if I err on the side of the non-usual and earlier definition to see James in this moment as insisting upon Isabel’s personal independence as artlessness, as a kind of willfully manufactured ignorance, it is perhaps because no other word seems to accurately describe the phenomenon.

While much recent work, which I will have abundant recourse to in the chapters that follow, has been invested in the antithetical merits of “stupidity,” “stupefaction,” “idiocy,” or “folly,” each of these terms, and the scholars who animate them, seems to describe a lack of intellection as a permanent condition. Just one of the many forms stupidity assumes in Avital Ronell’s *Stupidity* (2002) is an abiding “latency;” for the writer, stupidity is always “on the prowl,” ready to turn up in any sentence that is not explicitly intelligent.<sup>158</sup> “The best literature” is thus “haunted by the problem of stupidity and knows to bring it to the door-step of philosophy, giving it cosmic, encyclopedic,

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<sup>157</sup> We might here think of the circumlocutions characteristic of “The Beast in the Jungle,” which never disclose the *nature* of the beast, but return to that very question with a precision and clarity that can only be described as ruthless. Shoshanna Felman’s reading of “The Turn of the Screw” in her *Writing and Madness* is another particularly apt account of the same effect.

<sup>158</sup> Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 10. The point is more fundamentally Barthes’s, as Ronell glosses it a page later: “It is curious that an author, having to speak about himself, is so obsessed by Stupidity, as though it were the inner thing he most feared: threatening, ever ready to burst out, to assert its right to speak.”

gnoseological dimensions (Flaubert, Baudelaire, Bloy).<sup>159</sup> Insofar as the “difficulty” of Isabel’s personal independence persists as a nearly metaphysical distinction, this definition is nearer to what I mean. But stupidity, in Ronell’s sense, is again a pervasive condition of the text, something so integral that while it will always emerge by accident, it might as well, like Flaubert’s *Bouvard and Pecuchet*, be deliberately courted. Ronell, however, productively contrasts stupidity with ignorance, potentially getting us nearer to the term that better serves. “[I]gnorance, at once perniciously coherent and seriously lacking in coherence,” marks a departure from stupidity in that “you may still find an owner’s manual somewhere... some rules of operation.”<sup>160</sup> Where stupidity is potentially unavoidable, “[i]gnorance holds out some hope, you can get to know it, maybe move on.”<sup>161</sup> It is ignorance, rather than stupidity, that seems to stand on the other side of the “enlightenment accent on learning, no matter how slow going.”<sup>162</sup> Ignorance is simply not to know, and insofar as ignorance is the condition that knowledge would recover from, we need only imagine that the relationship is a two-way street: that whereas ignorance “holds out some hope” that you may recover from it, ignorance too would be the thing that an evacuation of accrued knowledge would produce.

Ignorance, then, might be preferred over any of the competing terms, if it wasn’t for the fact that ignorance, unlike “stupefaction” or even “stupidity,” bears a colloquially largely pejorative sense. (“That was such a stupid mistake I made,” we sigh, but only when we know that the mistake was mostly harmless and that we’re easily capable of doing better. “That was such an ignorant mistake I made” would be a different species of self-accusation altogether.) It is for this reason that I embrace “artless” in its primary definition as “[d]evoid of skill or art... unskilled, [and only lastly] *ignorant*” as my term of choice (OED, my emphasis). If the fit isn’t wholly perfect, then perhaps, like the difference between “sat” and “was,” “artless” is only just awkward enough, just wrong enough, to catch the many senses of what its context seems to demand. For “artless” is not only “ignorant,” but, in its 1b. definition, “*uncultured*.” To be artless is to have failed to learn something about the world in which one moves. The sense of de-socialization that Isabel Archer’s personal independence would require, and that is relevant to my project more broadly, is one that artlessness alone achieves.

The very marginality of “artlessness,” its ability to capture all of its many senses at once, is indeed itself vital to the work that I would have the term do. Artlessness captures a problem of intention that underlies the entirety of my project. Stupidity, as Ronell suggests, can creep in accidentally anywhere that intelligence isn’t on its guard, but artlessness’s 1b. definition as “[d]evoid of the fine or liberal arts; having *no desire for* or endeavor after artistic effect” leaves the question of whether artlessness is simply a condition that one possesses, or whether it is something that can be purposefully won, more or less unresolved. A desire for personal independence is Isabel Archer’s stated goal, but her attempted unlearning would seem threatened by any conscious knowledge that the process was taking place. Explicitly cognizing the process would bring Isabel only another item in her education. We cannot say then whether the process is active or passive, or rather, we can say that it is active solely insofar as it is actively sought and only passively achieved. Meanwhile, a problem of intention can be imputed to our consideration of Henry James himself. It is no longer quite fashionable to worry the author’s intention when taking up a specific work, and neither is it quite fashionable to invoke the intentional fallacy before moving on to other matters. But the state

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 28



of the word “sats” invites questions precisely *of* intention. Regardless of whether James meant for his novel to perform stream of consciousness in its first iteration, it all the same *did* so, and had to require James’s deliberate effort to be changed to something else. By observing the revision, we’re spotting the play of intention and its opposite already at work. But what we’re spotting, finally, is only the residue of a concern for pure style. James’s aesthetic requires “was” in a way that it doesn’t require “sat,” and the evidence that we can marshal to prove it is drawn first, if not only, from what James does everywhere else. Attending to the change alerts us to a stylistic investment that would be invisible in any individual text, an investment that reorganizes what we take Jamesian style even to be. Jamesian style depends upon the polished point or the elaborate phrase not as a demonstration of “intelligence at its most difficult, its most lucid, its most beautiful,” as early critics like R. P. Blackmur avow,<sup>163</sup> but as a way of unfolding ignorance in formally legible but not strictly cognizable terms. Unlearning, at this scale, with all of its reversals and negations, takes considerable attention, such that, as will be my ultimate claim for *Women in Love*, the effort to place not only Ursula Brangwen but *all* parties into a state analogous to Isabel Archer’s runs to some 600 pages. Such is the grammar by which unlearning needs to be registered. The Jamesian phrase displays not intelligence at work, but all the cognizable excess that needs to be left behind.

“Artless,” ultimately and along these lines, would warrant our preference over rival terms if only because it seems to be itself among the most Jamesian of locutions. In *The Golden Bowl*, James’s last great novel, and the final novel to be completed before the New York Edition, “artless” appears ten times; “artful” appears another seven. Insofar as the word belongs to James, it is because it conveys a perfect sense of the aesthete’s capacity for selection and omission, his *refinement* — and his willingness to cast a too studied refinement aside if it suits him. Yet the word dies, more or less, with James. We are more likely to find “heartless” than “artless” in Virginia Woolf or D. H. Lawrence. But all the same, the qualities that James ascribes to the process that I will call artlessness are nevertheless those that have helped to constitute modernist character. Insofar as James’s phrase will not appear in *The Waves* or *Women in Love*, we can imagine that it, like the substitution of “was” for “sat,” has only temporarily been left invisible; with James’s understanding of artlessness in mind, we might begin to register its relevance everywhere.

The word “artless” appears five times in the New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*: once in reference to Isabel, once to Pansy Osmond (in the litotic, “not entirely artless”), twice to Caspar Goodwood (in the overly abundant, as “rather artlessly” or “too...artlessly”), and once, almost unthinkably, to Henrietta Stackpole. Of all of James’s characters, Henrietta is the least likely vehicle for the assertion of a characterological concept, for Henrietta seems to be the one character that James most truly regrets. “As to Henrietta,” James writes in the final few words of the novel’s preface, “my apology for whom I just left incomplete, she exemplifies, I fear, in her superabundance, not an element of my plan, but only an excess of my zeal. So early was to begin my tendency to *overtreat*, rather than *undertreat* (when there was choice of danger) my subject.”<sup>164</sup> Henrietta is then what Alex Woloch might understand as a kind of misplaced minor character, one whose dimensions are too large to be really minor, but whose function fails to offer any real competition to even Osmond or Ralph for our attention.

If this is James’s objection, we might wonder why, with all of his other alterations, James can’t simply do away with Henrietta, not going so far as to write her out of the New York Edition, but at least to write her down, as he did to the melodramatic denouement of *The American*. For the novel’s ending lies, after all, in Henrietta’s hands. I had earlier alluded to the ambiguous quality of the

<sup>163</sup> Blackmur in James, *The Art of the Novel*, xiii.

<sup>164</sup> James, *The Art of the Novel*, 57.

novel's last lines, but it is worth qualifying that this ambiguity persists in *either* version of the novel, despite the fact that the endings are actually different. Where notable rewritten endings go, whether we think of *Great Expectations* or *Middlemarch*, the effort is usually motivated by some desire to offer greater clarity: providing Pip, controversially, with a firmer resolution in Dickens's case, or modifying an error in Eliot's. James's change is perhaps less famous because it seems unclear what could possibly motivate it. Isabel has left for Rome, and the question remains whether she intends to return to her husband or, having rescued Pansy, she plans to come back to England. Henrietta has just delivered the news to Caspar Goodwood, who begins to turn away. But

Henrietta had come out, closing the door behind her, and now she put out her hand and grasped his arm.

“Look here, Mr. Goodwood,” she said; “just you wait!”

On which he looked up at her. (Portrait 635)

These are the last words of the original edition of the novel, and it is almost impossible to fathom what they portend. What is so abrupt in James's ending is that Henrietta has been handed sole dominion over the knowledge of Isabel's intentions. But in the “look” up at Henrietta with which the novel ends, we seem to catch Goodwood's attempt to acquire that knowledge, as though he might emulate a reading of how Isabel's earlier recognition is conventionally understood and discern, in a glance, the novel's final lesson. What does that look look like? Is it full of hope? Despair? Whatever it is, it seems less to matter that the ending is ambiguous than that it captures again the perfect convergence of cognition and perception. Goodwood looks up at the very moment that he confronts a dawning knowledge. All that's left in the original ending is an endless, arrested education.

What Goodwood's glance seems to offer, even without immediate content, is the possibility of closure. By “closure” I am thinking of moments in Peter Brooks (as in his *Reading for the Plot*) but also analogous instances in Franco Moretti or Giorgio Agamben. If the *Bildungsroman* as given by *Wilhelm Meister* is “in its essence, *pedagogy*,”<sup>165</sup> then the novel can end at the moment that that education is complete, when the Society of the Tower has literally handed Wilhelm the book of his life. Resolution is assured in the crystallization of education's ends. What in Agamben's terms would provide the novel with closure is the “rhyme” established between Goodwood's gaze here and Isabel's in the original version of the recognition scene. Both, in a single look, take in an impression with the full force of knowledge. The too perfect coincidence of sound and sense<sup>166</sup> becomes, in the early version of *The Portrait of a Lady*, a coincidence of *sight* and sense — “sense” in the way that meaning gets spelled out, communicated, defined, sense of the intelligent sort.

It seems crucial then that the New York Edition is allowed to carry on for another three sentences, which do nothing further to clarify Isabel's possible fate, but only undermine the enlightenment that Goodwood was initially offered. The lines are extended in the New York Edition as:

— but only to guess, from her face, with a revulsion, that she simply meant that he was young. She stood shining at him with that cheap comfort, and it added, on the spot, thirty years to his life. She walked him away with her, however, as if she had given him now the key to patience. (Portrait NYE II. 438)

The novel will not end on Goodwood's glance. If we can imagine James receiving the kinds of hostile responses from incredulous readers that Dickens or Eliot received, it is difficult to imagine

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<sup>165</sup> Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 15.

<sup>166</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 105.

this new ending offering any further satisfaction. If anything, James has taken yet greater steps to exaggerate the impenetrability of Isabel's intentions. Goodwood learns nothing more from Henrietta. In the space of that emdash, he has actually *unlearned* whatever understanding his look up had briefly entertained. The novel's final note is now not of absolute knowledge but of enduring ignorance, one that wholly effaces the possible recognition that had preceded it. Will Isabel return? Who knows?

The ending to *The Portrait of a Lady* as amended by the New York Edition thus remains consistent with the refusal of knowledge staged in all of its preceding pages: in the terms of Isabel's own search for her personal independence, in the concept of character championed by Ralph Touchett and opposed by Madame Merle, and, crucially, in the revisions that reconfigure the terms by which Isabel's consciousness can be understood and accessed. More than that even, this ending allows Isabel her *own* place, where even the final terms of her existence cannot be bound by the expectations of friends and would-be lovers. The novel ends, in Agamben's sense, on a kind of off rhyme, "let[ting] language finally communicate itself without remaining unsaid in what is said" of it.<sup>167</sup> "That's what I try to do, [judging everything for myself,]" Isabel had said, "but when you do that people call you conceited" (Portrait 271); now no language is left to define her as anything. Having created Isabel's character, having allowed her to see how that character has been compromised, having helped her to unlearn her attachments, the novel's final trick is to allow Isabel's character to outlast even it.

When I say that the word "artless" is almost *unthinkably* applied to Henrietta Stackpole, is it possible then that I have simply been unfair in my estimations of her character? The moment when that phrase occurs is itself from the novel's end. It is the final time that the word is used. Henrietta has just announced her marriage to Mr. Bantling, an affair that has been quietly in the works for almost the entire novel; neither party, it seems, wants to take ownership for initiating it. Immediately after the announcement, Henrietta confesses that,

"I think I know what I'm doing; but I don't know as I can explain."

"One can't explain one's marriage," Isabel answered. "And yours doesn't need to be explained. Mr. Bantling isn't a riddle."

"No, he isn't a bad pun—or even a high flight of American humour. He has a beautiful nature," Henrietta went on. "I've studied him for many years and I see right through him. He's as clear as the style of a good prospectus. He's not intellectual, but he appreciates intellect. On the other hand he doesn't exaggerate its claims. I sometimes think we do in the United States."

...

[Isabel added,] "I hope you'll be very happy. You will at last—over here [in Europe, and in route to England]—see something of the inner life."

Henrietta gave a little significant sigh. "That's the key to the mystery, I believe. I couldn't ensure to be kept off. Now I've as good a right as any one!" she added with artless elation.

(602)

The inner life, a concern for style, an intellect that is not overstated, a recognition predicated on sight, which discloses a knowledge that might be privately kept but cannot, and needn't, be explained. Why does the novel end with Henrietta Stackpole? Because she seems, in denying any ability to know more of Isabel's affairs, to resist education as knowledge, as socialization, as definition — and so to welcome "artlessness" in its every sense.

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<sup>167</sup> Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 115.

How clear was this imperative to the Henry James of the New York Edition and beyond? What were the stakes of artlessness, and could James himself have recognized what they required?

“*Her* idiosyncrasy was never in the least to have been inferred or presumed; it could only, in general, make the outsider provisionally gape. She sat thus imperturbable in her felicities, and if that is how, remounting the stream of time, I like most to think of her, this is because if her interest is still undeniable—as that of overgrown things goes—it has yet lost its fineness of quality. Phenomena may be interesting, thank goodness, without being phenomena of elegant expression or of any other form of restless smartness, and when once type is strong, when once it plays up from deep sources, every show of its sincerity delivers us a message and we hang, to real suspense, on its continuance of energy, on its again and yet again consistently acquitting itself.”<sup>168</sup>

The subject of this late passage by Henry James, its “*her*,” is not, surprisingly from everything we’ve seen thus far, Isabel Archer, but is the city of London, as imagined by James in the incomplete third volume of his memoirs, *The Middle Years* (1914). This installment of James’s autobiography was intended to chronicle his initiation into the London scene from the 1870s onward, an initiation with the sights and sentiments and people — not least of all George Eliot — that would bring James eventually to the composition of *The Portrait of a Lady*. As critics have often noted, the production of these memoirs, following shortly after the consolidation of the New York Edition and the composition of its prefaces, really marks the latest possible moment in James’s literary activity.<sup>169</sup> In this account of the city (which takes up fully half of what James was able to complete), James attempts to reconstruct the appeal that London held for him then, finding in it its own character. Although James, from this point forward, “never produced another major work of fiction,”<sup>170</sup> London, it seems, *can* be read like a part of a novel, but one only of a singular sort. Its “real suspense,” its “continuance of energy,” what we might think of as its narrative practice, emerges only from its “again and yet again consistently acquitting itself” *as* itself. This is a phenomenon in marked contrast to any “restless smartness.” What James demands of his ideal vision isn’t intelligence, isn’t elegant expression, but is rather something nearer to its personal independence.

James’s conception of the city at mid-century is, as he himself often admits, no doubt romanticized, and it isn’t difficult to understand why in 1914, on the eve of war and a year removed from his fully becoming a British subject, James would see fit to commemorate a London that he’d loved and that now seemed to have vanished. But the terms in which the characterization is put give readers a kind of insight into the politics of personal independence that it is difficult to acquire elsewhere. Just before these lines, James attempts, in fact, simply to describe that city, holding that “one’s fondest notion of her” finds her “too indifferent, too proud, too unaware, too stupid even if one will.” All of these phrases, even down to “stupid,” are meant as praise. But what makes the city stupid is her unwillingness

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<sup>168</sup> Henry James, “The Middle Years,” in *Autobiography*, ed. Frederick W. Dupee (New York: Criterion Books, 1956), 557. Subsequent references to this volume will be abbreviated to “MY” in text.

<sup>169</sup> See, for instance, Dorothy J. Hale’s *Social Formalism*, which notes that “[h]aving discovered that the perfection of art lay in reading rather than writing, in self-apprehension rather than self-expression, in literary criticism rather than literary production, and having in the Prefaces fulfilled that critical vision, James had, as it were, theorized himself out of the art of writing novels” (51).

<sup>170</sup> Hale, *Social Formalism*, 51.

to enter any lists that involved her moving from her base and that thereby, when one approached her from the alien *positive* places (I don't speak of the American, in those days too negative to be related at all) enjoyed the enormous 'pull,' for making her impression, of ignoring everything but her own perversities and then of driving these home with an emphasis not to be gainsaid. Since she didn't emulate, as I have termed it, so she practised her own art... (MY 557)

Her own arts, the stupid arts, the quality that we can by now fully own as artless, are notable for being her own, ones that refuse to be shaped by any other, outer, alien influence. We might hesitate to say whether the autonomy afforded London in this instance is as ardently nationalistic or reactionary as it might seem.<sup>171</sup> What, finally, is to distinguish "personal independence" from a brand of libertarianism, where identity alone is paramount? If we can see, however, something of Isabel Archer in London, see London *as* Isabel Archer, it is easier to see how little what James is privileging here has to do with the city's native merits. Isabel herself is an immigrant, yet eventually virtual heir to Gardencourt, almost heir to Lockleigh (almost, in that respect, Lady Warburton).

James, we cannot fail to forget, is himself in a similar situation during the period accounted for by *The Middle Years*. An unusual amount of space is given over to describing James's first eager attempts to storm London's social scene, not through the usual paying of visits or the leaving of cards, but from the breakfast table. James's regular breakfast companions were "from the Temple, from the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the House of Commons, from goodness knew what other scarce discernible Olympian altitudes" — were all, in other words, not only members of English society, but the explicit agents of the British state (560). Knowing what we do about James's eventual social success, we might expect this episode to read as an entry in James's own *Bildungsroman* — when Leon Edel calls the equivalent volume of his biography of James *The Conquest of London*, we know just of what this conquest consists — but what James chooses to dwell on is not an awakening into knowledge but the acknowledgement of ignorance. Asked by his politically-minded companions about the likely members of President Grant's first cabinet, James, the sole American, is forced to admit that he knows nothing whatsoever. But this embarrassment in ignorance becomes the precise kind of experience worth prizing, for ignorance itself lets a lesson be learned: that "all lively attestations were *ipso facto* interesting, and that finally and in the supreme degree, the authenticity of whatever one was going to learn in the world would probably always have for its sign that one got it at some personal cost" (560).

Education and "personality" thus wind up diametrically opposed. James's English audience requires certain knowledge of an American, or from a "good [specimen]" of such (559), but James is not, then, a "good" American. If education produces fully socialized subjects, then James is not simply a bad American, but a *bad subject*, and it is his very unfitness that registers for the good. "All lively attestations" count, James discovers, even where the specific content isn't as learned as it might be. (Although the emphasis might equally fall on "lively" — what James has also learned is that ignorance can survive, even thrive, with the right style, with the right force of character.) What James might have found, in fact, is that his gaping could still be read, by his companions, with

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<sup>171</sup> The quotation continues, past my ellipsis, as "...altogether and both these ways and these consequences were in the flattest opposition (*that* was the happy point!) to foreign felicities or foreign standards, so that the effect in every case was of the straightest reversal of them—with black for the foreign white and white for the foreign black, wet for the foreign dry and dry for the foreign wet, big for the foreign small and small for the foreign big: I needn't extend the catalogue."

pleasure — for the breakfasts continue, and James never does advance a claim about President Grant’s cabinet.<sup>172</sup>

The merit of what James has extracted from his breakfasts seems, in fact, to exert an orienting influence on the structure of *The Middle Years* itself. In attempting to pivot *away* from this protracted and distributed consideration of London society towards the ordinarily more specific terrain of autobiography, James asks,

Why, however, should I pick up so small a crumb from that mere brief first course at a banquet of initiation which was in the event to prolong itself through years and years? — unless indeed as a scrap of a specimen, chosen at hazard, of the prompt activity of a process by which my intelligence afterwards came to find itself more fed, I think, than from any other source at all, or, for that matter, from all other sources put together. A hundred more suchlike modest memories breathe upon me, each with its own dim little plea, as I turn to face them, but my idea is to deal somehow more conveniently with the whole gathered mass of my subsequent impressions in this order, a fruitage that I feel to have been only too abundantly stored. (573)

Here James does explicitly make reference to “intelligence.”<sup>173</sup> James often, as R. P. Blackmur and others have appreciated, notes the merit of intelligence — only now we might see that what James connotes by “intelligence” has little to do with what is usually meant by it, for the thing that intelligence would demand in this moment is the *very* thing that James’s account has thus far refused to do. Intelligence would invite the consideration of a single specimen drama. But this is not the narrative mode that *The Middle Years* (or James’s other, completed volumes of memoirs) pursues. It is as though James must choose between two opposing biographical impulses: one, the intelligent approach, that would chart his accelerating success in the social world (that would capture, in other words, his *Bildung*), or two, the one that he actually writes. James’s endeavor, put most simply, is to write his way out of intelligence, to pile up impressions that are everywhere free of the sort of direct recognitions afforded by Isabel’s original entry into her drawing room. London, James’s creations, and now finally James himself are united in a willful want of smartness.

What *does* Henry James then finally know about politics? If the answer is simply “nothing,” then it might seem odd to credit him with a sensitivity towards the kinds of changes registered in British education contemporaneous with his career. The imputation seems more than total ignorance could bear. But in James’s mention of the gentlemen “from the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the House of Commons” who were his breakfast companions, we have a sense of the kinds of conversation that were his earliest inauguration into English life. This pattern would not much alter through the winter of 1878 to 1879, the period of the famed “140 dinners” just prior to James’s

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<sup>172</sup> One mystery might be to ask why it is that James still recalls these apparent “interrogat[ions]” (559) over breakfast so fondly, even going so far, when first introducing the subject, to mention that “I dare say it is the invitations to breakfast that hold me at this moment by their spell—so do they breathe to me across the age the note of a London world that we have left far behind; in consequence of which I the more yearningly steal back to it, as on sneaking tiptoe, and shut myself up there without interference. It is embalmed in disconnections, in differences, that I cultivate a free fancy for pronouncing advantageous to it...” (555) James’s only complaint with his companions’ curiosity seems to be that his “identity for [him]self” in going into these breakfasts “was *all* in [his] sensibility to [his companions’] own exhibition, with not a scrap left over for a personal show” (559). Yet James admits his ignorance and emerges from the questioning with his character intact.

<sup>173</sup> The quoted passage, in an association that will gain force momentarily, is the way in which James introduces his first acquaintance with George Eliot.

composition of *The Portrait of a Lady*. By that time, years after his breakfasts, when James was more fully comfortable in London social circles, he could write to his sister that he had been “dining out a good deal of late with ‘the same old set,’” a list comprised of nine names and two etceteras.<sup>174</sup> One, “Fred. Macmillan,” was the publisher of *The Portrait of a Lady*. Among the others are the founder of the Girls’ Day School Trust,<sup>175</sup> a Liberal member of the House of Lords, the eventual chairman of the London School Board,<sup>176</sup> and, most notably, W. E. Forster, the very author of the Elementary Education Act, which was then nearing its first full decade in force.

It requires almost an act of will to imagine then that the subject of the state and its mandates was a topic that James could be wholly blind to, but it is an arena that James *nevertheless* refuses any right or reason to know. More rather seems to rest for James, as Kent Puckett has observed, on the degree to which not knowing about politics in any strict sense serves as an aid to writing about it. As James freely admits in his preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, the fact that he knew almost nothing about revolutionary activity was not so much a failing as an “indispensable element in the composition” of the novel, for it is precisely that *no one* knows enough about politics to avoid the temptations of “[c]onfusion, bad faith, hucksterism” that makes it a subject worth James’s engagement.<sup>177</sup> Any education that Henry James has undergone in his conquest of London has become, in his last gloss on it, an education only into ignorance. James has let himself unlearn anything that might have passed from the school board to the breakfast table.

One crucial amendment to the New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady* stands out in just this respect. I began by describing Isabel Archer’s library, and the attraction to “metaphysics” and “psychological problems” that Isabel’s education will ultimately have to unlearn. In the scene just after her Aunt Touchett finds her in the family library in Albany, James adds a handful of phrases to

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<sup>174</sup> Leon Edel, ed., *Henry James Letters, Volume II, 1875-1883* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1975), 223. Subsequent references to James’s correspondence will simply be abbreviated to “Letters,” followed by volume and page number.

<sup>175</sup> Charles Savile Roundell, the man that James refers to here, was also in the process of serving on the Executive Committee to Harrow School, one of the administrative appointments put in place to “ensure that certain crucially important actions were carried out in line with the broad principles” of the educational reforms of the period. See Brian Simon, *The State and Educational Change: Essays in the History of Education and Pedagogy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994), 51. (Simon’s text prints “C. F. Roundell,” but the correct middle initial is found in Graham, *The Harrow Life of Henry Montagu Butler*, 207-208, which Simon quotes.) At the time of James’s letter, Roundell was in the process of standing (successfully) for Parliament. Some years earlier, Roundell had also served as the secretary to the Earl Spencer, then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, who in 1880, the same year that Roundell would win his seat, was installed as Lord President of the Council in Gladstone’s second government and placed in charge of educational policy. With A. J. Mundella and W. E. Forster, Spencer in 1880 passed the legislation formally making schooling compulsory (a provision that was only ambiguously defined in the original Forster Act), and later, in 1882, passed the new school code, which encouraged a broader curriculum for state schools. See Peter Gordon, “Spencer, John Poyntz, fifth Earl Spencer (1835–1910),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>176</sup> Here James refers to “Lady Reay,” whose husband, Lord Reay, was to become the chairman of the School Board from 1897 to 1904. In his earlier and later letters, James refers to the Reays, Lord and Lady, interchangeably (see Letters II.215, 167, 236).

<sup>177</sup> Puckett, *Bad Form*, 143, 144.

the New York Edition, not even a full sentence, but only an amendment to a list. Isabel “had everything a girl could have,” it is mentioned in the original edition, from a “sense of exclusion from none of the privileges of the world she lived in” to “a glimpse of contemporary aesthetics” (40). In 1906, this last phrase is replaced by “the latest publications, the music of Gounod, the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot” (Portrait NYE I.46). These mentions of Browning and Eliot are the only specific authors that Isabel is said to have read in either edition of the novel. What allows these figures to stand in for “contemporary aesthetics,” however, has as much to do with *James’s* experience as it does Isabel’s.

The winter of 1878 to 1879 and the “140 dinners” was the period during which James not only dined with W. E. Forster as part of the “same old set,” but was reintroduced to Eliot, and also dined often with Browning. It is in fact likely telling that Browning and Eliot often appear in James’s letters home from that period together, as markers of the same level of social success.<sup>178</sup> Both are also taken up in James’s account of this period in *The Middle Years*. (Where *The Middle Years* is concerned, W. E. Forster and those like him too, we might suspect, are registered within the space of those many breakfasts.) What James, looking back in 1906, has imputed to Isabel is a reading list that would have paralleled his own experiences in the period leading up to Isabel’s creation.<sup>179</sup>

But James’s social attachments are then the precise intellectual ones that Isabel Archer will have to overcome. (“It’s just like a novel!” we’ll remember she exclaims at her own novel’s beginning. *What* novel? *Middlemarch*, most likely.)<sup>180</sup> What Isabel has to unlearn is the very experience that might

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<sup>178</sup> See Letters II.93-94, II.194-196, II.337. This last set of mentions, from 1881, in fact, comes in a letter responding to Alice James’s “little criticism” of *The Portrait*.

<sup>179</sup> The reference to Gounod is possibly the most obscure. The composer did, it happens however, reside in London from 1870 to 1874 — just the year after James himself arrived in England.

<sup>180</sup> The similarities between the plots of James’s *Portrait* and the work of George Eliot, from *Middlemarch* to *Daniel Deronda*, has been taken up most directly in Levine, Sabiston, and Wiesenfarth. See George Levine, “Isabel, Gwendolen, and Dorothea,” *ELH* 30.3 (Sep. 1963); Elizabeth Sabiston, “Isabel Archer: The Architecture of Consciousness and the International Theme,” *The Henry James Review* 7.2-3 (Winter-Spring 1986); and Joseph Wiesenfarth, “A Woman in *The Portrait of a Lady*,” *The Henry James Review* 7.2-3 (Winter-Spring 1986). Much within the novel itself seems to conspire to supply us with just these suggestions. The only specific date that we are provided for the events of the novel are “the autumn of 1876” in Chapter XXXVI, at which point Isabel has already been married to Osmond for three years (Portrait 384). This year is precisely the year of the publication of *Daniel Deronda*. If Isabel were to be fond of “the prose of George Eliot,” it would be thus too late for Isabel to be familiar with Gwendolen Harleth, but the novel’s dating would permit her to be intimately acquainted with Dorothea Brooke. James himself reviewed *Middlemarch* in 1873 and an early installment of *Daniel Deronda* in 1876. In commenting upon *Middlemarch*, James’s most noted critique is characterological — that “Dorothea was altogether too superb a heroine to be wasted” (see Henry James, “Review of *Middlemarch*” in *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers* [New York: Library of America, 1984], 960.). Although James would prefer that the novel dwell on Dorothea, the novel’s focus, down to its very title, is explicitly social if not sociological. When James elaborates on the novel’s form, what it is that Dorothea’s singular place is drowned out by, his term for what the novel takes on is that it might possess too much “*brain*” (Ibid., 965). What James might mean by this phrase as it relates to a reading of *Middlemarch* itself is taken up by Kent Puckett (see Puckett, “Stupid Sensations: Henry James, Good Form, and Reading *Middlemarch* Without a Brain,” *The Henry James Review* 28 [2007].). James himself goes on to qualify that the novel is “too clever by half” and that the author wishes too earnestly “to recommend herself



have made her, the very experience that would have brought her as “a vision” to James’s eye.<sup>181</sup> The Henry James of 1881 may well not have existed without George Eliot, whether we understand her as a part of James’s understanding of the history of the novel, or as part of the social circumstances that had helped him to write *The Portrait of a Lady* in the first place. Where character is concerned, independence is a state for which James is finally willing to efface even himself.

If *The Portrait of a Lady* appears as “the link between George Eliot and Virginia Woolf, the bridge across which Victorian fiction stepped over into modernism,”<sup>182</sup> it bears remembering that the novel’s own twenty-five year history actually spans both of those points. This was a wide bridge, one whose planks could be replanned and polished on its own terms between the early and late moments of James’s career. It is then this very reconfiguration of the terms of Isabel Archer’s independence upon which this moment in literary history depends. It is in these terms that the revision of a single word in *The Portrait of a Lady*, “was” as opposed to “sat,” becomes paradigmatic of a tension worked out across the period that this project considers. One way of anticipating where we might wind up with Virginia Woolf is to say that the trick of Woolf’s method is to find a way of making the force of the “was” reading still available with “sat” — registering ignorance, in other words, even from within stream of consciousness. James’s individual revisions to his novel simply exaggerate this same problematic. On the other side of James’s career, in the late style of *The Golden Bowl*, George Eliot has already been effaced, forgotten, *unlearned* entirely. The ways in which character might be shaped solely by ignorance is the technique that *The Golden Bowl* will be given over to in full. Here, with Isabel Archer, however, the stakes of singularity are only the more immediate.

When Isabel enters her drawing room to find Madame Merle standing while Osmond sits, and reads in their postures a compromising position, do we imagine that she remembers this scene as echoing Chapter 77 of *Middlemarch*?<sup>183</sup> When she spends the evening staring silently into her fire, does she call back the analogous scene from Chapter 80 of Eliot’s novel, where Dorothea sobs herself to sleep on the floor?<sup>184</sup> Dorothea Brooke, however, is crucially *wrong* about Will and Rosamond. A remembered reading of *Middlemarch* might let Isabel know that she should be more trusting. Yet to take in the scene, to make one’s judgment, to spend the night not sobbing but seated upright, alone, to conclude that one had no “ideas” that one “would not have been eager to sacrifice” if only doing so could save one’s “character,” would be to ignore one’s reading of Eliot, or

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to a scientific audience” (James, “Review of *Middlemarch*,” 965). While nevertheless showering praise, James notes that this mode leads Eliot to produce “too copious a dose of pure fiction,” for if “we write novels so, how shall we write History?” (Ibid., 965-966). James’s principal complaint with *Middlemarch* as a novel then is that it is not *really* a novel, at least as James conceives of the form.

<sup>181</sup> James, *The Art of the Novel*, 42.

<sup>182</sup> Gorra, *Portrait of a Novel*, xvi.

<sup>183</sup> Coming into the Lydgate household, Dorothea Brooke finds Will Ladislaw and Rosamond Lydgate sitting together, and imagines, from their apparent intimacy, that they are engaged in an affair. The details of Dorothea’s recognition are somewhat uncanny when placed alongside Isabel’s own, down to Rosamond’s manner of dress: “close by [Will], and turned towards him with a flushed tearfulness which gave a new brilliancy to her face *sat Rosamond, her bonnet hanging back.*” See George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 775; my emphasis.

<sup>184</sup> *Middlemarch*’s commitment to the sociological alongside the characterological is no more apparent than in this chapter, where Dorothea spends *half* the chapter in agonized contemplation; the first half she spends running errands, allowing herself to be distracted by “the social spirit” (Ibid., 784).

rather, to let oneself be willfully ignorant of it.<sup>185</sup> Perhaps that book too simply slips from Isabel's hand. By allowing Isabel's attempt at artlessness to escape *any* possible reading of Eliot — James's own, shortly following his arrival in England, or Isabel's in turn, first suggested in 1906 — Isabel unlearns her own place in the history of the novel. The world that James first made for Isabel is now radically hers. If *The Portrait* is “the link between George Eliot and Virginia Woolf,” James would have Isabel Archer herself sever that link. Independence ignores even the Master. What survives, in Isabel's singular sense of it, is a history of the novel without novels, without history, a concept of the novel that is only ultimately character.

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<sup>185</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that this use of “ignore,” as “ignorant of,” is in fact the word's original root.

## Chapter II. Knowing War in *Women in Love*

“He began in French—*La vie, c’est une affaire d’âmes impériales*—in a most beautiful voice—he was a fine-looking chap—but he had got into Roumanian before he had finished, and not a soul understood.”  
— *Women in Love*, Chapter XXIX

### I. Fiction Without People

Are there men and women in D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1920)? The novel’s heroes are a school inspector and a schoolmistress; its denizens number mine owners, artists, and society hostesses. Given the popular understanding of Lawrence as a libertine and literary provocateur, the kinds of legibly delineated individuals that allow sex to be staged would seem not only likely, but necessary. The question appears absurd on its face. But for the novel’s earliest critics, even a friendly one like Lawrence’s confidante John Middleton Murry, the answer was a pained “No.” Writing for the *Nation and Athenaeum* in 1921, Murry tallied the novel at “five hundred pages” of “the persistent underground beating of some dark and inaccessible sea in an underworld whose inhabitants are known by this alone, that they writhe continually, like the damned, in a frenzy of sexual awareness.”<sup>186</sup> Even that writhing, however, is not attempted by bodily forms. *Women in Love* does not “admit of individuality as we understand it... Remove the names, remove the sedulous catalogues of unnecessary clothing... and man and woman are as indistinguishable as octopods in an aquarium tank.”<sup>187</sup>

It is less surprising that character should come to controversy for D. H. Lawrence than that he should be regarded as fundamentally unable to write it. Presumably when Justice John Ford of the New York State Supreme Court came home to find his daughter reading *Women in Love*, he was not moved to persuade the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice to censure the book<sup>188</sup> due to the sedulous catalogues of clothing. Surely when Kate Millett deplores Lawrence’s ventriloquism of “feminine consciousness” to convey a “masculine message,” she is objecting to the specific qualities of character by which that consciousness is imagined.<sup>189</sup> Yet even sympathetic critics find themselves puzzled by Lawrence’s apparent requirements for character. Raymond Williams lauds *Women in Love*’s depiction of the “pressures of industrialism,” but finds that there “is something false, in the end, in the way [that Lawrence] tries to separate the material issues and the issues of feeling.”<sup>190</sup> What is inside the characters is never fully reconciled with what surrounds them. Indeed, what is inside the characters itself is never entirely apparent, notes Leo Bersani, because “we are always being asked to make crucial but almost imperceptible distinctions” between one character and

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<sup>186</sup> John Middleton Murry, “In *Nation and Athenaeum*, 13 August 1921, xxix, 713-714” in *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. P. Draper (New York: Routledge, 1970), 170.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> See the introduction to *Sex, Literature, and Censorship*, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Compass Books, 1959), 15-16.

<sup>189</sup> *Sexual Politics* (Urbana-Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2000), 239.

<sup>190</sup> “Lawrence’s Social Writings,” in *D. H. Lawrence: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Mark Spilka (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 173.

another; we “must keep Birkin’s singleness separate from Loerke’s and Gudrun’s anatomy; we mustn’t confuse Gerald’s idolatry of organization and Rupert’s pursuit of harmony.”<sup>191</sup> But these distinctions, like Murry’s octopods, are indistinguishable for anyone but their author.

These disparate criticisms of Lawrence share the conviction that his sense of character is not as it should be. We can imagine a more moral version of Gerald Crich; we can fantasize, as Millett does, about a Gudrun Brangwen whose art had been elevated to an occupation.<sup>192</sup> It would take even less to make individual personalities more recognizable in Murry’s eyes. But of course Lawrence does not or cannot write character that way. I survey these many objections to Lawrence’s method here because I am curious what happens when character goes wrong, and whether, without character, anything really remains of a novel in a certain mode. My introduction on E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* had foregrounded the types of novels under consideration here: novels that, while adopting certain modernist gestures, pursue plots that remain recognizably “realist.” Far from the charges of John Carey and others that formal modernism was invented as a way of limiting literature to the intellectual elite, these novels, I am contending, are conducted in a way that is willed to remain eminently readable. It is by transforming the terms by which that reading takes place that unlearning unfolds. *Women in Love* is only the most representative case because it is also the most transitional. One would be hard-pressed to say whether Lawrence’s novel more resembled *The Mill on the Floss* or *Molloy*.<sup>193</sup> *Women in Love*, more than any of the other novels under consideration, highlights the problems of character that in a realist novel we take for granted, or that in a modernist novel we never bother to seek out.

Thus far, this project has concerned alternative ways of evaluating character. What would it mean to see Isabel Archer not as a figure of dawning consciousness, but of gradually — and crucially — severed appurtenances? Never, however, has a critical consensus posed that Isabel’s character is incomprehensible, or that Leonard Bast’s story is somehow separable from Leonard. Character, as a concept, is easily taken for granted because it is the medium in which a novel’s plot is captured. We live and die by the lives and deaths that the novel animates. Lawrence’s novel has frustrated generations of critics because he appears indifferent towards this approach. (As Louis Menand observes, “though written by a man who believed passionately in the genre,” *Women in Love* reads “little like a novel.”)<sup>194</sup> The basic questions that we might ask about a character, questions of motive, of social and psychological organization, seem foolish with *Women in Love* because, Pierre Vitoux contends, “the characters have been conceived functionally, out of the role they play in the impersonal drama of life.”<sup>195</sup> Is it possible then for a novel to renounce character while remaining a novel? Absent the stories of Ursula and Birkin, Gudrun and Gerald, what is left of *Women in Love*?

Critics’ preoccupation with Lawrence’s characterization is all the more striking because Lawrence himself offers character as the solution to one of the novel’s prevailing paradoxes. *Women*

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<sup>191</sup> *A Future for Astyanax* (New York: Little, Brown, 1976), 176.

<sup>192</sup> *Sexual Politics*, 268.

<sup>193</sup> A moment’s reflection will hopefully allow my reader to appreciate that these comparisons are not as absurd as might be supposed.

<sup>194</sup> See Menand’s “Introduction” to the Bantam Classic edition (New York: Bantam, 2007), xvii.

<sup>195</sup> Pierre Vitoux, *Women in Love, D. H. Lawrence* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2001), 58-59.

*in Love* ends with Ursula's reflection on the words of "the Kaiser" — "Ich habe es nicht gewollt."<sup>196</sup> The words fall with all the suddenness of an artillery shell. From its first page, the novel has avoided any mention of the date. No year for its events is ever stated. Yet Ursula's abrupt mention of the "Kaiser" awakens the reader to an unsettling reality: that the novel has occurred against the backdrop of the First World War. Begun in 1913 as *The Sisters*, then revised in 1916 and 1917 following the division of the initial enterprise into two novels, *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow* (1915), but not published until 1920, the novel owes its origin to the war's influence.<sup>197</sup> In all but this case, however, the influence is only implicit. The lines that Ursula recalls are taken from a declaration issued by Kaiser Wilhelm II and published in the *Reichsanzeiger* on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1915, to mark the first anniversary of the conflict; in full, they read "Ich habe den Krieg nicht gewollt," not just "I did not want it," but "I did not want this war."<sup>198</sup> The characters are commemorating something of their own anniversary; Ursula is "twenty-six" when the novel opens, Gudrun "twenty-five" (8), but we learn in the closing chapters that Gudrun is now "twenty-six" (426). A full year has passed since the sisters first spied Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich from a vacant schoolhouse. Ursula's memory of the Kaiser's words dates that interval more precisely. From that early "spring day" (12) near Willey Green to a winter in the Tyrol, the entirety of the novel has taken place while the war marched on.

Logically, practically, this is an impossibility. Were war to have ravaged Europe, the characters could not have conducted themselves across the continent — from "Dover to Ostend" (387), on to "Basel" (389), and on "through Luxembourg, through Alsace-Lorraine, through Metz" (391) — without interruption. In a preface to the novel, written in 1919 for his American publisher,<sup>199</sup> Lawrence takes stock of the anomaly. *Women in Love* "took its final shape in the midst of the period of war, though it does not concern the war itself. I should wish the time to remain unfixed, so that the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters."<sup>200</sup> The obliqueness of this statement has led critics to observe that the war's impact is limited to the novel's "atmosphere."<sup>201</sup> But if we are to take "the bitterness of the war" for granted "in the characters," Ursula's sudden recollection of the Kaiser pulls us up short. To take the bitterness of the war for granted would be to fail to notice it, to see it as a purely characterological phenomenon, and certainly there is abundant cause for "disillusionment"<sup>202</sup> in the novel's own events. Only at the final moment is it suggested that these sentiments have a source. We have, prior to that instant, been ignorant of the fact that what we have been reading is a reckoning with the Somme, with trenches and conscription and barbed wire. The time might remain "unfixed," but it is a time that nevertheless includes and encompasses the Great War.

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<sup>196</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, ed. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey, and John Worthen (London: Penguin, 1995), 479. Subsequent quotations from the novel will refer to this edition, unless noted otherwise, and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>197</sup> The prolonged circumstances of the novel's composition, and the tensions provoked by the war, will be taken up below.

<sup>198</sup> Wilhelm II, "1915. Ich habe den Krieg nicht gewollt, 31 Juli 1915" in *Deutschland im Weltkriege: 1914-1918*, ed. Gaston Varenne (Paris: Libraire Vuibert, 1919), 107.

<sup>199</sup> The preface was eventually used by the publisher, Thomas Seltzer, in an advertising leaflet, but was not directly incorporated into original printings of the novel.

<sup>200</sup> "Preface," in *Women in Love* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), ix.

<sup>201</sup> Menand, "Introduction," ix.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

It is one thing to unlearn an acquaintance with German metaphysics, and the education that has trapped you in a loveless marriage. It is one thing to unlearn arithmetic, and the logic by which your story might be multiplied. But it is another thing entirely to unlearn the foundational historical event of one's own lifetime. If ever an event were responsible for socializing subjects en masse, it would be the War and its aftermath. Many were called to be Englishmen;<sup>203</sup> others developed a more expansive sense of identity.<sup>204</sup> Often the effects were more literal. Among the terms of the Treaty of Versailles was the mandate that the "tutelage" of those people and territories dispossessed of their national sovereignty "should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them."<sup>205</sup> The "dynamics and iconography of the Great War have proved" their own kind of lesson, providing "crucial political, rhetorical, and artistic determinants on subsequent life."<sup>206</sup> It was the War that, in Gertrude Stein's memorable phrase, made a lost generation.

Readers of *Women in Love* cannot immediately recognize the War in the circumstances, but even the characters have failed to learn anything of what is going on around them. They can read German newspapers and be blind to the references. They are not called to be Englishmen or anything else. Their identities, in the most peculiar part of Lawrence's characterization, as Bersani, Menand, Vitoux, and others have hinted, are there at the start and remain that way, unchanged, until the novel's end. The War, Lawrence insisted, can be registered only as a function of "the characters," but the characters remain ignorant of the very thing that they are resisting. What in Isabel Archer's case was an aspiration becomes Ursula Brangwen's baseline: how can character be constituted independent of any immediate determinants?

Contrary to the instincts of Lawrence's critics, character is the novel's core concern, but it is a concept of character that places limits on what can be known, on the language in which it can be written, and that is possibly unrecognizable *as* character for that reason. Where the novel looks least "like a novel"<sup>207</sup> is that its plot seems to have no purchase on its characters. Development or dawning knowledge, the twin imperatives of the *Bildungsroman*, find no fulfillment when character is offered as already complete. It is not, as Raymond Williams charged, that Lawrence attempts to "separate the material issues and the issues of feeling,"<sup>208</sup> rather, it is that the material issues and the issues of feeling are always at once imbricated. There is, in fact, no "separating" to do, for the same issues are always available from first to last. What *Women in Love* explores is how character might

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<sup>203</sup> As Winston Churchill describes in his memoirs, the stroke of midnight (German time) at which war was declared was met with an immediate swelling of national sentiment, "the sound of an immense concourse singing 'God save the King' float[ing] in [through the window.] On this deep wave there broke the chimes of Big Ben" (*The World Crisis: 1911-1918* [New York: Free Press, 2005], 122).

<sup>204</sup> "England is not Europe," John Maynard Keynes cautions in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1920), but "the unconcern of London" cannot last as such. Keynes's account is delivered as "one who, though an Englishman, feels himself a European also" (*The Economic Consequences of the Peace* [Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004], 3, 5-6).

<sup>205</sup> *Conditions of Peace of the Allied and Associated Powers* (Berlin: Hans Robert Engelmann, 1919), 17.

<sup>206</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ix.

<sup>207</sup> Menand, "Introduction," xvii.

<sup>208</sup> "Lawrence's Social Writings," 173.

refuse to be constituted by its material reality, and in those terms, that we begin with a schoolhouse and end with a cataclysm is only a variation on the same continued theme.

Does anything occur then in *Women in Love*? What happens when the War finally catches up to the characters? Ursula's reference to "the Kaiser" would seem, if only briefly, to reorganize the novel's epistemological investments. It was impossible to know, prior to that moment, that war was found in Willey Green. Yet even Ursula's single passing thought creates a template for the way in which knowledge filters into the novel only to be refused by the language of the novel itself. "Ich habe es nicht gewollt." "Es?" "It" what? This crown, this endeavor, this life, this war? Ursula recalls the Kaiser's words with clarity, but modifies the most vital part, the only part that would fix a name to the underlying anxiety: "den Kriege."

The language that the novel devotes its entire length to realizing works not unlike that missing word. We pass through it without landing on it. The problem of *Women in Love* is a problem of character, and both problems seem wedded to the War. But the novel's every effort, down to that elided "den Kriege," ensures that war will not appear here. The problem of the novel is not the War. Instead what looks like war becomes a more foundational struggle between knowing and unknowing. In order to establish how this is staged, we need first to define what knowing for the novel looks like. In *Women in Love*, knowing becomes synonymous with reference, with the ability of any experience to specifically identify. This will take us, in time, to Bertrand Russell's foundational understanding of how knowledge gains referential force, and to contemporaneous changes in how libel law identified individuals, both concerns with which Lawrence wrestled prior to the novel's publication. But for now, however, we need think of it as only just like "den Kriege." Even in parroting the Kaiser's words, Ursula cannot specify the reference. To refuse the war that is all around, to refuse the event that has necessarily shaped one's life, is to refuse any kind of reference at all.

For characters and readers alike, the novel is a unity of not knowing, of being exorcised of the compulsion to even have to know. The effect, rather than what Fredric Jameson would call narrative, with its underlying "epistemological claim (for knowledge or truth)," is purely affective.<sup>209</sup> Readers not only find our place with the characters, but the novel's performance is predicated on the synonymy of those impulses. Reading the War, we can never read "the War." Yet stripped of the developmental impulse upon which plot depends, Lawrence's constructions do not *seem* like characters. Murry, it appears, was not ready to hear the call. And it is this that establishes Lawrence as the prototypical practitioner of unlearning that this project has considered, for *Women in Love* establishes an understanding of novelistic character that could be widely recognized, but before there was a language in place to name it. Unlike with James or Forster, Lawrence's characterization is never mistaken for having some other end. But it is the function of that end to confound any attempts to account for it. The novel itself stands as an instance of abandoned reference.

John Middleton Murry, we might say, was right; *Women in Love* does not admit "of individuality as we understand it," but the key term there is "understand," for the individuality that Ursula or Rupert require is not one that calls for understanding. What for Murry was a grave objection might instead be considered the cornerstone of Lawrence's method: that we need not know anything, must not know anything, to read *Women in Love*.

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What then does character in *Women in Love* look like? What is it about Rupert and Ursula, Gudrun and Gerald, that refuses "individuality as we understand it?" Before the novel has quite begun, the sisters, Ursula and Gudrun, are already conversing, in a protracted back-and-forth

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<sup>209</sup> *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 5.

exchange regarding marriage, home, children; first-time readers can be forgiven for not being able to tell the sisters apart at this point. By the time we pause to account for the separate qualities of the speakers, all we know are the sisters' ages, that Gudrun is "very beautiful, passive, soft-skinned, soft-limbed," and of course that someone has taken inordinate care to inventory their clothing (8). Ursula is not described.

The first character, however, to be really seen, to attract the narrative's interest along with the characters' own, is Gerald Crich.

Gudrun lighted on him at once. There was something northern about him that magnetised her. In his clear northern flesh and his fair hair was a glisten like cold sunshine refracted through crystals of ice. And he looked so new, unbroached, pure as an arctic thing. Perhaps he was thirty years old, perhaps more. His gleaming beauty, maleness, like a young, good-humoured, smiling wolf did not blind her to the significant, sinister stillness in his bearing, the lurking danger of his unsubdued temper. 'His totem is the wolf,' she repeated to herself. (14)

What begins as an indefinite description, "something northern about him," immediately gathers a series of more specific modifiers now said to issue inherently from Gerald himself. In just a sentence, "something" vaguely northern" has insinuated itself directly into Gerald's "clear northern flesh." Each additional item but perpetuates the original impression: "northern" begets "cold," begets "crystals," begets "ice," begets "arctic." In the space of a few sentences, Gerald becomes the very thing that he was first offered as an analogy for; he is at once signifier and signified, sign of himself. Narrative time appears to move forwards — "[p]erhaps" he was thirty years old, reintroducing Gudrun's perspective — but the story stalls into simple restatement. When we are told that Gerald was "like a young, good-humoured, smiling wolf," the next sentence reminds again that "His totem is the wolf." This is Gerald's first appearance in the novel, but it might as well be his only one. Chapters later Birkin reflects that Gerald "was one of these strange white wonderful demons from the north" ("having the arctic north behind him," as the previous paragraph has put it) "fulfilled in the destructive frost mystery" (254). He speaks with "icy skepticism," there is an "icy vapour round his heart" (401). When Gerald walks, he walks with "queer, long wolf-steps" (413). When he sees, he is either "completely blind, blind as a wolf" (414), or shows, "by the light of his eyes," "his power—the wolf" (455). By the time Gerald meets his death in the snows of the Alps, it is only the consummation of what we have known about him all along. "Foreshadowing" is too crude a name for this process, because there is no before or after to Gerald's fate. His end has been immanent in his character.

*Women in Love* is like a novel written in the imperfect tense. While cast in the simple past, while seeming to stage discrete events, its every action is habitual. Gerald cannot lift his head without it taking place "in a manner characteristic of him" (53). This is the great peculiarity of Lawrence's characterization. Characters, we expect, should change. Their passage through the plot brings them to some greater or lesser epiphany. If nothing else, they might be tested (in something like the academic sense) by their exposure to new situations, new settings, new people. *Women in Love* runs to some five or six hundred pages, but nothing over that interval has any effect on the singularity of anyone's existence.<sup>210</sup> Murry hits on the difficulty when he attempts to puzzle through what in the novel does not "admit of individuality as we understand it." The problem is expressed algebraically. Lawrence prizes some attribute that Murry can only call "x," and while we might strive with "all our power to understand what he means by the experience x[, and compare] it with the experience y,"

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<sup>210</sup> I will spare the reader from a rehearsal of how the same dynamics are worked out between the other characters, except, crucially, in the case of Hermione Roddice, which will be taken up below.



which takes place between the novel's other pair of lovers, there is no distinguishing the cause of  $x$  from the cause of  $y$ . Yet what for  $x$  "leads to undreamed-of happiness," for  $y$  leads to "attempted murder and suicide."<sup>211</sup> The novel's entire calculus is so "completely and utterly unintelligible," so "indescribable," that Murry cannot even "attempt to paraphrase it."<sup>212</sup> The conventional test of character is an extension of Murry's equation, the ability to derive the original variables from the outcome of the plot. Process  $x$  leads to one end, process  $y$  to another. But Lawrence's math is unworkable. The test cannot be borne out because character is not elaborated by any process whatsoever.  $x$  and  $y$  are constants.

What would be required to fix those variables? If they are not coherent as processes, what, simply, are their original values? Lawrence's suggestion that "the bitterness of the war" could be found in the characters offers a ready hint as to what the characterization of the novel achieves, but it provides only isolated insight into how character works. One place, however, where Lawrence's theory of character is most concentrated is in the "Study of Thomas Hardy," the companion piece that Lawrence produced in 1914 alongside his original attempt at *The Sisters*, the single manuscript from which *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* were eventually extracted.<sup>213</sup> It has frequently been observed that the "Study of Thomas Hardy" has more to say "about Lawrence than about Hardy."<sup>214</sup> But what has curiously gone unmentioned is that nowhere but in the title (which

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<sup>211</sup> "Nation and Athenaeum," 171.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>213</sup> The critical trend, I know, is to see the "Study of Thomas Hardy" as corresponding most closely with *The Rainbow*, and to see *Women in Love* as an elaboration of the concepts at work in a separate essay, "The Crown." For this see Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "The Marble and the Statue" in *Imagined Worlds: Essays on Some English Novelists in Honour of John Butt*, ed. Maynard Mack and Ian Gregor (London: Methuen and Co., 1968), or see Pierre Vitoux, "The Chapter 'Excuse' in *Women in Love*; Its Genesis and the Critical Problem," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 17.4 (1976): 825. Given, however, the intimate conditions under which both novels were jointly developed, it seems fair, indeed vital, to see the works and their backdrops as part of one and the same process. Although *The Rainbow* was published prior to *Women in Love*, Lawrence began *The Rainbow* with the culmination of its sequel already envisioned; remarking on the Skrebensky affair in *The Rainbow*, Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett that the episode "*must*" be there so that Ursula (at that point named "Ella") could "get more experience before she meets her Mr. Birkin" ("To Edward Garnett, 29 January 1914; Lerici, per Fiascherino, Golfo della Spezia, Italy." in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, Vol. II: June 1913 — October 1916 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 142). The concepts at hand were developed with a sense of the core of *Women in Love* specifically in mind.

When quoting from Lawrence's letters in what follows, I will refer uniformly to the seven-volume Cambridge edition of *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* under the general editorship of James T. Boulton. To facilitate comparison with other editions of Lawrence's letters (notably the two-volume Viking edition overseen by Harry T. Moore, or the one-volume edition edited by Aldous Huxley shortly after Lawrence's death), I will maintain the above method of citation, giving the date and correspondent in addition to the page number.

<sup>214</sup> For a fairly exhaustive catalogue of commentators, see the Cambridge edition of the *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xxxviii.

Lawrence had in fact attempted to change) does it ever claim to be about Hardy at all.<sup>215</sup> “This is supposed to be a book about *the people* in Thomas Hardy’s novels,” Lawrence notes in his first mention of Hardy, three chapters into the text.<sup>216</sup> That Lawrence is willing to grant the ontological status of people to Tess and Jude and the other denizens of Wessex should make clear the extent to which the “Study” is not the study of an author, but a character study. Even before Hardy is mentioned, much of the essay’s theorizing has already been given over to discussing the metaphysical integrity of fictional beings. After several pages of what has seemed a virtual parable (as in the later “The Crown”), Lawrence interjects in the first person that “What of Dido my unconsciousness has, I could not tell you. Something I am sure, and something that has come to me without my knowledge... The reckoning of her mortal assets may be discoverable in print. But what she has in the roomy space of somethingness, called nothingness, is all that matters to me” (402). Nothing prior prepares for this abrupt mention of the queen of Carthage, but what Lawrence appears interested in capturing here are the qualities of a historical figure whose dimensions are chiefly established through literary intervention. Yet Dido exists independent of whatever Virgil had put “in print.” Her merits, her essence,<sup>217</sup> are explicitly outside the domain of “knowledge.” Here Lawrence is invested in what life remains even after *The Aeneid* has been laid aside. Dido’s charms have survived the centuries; this concept of character, enduring without knowledge, is an achievement, one imagines, to be prized.

In finally turning to “the people in Thomas Hardy’s novels,” this dictum endures.<sup>218</sup> Lawrence can get away with discussing metaphysics rather than Hardy for so long because all of Hardy’s

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<sup>215</sup> The status of the “Study” is somewhat curious. In July of 1914, some time after finalizing what he thought would be a “completed” copy of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence wrote to his agent to say that he had been approached to write “a sort of interpretive essay on Thomas Hardy” (see *Ibid.*, xix). All evidence of the exchange between Lawrence and the prospective publisher was lost, however, when the publisher’s records were destroyed during the Second World War. For more information on the “Study’s” genesis, see Bruce Steele’s introduction to the Cambridge edition. In a welcome irony, the extant typescript only survives because it had been given for safe keeping to John Middleton Murry. History has not preserved Murry’s assessment of the material.

<sup>216</sup> “Study of Thomas Hardy” in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers, 1936*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1980), 410, my emphasis. Subsequent citations from the “Study” will be quoted parenthetically.

<sup>217</sup> “Essence” possibly is not even strong enough. What Lawrence means is analogous to Dido’s “Dido-ness.” “What was Dido was new, absolutely new. It had never been before, and in Dido it *was*. In its own degree, the prickly sow-thistle I have just pulled up *is*, for the first time in all time. It is itself, a new thing... The final aim of every living thing, creature, or being, is the full achievement of itself” (402-403). Compare these sentiments to Lawrence’s remarks on “the sense of truth” in response to Bertrand Russell in the second section of this chapter.

<sup>218</sup> Lawrence, it should be mentioned, seems inexpressibly dismayed by elements of Hardy’s art. But Geoff Dyer’s book on Lawrence, *Out of Sheer Rage* (1997), which takes its title, in a clever bid at mirroring, from Lawrence’s supposed thoughts on his own book on Hardy, possibly overstates the extent of the antipathy. What inspires Lawrence’s rage is not the project, but what provokes it; in the letter to J. B. Pinker from which Dyer takes his title, the full comment reads: “What a colossal idiocy, this war. Out of sheer rage I’ve begun my book about Thomas Hardy” (“To J. B. Pinker, 5 September 1914; The Triangle, Bellingdon Lane, Chesham, Bucks” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, 212).

novels, for Lawrence, reduce to a single resolution, but one with metaphysical significance. “Having achieved and accomplished love, then the man [in Hardy] passes into the unknown. He has become himself, his tale is told. Of anything that is complete there is no more tale to tell. The tale is about becoming complete, or about the failure to become complete” (410). We might here think of Clym Yeobright’s frustrated love for Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native* (1878), or Jude Fawley’s attempt to have his love for Sue secured. The known, whether the received wisdom of the “Fawley curse” or the collective judgment of Egdon Heath, is the condition that predates the plot. As soon as characters have stepped into the unknown, their story for Hardy has ended. Why though, Lawrence asks, should the novel stop there? “In the long run, the State, the Community, the established form of life remained, remained intact and impregnable, the individual, trying to break forth from it, died... This is the tragedy of Hardy, always the same: the tragedy of those who, more or less pioneers, have died in the wilderness... This is the theme of novel after novel: remain quite within the convention, and you are good, safe” (411). Hardy’s novels, for Lawrence, dramatize the theme of this project, the conflict inherent in any attempt at subject formation between the community and the individual, the known and the unknown — but the community in Hardy always triumphs.

Lawrence’s own interest in the individual at the expense of the community presents a fundamentally different model for epistemology’s place in a plot. In the type of *Bildungsromane* that Hardy mimes, or in the type that Lawrence himself once wrote,<sup>219</sup> the internal coherence of the community works to extinguish everything in the individual that remains unknown. With this complete, the *Bildungsroman* plot has ended. Lawrence, however, thinks that it would be possible to keep pushing, that a novel might be made on the continued illegibility of the individual. This is as close as Lawrence gets to laying out a specific judgment of Hardy. (Clearly, as per the reading advanced in the previous chapter, we could conclude that Lawrence is not entirely fair to what Hardy takes on.)<sup>220</sup> Writing the unknown would mean siding with character over the community. But it would also mean continuing to speak even when the novel’s personalities are “complete” or have, like Dido, achieved a full expression of “[them]sel[ves].” Against knowledge is the character that is unequivocally autonomous. A novel built on this principle would look little like the *Bildungsroman*. For if the novel of education ordinarily only ends when its subject has been slotted safely into society at large, to let that subject outlive the end would be to destroy the very genre that had sought to contain it.

Why, however, does Lawrence insist on the words “known” and “unknown?” We could suspect that their meaning is fairly loose; the words might easily be replaced with “limited” and “infinite” with little consequence. Yet the division between character and community in Hardy that Lawrence senses is explicitly given as a pedagogical imperative. Lawrence reserves special contempt for Clym Yeobright, who is trusted as Hardy’s hero, but has no goal more noble than “teach[ing] little Egdon boys in school... He is not able to undertake his own soul, so will take a commission for society to enlighten the souls of others” (414). (Lawrence, it should be noted, had — like Ursula, Will, and, briefly, Gudrun Brangwen — been a school teacher from 1908 to 1911 in Croydon before resigning

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<sup>219</sup> As in *The White Peacock* (1911) or *Sons and Lovers* (1913), but *The Rainbow* too could be numbered among this type.

<sup>220</sup> At least one biographical motive for Lawrence’s conclusions is available with respect to *Jude the Obscure*, the one novel about which Lawrence has strangely little to say. At the time of the Hardy study, Frieda Lawrence had left her husband and her children for a life with Lawrence. The two had only recently been married. Insofar as the novel expresses a judgment against Sue and Jude, it would be identical to any judgment cast against the Lawrences.

due to his health.) Clym's teaching not only ruins his own character; it contaminates his sense of what character in others should be by letting him think that all aspects of a person, even his beloved, are knowable. "As soon as he got [Eustacia], she became an idea to him, she had to fit in his system of ideas. According to his way of living, he knew her already, she was labelled and classed and fixed down" (417). Clym "did not know," however — fundamentally could not know — that she existed, like Dido, "untouched by his system and his mind, where no system had sway and where no consciousness had risen to the surface" (418). In terms suggested earlier, the very core of character in Hardy, Lawrence has discovered, turns out primarily to be a function of reference. Hardy celebrates the stability of identity. Everything in his novels is given over to slotting characters into a single suitable place. The limits of Clym's knowledge, Lawrence wants to say, are Hardy's own limits. Hardy, of course, will drown Eustacia Vye.

Lawrence's indictment of this tendency in Hardy cannot help but strike even the most ardent admirer of Wessex as fundamentally accurate. Only the socially adaptable emerge from the waters at the end of *The Return of the Native*, or survive the skimmity-ride of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The sheer fact that Hardy's novels can be called "traged[ies]" (411) should seem to suggest that their sympathies are on the side of those drowned or left in the wilderness to rot. But where Lawrence and Hardy differ is not in the attributes of character that they prize, but in where they think that the moral weight of a work is assigned. Where Hardy values means, Lawrence can only see ends. (As Hardy notes in one of the ever-propagating prefaces to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the story stands "as an attempt to give artistic form to a true *sequence* of things;"<sup>221</sup> later he reminds us that "a novel is an impression, not an argument; and there" — in the impression alone — "the matter must rest."<sup>222</sup>) Lawrence's complaint is essentially a moral question. Should a novel's ethical interest in a character be evaluated on the basis of the events or the outcome? To Lawrence, killing a character is a judgment.<sup>223</sup> Hardy's reluctance to allow the outcome to match events tips the unknown back into the socially sanctioned, the too readily known.

Hardy's impulse is tragic; by exaggerating the gap between ideals and ends, Hardy hopes to inspire his readers' sympathies. Yet whatever ideal the process of becoming brings his characters to, sacrificing those characters, for Lawrence, means sacrificing the ideal itself. What would be the alternative? If means are to always meet ends, there can be no becoming, no change. Characterological constancy of this sort will lead Lawrence to the arctic, wintry wolf of Gerald Crich. In the "Study," Lawrence reviews the possible trajectories of becoming by compiling a list of the "moral conclusion" of each of Hardy's works (434). With Hardy's concept of character implicitly committed to forming fixed references, Lawrence attempts to make the scheme explicit. "Looking

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<sup>221</sup> "Explanatory Note to the First Edition," in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (New York: Modern Library, 1951), xxv, my italics.

<sup>222</sup> "Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions," in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (New York: Modern Library, 1951), xxviii.

<sup>223</sup> We thus might be puzzled by F. R. Leavis's decision to build his discussion of *Women in Love* around Gerald and Gudrun rather than Ursula and Birkin (see *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist* [London: Penguin, 1976], 181-209). The two industrial magnates, Gerald and his father Thomas, are the only two principal characters that Lawrence finds worth killing. (The only other at all is Diana Crich, Gerald's sister and Thomas's daughter, who appears only briefly before being found drowned, her arms tangled around the neck of the young man — an admirer — who had tried to save her. With a different shift of emphasis, Diana Crich might have appeared in a Hardy novel.)

over the Hardy novels, it is interesting to see which of the heroes one would call a distinct individuality, more or less achieved” (434). Four possible classes of individual emerge:

1. The physical individual [who] must fall before the community...
2. The physical and spiritual individualist [who] is a fine thing which must fall because of its own isolation...
3. The physical individualist and spiritual bourgeois or communist... must fall [but] remains, however, fitted into the community...
4. The undistinguished, bourgeois or average being with average or civic virtues usually succeeds in the end. (438)

To the first class Lawrence assigns *The Mayor of Casterbridge's* Henchard; to the second, Tess and Jude (and, we can imagine, Eustacia); to the third Sue, Clym Yeobright, and Angel Clare; to the fourth (based on prior comments),<sup>224</sup> the utterly unexceptional, like *The Return of the Native's* Diggory Venn and Thomasin. Less interesting than the particular assignments, however, are their terms. One can be a physical individual, or a spiritual individual, or one can be neither. Those who are physical alone must fall; those who are physical but willing to compromise spiritually are granted a partial reprieve; those who are both become isolated, and fall; the community at large is made up of indifferent victors. These are the only four possibilities that Hardy allows. But if character is determined by “physical” and “spiritual” attributes, there remain two logical possibilities that are nowhere expressed: the spiritual individualist who is physically undistinguished, and the individualist who is solely spiritual. It is spiritual concession alone that lets an individual belong to “the community” in Hardy’s system. But the purely spiritual individual, who endures independent of the community, seems something that Hardy cannot even imagine.

Lawrence, however, apparently can. To be purely spiritual is the single route by which an individual could exist uncompromised, derived only from the unknowable aspects of oneself. Lawrence is willing to make the literary imperative categorical. In the “fullest living” that any man does, “he does not know what he does, his mind, his consciousness, unacquaint, hovers behind, full of extraneous gleams and glances, and altogether devoid of knowledge. Altogether devoid of knowledge and conscious motive is he when he is heaving into uncreated space, when he is actually living, becoming himself” (431). The only “becoming” is a becoming that lets knowledge slip away, that lets the living thing insist upon its own existence. (Pages earlier, Lawrence calls this “sentient non-knowledge” (425). The appellation is precise; being and not knowing are one, not processes, but conditions.) Lawrence is doubtlessly aware of how utopian this sounds. He even concedes that it is not a state of being possible at present. But the “more that I am driven from admixture, the more I am singled out into utter individuality, the more this intrinsic me rejoices... and on and on, till, in the future, wonderful, distinct individuals, like angels, move about, each one being himself, perfect as a complete melody or a pure colour” (432). Until then, the fault of our pre-angelic state is that we know it to be impossible. Knowing though how hard it is to be numbered among the angels, we, with Lawrence, might find it easier to unknow the limits that keep character anchored to earth.

A step in this direction is found in Gerald Crich, whose death is not an end, but only an extension of what he essentially is. Could letting Eustacia live have solved Hardy’s problem? No, for there would be nowhere for her to live, with Clym, upon Egdon Heath. Lawrence’s model here, remember, is Dido. Both Dido and Eustacia do die. But if Dido is to be privileged for how her “somethingness, called nothingness” subsists even apart from what “may be discoverable in print” (Study of Thomas Hardy, 402), what Lawrence means by “spiritual” seems to be something that can exceed the determinate force of any enumerated state, something that exceeds all referentiality. But

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<sup>224</sup> See “The Study of Thomas Hardy,” 414.

not even love is strong enough to overcome Clym's conviction that Eustacia's every aspect should be known. Clym's interest is the interest of the plot. It is his own effort at knowing that would carve Eustacia into discrete pieces, plainly labeled, so that she can be consigned into a definable category of Hardy's system: in this case, the second category, reserved for those who cannot be assimilated and thus must fall. Where individuals remain committed to the community, any concept of selfhood suffers. What is needed is a more radical reconfiguration of means and ends (which is to say, of plot itself), an effacement of the community delivered purely from spiritual individuals.

This brings us, appropriately, not to the novel's end or its beginning, but to its middle. Conceivably any scene could capture the effect of *Women in Love's* sustained experiment in spiritual characterization. (Of Gudrun, in the novel's earliest pages: "all the time her heart was crying, as if in the midst of some ordeal: 'I want to go back, I want to go away, I want not to know it, not to know that this exists'" [12]. While we will not return to this specific scene, I would contend that this cry, before the novel has entirely commenced, is itself a protest against plot, an unwillingness to be conscripted into the forward march of narrative.) But Chapter XXIII, or "Excuse," warrants special scrutiny for being the source of much of the critical confusion surrounding the novel. We might recall John Middleton Murry's identification of an experience so transcendent yet so incomprehensible that Murry can only refer to it as "x."<sup>225</sup> This variable is derived from "Excuse," which Murry calls "the essential crisis of the book."<sup>226</sup> Indeed, critics seem united in their sense that the chapter is the novel's most "crucial,"<sup>227</sup> "the climactic struggle,"<sup>228</sup> a moment of "equilibrium,"<sup>229</sup> "the denouement to [Ursula and Birkin's] love story,"<sup>230</sup> "the one positive value in a deeply pessimistic novel...like a flickering light in the dark."<sup>231</sup> Something important, in other words, happens here. But critics seem equally at a loss to say what that something is. Even F. R. Leavis, Lawrence's great critical advocate, finds that the chapter "betrays by an insistent and over-emphatic explicitness, running at times to something one can only call jargon" — this expression, "one can only call," is typical of reactions to the chapter — that Lawrence is "uncertain of the value of what he offers."<sup>232</sup> What Leavis calls "jargon," Mark Kinkead-Weekes isolates as the novel's "symbolic shorthand."<sup>233</sup> Whatever the chapter promises, it simultaneously demonstrates most of what Frank Kermode considers the "achievements" of *Women in Love* alongside "most of the risks."<sup>234</sup>

One of the passages that Murry singles out while defining "x" illustrates the difficulty. "Ursula and Birkin," he notes, "achieve their esoteric beatitude in a tearoom; they discover by means of the

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<sup>225</sup> "Nation and Athenaeum," 171.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>228</sup> Frank Kermode, *D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 76.

<sup>229</sup> Charles L. Ross, *Women in Love: A Novel of Mythic Realism* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 58.

<sup>230</sup> Gary Adelman, *Snow of Fire: Symbolic Meaning in 'The Rainbow' and 'Women in Love'* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 102.

<sup>231</sup> David Ellis, "Introduction" in *D. H. Lawrence's 'Women in Love': A Casebook*, ed. David Ellis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 12.

<sup>232</sup> F. R. Leavis, *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 177.

<sup>233</sup> "The Marble and the Statue," 402.

<sup>234</sup> Kermode, *D. H. Lawrence*, 76.

‘suave loins of darkness’ the mysteries of ‘the deepest physical mind.’<sup>235</sup> We can see these as instances of Lawrence’s “jargon” or “symbolic shorthand.” The “deepest physical mind” (318) is a particularly Lawrentian expression; it seems, on its face, to mean nothing, since the one thing that would tend to distinguish the Cartesian seat of reason is its dissociation from the body. The superlative only emphasizes the contradiction. Nevertheless, Lawrence arrests the opposition; “the deepest physical mind” it is. Although attention to the “Study of Thomas Hardy” might have helped establish the ambitions of Lawrence’s system, we must not lose sight of the sheer weirdness of what Lawrence’s bid for character takes on. What exactly are “spiritual” individuals? (Presumably we can recognize them by their “suave loins of darkness” or impossibly organized minds.) In championing the “spiritual” rather than the “physical,” Lawrence would again seem open to Raymond William’s original critique that his novels artificially “separate the material issues and the issues of feeling.”<sup>236</sup> Lawrence’s affirmation of the uniquely spiritual in 1914, and his insistence that the War could be “taken for granted in the characters” come 1919, seems to leave the novel in an insoluble contradiction. How, we might ask, do spiritual characters make love, let alone war? What Lawrence *wants* from his system, in short, seems to have brought us back to square one. In “Excuse” we have Murry’s “octopods,” illuminated. Lawrence’s biggest “problem as a writer,” Richard Aldington once observed, “was to put into words these feelings and perceptions which he believed to be independent of the conscious intellect,” which was hard enough for the man to put into prose, but “almost impossible for anyone else” to comprehend.<sup>237</sup> Understanding the novel requires better understanding this chapter. To tip my hand, however, I will caution that the chapter really is all “suave loins of darkness” and “deepest physical mind[s],” that what “Excuse” engages us in is a running contradiction that loosens the hold that language has in constituting character.

The awkwardness of “Excuse” is apparent immediately. Rupert Birkin has proposed marriage to Ursula chapters earlier, and although she has refused to provide him with an answer, the two have set off into the countryside in Birkin’s car. “Look,” he suddenly says, “what I bought.”

The car was running along a broad white road, between autumn trees.

He gave her a little bit of screwed-up paper. She took it and opened it.

“How lovely,” she cried.

She examined the gift.

“How perfectly lovely!” she cried again. “But why do you give them me?” She put the question offensively.

His face flickered with bored irritation. He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

“I wanted to,” he said coolly.

“But why? Why should you?”

“Am I called on to find reasons?” he asked? (302)

We are likely to feel here that we are being given abundant effect without obvious cause. For what is the “them,” the gift in the “screwed up paper,” that inspires the argument? Ursula has been allowed to “Look,” but it is not a glance that the narrative tracks. We might be taken aback too by the uncharacteristically staccato rhythm of the exchange. Actions occur in isolation; we are told of the characters’ sentiments (“bored irritation,” “cool,” a way of putting a question that shows “offense”), but the emotions, robbed of any immediate reference, seem to come and go in a vacuum. (What is

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<sup>235</sup> Murry, “*Nation and Athenaeum*,” 170.

<sup>236</sup> “Lawrence’s Social Writings,” 173.

<sup>237</sup> Richard Aldington, “Introduction” in *Apocalypse*, by D. H. Lawrence (London: Penguin, 1976), xvi.

“bored irritation?” And why, having just given her the gift, would Birkin be “bored” to begin with?) This is dialogue as dumbshow, or rather, since words are spoken, novel as virtual screenplay, where someone else — cinematographer, set designer, wardrobe assistant — can be counted on to furnish the rest of the effects. All we are left with is affect, the characters’ bearing towards a scene that the novel itself ignores. Only in the next sentence is Birkin’s gift apparent.

There was a silence, whilst she examined the rings that had been screwed up in the paper.

“I think they are *beautiful*,” she said, “especially this. This is wonderful—”

It was a round opal, red and fiery, set in a circle of tiny rubies.

“You like that best?” he said.

“I think I do.”

“I like the sapphire,” he said.

“This?”

It was a rose-shaped, beautiful sapphire with small brilliants.

“Yes,” she said, it is lovely.” She held it in the light. “Yes, perhaps it *is* the best—”

“The blue—” he said.

“Yes, wonderful—” (302-303)

Even establishing the rings as rings does not entirely simplify matters. Why rings, plural? (Now at least we can understand Ursula’s “offens[e].”) But how many are there? The narrative details each new offering only after the characters have already commented on it. Things — events, items, descriptions, the better part of the representable world — seem to be unfolding ahead of us, so that what we read is not the record of those things, but only the reactions that they provoke.

The scene might have looked quite different. It is worth noting that *The Wedding Ring* was Lawrence’s original name for the project, predating even *The Sisters*, and while the Wagnerian echo was presumably part of the title’s appeal, *the* wedding ring(s) offered here would give us, in concentrated form, the object of that original vision. But now not only has the title been abandoned; the entire object has been skipped over. Given Lawrence’s fleeting nod to Wagner, I am struck by Fredric Jameson’s discussion of the magic potions that appear in *Götterdämmerung* and *Tristan* as essentially “superfluous” contrivances that merely replicate the realities of the plot.<sup>238</sup> If Tristan and Isolde “are in love already,” then the potion does no real work. But for Jameson the utility of the potions is not the point; rather, they are the residue of an “affective redoubling;” “the very autonomous force of the passion in *Tristan*” differentiates the “effects from the material causes, all the while endowing them with a kind of materiality that grounds their autonomy in the first place.”<sup>239</sup> For Lawrence, however, to abandon the conceit of a physical, literal wedding ring redistributes the icon’s affective force. It is the people watching the central object who are of interest, not the object itself. The rings are as redundant as Wagner’s potions. Readers are not “behind” the events recounted; it is that seeing them in full would not illustrate any more than the characters themselves have already registered. Comparison with Wagner might seem arbitrary, but in fact Wagner seems to have been vital to Lawrence’s conception of “knowledge” as early as 1909, when he was teaching in Croydon. “Surely you know Wagner’s operas — *Tannhäuser* and *Lobengrin*,” Lawrence wrote to Blanche Jennings, a friend from Eastwood who had asked if he could recommend any books on music. “They will run a knowledge of music into your blood better than any criticisms. We are withering nowadays under the barren warmth of other people’s opinions, and second-hand knowledge. It doesn’t matter much how little you *know*, so long as you are capable of

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<sup>238</sup> See Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 69-70.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.



feeling much, and giving discriminate sympathy.”<sup>240</sup> Wagner’s entire operation is the essence of the unknowable. Do the potions work or not? As Jameson concludes, their place in the performance means that any answer is beside the point.

Let us not call this first excursus a “screenplay” then; let us think of it as a libretto. That Lawrence, unlike Wagner, will not supply the rest of the score does not show that he is a less devoted artist, but only that his concerns are concentrated on this single aspect alone. “Excuse” is a piece of a novel stripped of all but one fact, how character coheres. As the chapter continues, character becomes the very focus of Ursula and Rupert’s debate. Rupert

was not very much interested any more in personalities and in people — people were all different, but they were all enclosed nowadays in a definite limitation he said; there were only about two great ideas, two great streams of activity remaining, with various forms of reaction therefrom. The reactions were all varied in various people, but they followed a few great laws, and intrinsically there was no difference. They acted and re-acted involuntarily, according to a few great laws, and once the laws, the great principles, were known, people were no longer mystically interesting. They were all essentially alike, the differences were only variations on a theme. None of them transcended the given terms.

Ursula did not agree—people were still an adventure to her—but—perhaps not as much as she tried to persuade herself. Perhaps there was something mechanical, now, in her interest... [S]he became still, and she turned for a moment purely to Birkin. (305)

In light of Lawrence’s comments in the “Study of Thomas Hardy,” the content of this exchange should prove fairly straightforward. Birkin would forsake “the laws, the great principles” that, like the totalizing will of the community in Hardy, leave everything “known.” Individuals remain too rigidly defined by “the given terms” (or the “definite limitations”) that these expectations supply. The only alternative path away from the “known” would deviate from definition. The content is clear, but what, however, is this passage’s form? Rupert “said” that people “were all enclosed nowadays in a definite limitation,” but is the rest of the opinion spoken? Given the even alternation between speakers earlier in the chapter, Rupert’s mass of polemic seems out of place, as though we are given only the summary points of a more protracted conversation. Ursula “did not agree” — aloud, or in principle? Even what Birkin originally “said” has an air of received wisdom; not what Birkin literally said, but the kind of thing that an impartial third party would attribute to him: “Rupert says that people nowadays...” Whereas before the chapter had prioritized raw dialogue over the description of what was being discussed, now even dialogue has been replaced by an assertion of the underlying principles. The passage itself deviates from novelistic definition. What exactly passes here we cannot say.

Argument resumes. (Now Birkin wishes to return to Shortlands, the Crich estate, for dinner, where he plans to see Hermione Roddice; Hermione’s place in this exchange will be taken up below.) But as the chapter wears on, we would have less and less cause for confidence in the representational form of any part of what is depicted. The two go for high tea.

The world had become unreal. She herself was a strange, transcendent reality.

They sat together in a little parlour by the fire.

...

He stood on the hearth-rug looking at her, and her face that was upturned exactly like a flower, a fresh, luminous flower, glinting faintly golden with the dew of the first light. And he was smiling faintly as if there were no speech in the world, save the silent delight of

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<sup>240</sup> “To Blanche Jennings, 22 December 1908; Colworth Road, Croydon” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. I, 99.

flowers in each other. Smilingly they delighted in each other's presence, pure presence, not to be thought of, even known.

...

Unconsciously, with her sensitive finger-tips, she was tracing the back of his thighs, following some mysterious life-flow there. She had discovered something, something more than wonderful, more wonderful than life itself...

This was release at last...

He looked down at her with a rich bright brow like a diadem above his eyes. She was beautiful as a new marvellous flower opened at his knees, a paradisaal flower she was, beyond womanhood, such a flower of luminousness. (313)

Whatever we conclude about this passage, we must first take note of its insistency, the way that it circles back to the same few items. The world's "unreal" quality is matched by Ursula's own "reality," Ursula is "like a flower, a fresh, luminous flower," and Birkin's delight is the delight "of flowers." The two share not just "presence" but "pure presence," and even that most generic of identifiers, "something," is "something, something." In the same preface to the novel in which he discusses taking the War for granted in the characters, Lawrence closes by defending another possible "fault" of his "style," "the continual, slightly modified repetition."<sup>241</sup> Lawrence claims that the technique is only "natural to the author," but he adds that "every natural crisis in emotion or passion or understanding comes from this pulsing, frictional to-and-fro which works up to culmination."<sup>242</sup> We have seen something similar in the mounting "iciness" of Gerald's character when the narrative first discovers him, but now, midway through the novel, when our characters have long been familiar to us but stand on the brink of a great crisis, the same method seems to attach to every facet of their reality.<sup>243</sup>

Can we even call this "repetition?" We are not told of the same subject twice over — as in, to seize on an almost arbitrary example, the charges of Tennyson's light brigade — but are instead asked to renew our acquaintance with different aspects of objects that we have barely even left. It is surely not, as F. R. Leavis had insisted, that Lawrence here is "uncertain of the value of what he offers,"<sup>244</sup> since Lawrence is sure enough of the flower motif to take it up time and time again. Rather, it is the language itself that has become uncertain: uncertain of its ability to describe, to nominate, to refer. A "flower" alone is nothing; it must also be a "fresh, luminous flower," but even that is not good enough, and we pass on to another instance of the same thing. It is difficult to say whether each added description builds up or breaks down the original portrayal. Is the flower any clearer for being fresh and luminous? But what the order of our reading alerts us to is the insufficiency of language at any one moment to account for even the trivial. These lines alone pass through every available allegorical register, from simile ("like a fresh, luminous flower") to metaphor ("a paradisaal flower she was") to apparent identity ("such a flower of luminousness"). Even the temporary resolution of that final attribute carries with it the uncertainty of all the prior attempts. Ursula is the thing that was unclear just moments before. How though can one even be the thing that one was first (in simile and metaphor) compared to? (Unless one is Gerald Crich.) Ursula was

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<sup>241</sup> "Preface," ix.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Put differently, the rhetoric that had established Gerald as a character has now infected the very narrative, so that what we have read is a wild extension of character's reach. Gerald's iciness kills no one but himself, but here the plot has become a part of Ursula and Birkin's every action.

<sup>244</sup> *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 177.

“like” a flower, she “was” a flower, she becomes both was and like a flower all at once. My reader will hopefully concede the grammatical intractability of this last analysis; it is testament to what I have called the readability of *Women in Love* that the same passage remains legible in its original execution. Put logically, however, the passage functions like a rhetorical ouroboros, devouring its own tail, so that its original premises become reduced to tautology.

We see a similar slip in the narrative’s certainty in the very object of its depiction. Reading the passage above, we can hardly not imagine, as John Middleton Murry did, that the characters are reveling in their “sexual awareness,”<sup>245</sup> that the narrative has captured the equivalent of orgasm. Ursula strokes Birkin’s thighs; we witness “release.” But reading the scene sexually requires looking past the limited descriptions actually made available. In one moment the world is “unreal;” the next we are before a fire. We move from the public parlour to an intimacy more suited to the boudoir without interruption. It would be wrong to conclude that the experience is entirely sexual, for the moment we would consent to that reading, we are forcibly reminded of its implausibility. Waiting for tea to be served, the two would not have time to consummate their relationship in any literal sense. We are left with a sustained contradiction between two possible readings of the scene, one chaste and one sexual. But it is not clear that we are ever asked to choose one over the other. How could we? To read the scene as only allegory would be to miss at least half of what is staged. The only common element that arrests the contradiction is the literal letter of the account. What does take place in that parlour? Not only does the novel not say, it does not want to. There is “no speech in the world” that would capture Birkin’s looks, and while the two have finally attained “pure presence,” it is a presence “not to be thought of, even known.”

Don’t think of a pink elephant. Lawrence’s prose might well remind us of that old experiment, for it asks us to do something conceptually impossible: resisting an image that has nevertheless been laid before us. Aren’t the hundreds of words spent specifying Birkin and Ursula’s raptures an attempt to “think” them, to “know” them? Rather, I would contend that they are an earnest attempt to *unthink* the experience by defusing its definitional clarity. Like the flower whose status needs to be revised time and again, our hold on the thing we are meant to witness grows only more precarious with each added mention. The oscillation between possible readings of the scene is itself a struggle over what Birkin had earlier thought of as “the given terms,” the determinate power of reference to police meaning.

Even that word, “known,” seems to operate on a special register. Wayne Booth has memorably used Lawrence as his model for an incompatibility between implied author and reader, holding that he “simply cannot read [Lawrence’s] polemic without smiling when [he] should be panting, scoffing when [he] should be feeling awe.”<sup>246</sup> But here, despite the passage’s portentousness, it does seem like we might be invited in on a kind of joke. The scene offers sex without sex, but if we are sensitive to the Biblical sense of “knowing” (as Lawrence’s editor, Mark Kinkead-Weekes is on at least one occasion),<sup>247</sup> then we could be tempted by a possible pun only to have that possibility immediately nullified. The experience on offer is *not* “known,” in any sense, Biblical or otherwise. The awkwardness that Booth finds is the very thing that Lawrence would want discovered. Both reactions, laughter and awe, sexuality and chastity, are called up and refused at once.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> *Nation and Athenaeum*, 174.

<sup>246</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 138.

<sup>247</sup> See the note to page 242 in *Women in Love*, 548.

<sup>248</sup> This, of course, was Freud’s understanding of jokes, especially those that could be classified as “smut.” Since “civilization and higher education have a large influence in the development of

The entirety of “Excuse” mirrors the meaning called up and then leached out of that single word, “known.” To short-circuit the implied joke is to refuse the word’s ability to refer. Continually we are exposed to fresh experiences only to have that experience derealized by the next line, the next word. The novel still parades on — we have a handful of chapters and hundreds of pages left to go — but the only experience it seems willing to record is its divestment from the traits, from description to dialogue, that make it look like a novel. To qualify this statement, we might contrast “Excuse” with other specimens of the genre, whether the climactic sequences in Hardy’s novels (raging rivers, ad hoc riots, social forces given physical form), or the floridly descriptive passages that stand in for the drama of Lawrence’s own *The White Peacock*, but the case may be put even by a simple comparison with an earlier version of “Excuse” itself.

*Women in Love*, as we know, experienced a long gestation; what was begun as *The Sisters* produced *The Rainbow* in 1915, but Lawrence persisted in re-writing the sequel at intervals throughout 1916 and 1917. The earliest known text of what was formally *Women in Love* dates from the holograph notebooks that Lawrence produced in 1916;<sup>249</sup> from these notebooks emerged the typescripts that

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repression,” “jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation” temporarily, so that the obscene content is repackaged in a more socially amenable form. See Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960 [1905]), 120. But a joke is then only a licensed release (the superego’s calculated concession to the ego, in a later version of the same scheme), something itself social. The “utterance of the obscene... compels the person who is assailed to imagine the part of the body or procedure in question,” and to know “that the assailant is himself imagining it” (Ibid., 116). The only joke that would escape social sanction entirely would be the joke that did not know whether or not it was a joke to begin with. Is Lawrence’s “known” a pun? Who knows?

<sup>249</sup> Few of Lawrence’s notebooks survive. The earliest of those now held at the University of Texas, Austin’s Harry Ransom Center, begins with what in the finished novel is Chapter XXIII — which is to say, “Excuse” — and ends with Chapter XXXII, the novel’s penultimate chapter. In what follows, I will have recourse to the original notebooks alongside John Worthen and Lindeth Vasey’s edition of *The First ‘Women in Love,’* which reproduces the typescript (formally known as TSIa) circulated to publishers. What warrants my preference of the notebooks over the typescript, where available, is only that the holograph text reflects a slightly earlier instantiation of the same ideals. Having typed some “two thirds” of the novel, Lawrence was invited to send the rest to his agent for preparation (see *The First ‘Women in Love,’* ed. John Worthen and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xxx-xxxii.) Unwilling, however, to send off an earlier draft, Lawrence spent a fortnight in October of 1916 “under[taking] a very heavy revision of the last part of the novel in the old notebooks dating from June” (Ibid., xxxii). These revisions began with “Excuse,” and it was here too that Lawrence formally settled on his title; the first notebook entertains two possible titles, *Women in Love* and *Dies Irae* (Ibid.). Only with the second “Excuse” notebook, at the moment that Ursula and Birkin quit their jobs, is the latter title abandoned. With the last part of the novel re-written, Lawrence dispatched the notebooks to his agent. It was at this point then that the manuscript left Lawrence’s hands. Although the changes between the notebooks and the typescript of *The First ‘Women in Love,’* are not major, several variances exist which make recourse to the notebooks preferable, when possible. The typescript version of Ursula’s letter of resignation, for instance, reads “As I wish to go abroad immediately, I should be very grateful if you would liberate me from my duties as soon as possible” (Ibid., 290). The notebook version of the same passage, however, makes no mention of going abroad, and reads “I [As I] wish to leave ~~as soon as possible~~ [immediately,] so I should be ~~grat~~ very grateful if you would liberate me from my

were then circulated to publishers (and confederates), only to be summarily rejected (by both).<sup>250</sup> In the scene before the parlour fire that the original notebooks record, the intelligibility of Ursula and Birkin's actions is not so incessantly troubled.

Her face was now one dazzle of released, golden light, as she looked up at him, and clutched her arms round his legs as he stood near her. He bent down and kissed her softly on her wide, happy mouth. She was so happy, so released, she could hardly bear it. Ah, the awful prison of her life! Could it be true that she was liberated?

It was true. She knew she was sure. She knew by his eyes, that were so steady and infinite. They seemed to envelop her as the sky envelops a bird.<sup>251</sup>

Preserved in the published version is the "dazzle" of Ursula's face, but here we encounter a cross-cutting between the two figures that ensures that we never lose track of either their actions or, indeed, even access to their conscious thoughts. We see her gaze, we see their posture, we see where she touches him and he touches her. Every sentence flows causally from that first kiss: because Ursula's mouth is wide and "happy," she is "so happy, so released;" because she is now released, she realizes that her life had been a "prison;" and because she is no longer a prisoner, she is "liberated." The lines could be diagrammed logically as well as physically, if need be. But along with that logic comes Ursula's absolute certainty in what this experience is; not only was it "true," she "knew she was sure." This is the exact opposite of what the ultimate *Women in Love* will assert. Nothing in the early version is beyond what can be "known" (313), for it keeps every ready reference in place.

Meaning, in this rendition of the scene, is preserved, emphasized, acknowledged by touch. Compare this with another physical exchange that appears nowhere in the 1916 notebooks but that is added to the final novel.

Her arms closed round him again, her hands spread upon his shoulders, moving slowly there, moving slowly on his back, down his back slowly, with a strange, recurrent, rhythmic motion, yet moving slowly down, pressing mysteriously over his loins, over his flanks. The sense of the awfulness of riches that could never be impaired flooded her mind like a swoon, a death in most marvellous possession, mystic-sure. She possessed him so utterly and so intolerably, that she herself lapsed out. And yet she was only sitting still in the chair, with her hands upon him, and lost. (316)

What transpires here is rightly, in Murry's phrase, "indescribable." At the risk of sounding like Ruskin, famously lamenting the fallacy of a "foam" that should be neither "cruel" nor "crawl," of all

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duties as soon as possible" (*Holograph Notebooks to "Women in Love," Notebook 1* [Harry Ransom Center at UT Austin, Box 24: 1916], 34.) What seems notable in the earlier version — other than the obliqueness of Ursula's motive for departure, which the typescript supplies but the final publication then again drops — is the substitution of "immediately" for "as soon as possible" at the beginning of the sentence. Presumably, since the same phrase appears at the sentence's end, Lawrence at this point wanted to avoid redundancy — a redundancy, however, that we will encounter quite often in the published novel's "slightly modified repetitions" ("Preface," ix.).

<sup>250</sup> These twin rejections will be the subject of the next section, which considers the circumstances that would have warranted Lawrence's reimagining of the novel between 1916 and 1920. For now, I only want to prove that it is a reimagining.

<sup>251</sup> *Notebook 1*, 25-26. It should be noted that there is a slight incongruity in the page numbers throughout the notebooks. The numbers are given in Lawrence's own hand, but two consecutive pages of Notebook 1 are numbered "12," meaning that the text here actually appears on the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh physical pages.

the things that might “flood” one’s mind, “riches” seem the least well suited to do so. And what first provokes the cascade? The “recurrent, rhythmic motion?” The “flanks?” That Ursula “swoons,” like “death,” almost suggests an Elizabethan euphemism for orgasm, and yet we are reminded, to her surprise and ours, that “she was only sitting still in the chair.” Critics have noted how the sudden revelation of that chair allows us to “safely dismiss all speculations about ‘what really happened’ sexually during the scene,”<sup>252</sup> but it is formally more arresting that the exchange has proceeded without regard for the physical objects surrounding Ursula and Birkin at all. This is the only mention of a chair in the entire chapter; a page prior, Ursula had looked at Birkin “across [a] table” (315) but no one is even ever said to sit. What has happened to the recognizable world of happy mouths and kisses? Lawrence’s critics, from Murry to Leavis, would have had no trouble comprehending the earlier version of the scene. (One of the certainties, moreover, that the notebooks establish is the chastity of what takes place. A kiss in a public parlour is perhaps a transgression, but nothing amounting to the published novel’s implied — and then abandoned — “release.”) But here whatever movements through space and time have brought us to this rapture are lost. The world itself disappears behind the characters’ communion.

Not only the physical legibility of the scene is obscured; so too is its lexical legibility. The nearest summary of the experience taking place in Ursula’s “mind” is that it was “mystic-sure,” but the hyphenation of the term underscores an immediate contradiction. That which is “mystic” definitionally, as the Oxford English Dictionary has it, “transcend[s] human understanding.” It could never, by that measure then, be “certain,” in the only non-obsolete definition of “sure.” Similar “oxymoronic phrases” appear frequently throughout “Excuse.”<sup>253</sup> Already we have noted the “deepest physical mind” (318) that had caught Murry’s attention. To possess a “physical mind,” or to be “mystic-sure,” or to be “mystically-physically” satisfied (314), or to participate in “unspeakable communication” (320) are all necessarily impossibilities. While formally coherent, in that they remain recognizable as English words ordered in a familiar way, each of these phrases defies conscious articulation. The very title of the chapter, “Excuse,” performs a similar operation. “Excuse,” if it means anything, can only be descended “from an obsolete noun meaning ‘a mad outrush’”<sup>254</sup> The word seems to have died, in this sense, after 1587.<sup>255</sup> “Excursus,” however, is a noun, as is “excursion.” What happens in Chapter XXIII might well hover between “a detailed discussion of some point” and an “escape from confinement... running to extremes.” But it is the hovering, the ability to capture the general sense of two concepts while shirking the definitional integrity of either that the title performs. “Excuse” is realer, as a reflection of the chapter’s wants, than an excuse or excursion. “Excuse” unknows the very roots from which it is descended.

This is what it means, in the terms of the “Study of Thomas Hardy,” to exchange the “physical” individualism of a Clym Yeobright for the purely “spiritual” independence of Lawrence’s ideal. The physical world loses its hold on our heroes, as does the linguistic system by which that world takes shape. We can still, if the verb fits, “have” something of the experience that the novel stages, but what it is “comes to [us] without [our] knowledge” (Study of Thomas Hardy, 402). To read “mystic-sure,” we must somehow attend to both possibilities at once, to imagine something that cannot be

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<sup>252</sup> Pierre Vitoux, “*Women in Love*: From Typescripts to Print,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 23.4 (1981): 831. See also Mark Kinkead-Weekes, “The Marble and the Statue,” 405.

<sup>253</sup> J. F. Stewart, “Dialectics of Knowing in *Women in Love*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 37.1 (1991): 68.

<sup>254</sup> Kinkead-Weekes in *Women in Love*, 550. The OED’s definition, more suitable for our purposes, is “an outrush, a raid, a hostile sally.”

<sup>255</sup> Its only OED source is Hooker’s translation of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*.

imagined. Because it deploys known concepts to contradictory ends, it remains readable, as all language must, but the phrase and those like it seem at once prelingual and superlingual. The word “mystic-sure” itself is a refused reference, much like “den Kriege,” “known,” or Lawrence’s desire to escape the rigid character system of Hardy. There is no single sense that it conveys — there is in fact no stable sense at all. Isabel Archer, in James’s *Portrait of a Lady*, had noted that when you judge for yourself people “call you” conceited. Lawrence aspires towards a language where nothing anyone could call you, nothing anyone had ever named, could ever come to anything. The mounting record of the novel works to avoid reference, to refuse definition. Unlearning, for *Women in Love*, is how the multiplication of words manages to gather less meaning.

Can it be a coincidence that, immediately following this exchange, Ursula and Birkin spontaneously decide to “drop [their] jobs, like a shot” (315)? She is, recall, a school teacher, Birkin a school inspector. Their jobs have barely intruded on the narrative. (Ursula’s own education, in *The Rainbow*, was treated at much more exhaustive length. Consistent with the lack of progress afforded to the characters, Ursula and Birkin have spent the better part of their time not teaching, not inspecting, despite the fact that these are their nominal occupations.) Yet nevertheless, resigning their positions — not marrying, not abandoning their families, not fleeing to found some commune, like Lawrence’s own imagined Rananim — is offered as the decisive step by which their spirituality will be signified. As Birkin enters a post office to mail their letters of resignation, Ursula observes that

[e]ven as he went into the lighted, public place he remained dark and magic... It was a travesty to look and to comprehend the man there. Darkness and silence must fall perfectly on her, then she could know mystically, in unrevealed touch. She must lightly, mindlessly connect with him, have the knowledge which is death of knowledge, the reality of surety in not-knowing. (319)

The things that Ursula has discovered in Birkin are the very effects that the chapter has thus far worked up. Ursula’s existence — “the knowledge which is death of knowledge” — is an existence cut off from determinate meaning. Her desire to “know mystically,” an oxymoron like the prior “mystic-sure,” would be met in “unrevealed touch,” much like those caresses in the parlour that had proved impossible to track. While preserving the basic faculty of touch, Ursula has emptied out much of its force; Ursula’s hunger is for a feeling that is not physical, where the entire world exists in “darkness,” like Birkin’s silhouette. Fittingly, that silhouette emerges against the “lighted, public place” of the post office. Letters of resignation written, Ursula and Birkin are ready to renounce their own place in the public trust. Unlike Hardy’s tragedies, “the State, the Community, the established form of life” — to wit, the *known* — is eschewed (Study of Thomas Hardy, 411). Ursula is unlike anyone in Hardy because she refuses the fixity of definition on which Hardy depends.

What Birkin’s silhouette shows is a perspective on pure personhood. After this, Birkin will touch Ursula’s “forever invisible flesh. Quenched, inhuman, his fingers upon her unrevealed nudity were the fingers of silence upon silence... never to be seen with the eye, or known with the mind, only known as a palpable revelation of living otherness” (320). Murry can be forgiven for failing to keep up with the acceleration of the rhetoric. Lawrence, as always, is trading on both sides of a series of paradoxes. While piling up more and more words, the underlying utterance can only offer “silence upon silence.” The acceleration and the incomprehensibility go hand in hand. Where “Excuse” seems to run the greatest risks is in how any of this can ever be brought to an end. The next day, Ursula and Birkin awaken to “such an inheritance of a universe of dark reality, that they were afraid to seem to remember. They hid away the remembrance and the knowledge” (320). These are the chapter’s last words. Ursula’s physical flesh is “forever invisible,” never to be seen again.

None of these last passages appear in the notebooks that Lawrence prepared in 1916, or in the typescript that was sent to publishers. That version of the chapter ends with Rupert and Ursula still

before the parlour fire, “lost in pale, dim thought.”<sup>256</sup> “I *think* I have had enough” of physical passion, Rupert laments, but “I only know this, that I *do* want something else... I *know* that—whether I have finished with [passion]—heaven help us, I don’t know... At any rate,” he adds, “I know I love you—I love your face.”<sup>257</sup> “The knowledge,” the narration adds, “was a great comfort to him, a rock.” That the knowledge Birkin is searching after is troubled here is certain from Lawrence’s repeated italics. But this, if anything, is the exact opposite of the later chapter’s apotheosis. Here Birkin searches after knowledge; there knowledge is the figment that he and Ursula, as silhouettes, set aside. For those who only know the novel in its finished form, however, the question that lingers is simple: what motivated the change? In the final *Women in Love*, Lawrence supplies his heroes with a form of character sketched as an ideal as early as 1914, but that the intervening draft of 1916 skips over entirely. The epistemological interests of the two texts are wholly inverted. What happens between 1916 and 1920 to change Lawrence’s mind about minds, to lead him to believe that ignorance, not knowledge, was the nobler pursuit?

The novel itself, of course, did not become a novel in 1916. The typescript that Lawrence dispatched to publishers in England was widely rejected even by those familiar with his work.<sup>258</sup> The publisher of *The Rainbow* turned away from its sequel, in part at least because the earlier book had been banned under the 1857 Obscene Publications Act, with all existing copies seized and burnt. Already Lawrence had begun to develop his eventual reputation.<sup>259</sup> But publishers also may not have been keen to publish Lawrence’s work given the prevailing political climate. Lawrence’s contemporaries had speculated that even *The Rainbow* was banned not because its content was considered indecent, but because of its explicit agitation against imperial expansion and the Boer War.<sup>260</sup> The only publisher’s record on *Women in Love* that survives, an internal readers’ report from Constable & Co., protests against “the writer’s expressions of antipathy to England and the forms of English civilization. At the present time, when people are sacrificing all that is dearest to them for their country, such expressions are we think bound to rouse the resentment both of the reviewers and the public.”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> *Notebook 1*, 42.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, all emphasis Lawrence’s.

<sup>258</sup> Methuen had published *The Rainbow*, and was under contract with Lawrence for another two novels, but turned the sequel down. Duckworth, which had brought out *The Trespasser* and *Sons and Lovers*, rejected the new book in short order despite the fact that their reader, Edward Garnett, had made suggestions on multiple drafts. An exhaustive record of Lawrence’s attempts to secure a publisher can be found in John Worthen and Lindeth Vasey’s introduction to *The First ‘Women in Love,’* xxxiv-xxxix. The other publishers to have turned down the novel were first Constable & Co. and then Martin Secker, who would eventually publish the novel in 1921 after it was brought out in America by Thomas Seltzer in 1920 for private subscription only.

<sup>259</sup> This reputation was in ready making; Heinemann, the publisher of Lawrence’s first novel, *The White Peacock*, had apparently caught on early and turned down Lawrence’s two subsequent submissions.

<sup>260</sup> The imputation was made at the time by May Sinclair, and echoed by Richard Aldington and Gilbert Cannan (see Harry T. Moore’s introduction to *Sex, Literature, and Censorship*, 12).

<sup>261</sup> Quoted in *The First ‘Women in Love,’* xxxvii. The original is located at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL.



Lawrence's "antipathy" towards his mother country was not without cause. Although the Lawrences had been planning to emigrate for America shortly before the declaration of war, they were denied exit visas because Frieda was German, and still in regular contact with her family. (A cousin, Manfred von Richthofen, was the famous *Luftstreitkräfte* ace the "Red Baron," which likely did not help matters.) Lawrence and his wife spent the war years in a seaside shack in Cornwall, unable to publish, and enduring regular interrogations by various British officials about their involvement in the war effort. Although not an eyewitness to the front lines, like some of his contemporaries such as Ford Madox Ford or Robert Graves, Lawrence's experience of the war was even more intensely alienating in that he had no enemy but England to rage against. Corralled in a corner of the country by his countrymen, Lawrence found that he and his own civilization were now on opposite sides.<sup>262</sup> In May of 1917, Lawrence wrote from Cornwall to Murry (of all people) to explain how his disenchantment had manifested itself in his work. With "no writing and publishing news" to speak of, Lawrence had concluded that "[p]hilosophy interests me most now—not novels or stories. I find people ultimately boring; and you can't have fiction without people."<sup>263</sup> A few months later, he would write to another friend, the Russian émigré S. S. Koteliansky, with the conviction that "[h]enceforth I deal in single, sheer beings—nothing human, only the star-singleness of paradisaal souls."<sup>264</sup> Despite prolific efforts in poetry and painting, philosophy and polemic, Lawrence would never give up on fiction. Although it would be easy to dismiss these comments as just so much "bitterness" (to quote Lawrence's eventual preface to *Women in Love*), the gap between what you "can't" have, in Lawrence's letter to Murry, and what he would "[h]enceforth" attempt, in his letter to Koteliansky, seems significant. Lawrence is aware of the limitations that his chosen medium would ordinarily impose. "[Y]ou can't have fiction without people." But in dealing with "the star-singleness of paradisaal souls" — or what, in the grammar of the "Study of Thomas Hardy," could be called purely "spiritual" individuals — Lawrence does have a sense, however, of what an attempt would entail. The task that Lawrence sets for himself prompts a question already asked: what happens when character in a novel goes wrong? We are left with something like *Women in Love*, which maintains the basic concept of character while gutting it of the epistemological interests that character ordinarily inspires. With respect to the novel's attempts to short-circuit reference, the definition of what counts as "character" itself comes into question.

Thus far, we have discussed "Excuse" as the epitome of the novel's characterization, as the moment where its two principals come into closest spiritual contact, without qualifying an important fact: there is a third character hovering at the margins of the chapter. Ursula and Rupert's fight, following the gift of the rings, is brought about by his plan to meet Hermione Roddice later that evening, and as much as the rest of the chapter is concerned with purifying the couple, equivalent

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<sup>262</sup> For a more protracted account of this period, see Paul Delany, *D. H. Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and His Circle in the Years of the Great War* (New York: Basic Books, 1978). The "Nightmare" of Delany's title is taken from a chapter of Lawrence's *Kangaroo* describing the protagonist's experience in wartime Cornwall, which is taken for Lawrence's own.

<sup>263</sup> "To John Middleton Murry, 23 May 1917; Zennor, St. Ives, Cornwall" in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III, 127.

<sup>264</sup> "To S. S. Koteliansky, 23 September 1917; Zennor, St. Ives, Cornwall" in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III, 162. Koteliansky and Murry were themselves confederates; in 1923 they would jointly issue a translation of *Dostoyevsky: Letters and Reminiscences* (New York: Knopf, 1923). Given that Lawrence had communicated his disinterest in people to Murry any number of ways prior to the "octopods" review, it cannot be said that Murry had not been warned.

effort is devoted to anatomizing Hermione. Whereas Rupert and Ursula will escape into “not-knowing,” Hermione Roddice hungers for knowledge. In fact, like Gerald’s iciness, this epistemological appetite might be the one trait around which her entire existence is constituted.

The first time that Hermione appears, at the same wedding where the sisters first spot Rupert and Gerald, Ursula observes that it was “as if a strange mass of thoughts coiled in the darkness within [Hermione], and she was never allowed to escape... Her father had been a Derbyshire baronet of the old school, she was a woman of the new school, full of intellectuality, and heavy, nerve-worn with consciousness” (15-16). Without explanation or interruption, that consciousness suddenly assumes control of the narrative, so that while we began with an observation of what “Ursula knew,” we continue with what “Hermione knew herself” — that she was

well-dressed; she knew herself to be the social equal, if not far the superior, of anyone she was likely to meet... She knew she was accepted in the world of culture and intellect. She was a *Kulturträger*, a medium for the culture of ideas. With all that was highest, whether in society or in thought or in public action, or even in art, she was at one... (16)

Hermione *is* society, but she is also knowledge. The insistent repetitions of what she “kn[ows]” are surpassed only by the apparent ease with which she colonizes all other claims to knowledge, even what “Ursula knew” of her.<sup>265</sup> There is one thing alone that Hermione “did not know,” her own “lack of robust self... But still she believed in her strength to keep [Birkin], she believed in her own higher knowledge. Her own knowledge was higher, she was the first touchstone of truth” (16). Nearly identical descriptions of Hermione occur almost every time she appears.<sup>266</sup> In “Excuse,” however, Ursula turns her accusations against Hermione in a somewhat different direction, condemning her for pretending to be “spiritual—*spiritual* she! A dirty materialist as she is. *She* spiritual?—What does she care for, what *is* her spirituality?... What does she work out to, in the end, with all her social passion, as you call it. Social passion—... she wants the illusion that she is a great woman, that is all” (307). Ursula’s attack might well strike the reader as unmotivated — what social passion is there for Hermione to speak to with no obvious social content in the novel? But in light of Lawrence’s consistency of characterization, we might appreciate that the imputations are really one and the same. Hermione’s effort to know everything is wrapped up with her social passion; her epistemological investments are at root social, and vice versa. More threatening still, Hermione’s excessive intellect amounts to a sham “spirituality,” the same condition towards which Ursula and Birkin will shortly aspire. The real spirituality, the real solace, that they find will disavow every aspect

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<sup>265</sup> In however many passes through the novel, I have never ceased to be thrown off by the suddenness with which we are thrust from Ursula’s thoughts into Hermione’s. With the first several readings, we might in fact think that the lines are still owned by Ursula, and that only when it comes to Hermione has she suddenly been blessed with an impossible omniscience. As the lines continue however, with discussion of Hermione’s private “belie[fs],” it becomes ever more apparent that we have now entered into Hermione’s mind entirely. The move is all the more startling because of its relatively early place in the novel. Thus far events have been focalized around one of the two sisters, but here, at a seemingly insignificant moment, the novel sheds any conceit that this focalization will be maintained. Hermione’s presence quite literally reorganizes the epistemological investments of the novel. In an earlier chapter, on *The Portrait of a Lady*, I had discussed D. A. Miller’s revolving turnstile of free indirect discourse, which keeps the legibility of narrator and character in constant flux. Here we encounter something perhaps odder, a kind of turnstile between characters alone, where the narrator’s vantage point is never in question, indeed, where the narrator has recused himself from interference entirely.

<sup>266</sup> On pages 40, 89, 159, and 292 for instance.

of Hermione's being, whether social, cognitive, or material. One of Hermione's potential social passions, however, does stand out. Within the first several pages of the 1916 typescripts of *Women in Love*, Hermione turns the conversation at Shortlands towards a theme wholly missing from the finished novel, the nation's "building of Dreadnoughts."<sup>267</sup> These lines, and all other explicit references to the war, were deleted by the time the novel appeared in 1920. Like the other changes made to "Excuse," even the substance of Hermione's social passion is something that the final *Women in Love* will elide.

What is most curious about Hermione's lingering presence at the margins of "Excuse," with the novel's heroes engaged in an experiment in "fiction without people," is that by rights, Hermione should not be there at all. If defined by no one, if spiritual in essence, why should another party need to be rejected? Why should Hermione even matter? (True, Hermione is never literally present during Rupert and Ursula's exchange, thanks to one other change between the 1916 drafts and the final edition; in the notebooks and typescript, the prior chapter ["Woman to Woman"], where Hermione attempts to assert her superiority over Ursula, is contiguous with the material that would become "Excuse." The 1920 novel is the first to insist on exiling Hermione in the flesh to a different chapter.) But what is stranger still, if "Excuse" is to be a bid for "fiction without people," is that Hermione Roddice is, in fact, a person, based on one of Lawrence's real-life acquaintances, Lady Ottoline Morrell. Can it be that even the experiment cannot get by without bringing people back into its fiction? That including Hermione is an admission of artlessness's impossibility? Paradoxically — and for that, appropriately — it will require a closer look at Lawrence's social circle to appreciate what Lawrence stands to gain by abandoning the social entirely. What in part provoked the change in *Women in Love*'s treatment of character and knowledge between 1916 and 1920 is a shift in the broader political, legal, and social conception of personhood. Only when Hermione Roddice has ceased to be Ottoline Morrell can "fiction without people" be produced — can the novel, indeed, even exist at all.

## II. Reference, Libel, and the Limits of Character

Despite the detailed epistemology provoked by her first appearance, and for all the cultural and critical commentary directed at her depiction, Hermione Roddice is not a major character in *Women in Love*. She attends the wedding in the preliminary scene; she hosts the central characters at her estate during one chapter; she appears on two further occasions to suggest her influence over Birkin, and she at one point almost clubs him to death with a paperweight. That is, more or less, it. After "Excuse," she effectively evaporates from the novel. Nevertheless, her place in its reception is significant due to her association with the society hostess Ottoline Morrell. Although other interests obviously predominate, Virginia Woolf, for her part, only ever referred to *Women in Love* as "Lawrence's novel about Ottoline."<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> *The First Women in Love*, 23.

<sup>268</sup> *The Question of Things Happening: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1912-1922*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: Hogarth Press, 1976), 475. Considerable work might be done to marry Alex Woloch's notion of character-space to recent studies of the roman à clef (such as Sean Latham's *The Art of Scandal* [2009], discussed below). It is one thing to recall those characters that exert an outsized influence on our memories of a novel despite their relatively brief appearances. (*Crime and Punishment*'s Svidrigailov comes to mind.) But what can be made of characters whose swollen status is derived principally from extratextual associations? Is the singularity of an identifiable "individual"

Posterity's interest in Hermione Roddice is proportional to the interest that Morrell herself inspired. Her salon in Bloomsbury and her country-house-turned-artists'-retreat at Garsington attracted the likes of Virginia Woolf and Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley and T. S. Eliot, Siegfried Sassoon and Mark Gertler, as well as D. H. Lawrence. Before the recognized advent of the "Bloomsbury group" — and the coterie of Woolf, Russell, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, and others, who will be the subject of the next chapter, all of whose members, it should be noted, were also intimates of the Garsington set — Morrell had already established herself and her homes as a nexus point for many of the writers and thinkers who formed what we now know of as English modernism. Until *Women in Love* led to a years-long falling out, Morrell had offered herself as Lawrence's patron. Her husband Philip, a member of Parliament, had defended *The Rainbow* from suppression in the House of Commons, without effect, and Lawrence's poems of 1916, *Amores*, were dedicated to her. After producing the typescripts (derived from his original notebooks) that were circulated to publishers, Lawrence set aside one copy for the perusal of his acquaintances. Nominally this typescript was meant to be sent to American publishers, but he had promised to show the finished text to Catherine Carswell.<sup>269</sup> Soon, however, Morrell received word — apparently from Murry<sup>270</sup> — that she was the "villainess of the new book," and asked to see the manuscript.<sup>271</sup> The version of the novel discussed above was thus the first version that Morrell read — and, from her account, the only one.

In her uncompleted memoirs, Morrell describes receiving Lawrence's manuscript in detail:

I read it and found myself going pale with horror, for nothing could have been more vile and obviously spiteful and contemptuous than the portrait of me that I found there... I was called every name from an 'old hag,' obsessed by sex-mania, to a corrupt Sapphist. He described me as his own discarded Mistress, who, in my sitting-room, which was minutely described, had tried to bash him over the head with a paper weight, at which he had exclaimed, 'No you don't Hermione. No you don't.' In another scene I had attempted to make indecent advances to the Heroine, who was a glorified Frieda. My dresses were dirty; I was rude and insolent to my guests.<sup>272</sup>

Years after the fact, and apparently without the novel in front of her, Morrell demonstrates an impressive recall of the incidents that had most incensed her. Several of the imputations Morrell mentions are only implicit — the words "old hag" are never used in the novel, although the suggestions of sex-mania or Sapphism are certainly available — but the line of dialogue she quotes, "No you don't Hermione," does in fact occur. Already in Morrell's account, however, we might

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enough to lift him or her out from among the Many? What would it take to read *Women Love* as "about" Ottoline Morrell?

<sup>269</sup> This is the typescript formally known as TS1b now housed at the University of Toronto. Carswell's subsequent influence on the novel's genesis will be taken up below.

<sup>270</sup> The suggestion is made by the editors of *The First 'Women in Love.'* Murry alone among Ottoline's intimates "had been present during the writing of most of the April-June 1916 draft, and would have known exactly what it contained" (see *The First 'Women in Love,'* xli). Furthermore, Murry had confessed to Ottoline that autumn that he suspected he was falling in love with her (Ibid.)

<sup>271</sup> "To Catherine Carsell, 27 November 1916; Zennor - St. Ives - Cornwall" in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III, 41.

<sup>272</sup> *Ottoline at Garsington: Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell, 1915-1918*, ed. Robert Gathorne-Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 195.

notice a curious slippage between fictional characters and the real people on whom they are based. The “he” “exclaim[ing]” against Hermione is, in Morrell’s rendition, Lawrence himself, but the person who actually speaks these lines is Rupert Birkin. There is, let it be clear, no character in the novel named “David Herbert Lawrence,” and while we can read Birkin as the author’s thinly veiled self-portrait, not every event that the novel records captures the author’s own experience. (Lawrence, for one, was never a school inspector, and never owned a car.) Morrell, however, seems convinced that there can be no veil between author and character, that the correspondence is perfect enough that her double can be said to “tr[y] to bash” Lawrence himself “over the head.” So wounded was Morrell that her husband, the MP, “went to Putnam’s... and told them that if it was published as it stood he should bring an action against the Publishers for libel.”<sup>273</sup>

Seemingly everything that D. H. Lawrence ever produced had some kind of legal infraction attached to it.<sup>274</sup> Besides the suppression of *The Rainbow* and the famous, decades-long ban of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, even Lawrence’s first exhibition of paintings was seized by authorities, with the works only returned under the condition that they never be publicly exhibited in England again.<sup>275</sup> Lawrence is not a figure known for hewing to the letter of the law. But Philip Morrell’s threatened suit was enough to leave him rattled. Although initially writing his agent, J. B. Pinker, to claim that “Hermione is not much more like Ottoline Morrell than Queen Victoria,”<sup>276</sup> he apparently took the accusation seriously; months earlier, he had already written to mutual friends like Catherine Carswell to ask whether “it would really hurt [Ottoline]—the Hermione? Would you be hurt, if there was some of you in Hermione?,”<sup>277</sup> and Carswell’s own husband, an attorney, was enlisted to look over the manuscript with an eye towards what might be actionable. Later he would write back to Pinker requesting a copy of the novel so that he could “look at Ottoline Morrell[’s] imaginary portrait again”<sup>278</sup> In the meantime, Lawrence wrote to Lady Cynthia Asquith, asking if she could help him secure a prominent patron for the novel,<sup>279</sup> presumably with the thought that a patron could help shield him from whatever action the Morrells brought, as the Morrells themselves had once done.

The novel would go unpublished for another three years. “Intimated by the banning of *The Rainbow* and repeated threats of libel suits,” publishers “would not venture to handle” *Women in Love*.<sup>280</sup> Even before the novel had been placed, Lawrence was forced to terminate his business with

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 196. The name “Putnam’s” here is Morrell’s misprint for “Pinker,” Lawrence’s literary agent. That it was Pinker that Philip Morrell threatened is given by Lawrence’s response to Pinker below. Possibly Ottoline was thinking of the London branch of the American publisher, but this would have been unlikely, since they had not been approached with the novel. Heading off the prospects of publication before the novel had been placed, however, was likely even more to the Morrells’ interests.

<sup>274</sup> Martin Amis astutely makes an analogous point in Chapter III of his novel *The Pregnant Widow* (2010).

<sup>275</sup> See the introduction to *Sex, Literature, and Censorship*, 21-22.

<sup>276</sup> “To J. B. Pinker, 20 February 1917; Zennor, St. Ives, Cornwall” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III, 95.

<sup>277</sup> “To Catherine Carswell, 2 December 1916; Zennor, St. Ives, Cornwall” in Ibid., 44.

<sup>278</sup> “To J. B. Pinker, 19 March 1917; Zennor, St. Ives, Cornwall” in Ibid., 104.

<sup>279</sup> “To Lady Cynthia Asquith, 19 December 1917; Zennor, St. Ives, Cornwall” in Ibid., 55.

<sup>280</sup> Charles L. Ross, *The Composition of ‘The Rainbow’ and ‘Women in Love’: A History* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1980), 97.

Pinker after learning that Pinker had failed to circulate any of the copies in his possession to publishers while claiming all the while “that he was doing everything possible.”<sup>281</sup> Between questions of its author’s patriotism, as the Constable & Co. reader’s report suggests, and threatened litigation from the Morrells and others, like the composer Peter Warlock (the pseudonym of Philip Heseltine, who is commemorated in the novel as Halliday),<sup>282</sup> publishers had every reason to walk away from *Women in Love*. Given the novel’s eventual success, one wants here to find Morrell in the wrong, and Lawrence in the right. (With Morrell as a nominal patron of the arts, it is doubtful whether the arts were well served by her intervention.) Yet Virginia Woolf saw Morrell in Hermione Roddice. Morrell recognized herself there. Even, ultimately, Lawrence was willing to concede the point in private. Would the law have recognized Hermione as Morrell’s “portrait” in turn?<sup>283</sup>

We might note the recurrence of that word, “portrait,” both in Morrell’s original objection and in Lawrence’s later letter to Pinker asking to see Ottoline’s “imaginary portrait again.” Whether Lawrence’s words are libelous depends upon the degree to which that portrait can be said to be imaginary or not. But given the terms of Morrell’s complaint, there does not seem much material for proper portraiture. To bring a claim of libel based on any of the above, one would have to demonstrate that the account, no matter how unflattering, in fact applied to Ottoline Morrell. The distinction, which will be developed further below, is between the two principal components of libel under the British system: whether, first, the words used are defamatory, and whether, second, they actually “hit” the plaintiff. One potential match could be Morrell’s “sitting-room,” which she avers is “minutely described,” but while a minute description might provide enough evidence to coincide with Morrell’s amenities at Garsington, the only item ever mentioned is the lapis-lazuli paperweight that Hermione uses to attack Birkin. This paperweight has its own history, but it was not at the time even owned by Morrell.<sup>284</sup> The only other possible points of convergence seem to be characterizations — rudeness to guests, sex-mania, tendencies towards aggravated assault — that Morrell might have found objectionable, but that she found “spiteful and contemptuous” principally because she could not see how they applied to her. While obviously defamatory, fulfilling the first

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<sup>281</sup> “To Benjamin Huebsch, 29 January 1920; Palazzo Ferraro, *Capri* (Naples),” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III, 466. According to the same letter, written to the American publisher B. W. Huebsch, who had been awaiting a copy of the manuscript for some time, Pinker had been holding onto at least “3 copies” for “two years.” Ross reads this as a sign that Pinker “silently agreed with the generally adverse opinion and did not actively support the novel” (*The Composition*, 97).

<sup>282</sup> My attention to Ottoline Morrell’s complaint, over Heseltine’s, is in part pragmatic, since it is Morrell’s suit, after all, that literary history has remembered. Moreover, Heseltine’s legal position is somewhat different from Morrell’s, since he dropped his suit after settling with Martin Secker, Lawrence’s British publisher, out of court. I will touch on the items that would identify Heseltine as Halliday briefly in the ensuing discussion. Pressure from the Morrells, however, never once relaxed, and it would not be until 1928 that Lawrence and Ottoline would reconcile.

<sup>283</sup> *Ottoline at Garsington*, 195.

<sup>284</sup> Morrell had apparently given Lawrence a piece of lapis lazuli as a present, which he in turn bestowed on Hilda Doolittle — the poet H.D. — without attempting to conceal the original source of the gift. Interestingly, this story is itself transmitted through a fiction: an account made by equivalent characters in H.D.’s *Bid Me to Live* (1960). (See, for the full record, the editors’ note to *The First Women in Love*, 470.) By point of contrast, *Heseltine’s* case against Lawrence would have been augmented by the statues described in the chapter “Fetish,” statuary which Heseltine himself was known to own.

condition of libel, Morrell would have been unlikely to testify that any of these other items amounted to a “hit.”<sup>285</sup> If that part of Lawrence’s characterization was defamatory but false, Morrell would then need to supply additional evidence that she was truly the intended subject of the defamation.

On what grounds a “hit” might be determined, however, is ultimately a claim about reference: on what basis do a cluster of provisions pick out one person in particular? Although Morrell’s first complaints are only directed towards the defamatory aspect of “her” portrayal, how does Morrell begin to assemble the inference? Where the actual legal status of the portrayal is concerned, Morrell herself appears aware enough of the necessary hurdles to further note that while

[a]ll of [Lawrence’s “spite”] was offensive enough to me personally... it was made quite clear to anyone who read the book that it was meant as my portrait. There was an accurate description of the house and garden and of Philip and Julia [her husband and daughter], Mademoiselle and Maria, Bertie Russell and other friends who were in it.<sup>286</sup>

Again that word, “portrait.” Setting aside, for the moment, the specific items that Morrell inventories, what are the individual aspects of Hermione Roddice that Lawrence paints at all? Biographically, we know more about Hermione than we do about Rupert Birkin. Hermione’s father is said to be a “Derbyshire baronet of the old school” (15).<sup>287</sup> Lady Ottoline Morrell was the daughter of Lieutenant-General Arthur Cavendish-Bentinck. He was not a baronet, although her great-great uncle had been the Duke of Wellington. (The title “Lady” was a courtesy granted after her half-brother succeeded to the Dukedom of Portland.) Hermione, meanwhile, “was a woman of the new school, full of intellectuality” (16).<sup>288</sup> While this phrase might — and must! — have many meanings, Morrell had attended the University of St. Andrews and Oxford. A servant from the Crich estate humors a child by asking if “the Duchess of Portland” is coming to receive a bouquet (279).<sup>289</sup> Morrell’s sister-in-law was the Duchess of Portland; however, Hermione Roddice is entirely

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<sup>285</sup> These items fall under the umbrella of what, in an American legal context, is often referred to as the “small penis rule.” Not in fact an actual legal defense, but rather a “sly trick” for authors hoping to libel freely, the small penis rule encourages authors to bundle their defamations with supplementary descriptions, such as having a small penis, that no plaintiff would readily attribute to himself. See Mark Arnot, “When is Fiction Just Fiction — Applying Heightened Threshold Tests to Defamation in Fiction,” *Fordham Law Review* 76 (2007): 1854. In Morell’s case, however, it seems plain that the litany of complaints is meant to emphasize the “spiteful” aspects of Lawrence’s portrayal. Pages upon pages of Morrell’s memoirs are indeed devoted to detailing just how wrong Lawrence’s account was — Ottoline’s guests are treated generously, her dresses are never dirty, certainly no one is assaulted.

<sup>286</sup> *Ottoline at Garsington*, 195.

<sup>287</sup> See also *The First Women in Love*,’ 11. Ottoline Morrell would not have read the published version of the novel, but only the typescripts. I have thus provided citations to both texts for each of the items in this paragraph. One of the curiosities of the ensuing discussion is that Lawrence made no effort whatsoever to alter these specific details between versions.

All items mentioned in this paragraph are dutifully recorded in the editorial apparatus to *The First Women in Love*.’ What is most of interest in Hermione’s characterization, I want to demonstrate, are those items that would not quite lend themselves to an editor’s footnote.

<sup>288</sup> See *The First Women in Love*,’ 11.

<sup>289</sup> See *The First Women in Love*,’ 256.

absent from this chapter. In her final appearance in the novel, Hermione departs for Florence, where Morrell had vacationed a number of times (298);<sup>290</sup> almost needless to say, this detail is broad enough that it could conceivably apply to any member of the English aristocracy,<sup>291</sup> or indeed, even to those of a more common extraction, like D. H. and Frieda Lawrence.

In comparison with Lawrence's antecedents in literary history, this is thin material for biography in the first place, let alone libel. Hardly an aristocrat enters into a George Eliot novel (to seize on only one near comparison)<sup>292</sup> without dragging behind him a whole history of infelicities, infidelities, and illegitimacies. Hermione's past is arguably the least interesting thing about her. Any one of these details could be altered, if need be, without immediate effect. Yet it is telling that these are not the aspects of Hermione's character that Lawrence ever attempted to amend. Instead, those changes made to Hermione mirror those made to Ursula and Birkin between the two versions of "Excuse." In an early version of the novel, prior to the production of the typescripts, Hermione is depicted as having "reddish-brown hair,"<sup>293</sup> the same as Ottoline Morrell's famous mane,<sup>294</sup> but this line was deleted before Ottoline could have seen it. Every time Hermione's head is mentioned, we are instead told about apparently lavish but rather tepidly described hats.

This smattering of points is the only immediately identifiable portrait of Hermione Roddice in the book. There simply is not much else. Yet Morrell, and Lawrence with her, does not seem preoccupied by the biographical convergences. Rather, she paradoxically asserts that *her* "portrait" was identifiable based on the accurate descriptions of half a dozen other people, "Philip and Julia, Mademoiselle and Maria, Bertie Russell and others who were in it." This might amount to a graver charge. The force of Morrell's complaint hinged upon a relatively recent change in the way that libel law was constructed, and one that had been embraced with accelerated regularity in the years during which Lawrence was attempting to get *Women in Love* published. Where Hermione has been, what Hermione has done, is of little interest if the particulars cannot be applied to Morrell in particular. Those details Lawrence leaves untouched. But the changes that Lawrence does make all concern the way that characters relate to one another. Can libel be directed at one's "spirit" alone? Unable to publish due to his opinions about the war, on one hand, and due to threats of libel, on the other, it is possible that Lawrence settles on his novel's idiosyncratic characterization as a means of revising both problems at once. Building a novel based on spiritual character lets Lawrence escape the referential force of a "hit;" but by burying the war in the "bitterness" of the characters, Lawrence is simultaneously able to escape the most glaring reference of all.

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<sup>290</sup> See *The First 'Women in Love'*, 273.

<sup>291</sup> The editors' footnote to *The First 'Women in Love'* mentions that Morrell had "visited Florence in the winter of 1892 and again in 1898," and that she had "also honeymooned there in the winter of 1902" (Ibid., 493, n. 273:26). All of these visits, we might note, had been decades before the novel's events.

<sup>292</sup> The likeness is addressed more exhaustively in F. R. Leavis's chapter on *The Rainbow*, "Lawrence and Tradition," in his *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist*. See also Michael Squires, *The Pastoral Novel: George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1974).

<sup>293</sup> See *The First 'Women in Love'*, 458 n. 11:14.

<sup>294</sup> David Garnett, a Lawrence contemporary (and the son of Edward, the reader for Duckworth who had helped Lawrence with *Women in Love*), describes Ottoline as possessing "masses of dark Venetian red hair" (*The Flowers of the Forest* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1953], 37.)



In the summer of 1908, around the time that Lawrence was preparing for his first teaching post in Croydon, the Manchester *Sunday Chronicle* published a reporter's fanciful account of that year's Grand Prix motor race at Dieppe. The story features a character named Artemus Jones, whose entire appearance is limited to a few sentences:

“Whist! There is Artemus Jones with a woman who is not his wife, who must be, you know – the other thing!” whispers a fair neighbor of mine excitedly into her bosom friend's ear... Who would suppose, by his goings on, that he was a church warden at Peckham? No one, indeed, would assume that Jones in the atmosphere of London would take so austere a job as the duties of a church warden. Here, in the atmosphere of Dieppe, on the French side of the Channel, he is the life and soul of a gay little band that haunts the Casino and turns night into day, besides betraying a most unholy delight in the society of female butterflies.<sup>295</sup>

The article's author, Charles Dawbarn, claimed that he had selected the name “Artemus Jones” at random, as a name unlikely to be held by any actual person, and as a favorable alternative to using a blank or a set of invented initials. This might have been sound reasoning; unfortunately, it proved untrue. A barrister living and practicing in Wales sued the *Sunday Chronicle*, claiming that the paper had appropriated his name. Since the real Artemus Jones had once resided in Manchester, where the *Chronicle* circulated, and had actually published articles in the *Chronicle* under his initials at the time, he claimed that numerous acquaintances had read the Dieppe story and assumed that it referred to him. There were, however, numerous obstacles to identifying the fictional Artemus Jones with his possible counterpart. Most immediately, the plaintiff in the case was not actually named Artemus Jones; he had been baptized Thomas Jones, but at some point (perhaps to avoid the indignity of being associated with the Fielding novel), he had begun using his middle name, “Artemus.”<sup>296</sup> Furthermore, Dawbarn testified that he had no acquaintance with the real Artemus Jones, and Jones, for his part, testified that he was unacquainted with Dawbarn, so any correspondence between the two Joneses could only have been coincidental. But even that correspondence would not go much beyond the shared name. The Artemus Jones of the article is identified only by a handful of features: he is said to be at the Dieppe motor festival, he is said to reside in Peckham and London, and he is said to be a church warden. Not one of these things applied to Thomas Artemus Jones.

Because of these very barriers, however, the ensuing case, “Jones v. E. Hulton,” would help shape the libel standard for any manner of fictional portrayal, leading eventually to the notoriously strict standards in place in Britain today. As early as 1869, there had “been dicta suggesting that purely fictional characters could be a source of liability,” but to prove libel, plaintiffs ordinarily had to demonstrate willful malice on the part of the defendant.<sup>297</sup> Despite the fact that both parties to the case testified that they were unfamiliar with one another, making malice a less than likely possibility, the defense failed to address the question of malice at trial.<sup>298</sup> In his instructions to the

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<sup>295</sup> Dawbarn in *Jones v. E. Hulton*, (1909) 2 K.B. 445. British legal citations under Chicago style become somewhat necessarily exotic. For the record, citations like these refer to the second volume of the King's Bench report for 1909, page 445. After initial case citations in what follows, I will tend to abbreviate to simply the case name and page number.

<sup>296</sup> The facts of the case are enumerated at *Ibid.*, but see also Jeremiah Smith, “Jones v. Hulton: Three Conflicting Judicial Views as to a Question of Defamation,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review and American Law Register* 60.6 (1912): 374.

<sup>297</sup> Paul Mitchell, *The Making of the Modern Law of Defamation* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2005), 109.

<sup>298</sup> Paul Mitchell has suggested that Dawbarn and Jones might have been obscurely known to one another due to a controversy regarding the internal politics of the London Press Club (see “Artemus

jury, the judge registered his surprise that malice had not entered into the defense, leaving the only question before the jury whether “readers might and did reasonably understand that the article referred to the plaintiff” despite the relatively obvious hurdles.<sup>299</sup>

The jury, to the surprise of many legal observers, especially those in the United States, found for Jones, awarding him £1,750 in damages. If Thomas “Artemus” Jones was indeed “Artemus Jones,” Dawbarn’s words were no doubt defamatory. But what was surprising about the jury’s judgment is that it seemed to entirely abandon any question of a “hit,” the second component of libel, which would determine whether the defendant’s words had singled out the plaintiff in particular. A hit is an assertion of identity, which is to say, of reference. When ordinarily we think of how descriptions attach to a specific person, we tend to imagine an objective correspondence between the words and the person described. A handful of the examples often recycled in philosophy to illustrate the idea of reference can furnish the point: Aristotle is the philosopher from Stagira, Scott was the author of *Waverley*. We can accept these statements as sound assertions of identity, as definitions that designate the same individual through a new constellation of descriptions. Even if we know nothing else about Aristotle, even if we have reason to believe that “Aristotle” was not his given name, our description of “the philosopher from Stagira” would nevertheless “hit” that figure and not Plato, Schopenhauer, or Bertrand Russell.

It is difficult to imagine how the facts written of Artemus Jones would hit the barrister living in Wales. In fact, the only evidence that Thomas Artemus Jones introduced at trial was the testimony of several of his Manchester friends, who reported that they had read the story in the *Chronicle* and had figured that it applied to the man they knew. In the terms sketched above, this is like being mistaken about Bertrand Russell’s birthplace; provided enough people seem to remember Russell mentioning something about Stagira, the Monmouthshire native might be offered as a ringer for Aristotle. So, at least, found the jury. The *Chronicle* appealed, and again lost. One of the King’s Court judges to hear the appeal in 1909, Lord Justice Farwell, summed up the general principle informing the case by holding that

the true intention of the writer of any document... is that which is apparent from the natural and ordinary interpretation of the written words, and this, when applied to the description of an individual, means the interpretation that would reasonably be put upon those words by persons who know the plaintiff and the circumstances.<sup>300</sup>

This was not, however, the general principle as it had always been accepted. Prior to “Jones v. E. Hulton,” the general principle had always assumed that “intention to injure could only be presumed if the defendant had actual or constructive knowledge *that* his action would injure.”<sup>301</sup> Defamation could be malicious or merely negligent, but even in the latter case it would need to be demonstrated that the defendant was aware that his words could cause harm to some actually existing person. Based on the evidence then at hand, surely this was not the case. Under Lord Justice Farwell’s

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Jones and the Press Club,” *The Journal of Legal History* 20.1 [1999]). While this might explain why the defendants did not pursue the issue of malice at trial, since they would have suspected that they could not prevail, it does not explain why Jones himself never brought attention to the connection (and in fact testified to just the opposite), since demonstrable malice would only have helped secure his claim.

<sup>299</sup> Smith, “Three Conflicting Views,” 375.

<sup>300</sup> Farwell LJ in *Jones v. E. Hulton*, 478. Citational convention places Farwell’s title, Lord Justice, after his name.

<sup>301</sup> Mitchell, *The Making of the Modern Law of Defamation*, 110; emphasis mine.

understanding, however, “intention to defame was presumed conclusively” if a certain class of “readers understood the words to be defamatory,” full stop.<sup>302</sup> The intention behind a writer’s words was presumed to be whatever interpretation “would reasonably be put upon those words by persons who know the plaintiff.”

The failed appeal effectively reorganized how a “hit” could be measured. Previously, parsing a writer’s words had begun with the subjective perspective of the writer: awareness “that his action would injure” was required before a hit was even possible.<sup>303</sup> In Lord Justice Farwell’s reading, however, all that mattered was whether the plaintiff could be perceived as the object of speech in the eyes of his associates.<sup>304</sup> The question of reference that comes with a “hit” was now a purely social construction.

There is something frankly modern in Lord Justice Farwell’s judgment, and not just the formal innovation it introduces. Decades before the New Critics would turn the troubling of an author’s intent into an official taboo, Farwell’s judgment makes a number of radical inferences about reading practice. The meaning of words for Farwell, foremost, is plain, “apparent from the natural and ordinary interpretation” of the words that appear on the page. If we can recall Lawrence’s “mystically-physically,” or the terse declamations of a Hemingway — “[Y]ou better not think about it,” “Isn’t it pretty to think so?,” “There is nothing wrong with me. I feel fine” — we might have a sense of how this is borne out. Following the words as they are printed may well produce meaning in excess of what their simple presentation suggests. But the only party responsible for making these phrases mean is, in Farwell’s opinion, their reader. Not just any reader, however, but a reader whose perspective is necessarily, automatically social. In cases of libel, no input from the author is required; the only understanding that matters is that of the plaintiff’s “circle of friends and acquaintances.”<sup>305</sup>

For Lawrence, and for *Women in Love*, this would suggest that the threat of libeling someone almost invariably described as a “society hostess” is particularly high. None of the features distinguishing Hermione Roddice from Ottoline Morrell are as remote as those separating the two Artemus Joneses from one another. In the wake of “Jones v. E. Hulton,” the force of a claim to libel became based on the degree to which the libeled party can be situated within any number of social fields. The more acquaintances one has, and the more words there are to be read, the more likely that any one of those acquaintances might be privy to identifying information. Recall again the terms of Morrell’s original complaint:

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Even the cases cited by the Lord Justice as corroboration of his judgment only advance points at odds with his own. Deciding the intention of libelous words, Lord Blackburn is quoted as saying in 1877, requires determining “the object, appearing from those circumstances, *which the person using them had in view*; for the meaning of words varies according to the circumstances” (see Lord Blackburn in [1877] 2 App. Cas. 763, my italics). One might argue that Lord Blackburn’s word should be “that,” not “which,” although the grammatical convention governing either word’s use was not so established at this time. It is unclear, however, what the clause would mean if it were taken in a nonrestrictive sense. In either event, “that” or “which,” just what “the person using them had in view” would be informing “the object” or “the circumstances.” “Jones v. E. Hulton” preserves the interest of “the object” and “the circumstances” in determining meaning while passing over the italicized portion entirely.

<sup>305</sup> Farwell LJ in Jones v. E. Hulton, 482.

All this was offensive enough to me personally but it was made quite clear to anyone who read the book that it was meant as *my portrait*. There was an accurate description of the house and garden and of *Philip and Julia, Mademoiselle and Maria, Bertie Russell and other friends* who were in it.<sup>306</sup>

All the while maintaining that Lawrence's words were meant as *her* "portrait," Morrell enumerates "accurate description[s]" of her husband, daughter, and friends as the chief identifying features. Portrayals of Morrell's intimates, no matter how pointed, cannot of course literally paint a portrait of Morrell herself. Yet descriptions of the others would be enough to place Hermione/Ottoline within a relatively limited social field. If one knew that Ottoline Morrell was a close friend of Bertrand Russell, and one could recognize Russell behind the sociologist with "long greyish hair" and a "neck set into thick, crude shoulders," talking "endlessly, endlessly... always interesting and yet always known" at a party thrown by Hermione Roddice (98), it would require but a breath to distinguish his host. If one recognized that the name of this sociologist, "Sir Joshua Malleon," contained the name of Russell's onetime mistress, Lady Constance Malleon, one might have a yet stronger case. Or alternatively, if one happened to *be* Bertrand Russell, you might read Lawrence's description of Hermione "like a long Cassandra" (90), and recall a visit to the Lawrences during which the novelist had made a habit of referring to his patron as "Cassandra," a tendency, of course, that was then dutifully reported back to Morrell.<sup>307</sup> The more associates an aggrieved party possesses (particularly ones who are adept at record-keeping), the easier it becomes to work back from the field of reference to the named person at its center. In the eyes of the law, it ceases, essentially, to matter how much Hermione Roddice resembles Ottoline Morrell. Individual identity, where works of fiction are concerned, has become entirely relational. The law has only discovered what Henry James, for instance, well knew; that without tremendous effort, subjects are always already assembled from their appurtenances.

There is a kind of fatalism that the permanence of legal precedent inspires. By isolating the inconsistencies in the Court's handling of "Jones v. E. Hulton," one emerges with a suspicion that the modern law of libel was founded, as one commentator suspected, on a "chapter of accidents."<sup>308</sup> However, it is worth remembering that even accidents have origins, and that if Farwell's ruling was the proverbial slip on the banana peel, there were other influences, both before and after, that provided the push in the right direction, and that choreographed the tumble down the stairs. Of the three justices on the appellate panel reviewing "Jones v. E. Hulton," not all concurred with Farwell. One actually found for the *Sunday Chronicle*, and the other, while supporting Farwell's judgment, did not mention the newly expanded general principle at all.<sup>309</sup> The judgment stuck, however, because going forward the legal establishment proceeded to behave as though Farwell and Farwell alone had best articulated the law at hand. When the appeal subsequently made its way before the House of Lords, two of the Law Lords agreed that Farwell's position summarized the underlying legal principle.<sup>310</sup> The opinion was echoed by the two leading English legal periodicals, which both

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<sup>306</sup> *Ottoline at Garsington*, 195; my italics.

<sup>307</sup> Russell's letter is quoted in *Ottoline at Garsington*, 59.

<sup>308</sup> Quoted in Mitchell, *The Making of the Modern Law of Defamation*, 117.

<sup>309</sup> Nominally, this latter opinion had been meant to express the opinion of the majority; Farwell's brief was only a supplementary concurrence.

<sup>310</sup> Smith, "Three Conflicting Views," 366.

affirmed that “the true ratio decidendi [was] to be found in [Farwell’s] opinion.”<sup>311</sup> With each added opinion, a recurring theme advances: throughout, a “dislike of the conduct of certain newspapers can be detected in the judgments,”<sup>312</sup> so that regardless of the merits, the *Sunday Chronicle* at least had it coming. In his own ruling, Farwell goes out of his way to commend the jury for awarding such ostensibly extreme damages because “[s]uch newspapers as publish libellous statements do so because they find that it pays; many of their readers prefer to read and believe the worst of everybody.”<sup>313</sup> But now, £1,750 pounds poorer, publishers will presumably need to revise that calculus.

Although it is the paper that will pay, Farwell’s aside about the moral character of its readers is the nearest motive offered for what punishing the *Sunday Chronicle* might accomplish. In the late nineteenth century, and as recently as 1877, even down to the cases that Farwell cites, intention had governed the relevance of libel. Since then, however, the Forster Act of 1870 had helped create “an enormous class of new readers.”<sup>314</sup> Newspaper proprietors, it was understood, had “quickly identified the potential” of the new market, turning out an abundance of tabloids that promised “information as entertainment.”<sup>315</sup> The “most widely circulated periodicals” of the period appealed especially to “the indifferently educated reader;” a staple of these newspapers, like the *Family Herald* or the *London Journal*, were fictionalized stories of “the aristocracy of wealth or blood, whose lives were crammed with crises and no little sin.”<sup>316</sup> With the prospect of defamation simply for entertainment’s sake (as Farwell likely rightly noted, “it pays”), decisions like the one in “*Jones v. E. Hulton*” thus aimed to protect the reputation of litigants at all costs. Newly literate readers, it was concluded, simply could not be trusted, at least when those readers, in the words of one commentator, “had been taught to read but not to think.”<sup>317</sup>

Shoring up the standard of defamation thus becomes an extension of our original pedagogical problem. That the Forster Act should rear its head again here, forty years after its passage by the breakfast companions of Henry James, should not be surprising. Those readers who had first been schooled under the Forster Act would now be entering middle age. By 1882, the circulation of *The Times* reached 100,000 readers; the *Cornhill Magazine*, whose first issue had included work from Thackeray, Trollope, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Ruskin, had numbered 120,000 readers at its debut in 1860, but this number had fallen to 12,000 by that same year.<sup>318</sup> In 1897, by contrast, *Tit-Bits* attracted 671,000 readers.<sup>319</sup> The new libel standard of 1909 was a direct response to the perceived tastes, sophistication, and intelligence of this expanded audience. If readers “had been taught to read but not to think,” or if they were inclined “to read and believe the worst of

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<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>312</sup> Mitchell, *The Making of the Modern Law of Defamation*, 119.

<sup>313</sup> Farwell LJ in *Jones v. E. Hulton*, 483.

<sup>314</sup> Mitchell, *The Making of the Modern Law of Defamation*, 117.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 360. That readers were eager for stories that would bring fiction even truer to life is in essence the argument of Sean Latham’s *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>317</sup> Mitchell, *The Making of the Modern Law of Defamation*, 117.

<sup>318</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 394.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 395.

everybody,” a defamatory portrayal meant as satire might easily be misread as the honest truth. By reconstituting the definition of a “hit,” the jurists handling “Jones v. E. Hulton” and its aftermath reallocate the responsibility for interpretation to those who would know better. This phrase, indeed, recurs throughout these judgments; determining a hit rests with “persons who *know* the plaintiff and the circumstances.”

In Britain, where jury trials were not necessarily the norm, defamation remained one of the few possible suits to require a jury under all circumstances. Even during the First World War, when the demands of conscription led to the suspension of most jury trials, juries remained in effect for defamation suits. The rationale behind this was that no crime could be more social than injury to a man’s character. In a smaller, more neighborly Britain, where all members of the community likely knew both prospective litigants, juries rather than judges could best tell whether an alleged defamation had in fact damaged a plaintiff’s reputation. Juries were *expected* to already know the most relevant facts.<sup>320</sup> Lord Justice Farwell’s judgment thus seems characteristically modern in another respect: it marks a moment when the scale of society has rendered assumptions about a community’s knowledge untenable. If readers could not be trusted to tell a fictional portrayal from an authentic one, and jurors could no longer be expected to know every Jones in Manchester, the authority to determine Jones’s identity had to be displaced elsewhere, to those who did know the plaintiff. Shoring up the libel standard doubled as a retrenchment of education’s social function. Between impressionable readers of the *Sunday Chronicle* and a litigant’s intimates, two distinct fields of knowledge were now effectively pitted against one another. What learning came from basic literacy counted less than the knowledge acquired in good society. Subscribers to the *Family Herald* or *Tit-Bits* were perceived as only *half-educated*. They still remained to be properly socialized.

The impact of this reading of “Jones v. E. Hulton” was acutely felt as more and more cases were fit to it from 1909 onwards. In 1918, a decision by the High Court of Australia (which did not enjoy legal autonomy from Britain until 1986) held that the position throughout the dominions of the British Empire was identical with the Farwell decision:

The test of whether words that do not specifically name the plaintiff refer to him or not is this: Are they such as reasonably in the circumstances would lead persons acquainted with the plaintiff to believe that he was the person referred to? That does not assume that those persons who read the words know all the circumstances or all the relevant facts. But although the plaintiff is not named in words, he may, nevertheless, be described so as to be recognized...whether that description takes the form of a word picture of an individual or the form of a reference to a class of persons of which he is or is believe to be a member...<sup>321</sup>

That this logic is largely circular seems to be the point. What would “lead persons acquainted with the plaintiff to believe that he was the person referred to” need not be knowledge of “all the circumstances or all the relevant facts,” so long as the “description” can “be recognized” by the persons in question. But what is to govern the accuracy of that description? Nothing, save the judgment of the plaintiff’s peers, with which the test began. Here knowledge itself has been replaced by a purely social function. There is nothing that need be known other than a man’s place among his peers. The backdrop of this decision, from 1917 to 1918, was precisely the period at which *Women in Love* was being shopped to publishers without success.

Ottoline Morrell’s objection to the *Women in Love* she had read in 1916 is organized around the British legal system’s understanding of how people, places, and their portrayals might be known. Lawrence and Morrell offer fundamentally incompatible visions for what the novel is, not because

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<sup>320</sup> See, for this account of jury trials, Mitchell, *The Making of the Modern Law of Defamation*, 54-56.

<sup>321</sup> Isaacs J in *Syme Co v. Canavan*, (1918) 25 CLR 234.

one wrote it and one worked to have it suppressed, but because they at root have different convictions regarding the place of people in fiction. Armed with the relational principle informing libel after “Jones v. E. Hulton,” even Morrell’s most far-fetched complaints become suddenly credible. In the passage quoted above, Morrell holds that *Women in Love* contains “an accurate description of [her] house and garden,” but one would have to be forgiven for thinking Breadalby, Lawrence’s fictionalized country manor, described in even the earliest drafts as “a Georgian house with Corinthian pillars,”<sup>322</sup> a poor substitute for Garsington given that Morrell’s home was built in the Tudor style and painfully restored without a column to be seen. Nevertheless, what counts as “an accurate description” of the house concerns less the specific architecture than it does the people within it. With Russell as a recognizable guest at Breadalby, the house itself becomes Garsington.

This preference for associations over architecture is not limited to Morrell’s reading of Lawrence. Just a year after *Women in Love* was finally published, Morrell would make her way into another novel, this time Aldous Huxley’s *Crome Yellow* (1921). Huxley’s novel is set at Crome, a country-house turned artists’ retreat much like Garsington, and while Morrell in her memoirs freely admits that “the house and garden which [Huxley] described is not Garsington,” she hastens to add that it was, in fact, “a picturesque redbrick house with three towers belonging to our friend Percy Feilding where we had once taken Aldous to tea... [I]f there had been no other resemblance than that of setting the book could never have been regarded as a description of our life there. But in fact... the characters in the book were all taken directly from people he had met at Garsington.”<sup>323</sup> There is nothing in being “a redbrick house with three towers” that would preclude the possibility that Lawrence and Huxley had committed equivalent offenses; “Georgian” homes like Lawrence describes can indeed be made of brick. But Morrell’s immediate impulse is to overlook the incongruity to place Huxley within a socially organized field. Since Morrell can take credit for introducing Huxley to Feilding, she is able to recognize Huxley’s Crome as all her own doing, Garsington’s social function simply transposed to Feilding’s redbrick house. In the event that Percy Feilding ever decided to sue Huxley for defamation, Morrell would make a compelling and central witness.

It is here that the seeming futility of resisting socialization becomes most palpable. With one’s social field defined so loosely, and dictated at second- or third-hand, every item imaginable becomes subject to someone’s social reach. If even altering a description so that a “Tudor” house becomes “Georgian” still suggests a synonymy between the two, there is simply no way that Lawrence can possibly prevail in court. Any number of connections could potentially identify Ottoline Morrell as Hermione Roddice’s original. At one point in the 1916 manuscripts, Ursula, who Morrell had described as a “glorified Frieda [Lawrence],”<sup>324</sup> holds forth that Hermione is a “dirty materialist,” possessed of a “sham spirituality.”<sup>325</sup> This characterization is one that Morrell had heard recently — directly from Frieda Lawrence. “I told her what I thought of her,” Frieda wrote in a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, a mutual friend, in 1916; “[a]ll her ‘spirituality’ is false, her democracy is autocrat turned sour, inside those wonderful shawls there is cheapness and vulgarity.”<sup>326</sup> Even provided that

<sup>322</sup> Such would Ottoline have read; see *The First ‘Women in Love,’* 71.

<sup>323</sup> *Ottoline at Garsington*, 217

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>325</sup> *Notebook 1*, 12, 13. See also *The First ‘Women in Love,’* 281, 282.

<sup>326</sup> The description occurs, in Frieda’s handwriting, in the first part of a letter sent by both Lawrences to Asquith, “To Lady Cynthia Asquith, [post 20 May 1916]; High Treggerthen, Zennor, nr St Ives, Cornwall” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III, 606.

Frieda could have embellished her account of the confrontation for effect, such that Morrell might not recognize the origin of Ursula's outburst (although Morrell in her memoirs maintained that "all the worst parts [of the manuscript] were in Frieda's handwriting"),<sup>327</sup> Cynthia Asquith no doubt could. The same game can be played endlessly, and to acknowledge a certain hypocrisy on my part, it is a game that the work of literary criticism, down to this very chapter, often entertains. In the eyes of critics, Lawrence has already lost, will always lose. The most lasting consequence of Ottoline Morrell's complaint against *Women in Love* is that critics are compelled to read the novel in just the way that Morrell requires, ferreting out every reference that would link the novel's principals more efficiently.<sup>328</sup>

There is nothing for Lawrence to gain by deleting distant references to the "Duchess of Portland," or by tempering Ursula's vitriol towards Hermione, since merely having brought the manuscript to the attention of Ottoline Morrell and those who knew her would be enough to link the novel's social system to its author's own. The only way Lawrence can possibly win would require refusing the concept of socializable subjects altogether, establishing a brand of character that could not be comprehended by those who "know the plaintiff and the circumstances" because the very circumstances are left unknowable. By this measure, however, judging from the reaction of Lawrence's critics, the final version of the novel was a triumph. John Middleton Murry's recurring cameos throughout this history are no accident. It was Murry who had been given the "Study of Thomas Hardy," Murry who had received Lawrence's letter championing "fiction without people." It was even Murry who had alerted Morrell that she was "the villainess" of Lawrence's new novel. Were we to sketch the social network surrounding *Women in Love*'s production, Murry would occupy the most prominent place. And yet, despite having touched so many of the relevant pieces, Murry can make neither heads nor tails of the novel's characterization: it remains "indescribable," does not "admit of individuality as we understand it." In a potential libel suit, when the test of a defamation is whether or not the plaintiff could be "described so as to be recognized" by his or her acquaintances,<sup>329</sup> Murry's review would be the first item of evidence for the defense that even the litigants' shared intimates could not recognize the reality of the novel's world.

The transformations made to the novel's sense of character would have also permitted it to pass an added test. Among Ottoline's acquaintances, Murry would have been foiled by an attempt to comprehend the novel's construction. But so too would Russell, whose own intellectual efforts over this period had been directed towards qualifying how description, acquaintance, and knowledge coincided. Russell's place in the novel — both literally, as one of its characters, and more figuratively, as a potential witness to its production — actually helps accentuate the significance of what *Women in Love* takes on. In addition to being a fixture at Garsington garden parties, and besides being the one who had reported back on Lawrence's penchant for referring to his host as a new "Cassandra," Russell's work from 1905 onwards is notable for being one of philosophy's earliest attempts to turn epistemology in on itself by first rigorously defining what knowledge actually is.

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<sup>327</sup> *Ottoline at Garsington*, 128.

<sup>328</sup> Might it be suggested that this tendency too is something that Hermione Roddice would admire? For it is by investing in the social conditions underpinning the novel, as Hermione might — "What does she work out to, in the end, with all her social passion...?" Ursula Brangwen proclaims — that critics offer proof of our own intelligence.

<sup>329</sup> *Isaacs J in Syme Co. v. Canavan*, 234.



The definition discovered from 1905 to roughly 1914<sup>330</sup> amounts to a struggle over what counts as knowledge, a struggle that would have been comprehensible in the exact terms of the developing libel standard. Through Russell's definition of knowledge, we gain a better appreciation for what its opposite, in Lawrence, achieves.

Russell's inquiry begins in 1905's "On Denoting" by undoing a foundational assumption of philosophical accounts of identity, like the assertion that "Scott was the author of *Waverley*" or "Aristotle" the "philosopher from Stagira" offered above.<sup>331</sup> Should we, like George IV (as the story goes), want to know whether Scott was the author of *Waverley*, a simple yes or no would confirm whether the man in question was the man who had written the novel. Yet the most vexing part of this formulation should not be matching the description to the man, but determining the nature of the attribution "the author of *Waverley*" at all. The assertion that "Scott was the author of *Waverley*" would be false if *Waverley* was not a novel but a monument or a race horse; it would be at best only half true if the novel had been written by multiple people. Figuring out what the description means requires a broader scope of reference than assigning that description to a specific person.

In answer, Russell proposed that "Scott" was not synonymous with "the author of *Waverley*" (otherwise, the attribution would be circular, holding only that Scott was Scott), nor was "Scott" the phrase's meaning. Rather, Scott is the "denotation" of who was meant by "the author of *Waverley*," so that George IV's query can be more accurately stated as "George IV wished to know whether one and only one man wrote *Waverley* and Scott was that man," or alternatively, "One and only one man wrote *Waverley*, and George IV wished to know whether Scott was that man."<sup>332</sup> Denoting phrases are not "genuine constituents of the propositions in whose verbal expressions they occur,"<sup>333</sup> but instead are "essentially part of a sentence, and do [ ]not, like most single words, have any significance on [their] own account[s]."<sup>334</sup>

These fresh labels for familiar understandings — with "denoting" now standing in place of "meaning" — might seem like mere semantic reshuffling, but there is an explicit epistemological interest to what Russell entertains. Although the field of analytic philosophy that Russell helped invent is primarily assembled from logic, Russell is eager to demonstrate his system's success "both on logical and on epistemological grounds."<sup>335</sup> Those following in Russell's footsteps, whether Wittgenstein or, later, Saul Kripke, will see the moment when an object acquires a denotation as an initial "baptism," which fixes the qualities by which it is possible to refer to any object in the first

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<sup>330</sup> These dates correspond to the publications of "On Denoting" (1905), "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1910), and the subsequent expansion of the latter essay to the book-length *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (1914).

<sup>331</sup> Russell had considered this problem prior to 1905, but "On Denoting" can be considered the first significant amendment to Russell's views on the subject. The first footnote to "On Denoting" qualifies that while its author had "discussed this subject in [1903's] *Principles of Mathematics*, chapter v., and § 476," "the theory advocated [there] is very nearly the same as Frege's, and is quite different from the theory to be advocated in what follows" ("On Denoting," *Mind* 14.56 [Oct. 1905]: 480.).

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 489.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 482.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>335</sup> "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* New Series 11 (1910-1911): 127.

place.<sup>336</sup> How we come to identify something thus fundamentally dictates how we can know what things even are. Setting Scott and his authorship aside, we might put the question another way — what would it take to know that Hermione Roddice is Ottoline Morrell?

As Russell will supply in a subsequent essay, it is not the description of an object that counts, but its denotation. “If we know that the proposition ‘*a* is the so-and-so’ is true... we call *a* the denotation of the phrase ‘the so-and-so.’ A great many of the propositions that we naturally make about ‘the so-and-so’ will remain true or remain false if we substitute *a* for ‘the so-and-so,’ where *a* is the denotation of ‘the so-and-so’” — more, Russell holds, than we could offer for “the so-and-so” itself.<sup>337</sup> “[A]s practical men,” we tend to “become interested in the denotation more than the description.”<sup>338</sup> But we retain description as denotation’s cheap substitute. “[T]he description is merely the means we employ to get as near as possible to the denotation;” when we offer descriptions of an object, we often do so because we “wish to reach the denotation, and are only hindered by a lack of acquaintance” with what the denotation requires.<sup>339</sup>

It is what Russell calls “acquaintance,” and acquaintance alone, that would allow us to reach an object’s authentic denotation. The difference between acquaintance and description thus establishes two fundamentally different fields of knowledge, which is what invites the title of this later essay: “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description.”<sup>340</sup> What then would permit acquaintance? The example Russell offers is, appropriately enough, social, relational, and — even more aptly — German. “Suppose some statement made about Bismarck. Assuming that there is such a thing as direct acquaintance with oneself, Bismarck himself might have used his name directly to designate the particular person with whom he was acquainted.”<sup>341</sup> One can only be “acquainted with an object” when one has “direct cognitive relation to that object.”<sup>342</sup> “But if a person who knew Bismarck made a judgment about him, the case is different. What this person was acquainted with were certain sense-data which he connected (rightly, we will suppose) with Bismarck’s body. His body as a physical object, and still more his mind, were only known as the body and the mind connected with these sense-data. That is, they were known by description.”<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> One of Kripke’s examples — originally it was Mill’s — is that while “Dartmouth” denotes a town at the mouth of the river Dart, it would maintain its sense even if the river’s course were to be diverted (see Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980], 26.). Wittgenstein’s position here is characteristically more pessimistic; such a ceremony, Wittgenstein holds, requires that we imagine a primordial act of naming, which is not of course, how language works. We can imagine an object’s baptism only when “philosophizing,” which is when “language goes on holiday” (see *Philosophical Investigations: The German Text, with a Revised English Translation*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001], 16.).

<sup>337</sup> “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,” 126.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>340</sup> It is, incidentally, the unwieldiness of this title that has kept me from referring to it more deliberately and more explicitly. To spare myself the effort, in what follows the reader should be confident that I am concerned primarily with this essay of 1910-1911, and none other.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 114.

Only Bismarck's immediate comprehension of himself can be counted as primary, as knowledge by acquaintance. His associates operate at an added remove, knowing "Bismarck," or the constellation of sense-data attached to him, only by description. (Even the convention that invites these scare quotes around "Bismarck" signals that it is a description of the Chancellor alone that is available, not any direct denotation.) Russell seems to have chosen this scene to register a kind of pun on the word "acquaintance." Even the most intimate acquaintance with a man's traits, his flaws, his features, can still only be known by description. For us today, who presumably have not attached any sense-data to Bismarck's body or mind at all, our knowledge of the man can only be furnished from someone else's prior description.<sup>344</sup>

How then would Russell parse a statement like the one made by Lord Justice Farwell in "Jones v. E. Hulton" the same year as his essay's composition? A writer's meaning, "when applied to the description of an individual, means the interpretation that would reasonably be put upon those words by persons who know the plaintiff and the circumstances."<sup>345</sup> (Better still, how would he have addressed the judgment of "Syme Co. v. Canavan" in 1917, which substitutes "persons *acquainted* with the plaintiff"<sup>346</sup> for the same principle?) The "description of an individual," for Russell, is only "*merely* descriptive knowledge."<sup>347</sup> We know by description when we cannot know better. Literal acquaintance with an individual, however, allows for no greater access than the most casual familiarity. Because it is "very much a matter of chance which characteristics of a man's appearance" — sense-data — "will come into a friend's mind when he thinks of him," *which* description is associated with an individual is largely "accidental."<sup>348</sup> A reader of the *Reichsanzeiger* and Bismarck's best friend are on equal footing. This is a problem of reference that the libel standard, try as Farwell might, cannot solve. Finding any work of fiction defamatory is, at root, a test of whether a set of descriptions apply to a specific person even when a plaintiff and a character have different names. But to depend on description at all is to have already left acquaintance with the individual long behind.

Knowledge by description is the weaker of Russell's categories. And yet knowledge by description alone would let us say that Thomas Artemus Jones resembled the *Sunday Chronicle's* caricature even when Thomas Artemus Jones had never been to Dieppe, never resided in London or Peckham, never was a church warden. If the characteristics we attribute to another person are only "accidental," it would be enough to claim that Jones was a man who had once lived in Manchester, all other incongruities aside. The latitude afforded by the Court's new standard has taken the lesser of two kinds of knowledge and permitted it to operate as though it were absolute. With a long

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<sup>344</sup> It should likely here be noted that Winifred Crich of *Women in Love*, sister to the wolf-like Gerald, has a pet rabbit named Bismarck, who is primarily described, during a foreign language lesson in the chapter "Rabbit," through the cumulative observations of others. The lesson devolves, however, into ultimately concluding that "Bismarck is a mystery, Bismarck, c'est un mystere, der Bismarck, er ist ein Wunder" (237).

<sup>345</sup> Farwell LJ in *Jones v. E. Hulton*, 478.

<sup>346</sup> Isaacs J in *Syme Co v. Canavan*, 234; my emphasis.

<sup>347</sup> "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," 112. This emphasis is his; he also swathes the entire phrase in its own set of scare quotes.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115. From this distinction, Saul Kripke's entire quarrel with Russell (and thus natural language philosophy's quarrel with analytic philosophy) emerges, for Kripke is convinced that names, uniquely, are rigid designators and by no means accidental.

enough life and enough willing confederates, almost every accidental association can become a “hit” for libel. By distinguishing between description and acquaintance, however, what Russell has attempted is to carve out a stronger claim for knowledge, one that would have a sounder basis than Jones’s tenuous claim. “The word *acquaintance* is designed,” Russell notes, “to emphasize, more than the word *presentation*, the relational character of the fact with which we are concerned. There is, to my mind, a danger that in speaking of presentations, we may so emphasize the object as to lose sight of the subject.”<sup>349</sup> If description is too broad to count as proper knowledge, there remains a knowledge that is absolute. Let identity be known by the individual alone.

Can we know then that Hermione Roddice is Ottoline Morrell? By description, surely. But in an unexpected way, Russell’s distinction would only accentuate Ottoline Morrell’s claim. Repeatedly I have pointed to the curiosities of Morrell’s account: that “[*her*] portrait,” first and foremost, was recognizable by pictures of “Bertie Russell” and others that she found in *Women in Love*.<sup>350</sup> As the subject in question, however, only Morrell would be fully acquainted with the catalogue of ephemera by which she was aggrieved. Anything else that we might add — that her sister-in-law was the Duchess of Portland, that someone had once called her Cassandra — would only be an attempt to furnish descriptions to get us nearer to the denotation at hand.

All identity, in Russell’s system, comes down to a question of knowledge, whether mediated externally, by description, or inherently, by acquaintance. Lawrence’s resistance to this notion is registered on both fronts. By developing a model of character founded not on knowledge, but ignorance, *Women in Love* manages to escape this system entirely. Where even chairs have lost their material basis, knowledge by description becomes more difficult. But Lawrence’s mere grammar also refuses knowledge by acquaintance in letting character take shape independent of any specifiable reference. Likely no one has ever experienced Ursula’s exact sentiments at the close of “Excuse,” “mystically-physically” satisfied, “mystic-sure.” Logically, these are not experiences with which anyone could be acquainted. Identity in *Women in Love* is what knowledge of both sorts looks like when emptied out.

Lawrence’s link to Russell and his work was more, however, than an abstraction. During the early years of the war, when Lawrence was working through his first revisions of *Women in Love*, Ottoline Morrell had introduced him to Russell. The two shared an intense opposition to the war (Lawrence would think of Cornwall as a prison; Russell would literally be jailed for his activism), and eventually it was proposed that they might produce a joint lecture series, with Russell speaking on ethics, and Lawrence on immortality. This would lead, Lawrence hoped, to the founding of a kind of spiritual society; Lawrence, ironically in retrospect, invited Ottoline to be its president, and nominated Garsington as its seat.<sup>351</sup> Lawrence was familiar enough with Russell’s work to understand the potential honor, and approached the eminent philosopher with what, for him, was unusual initial trepidation.<sup>352</sup> Despite protesting early in their correspondence that it “is not much

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>350</sup> *Ottoline at Garsington*, 195; my italics.

<sup>351</sup> The project is first described in Lawrence’s letter “To Lady Ottoline Morrell, [20 June 1915]; Greatham - Pulborough - Sussex” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, 358-360.

<sup>352</sup> “Dear Mr. Russell,” their first letter begins, before becoming “Dear Bertrand Russell,” “Dear Russell,” “Dear Bertie.” As F. R. Leavis once suggested, a whole study could be written on Lawrence’s habits of epistolary address (see “‘Lawrence Scholarship’ and Lawrence,” *The Sewanee Review* 71.1 [Winter, 1963]: 32.). For the full record of correspondence, other than *The Letters of D. H.*

good my asking you about your work. I should have to study it a long time first. And it is not in me,”<sup>353</sup> Lawrence was soon addressing Russell as an equal, and complained to Morrell that Russell could not “work in the Knowledge of the Absolute, in the Knowledge of Eternity... apart from philosophical mathematics.”<sup>354</sup> (As ever with Lawrence, the “Knowledge of the Absolute” implies a kind of contradiction.) In November of 1915, after their relationship had cooled, Lawrence would thank Russell for lending him “[his] book.”<sup>355</sup> It is impossible to recover just which of Russell’s works Lawrence referred to; Russell’s own letters to Lawrence were not preserved. But by 1915, Russell had produced only a portion of his sprawling oeuvre. The only possibilities at the time would have been works on German social democracy (1896) or Leibniz (1900), efforts in the mathematical philosophy with which Lawrence was repulsed (1897, 1903, 1910-1913),<sup>356</sup> or a handful of epistemological works, from “On Denoting” (1905) to *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912).<sup>357</sup> Most recently published, and thereby most likely, was *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (1914). This volume was in essence a book-length reconciliation of the ideas advanced in Russell’s earlier attempts in epistemology and logic, most notably “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description.” In that volume Russell would write that “since the true objects of philosophy, and the habits of thought demanded for their apprehension, are strange, unusual, and remote, it is here, more almost than anywhere else, that intellect proves superior to intuition.”<sup>358</sup> Here was a sentiment with which Lawrence could not find much sympathy. (Some time after returning Russell’s book, Lawrence would rail at Russell to “cut your will and leave your old self behind. Even your mathematics” — presumably referring to whatever of Russell he had read — “are only *dead* truth: and no matter how fine you grind the dead meat, you’ll not bring it to life again.”)<sup>359</sup> Fascinating though the planned series of talks would have proved, the two quickly

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Lawrence, one is urged to consult *D. H. Lawrence’s Letters to Bertrand Russell*, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Gotham Book Mart, 1948).

<sup>353</sup> “To Bertrand Russell, 24 February 1915; Greatham, Pulborough, Sussex” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, 295.

<sup>354</sup> “To Lady Ottoline Morrell, [20 June 1915]; Greatham - Pulborough - Sussex” in *Ibid.*, 358-360.

<sup>355</sup> It is somewhat awkward to capture the exact sense of the phrase in a trimmed quotation. In full, the line reads “I send you your book. Thank you very much for lending it me” (“To Bertrand Russell, [15 November 1915]; I, Byron Villas, Vale-of-Heath, Hampstead, London” in *Ibid.*, 436). Lawrence typically only uses this phrase, “send you your book,” when the correspondent actually wrote the book in question; otherwise he tends to treat others’ books by their full titles (as in “your *Karamazov*,” see *Ibid.*, 367). The editors of Lawrence’s letters speculate that the work in question might have been a “pamphlet published by the Union of Democratic Control: *War, the Offspring of Fear*” (see note to *Ibid.*, 436) but “book” seems an awkward appellation for the slender thirteen-page treatise.

<sup>356</sup> These three dates refer to *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*, *The Principles of Mathematics*, and the *Principia Mathematica*, respectively.

<sup>357</sup> It was in the latter that “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description” was first collected.

<sup>358</sup> “Current Tendencies; from *Our Knowledge of the External World*,” in *Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Bertrand Russell (New York: Modern Library, 1955), 341.

<sup>359</sup> “To Bertrand Russell, [19 February 1916]; [Porthcothan, St. Merryn, North Cornwall” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, 547.

diverged on what the “true objects of philosophy” should be, on what opposition to the war entailed, and on what way of registering that resistance was acceptable.

A glimpse of what Lawrence had wanted from Russell, and what Russell was yet unable to give, is found in Lawrence’s annotated response to an outline of Russell’s own plans for the lectures. Russell’s manuscript, entitled *Philosophy of Social Reconstruction* (wedded, following the failure of the lecture scheme, to 1916’s *Principles of Social Reconstruction*) was heavily marked up by Lawrence, with the summary appraisal that “this which you say is all social criticism: it isn’t social reconstruction,” that Russell’s “destructi[ve]” analysis lacked a “*positive idea*.”<sup>360</sup> Where Russell would attack the existing order “one by one, The State, Marriage, etc.,” Lawrence warned that he “must go very deep into the State, & its relation to the individual.”<sup>361</sup> Lawrence’s irritation with Russell’s outline, indeed, seems to be with Russell’s neglect of the individual person. When Russell writes that “What is wanted is a direct interest in other people of a kind which develops their life and one’s own at once,” Lawrence strikes out “interest in other people” entirely, writing alongside it “no—no—.”<sup>362</sup> At the end of the paragraph, Lawrence repeats his protest, inserting “No no no, don’t talk about interest in others. What you mean is the unanimous impulse, the impulse towards a unanimous movement. It isn’t *the others* we are interested in.”<sup>363</sup> Even so innocent a line as “A man’s acts affect others” is greeted with an emphatic “NO! NO!”<sup>364</sup> Russell cautions against “action against the desires of others.”<sup>365</sup> Lawrence responds “NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!”<sup>366</sup>

Throughout, Russell insists on others; Lawrence instead insists on what he repeatedly calls “the sense of truth.” In the section outlining a system of law and morals (given Russell’s focus on ethics, nominally the heart of the piece), Lawrence lauds “the principle of growth: is it not the prescience of conscience that which is ~~needed~~ to be; in the grown tissue is all the ungrown tissue of all time: this ungrown tissue *knows* its own ~~laws~~ relations... this knowledge in us I call the sense of truth.”<sup>367</sup> This last comment requires at least as much unpacking as any of Russell’s analytic statements, and it is to be pitied that Russell’s reaction to these annotations has not been preserved. When we have crossed out all of the deliberate negations — “grown,” “ungrown” — we are left with a kind of knowledge, but a knowledge that is “the prescience of conscience,” which is to say, a knowledge that precedes itself as knowledge, a knowledge that is intrinsic, but not expressed (because “ungrown”). “Let the law,” Lawrence writes just prior, “be established” on this same “sense of truth.”<sup>368</sup> Below this,

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<sup>360</sup> Lawrence’s emphasis. These prefatory remarks are available in “To Bertrand Russell, [c. 8 July 1915]; [Greatham, Pulborough, Sussex]” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, 361. In what follows, however, I will refer instead to Appendix A of *D. H. Lawrence’s Letters to Bertrand Russell*, which reprints the manuscript in full.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> *Lawrence’s Letters to Bertrand Russell*, 81. Below Russell’s lines, Lawrence adds in his own gloss: “What is wanted is a knowledge of the true conditions we all desire in our souls, putting aside the fetish of what is” (Ibid.).

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 87.

Lawrence is more emphatic: “The sense of Truth (you must say it—or something like it).”<sup>369</sup> The trouble is that Russell’s own philosophical positions prevent him from saying *anything* like it; from Russell’s understanding, Lawrence’s statements are at best incoherent, at worst, nonsense. Russell’s knowledge by acquaintance had established a strong positive claim for what part of an individual’s experience is logically valid. Lawrence, however, insists that the only knowledge “in us” is “ungrown,” unexpressed, endogenous, autonomous, and prior to any conscious apprehension.

There is much in Lawrence, much in *Women in Love*, much, perhaps, in fiction writ large that for Russell would remain fundamentally incoherent. Part of Russell’s argument in “On Denoting” and “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description” concerns the state of knowledge when the object in question does not exist; the famous example is “the present King of France.” Russell consigns “the present King of France,” along with such obviously fictive entities as “the round square,” “the even prime other than 2,” and “Hamlet,” to the category of “denoting phrases which do not denote anything.”<sup>370</sup> Where Alexius Meinong and others<sup>371</sup> need insist that there are such objects as “the round square,” but that these objects simply do not exist, Russell finds it rudimentary that admitting the existence of non-existent entities violates the law of contradiction.<sup>372</sup> Voiding the denotations of fictional objects allows Russell to recast the law of contradiction, not “in the traditional form” (“A is not both B and not B”), but now in the form that “no proposition is both true and false.”<sup>373</sup> Preserving the ban against contradiction is paramount to Russell’s account of knowledge. But what could more flagrantly flaunt this convention than “mystically-physically,” an attribution which is necessarily both true and false, or true *but* false at one and the same moment? Fiction for Russell ceases to count because it cannot be logically accounted for, cannot be properly known. Yet this is precisely why, for Lawrence, fiction should be prized. Lawrence’s fiction will proceed by attacking knowledge at its roots, even down to logic.

Everything that Lawrence would want from philosophy and from art seems elementally opposed to what Russell can offer. If anything, the temporary alliance with Russell can only have pushed Lawrence to a firmer conviction of the sentiments first formed in the “Study of Thomas Hardy.” Fictional entities do not denote for Russell, but for Lawrence more is to be staked on Dido, her “somethingness, called nothingness,” than even the sum of what can be logically “reckoned in print” (Study of Thomas Hardy, 402). Identity for Russell is a function, foremost, of existence, and the sense-data that allows for knowledge by acquaintance. It might never have occurred to Russell that one could cast one’s lot on the other side entirely. If identity is only made in the narrow way that Russell prescribes, Lawrence depends then on a fiction free from people.

The world-views that the two men require were as incompatible as Lawrence’s and Morrell’s. Harry T. Moore’s *Lawrence’s Letters to Bertrand Russell* records a representative series of conversations witnessed by William Gerhardi, a novelist who came into contact with many of my principals during

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> “On Denoting,” 491.

<sup>371</sup> Russell’s resistance to Meinong is explicit; see Ibid., or “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,” 122.

<sup>372</sup> “Meinong does not regard this as a contradiction, but I fail to see that it is not one” (“Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,” 122.). Meinong’s position as given by Russell is that “there are such objects” as “the round square, although these objects do not have being,” which would require admitting “that the existent round square is existent, but does not exist” (Ibid.)

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

the mid-1920s: “Bertrand Russell, whose eyes gleamed with loving-kindness, answered my discreet inquiries into the realm of the Mind with the utmost willingness and lucidity. Only when I mentioned D. H. Lawrence’s theories did the look of serenity fade in his large wise eyes, and a note of intellectual fastidiousness crept into his voice, and he said ‘Lawrence has no mind’.”<sup>374</sup> When Gerhardi then met Lawrence a week later, he mentioned “how enchanted [he] had been by the lucidity, the suppleness and pliability of Bertrand Russell’s mind. He sniffed... ‘Poor Bertie Russell! He is all Disembodied Mind!’”<sup>375</sup> Moore sees this as a sign of how “disenchanted” the relationship between the two had become, but the difference between all mind and no mind, we might say, was rather primary, essential, necessary. By the last stages of their relationship, Lawrence was willing to put his troubles directly: “Your basic desire is the maximum of desire of war, you are really the super-war spirit. What you want is to jab and strike, like the soldier with the bayonet, only you are sublimated into words... Your will is false and ~~dark~~ cruel.”<sup>376</sup>

These last words should ring familiarly to the reader of *Women in Love*. They occur throughout the novel, applied less to Sir Joshua Malleson, Russell’s nominal surrogate, than, oddly, to Hermione Roddice. In the sequence where Sir Joshua makes his first and final appearance, we are told that “[t]here was an elation and a satisfaction in it all, but it was cruelly exhausting for the new-comers, this ruthless mental pressure, this powerful, consuming, destructive mentality that emanated from Joshua and Hermione and Birkin [(still, recall, “attached” to Hermione)] and dominated the rest. But a sickness, a fearful nausea gathered possession of Hermione. There was a lull in the talk, as it was arrested by her unconscious but all-powerful will” (90-91). After lunch, Hermione claims to champion democracy, but Birkin interjects that “spiritually, there is pure difference and neither equality nor inequality counts. It is upon these two bits of knowledge that you must found a state. Your democracy is an absolute lie — your brotherhood of man is a pure falsity, if you apply it further than the mathematical abstraction” (101).<sup>377</sup> This is only the first of many times that Hermione’s worldview will be denounced as false. (“It is what Hermione *stands for* that I *hate*. I *hate* it. It is lies, it is false, it is death,” declaims Ursula in “Excuse.”)<sup>378</sup> This is where Russell’s philosophy likewise stands as *Women in Love* enters its final phase.

Presumably this rupture troubled Lawrence. In a letter to Morrell, when the lectures had first begun to encounter difficulty, Lawrence hoped to avoid a quarrel, and mentioned that he and Russell “ha[d] almost sworn *Blutbruderschaft*.”<sup>379</sup> It is a charged phrase, one that recalls the blood oath Birkin offers Gerald in the chapter “Man to Man,” and one that otherwise occurs seldom in Lawrence’s work or correspondence. (He uses it once more in a letter to Murry in another attempt

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<sup>374</sup> Quoted in *Lawrence’s Letters to Bertrand Russell*, 25.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. Here again I refer to Moore’s *Letters to Bertrand Russell* over *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* because Lawrence’s amendment, which the Cambridge editors do not note, appears vital. In the later language of *Women in Love*, “dark” would have amounted to a kind of compliment.

<sup>377</sup> Recall one of Lawrence’s last letters to Russell, that “[e]ven your mathematics are only *dead* truth” (see *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, 547).

<sup>378</sup> Another passage from the same tirade, regarding Hermione’s misplaced “social passion” actually appears in Lawrence’s earliest letter to Russell as a denunciation of E. M. Forster (see “To Bertrand Russell, 12 February 1915; Greatham, Pulborough, Sussex” in *Ibid.*, 283-284.).

<sup>379</sup> “To Lady Ottoline Morrell, [12 July 1915]; Greatham, Pulborough” in *Ibid.*, 363.



to put down a quarrel.)<sup>380</sup> What it means to see Bertrand Russell as Gerald Crich, the strapping and mustachioed industrial magnate, I do not venture at all to say. But between Gerald, Hermione, and Sir Joshua Malleson, this is at least the third form that Russell takes in *Women in Love*. Russell's philosophy holds that identity is only most distantly secured by description. Even then, however, where is Russell among these many descriptions? Could any causal chain, other than Lawrence's imagination, place him as any single figure at all? Were Russell to advance a claim of libel for Sir Joshua, Lawrence could just as easily offer Gerald as a possible portrayal, or Hermione. Russell is not present in the novel as a man. He is an idea; or better still, "all Disembodied Mind."<sup>381</sup> At best, he is one of the crowd, a crowd that "Excuse" will set out to excise.

Even had Ottoline Morrell not been familiar with the libel standard of the day, she might easily have gathered her understanding of reference directly from Russell. Russell's two fields of knowledge are supple enough that Morrell's sense of Hermione Roddice could be known by acquaintance, through Morrell's own sense-perception, or by description, in whatever loose cluster of attributions surround the character. Where the voices of Garsington and the Breadalby set most legitimately resemble one another, in fact, is in their shared sense of where the social and the knowable coincide. The novel's initial description of Hermione dwells on her thirst for knowledge, as we've seen, but this knowledge does not make her an intellectual, or even particularly charming at dinner parties; rather, her knowledge makes her a "Kulturträger" (16), literally a vehicle for culture's advancement and ends. Knowing the right thing and knowing the right people are both ways of knowing by description. At one point, after Hermione has tracked him down — appropriately enough — to the school-room where Ursula teaches, Rupert Birkin protests that "Knowing is everything to you, it is all your life" (40). And so, like Gerald's perpetual iciness, it is. In Lawrence's system, this amounts to an insult, and Birkin is quick to specify that the trouble with Hermione is that everything she knows is only, like the lasting social links that would plague Lawrence or, at an earlier moment, the *Sunday Chronicle*, another item of interest to be weighed relationally. "Passion and the instincts—you want them hard enough, but through your head, in your consciousness. It all takes place in your head, under that skull of yours.—Only you won't be conscious of what *actually* is: you want the lie that will match the rest of your furniture" (41). Hermione has staked herself on what relations surround her. Every interest is only a method of arrangement, a way of slotting people and things into some decorative scheme. Hermione is the place where Russell's two forms of knowledge meet: having submerged her own individuality into whatever will make for the best decoration, Hermione's identity (her own intimate acquaintance) is assembled from deferred description.

Birkin's reference to "furniture" is apt; although the novel so seldom engages in material description, it is in fact the arrangement of furniture that occupies most of Hermione's attention throughout the novel. Over Ursula's objections, Birkin allows Hermione to furnish his rented rooms (133), and in each subsequent scene in Birkin's lodgings, the enumeration of furnishings becomes particularly dense. "He handed [Ursula] her cup. He had everything so nice, such pretty cups and plates, painted with mauve-lustre and green, also shapely bowls and glass plates, and old spoons, on a woven cloth of pale grey and black and purple. It was very rich and fine. But Ursula could see Hermione's influence" (151). Is it too much to suggest that this multiplication of irrelevancies, bowls and plates and spoons, positioned perfectly, shows not just Hermione's influence but *is* Hermione? Just prior to this catalogue, Ursula and Rupert have been discussing the roles of men and women, and Birkin has made the lamentable mistake of analogizing the Eve of the Old Testament to "a star

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<sup>380</sup> See *Ibid.*, 570.

<sup>381</sup> William Gerhardi, quoting Lawrence in *Lawrence's Letters to Bertrand Russell*, 25.

in [Adam's] orbit" (150). Ursula seizes on this locution to make a crucial point about what has thus far held Birkin back. (To those who would see Birkin as Lawrence's unfiltered mouthpiece, we might note, with Frank Kermode, the number of times, as here, where Lawrence opens up his substitute to the other characters' ridicule.)<sup>382</sup> "You[, Birkin,] want a satellite, Mars and his satellite! You've said it—you've said it—you've dished yourself!" (150). To "dish oneself" is a somewhat colloquial construction, and insofar as Birkin has accidentally exposed a private conviction in public, Ursula is correct in at least one sense. But in sketching a world where men and women are one another's satellites, where all relationships require a social center of gravity, Birkin has "dished himself" in a more literal sense, positioning himself as just another item in Hermione's table setting, a dish among bowls and plates. Against Birkin's social solar system, we might recall Lawrence's commitment to Kotliansky, that he would henceforth deal only in "the star-singleness of paradisaal souls."<sup>383</sup>

Only in the published revision of "Excuse" can this star-singleness be achieved. The conflict between Ursula and Birkin that precedes that chapter is inspired, indeed, by Hermione's continued influence over Birkin's furniture. "The very tea-cups and the old silver was a bond between Hermione and Birkin. It seemed to belong to an old, past world which they inhabited together, and in which Ursula was a foreigner... Her convention was not their convention, their standards were not her standards" (300). By the time "Excuse" has taken shape, not only the influence of others will be forgotten — Ursula's attempt at unlearning will overwhelm even the fact that "she was sitting still in the chair" (316), a chair that had never been mentioned before, a chair that reveals its relevance only in its utter irrelevance to the events staged around it. Wholly spiritual characterization, as Lawrence creates it, will forswear everything that is external, even the furniture.

It should be added that this theme persists even after "Excuse" has ended, down to the significant insignificance of chairs. Chapters later (in a chapter actually called "A Chair") Birkin and Ursula consider buying furniture for their new life together, and having selected a chair, Birkin mentions that it makes him "think of England, even Jane Austen's England—it had living thoughts to unfold even then... and now we can only fish among the rubbish heaps for the remnant of their old expression" (355). The "truth is," Birkin concludes, "we don't want things at all... The thought of a house and furniture of my own is hateful to me" (356). We might wonder how, having perfected his sense of character by Chapter XXIII, Lawrence still manages to write fresh material for his heroes without abandoning his conceit. By fitting his heroes to new experiences, it might seem that every new acquaintance would only suck Ursula and Birkin back into some social system. But after "Excuse," Birkin and Ursula do seem to fade as the novel's primary concern, with the remaining chapters taking renewed interest in Gerald and Gudrun. Ursula and Birkin's limited remaining appearances, like this debate about the chair, appears then given over to resolving the conceptual complications of their singleness. How, "A Chair" asks, does one abandon the physical world and go on living? Birkin would forswear furniture entirely, but, Ursula tries to remind, "one must live somewhere." "Not somewhere," Birkin corrects, "— anywhere" (356).

Where, however, is anywhere? Can one get there by "Dover," from "Ostend," from "Basel," "Alsace-Lorraine" and "Metz?"<sup>384</sup> Each of these places are real, tangible "somewheres," but are also unreal in an even more important sense. The path that Birkin and Ursula chart would be impossible in 1914 or 1916 or 1918. The ideal that Birkin and Ursula require can pay no mind to the likely war-ravaged vistas. War itself vanishes as readily as the furniture. What of the war remains is present only as affect, as a function of "the characters" alone.

<sup>382</sup> See Kermode, *D. H. Lawrence*, 66.

<sup>383</sup> In *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III, 162; my emphasis.

<sup>384</sup> These, recall, are the destinations detailed in the two's travel to the Tyrol from p. 387 to 391.

One instance of how the War can be written purely as a consequence of character appears early in the novel; its setting, fittingly, is Hermione Roddice's Breadalby. Despite Ursula's sudden proximity to the upper crust of Midlands society, despite her sudden proximity to Birkin, she finds that "in *spirit*" — my italics — "she was unhappy. The talk went on like a rattle of small artillery, always slightly sententious, with a sententiousness that was only emphasized by the continual crackling of a witticism, the continual spatter of verbal jest" (84). One would be hard pressed to conclude that Lawrence's use of "artillery" at this moment is in any way accidental. The effect of that one word, however, is immediately drowned out by another of Lawrence's "slightly modified repetitions." Somehow it is sententiousness, which is to say, "affect," that overwhelms the description. Like the changes made to Isabel Archer's fresh perception of her husband and Madame Merle, the unlearning that the text takes on is not an amendment, not an elision, but a process of active substitution. The temporal advance of the novel's language works to deaden its own impact. As with "Excuse," more words lead to diluted meaning. What "artillery" specifically references is immediately skirted. But the specificity and peculiarity of Lawrence's representational requirements are clearest if we imagine how differently such a scene might have been handled by another novelist. Quite a lot of empty talk, talk that is meant to be read *as* sententious, can be found in the novels of Henry James. Aldous Huxley built whole novels (not least of all *Crome Yellow*) on the same conceit. Yet none of the sententious talk at Breadalby is ever sampled for us. No glasses are brandished; no one touches his plate. Instead all we have is the measure of Ursula's spirit, and the way that the talk registers on the rest of the characters. "Only the elderly sociologist, whose mental fibre was so tough as to be insentient, seemed to be thoroughly happy" (84). This is Sir Joshua Malleon, the novel's nearest equivalent to Bertrand Russell. Was Ottoline Morrell then right? Can Russell then be found at Breadalby? Are there people in *Women in Love*? Perhaps, but only those so transfigured that the law, or no other social system, could readily identify them. No words are exchanged. No scenario is elaborated. Russell (or rather, Malleon) is himself a spirit. All he possesses is "mental fibre," this "so tough as to be insentient."

The artillery persists, but only likewise in spirit. When dialogue does come, its subject is apt. "There had been a split in the Cabinet; the minister for Education had resigned owing to adverse criticism. This started a conversation on education" (85). Tellingly, this is Lawrence's only depiction of the artillery at Breadalby. Over the next page, more than half a dozen characters speak up. Likely we are not meant to keep track of the precise sentiments espoused. If we see behind the staccato of their exchange the rapid boom and burst of exploding shells, we must also then understand that it is education that is at issue. Is education "really like gymnastics," its end "the production of a well-trained, vigorous, energetic mind" (85)? Is there "no reason, no *excuse* for education, except the joy and beauty of knowledge in itself" (85)? (This last is Hermione.) The answer, in either event, is simply irrelevant. Nothing that their talk will touch on can offer any solutions. It is all sound, all fury; all artillery. The talk itself is symptom of everything that the novel will eventually try to work its way out of; social pleasantries, education, war — all come to one and the same thing. In a note to the Penguin edition, Mark Kinkead-Weekes is eager to point out that this debate at Breadalby has no authentic basis; the "Minister for Education did resign in 1917, but [Lawrence] may in 1916 have been thinking of the more spectacular resignation of the Secretary of State for Ireland over the 1916 Easter rebellion"<sup>385</sup> Yet that Lawrence ignores the historically particular, that he replaces a real uprising with an invented spat about schooling in fact perfectly captures the point. The world-historical is the last thing that Lawrence need invest in. War will only appear here in transfigured form.

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<sup>385</sup> Kinkead-Weekes in *Women in Love* 542.

War's last, limited gasp, its final form, is fittingly limited to "Excuse." After Birkin has given Ursula her rings, she becomes incensed that he still "belong[s] to Hermione and her dead show," and casts them off (306).<sup>386</sup> As they stop the car in the middle of a country road, we are told that it was a "crisis of war between them" (306). A battery of words will fly. But when they cease, Ursula and Birkin will retreat to the inn. They will be transfigured. They will sit, or not sit, without regard for the possible placement of chairs. And it is this experience alone that offers "peace, just simply peace" (310). Far from an impenetrable mess of "jargon," we thus might see "Excuse" as the heart of *Women in Love*, the place where all the necessary amendments to Lawrence's concept of character come together. War is written out. Education, even knowledge itself, is abandoned. (For no necessary reason, the chapter begins by announcing that its events "happen" to fall on the "half-day at the Grammar School" [302].) Hermione Roddice, the avatar of both knowledge and the promise of "war," herself fades from relevance. (Recall that it was Hermione who had first turned the talk at Shortlands towards "Dreadnoughts" in the 1916 version of the novel before those lines too were erased.) The form of character that does survive gives Lawrence his means of managing all of this material. And it provides him too with a response to the real Hermione Roddice, to Ottoline Morrell. The gap that exists between the real world and the one that Ursula and Birkin will escape into, the gap between the "physical" and the purely "spiritual," is the same gap that would let Hermione Roddice remain only Hermione Roddice, the real world behind her as unobtainable as the war. In the same letter from 1917 to S. S. Koteliansky, where he had announced his intention to deal, henceforth, in "nothing human," Lawrence had added a line on the merits of his method — "[m]ystically the world does not exist to me any more: nor wars nor publishings [...] nor Ottolines."<sup>387</sup>

"Ich habe es nicht gewollt" (479). What exactly is Lawrence here addressing? The words are, roughly, the Kaiser's, but we have come across them often in *Women in Love*. Shortly before Gerald trudges to the top of a mountain and, unable or unwilling to descend into the valley by way of "the old, old Imperial road" (478), expires there, he makes a desperate lunge at Gudrun and attempts to strangle her before relenting. "I didn't want it, really," we are told, "was the last confession of disgust in his soul" (472). These lines are neither full description nor dialogue. Although the first phrase is enclosed in quotation marks, we are not told that Gerald speaks. No one responds as if they have heard. The lines instead record a different method of discourse, as though the physical Gerald, the one who might murmur or cry or shout, has been vacated, and we are left instead with the direct protest of his "soul." Like the paraphrase of the Kaiser that it anticipates, here too words work to deny their referential reality. In the Kaiser, we have a statement that omits its source, "den Kriege." In Gerald, we have a statement that itself is not representable. Even passages that I have already quoted have sounded a similar note: "I *don't* want old things," Ursula cries in "A Chair," before Birkin adds that the "truth is, we don't want things at all" (356, Lawrence's italics).<sup>388</sup> It is this

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<sup>386</sup> Recall again Lawrence to Russell: "Even your mathematics are only *dead* truth: and no matter how fine you grind the dead meat, you'll not bring it to life again."

<sup>387</sup> "To S. S. Koteliansky, 23 September 1917; Zennor, St. Ives, Cornwall," in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. III, 163.

<sup>388</sup> The word "want" itself might be productively tracked through several key sequences of *Women in Love*. Birkin, to Hermione: "Passion and the instincts—you want them hard enough, but through your heard, in your consciousness... you want the lie that will match the rest of the furniture" (41). At another point, Birkin, perhaps thinking of the "forever invisible flesh" (320) of "Excuse," mentions that he "want[s] a woman I don't see" (147). And of course there is Gudrun, back at the

very renunciation that will bring Ursula and Birkin to their impossible itinerary across a peaceful Europe. Divesting from “things,” whether chairs, plates, or the other trappings of a socialized life, is fundamentally — if strangely — the same as renouncing “den Kriege,” at least insofar as both make use of the same language, both resist a reality that would be externally determined. The war that *Women in Love* most concerns is a struggle over the determinacy of everything that threatens to define.

*Women in Love* “does not concern the war itself,” Lawrence had written in his preface to the novel; instead he “should wish the time to remain unfixed, so that the bitterness of the war may be taken for granted in the characters.”<sup>389</sup> The war itself, as “den Kriege,” will not be referenced. But for Lawrence’s characters to match his spiritual ideal, they must resist any reference at all. When Ursula and Birkin have planned their unlikely escape, Gudrun takes her sister aside and, in the same recurring language of wanting and refusal, asks if Ursula won’t “*want* the old connection with the world—Father and the rest of us, and all that it means, England and the world of thought” (437, Lawrence’s italics). Her concern is almost quaint. “Father and the rest of us” we have barely seen since *The Rainbow*, and England as it stands seems to offer little. We might however wonder what unites these three specific concerns. Family, the nation, thought. What Ursula and Birkin have run from is the way that these three notions tend to collide. For “[f]ather and the rest of us,” in fact, we might read not just “family,” in the strictest nuclear sense, but Lawrence’s own family of fictions as enacted in *The Rainbow* and summarily banished by *Women in Love*. David Ellis once observed how souring, how nullifying it is to see Will Brangwen, whose courtship in *The Rainbow* had warranted all of Lawrence’s artistic energies, reduced to a figure of comedy in the eyes of his daughters by the time of *Women in Love*.<sup>390</sup> I would insist that the case is, if anything, more dramatic still. Overcoming referential reality in *Women in Love* requires overturning all of the characters’ possible determinants, even the epochal history of the Brangwens, even the story where their own upbringings, rebellions, and first loves were spelled out. Were there men and women in *Women in Love*? Perhaps there were, at the time of *The Sisters*. Perhaps there are, but only in *The Rainbow*.

“Family,” the nation, thought, will not be found in Alsace-Lorraine or the Tyrol. The sense of character that would supply them has already been too fundamentally altered. What has happened to the Ursula of *The Rainbow*, whose own schooling, whose *Bildung*, takes up the prior novel’s final half? In that novel, war remains front and center. Ursula Brangwen is “nearly sixteen”<sup>391</sup> in *The Rainbow* when she falls in love with Anton Skrebensky, shortly before “war [is] declared with the Boers.”<sup>392</sup> Skrebensky, an engineer in the Army, is called away to the conflict, and much of their parting concerns the rights of war and the needs of the nation. (“[Skrebensky] thought that, because the community represents millions of people, therefore it must be millions of times more important than any individual, forgetting that the community is an abstraction from the many, and is not the

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novel’s beginning: “I want to go back, I want to go away, I want not to know it, not to know that this exists” (12).

<sup>389</sup> “Preface,” ix.

<sup>390</sup> See David Ellis, “Introduction,” in *D. H. Lawrence’s ‘Women in Love’: A Casebook*, ed. David Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-5.

<sup>391</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes (London: Penguin, 1995), 267.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

many themselves.”)<sup>393</sup> At that moment, the year is 1899. The novel ends when Ursula is “twenty-two,”<sup>394</sup> six years later, in what would be 1905.

This same Ursula reads the Kaiser’s words, and remembers them, inaccurately, in 1915. Ten years have passed. But when *Women in Love* begins, recall, Ursula is only “twenty-six” (8); by its end, by the time she reads those lines, twenty-seven. In ten years, Ursula has aged only five. Five years of Ursula’s life have gone missing, have been held in stasis, have simply not happened. Ursula’s age too, however, had varied between drafts. In a fragment of *The Sisters* from 1913, Lawrence gives Ursula’s age as “twenty seven” at the time of the wedding where Birkin and Gerald first appear.<sup>395</sup> Why, however, if the dates do not line up anyways, should Ursula’s age warrant revision? This version of Ursula at twenty-seven would have been the last before the War broke out, the last when ensuring continuity with *The Rainbow* might have still seemed worth attempting. By 1916, in the manuscripts, Lawrence has already made the change to “twenty-six.”<sup>396</sup> Come 1920, maintaining that five-year gap would become itself significant. Hostilities in the First World War had officially ceased on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, but the Treaty of Versailles was not signed until June 28<sup>th</sup> the following year: five years to the day, by design, after the assassination of the Archduke. For five years a world was defined by a single event. But those same five years will exert no influence on Ursula. Over their duration she remains unchanging, unaging, her *Bildung* arrested, never again to be pursued. The War is only the most symptomatic of the references that Lawrence’s characters in *Women in Love* must refuse. The War — like family, England, *The Rainbow* — is exiled to the novel’s prehistory, standing simply as a five-year gulf where no developmental imperative can encroach, where character survives but even that most basic plot, time, is forgotten.

Modernism would one day be defined by its oblique or implied representations of the War. As emblematically in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) or Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927), the ability to refract this one colossal event brought a new attention to other concerns, other styles, other forms. Both of those novels, of course, post-date Lawrence’s. Yet a more surprising finding is that the War carries no greater gravity for *Women in Love* than anything else. The War’s extremity, its scope, allow its deformations to remain recognizable. But as part of a pattern of unlearning, “den Kriege” is only another reference to be defused, no different than “mystic-sure” or “excuse.” It is Lawrence’s early commitment to unlearning that lets him settle on his aesthetic prior to his contemporaries, even before the War’s end. The problems and pressures of learning exceed even that single event. The same effect is applied indifferently to anything that might make a claim on the novel’s subjects, no matter how trivial or how grand. “[Y]ou can’t have fiction without people.” The effort of *Women in Love* is to write a fiction where people have become something different, where chairs and the battles of Neuve Chapelle, Champagne, Charleroi, are equally unknown to its characters.

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>395</sup> “Fragment of ‘The Sisters’” in *Women in Love*, 517.

<sup>396</sup> *The First Women in Love*, 4.

### Chapter III. Time Passes: How Bloomsbury Civilized Ignorance

*“He had developed a protective intellectual facade in which a highly personal and cynical wit and humor played an important part. It was very rarely safe to accept the face value of what he said.”*  
— Leonard Woolf on Lytton Strachey

*“What are you? Only an intelligence that they need in their extremity... A genie taken incautiously out of King’s... by savages to serve them faithfully for their savage ends, and then — back you go into the bottle.”*  
— David Garnett to John Maynard Keynes on his wartime work, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1915

*“She has all the esthete’s characteristics: selects and manipulates her impressions; is not a great creator of character; enforces patterns on her books; has no great cause at heart.”*  
— E. M. Forster on Virginia Woolf

“The history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we know too much about it. For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian — ignorance, which simplifies and clarifies, selects and omits, with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art.”<sup>397</sup> So wrote Lytton Strachey in the first words of the preface to his *Eminent Victorians* (1918). One wants, with Strachey, to say the same of the history of the high modernists. For their output was so substantial, their products so complex, that modernism writ large remains an intractable mass of unresolved and unresolvable questions. How far are the footnotes to “The Waste Land” an earnest annotation, how far a wild goose chase? Does Clarissa Dalloway die on her final page? Who is the man in the mackintosh? The only common path through the period, historians of modernism have tended to allege, follows the sheer complexity of the questions on offer.<sup>398</sup> The history of modernism will never be written, yes, because we know too much about it, but also because there is simply too much to know.

Modernism then is most often defined by the erudition that encircles it. Surely this formula would have applied to Strachey. With his friends and contemporaries, from Leonard Woolf to John Maynard Keynes and E. M. Forster, Strachey was educated at Cambridge, and although the vignettes of *Eminent Victorians* are suffused with what Strachey’s biographers alternately call either “flippan[cy]”<sup>399</sup> or “satir[e],”<sup>400</sup> they are nevertheless serious in their academic intensity; the longest

<sup>397</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Penguin, 1986), 9. Subsequent citations to *Eminent Victorians* will be made parenthetically in the text.

<sup>398</sup> The attitude is best captured by the *Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Literature*, which, made to contend with everyone from Oscar Wilde to Fay Weldon, early on asserts that “the tendency in the cultural scene that this volume explores is towards a greater complexity that resists easy categorisation” (see *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Literature*, eds. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 2.). Hugh Kenner, in his own treatment of English modernism, *A Sinking Island* (1988), claims that his story is “[s]o intricate” that its “narration must be highly selective” (see *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers* [New York: Knopf, 1988], 7.).

<sup>399</sup> Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography* (New York: Norton, 2004), 423.

biography, on Cardinal Manning, numbers twenty-one volumes in its bibliography. As a consequence of his habitual archness, Strachey's assertion that "ignorance is the first requisite of the historian" would at first seem to deride the intellectual merits of every competing effort. The most obvious way to read Strachey's remarks, in this light, is to imagine Strachey laying claim to a more knowledgeable alternative: historians, in an attempt to be exhaustive, peddle only ignorance, and Strachey, with his limited and lampooning profiles, will offer a surer model of what knowledge can look like. No profile from *Eminent Victorians* numbers more than a hundred pages — Strachey does in short order what it takes volumes for others to attempt. Michael Holroyd, Strachey's biographer, takes this line; although siding with his subject as foremost a "master of irony,"<sup>401</sup> and so safe from the "marvellously trivial"<sup>402</sup> complaints of professional historians, who have taken issue with Strachey's accuracy, Holroyd nevertheless concludes that "[d]espite [Strachey's] lack of a university [post]" — he had been refused a Fellowship from Cambridge — "Strachey's role was largely that of an educator."<sup>403</sup>

Yet we could wonder whether the archness (or "satirical" "flippancy") characteristic of Strachey is not attributed prematurely here. Although Strachey's work had appeared in a variety of publications since 1906, this is the earliest instance of Strachey's satire that much of the world had ever seen. (An earlier book, *Landmarks in Literature* [1912], was conventional enough in its fawning treatment of its authors that even Strachey's friend, Desmond MacCarthy, could call it "a little textbook of enthusiastical critical clichés.")<sup>404</sup> Critics quick to note Strachey's abiding "irony" — and this word recurs, without fail, as the defining element of Strachey's style —<sup>405</sup> do so with an understanding of Strachey, of *Eminent Victorians*, of Bloomsbury, already formed. By contrast, Strachey's first readers likely shared the experience of a young Hugh Kingsmill, who, "assuming the title was unironic," had quickly "made off with the book," determined to "examine this old bore."<sup>406</sup> This early in his prose career, might it not be possible simply to take Strachey seriously?

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<sup>400</sup> John Ferns, *Lytton Strachey* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 48.

<sup>401</sup> Michael Holroyd, "Introduction" to *Eminent Victorians*, xi.

<sup>402</sup> *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 422.

<sup>403</sup> "Introduction" to *Eminent Victorians*, xii. The pupils that Holroyd numbers are E. M. Forster (with *A Passage to India*) and Maynard Keynes (with *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, a fuller discussion of which follows here).

<sup>404</sup> Quoted in Ferns, *Lytton Strachey*, 38.

<sup>405</sup> In addition to Holroyd's quotation, above, see, for instance, Charles Richard Sanders, "Lytton Strachey's 'Point of View,'" *PMLA* 68.1 (March 1953), 84. Sanders approvingly quotes Edwin Muir (in 1925) and Arthur Waugh (in 1932) to the same effect. Richard A. Hutch gives Strachey credit for bringing "strategic irony" to biographical writing, which he defines as "a sophisticated form of hostility... a deigned ignorance designed to confound or provoke" (see "Strategic Irony and Lytton Strachey's Contribution to Biography," *Biography* 11.1 [Winter 1988], 2.). It is suggestive even that D. C. Muecke, in an article itemizing individual markers of irony, uses a passage from *Queen Victoria* to illustrate the assumptions a reader can make of a text due to the "share[d]" set of "values and customs" between writer and reader (see "Irony Markers," *Poetics* 7 [1978]: 366-367.). I do not share this latter view, but for now, the attribution should be understood as simply representative of a broader consensus.

<sup>406</sup> Hugh Kingsmill, *The Progress of a Biographer* (London: Methuen, 1949), 7.



“[I]gnorance is the first requisite of the historian,” simplifying and clarifying, with a “perfection unattainable by the highest art.” A credentialed historian would not make these claims for his own work, but then again, Strachey was not credentialed. To take this statement at face value, ignorance would become the enabling condition of Strachey’s own art. Indeed, it would provide him with a method of representation in excess of art, something that even “the highest art,” the most heady effort, cannot obtain. It would be, in a word, artless. Confronted with the immensity of his subject, paragraphs later Strachey holds that the historian, if he “is wise” — not quite the same thing as “knowledgeable” — “will row out over the great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity” (9). Strachey’s bucket, dropped at hazard from a boat rowed who knows where, does not sound like a studied method of selection.

*Eminent Victorian*’s reflections on ignorance — their meaning, their intent, their force — deserve considerable scrutiny because, as Holroyd and others have affirmed, they are among the first statements attributable to “Bloomsbury style.” The years after 1918 mark the moments when Bloomsbury first came into their own. Keynes’s *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* would follow a year after *Eminent Victorians*. All but one of Virginia Woolf’s novels were written after that point. E. M. Forster would have one novel left in him, and although, as my introduction has mentioned, *A Passage to India* looks more like Forster’s early work than *The Waves* does like *Night and Day*, its central scene revolves around a single prototypically modernist elision. *Eminent Victorians* is not a novel, but it does concern character, and so its early influence on Strachey’s thought, and that of his peers, is particularly worth isolating. My next section will make the case for Strachey’s method in greater detail, but I trouble these lines here as an example of how Bloomsbury’s own style tends to discourage any reading but the “smartest” one. Strachey’s very archness keeps us from ever thinking him sincere. Even if it makes more sense for Strachey to claim ignorance as his own, we would seldom permit ourselves to do so, because ignorance appears incompatible with what we want to see as Bloomsbury’s genius. The story of “Bloomsbury style,” as taken up by Woolf and Keynes and Forster, is similar. The low connotation brought to “ignorance,” the high connotation attached to “art,” leads us to conclude that Bloomsbury’s every endeavor could only have been on the side of smartness. Wherever Bloomsbury maintains an interest in artlessness, the sheer identifiability of “Bloomsbury style” leaves the effort looking like only another exhibition of intelligence.

Each of my prior chapters have seen the artlessness embraced by the early modernist novel as a struggle between character, on one hand, and form, on the other. Contrary to the suppositions of critics, this modernism emerges from a recurring insistence upon character alone, whatever the costs. Henry James forsakes stream of consciousness for Isabel Archer; D. H. Lawrence warps even his grammar to accommodate character. Bloomsbury, whether in the work of Strachey or Keynes or Woolf, ought to spell the end of this argument, because form is so clearly paramount to Bloomsbury’s aesthetic program. But by taking a holistic view of Bloomsbury’s collective career, both early (1910, 1918, 1919) and late (1921, 1927, 1938), this chapter looks to reposition Bloomsbury’s eventual formal achievements as originally rooted in the same concern for character shared by James and Lawrence. From 1910 to 1938, Bloomsbury’s commitment to character remained constant — what changed, however, was their willingness to apply the artlessness of earlier modernist novels to increasingly elaborate forms without always affirming the underlying rationale. In a single novel, with a single set of characters and a uniform set of stylistic choices, artlessness commands attention. The case of Isabel Archer is compelling precisely because we cannot imagine it otherwise, cannot supply any other logic that both explains James’s editorial choices and remains consistent with his interest in his heroine. Yet distributed across decades, something so slight as style — as fleeting as Strachey’s “satirical flippancy” — becomes more easily recognized as an agenda in its own right. What could be clear in 1918 might be less so when the same tropes appear years later.

What is readily discernible in Strachey is less obvious in an economic treatise, less obvious still — oddly enough — when made to meet Woolf’s formal method. This chapter then entertains two central claims: first, that understood as an elaboration of character, “Bloomsbury style” is in fact a way of stylizing ignorance, and second, that the formalization of what had previously been a characterological concern is what ultimately let “ignorance” be misrecognized as smartness. Strachey’s early aside on ignorance is only the most obvious instance of this: the words have a plain and literal meaning, but our willingness to find irony everywhere in his work makes us assign them a more “nuanced” reading all the same. Somewhere between *Eminent Victorians* and *Queen Victoria* (1921), assumptions could easily be made about Strachey’s style, and it is because of a consistency of style that critics cannot see his concern for character.

Put differently, this reading of Bloomsbury is as much about us as it is about them. By taking apart separate aspects of Bloomsbury’s style, and rooting them again in character, I hope to expose what about Bloomsbury we have accidentally misconstrued, and thus what we have likewise misconstrued about modernism, about the novel. Here I want to illuminate individual formal tropes that Bloomsbury brought to characterization, and the common way that those tropes actually came to obscure character.

The apparent irony already encountered in Strachey offers an early example. Although many names can be found for this posture, my next section tracks Strachey’s characteristic detachment from *Eminent Victorians* to *Queen Victoria*, defining it primarily as a question of *tone*. So sweeping, however, is this style, that sorting out Strachey’s authentic investment in intelligence or its opposite requires first identifying where that style is least successful. In Strachey’s portrait of Dr. Thomas Arnold from *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey’s antipathy towards education is only too evident. His quarrel begins because he, like Arnold, is preoccupied with questions of character. But the failure of “Dr. Arnold” is that Strachey’s open contempt begins to resemble mere pedantry. Every learned allegation that Strachey levels simply embroils him further in Arnold’s own scholastic system. Strachey’s solution, more successfully executed elsewhere, is stylistic. By cultivating a consistently reserved tone, no matter his enervation at the practices in question, Strachey essentially allows his subject’s contradictions to speak for themselves. If they prove ridiculous, as they often will, it is precisely because this style allows the proprieties that Strachey feigns to practice to become unlearned. Come *Queen Victoria*, Strachey simply appears to accept the pedagogical imperative of the *Bildungsroman*. But by allowing the impassive tone that had left him in “Dr. Arnold” to now become totalizing, *Queen Victoria* ultimately inverts education’s every expectation. While seeming to show us a series of pedagogical lessons, Strachey’s *Victoria* remains utterly unaltered. With this pose, the accreted expectations of every other “learned” study of *Victoria* are summarily exhausted. Strachey’s creation could then be considered an emblem of ignorance. And yet, so stylized, it becomes exceptionally easy to miss that this version of *Victoria* is so subversive. The question becomes whether character, emptied out of any intellectual interest, can even be considered character at all.

This same tone, and the questions that accompany it, persists into Bloomsbury’s next notable works. As Crauford D. Goodwin notes, the character sketches of Keynes’s *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* can be owed largely to Strachey’s style.<sup>407</sup> Stylistically, Keynes’s first book is best known for its colorful portraits of the Allied heads of state. Through details as minor as the movement of a prime minister’s hands, Keynes’s seems to boil character down to immutable idiosyncrasies. His characters are essentially static: whatever fixed traits Keynes notices purport to predict his subjects’

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<sup>407</sup> Crauford D. Goodwin, “The Art of an Ethical Life: Keynes and Bloomsbury” in *The Cambridge Companion to Keynes*, ed. Roger E. Backhouse and Bradley W. Bateman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 234.

behavior at the Paris Peace Conference. Yet as Keynes's later reflections make clear, this understanding of character can be linked to his early indifference to the vicissitudes of *time*. Inspired by his training at Cambridge and the teachings of G. E. Moore, the young Keynes was committed to a belief that states of mind were essentially "timeless," "largely unattached to 'before' and 'after.'"<sup>408</sup> But with Keynes's ever-expanding sensitivity to questions of time in mind, an attempt to extract himself from Moore's system can indeed be found even within *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. The immutable conception of character suggested by Wilson or Clemenceau is indeed to be resisted — in fact, it is the same conception of character that the Allies themselves have applied to their reading of Europe's recent history. An alternative conception survives, however, in what Keynes repeatedly calls "the character of the Peace." Where the Allies have erred is in understanding history with the complacent quiescence owed to a completed *Bildungsroman*. Despite the nominal sophistication of Keynes's rationalistic calculations, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* becomes a willfully less intelligent attempt to unlearn the lessons that Europe's leaders would enforce.

Virginia Woolf stands at the extreme end of this spectrum, for although — unlike Keynes, and unlike Strachey — an actual novelist, *To the Lighthouse* somehow appears an even greater challenge to conventional modes of characterization than either economics or biography. If, like Philip Weinstein had alleged earlier in this project, modernism is most often appreciated for abandoning the "drama of character"<sup>409</sup> and "attacking realist narrative's constitutive compact joining subject, space, and time,"<sup>410</sup> then *To the Lighthouse* would be perhaps the most explicit attack of all, dispersing its characters through space and time in scattered and accelerated fashion. But despite its formal daring, Woolf's novel nevertheless grounds its character system in a far more recognizable tradition by simply forming a near amendment — if not literal sequel — to another novel, the novel with which this project first began: *Howards End*. Although Lily Briscoe and the Ramsays are figures of style, fully formed, the novel's central character can instead be read as the unprepossessing Mrs. Bast, one of the two elderly women who come to set the Ramsays home in order, allowing time's passage to be marked, but whose only and repeated attestation is that she "never knew the family." Ignorance becomes the novel's enabling condition, its source of strength. But "never kn[owing] the family," in these terms, could be considered a byword for the better appreciation of Bloomsbury itself. Not knowing the family, forgetting the formal unity binding Woolf and Forster and Keynes and Strachey, allows us to appreciate the central presence of artlessness that Bloomsbury's easily identifiable style conceals.

In Bloomsbury, in other words, artlessness was transformed into, precisely, an *art*, an art form, a style with its own rules, and patterns, and idiosyncrasies. Artlessness's late stylization, however, answers a question hovering at the margins of this entire project. In a period of widespread social, political, and yes, artistic change, why did artlessness become expressed as an exclusively literary movement and not as a pedagogical platform? The essay where Maynard Keynes expresses doubts about the advantages of his education, "My Early Beliefs," was read to Bloomsbury's Memoir Club in 1938, but published only posthumously, in 1946. During that entire span, Keynes's ideas had generated widespread currency; he was chairman of the World Bank, the most celebrated economist in Britain. And still, his thoughts on education went unvoiced, by request, until his death. Similarly, Lytton Strachey had reveled in his Cambridge education, but his early schooldays had been dismal; at the first of his schools, he had been put to constant work felling trees and damming streams as a

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<sup>408</sup> John Maynard Keynes, "My Early Beliefs" in *Two Memoirs* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), 83.

<sup>409</sup> Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*, 63.

<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

means of instilling “a broader social feeling.”<sup>411</sup> This, incidentally, was the same labor — without the streams — imposed on Oscar Wilde in prison, and imposed with much the same aim.<sup>412</sup> Surely Strachey sensed some room for improvement. Surely the lessons of character formation performed by literature could have traction elsewhere. Perhaps those lessons have been made, but like artlessness itself, they have survived in a different form.

### *I. Some Versions of Irony: Lytton Strachey and Tone*

Years before *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey’s literary stature was first signaled by his correspondence with a Victorian of, in fact, some eminence — the critic and historian Edmund Gosse, who objected to a 1906 essay Strachey had published in the *Independent Review* on Sir Thomas Browne, where Strachey had slighted Gosse’s treatment of the same subject. There was little in Strachey’s standing to even warrant Gosse’s regard. Gosse was a friend of Tennyson and Browning, Hardy and James; he would be named to the Order of the Bath not many years later, and would be knighted in 1925. Strachey, meanwhile, fresh from Cambridge, had turned to essay writing only because his 833 pages on Warren Hastings had failed to win him a Fellowship; an alternative attempt to take a post in the Civil Service — appropriately enough, in the Board of Education — had met with similar success. Nevertheless, Gosse dashed off a complaint on his “House of Lords cream-laid, extra thick, imperial octavo notepaper,”<sup>413</sup> and Strachey seized the opportunity to defend his critical agenda. In so doing, he would define it.

Responding to Gosse’s charge that only the insane could mistake the merits of his account, Strachey replied:

You are so good as to write of my sanity; I thank you for the compliment; yet I think that it is possible to have too much, as well as too little, of that quality. The sanity which looks with a reproving eye upon every audacity, however splendid, which would bind down the workings of a great intellect to the understanding of ‘women and people who have not studied,’ and which, while it admires the effect of a work of art condemns the means whereby the effect was obtained ... [has] something delusive + dangerous in its composition...<sup>414</sup>

Here if anywhere would be the best example of an allegation that this dissertation has worked strenuously to resist. The lines that Strachey quotes concerning “women and people who have not studied” comes from Gosse’s original evaluation of Browne; the Stuart-era essayist would have done better, Gosse finds, “to consult women and people who have not studied, [rather] than those who are too learnedly oppressed by a knowledge of Latin and Greek.”<sup>415</sup> By prizing Browne’s “great

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<sup>411</sup> Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 31. I will touch upon Strachey’s time at Abbotsholme, and the educational imperatives of its founder, in the next section.

<sup>412</sup> As Wilde’s biographer Richard Ellmann explains, the “simple minded theory behind the 1865 [Prison Act]” was that “‘hard labor, hard fare, and a hard bed’ would deter criminals and make them law-abiding” (*Oscar Wilde* [New York: Vintage, 1988], 506).

<sup>413</sup> Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 138.

<sup>414</sup> Strachey quoted in Barry Spurr, “The Miracle of Order: Lytton Strachey’s Essayist’s Art,” *Prose Studies* 12.3 (December 1989), 245.

<sup>415</sup> Quoted in Lytton Strachey, “Sir Thomas Browne” in *Books and Characters; French and English* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922), 37.

intellect” over anything such an audience could contribute, Strachey seems only to be playing to the charges of intellectual elitism that would shortly plague his peers. Yet if we take this line, we face an immediate contradiction. Strachey surely thinks Browne’s intellect enough to inoculate him against criticism;<sup>416</sup> but this conviction comes, if need be, at the expense of Strachey’s own “sanity.” The very ground of intellect, of rational and measured expression, is given up as soon as it is owned. This rhetorical move is emblematic of how we will soon think of Strachey’s style. We could call it mere “flippancy,” as critics are inclined to do, but its effect is far from frivolous. By dismissing the value of intelligence at the same moment that he seems to praise it, Strachey summarily subverts the terms of Gosse’s critique. Strachey cannot be an intellectual elitist, because he prefers to be insane. But by turning Gosse’s criticism on its head, Strachey can then level the same charge back at Gosse. The fault of Gosse’s study, Strachey is able to reply, lies not in catering to the uneducated, but in staking too great a claim on the “sanity” of his own scholarship. Every element of Gosse’s study displays its author’s immense erudition. Readers will learn about Browne’s medical practice, his sons.<sup>417</sup> But Gosse only imparts knowledge, claims Strachey, that no one who has merely read Browne would ever desire to know.<sup>418</sup> For all his mastery of “such a variety of topics,” Gosse is indifferent towards “what is, after all, the most important thing about [Browne] — his style.”<sup>419</sup> Note that it is not even Browne’s “great intellect” that Strachey celebrates in his letter, but “the *workings*” of that intellect, or later, “the *means* whereby [its] effect [is] obtained.” What Strachey objects to is the damage that Gosse’s intelligence inflicts upon Browne by thinking his scholarship a suitable substitute for the poet’s style. It is Gosse who betrays his disdain for the masses by assuming that Browne’s own words would baffle them. Strachey, however, trusts that Browne’s style, understood *as* style, would be as accessible as any audience could require. If made to choose between brainpower and beauty, it would be far preferable to be dumb.

This exchange between Strachey and Gosse, which looks at first to be a battle between intellects, with the two combatants contending for highest honors, illustrates how often, at least for Strachey, intellectual issues have little to do with intellect, and everything to do with style. Intelligence itself simply is not at issue. But the exchange also lets us make a more crucial observation about Strachey’s own style — the rhetoric makes it exceptionally easy to miss the meaning. Any arbitrary phrase, like the line about “women and people who have not studied,” can easily be read as mocking or solemn as the occasion suits. This presents a methodological peril for any critic to take up Strachey. Limited quotation is of little use, because Strachey’s sense requires enormous breadths of context. If asked to say here whether Strachey prizes intelligence or ignorance, we can settle the question simply by reference to Strachey’s correspondent: Gosse’s inflated intellectualism demands as much distance as

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<sup>416</sup> “It is difficult,” as Spurr concludes, “to conceive of higher praise for an essayist than that conferred by Strachey on Browne,” save his later evaluation of Voltaire (see “The Miracle of Order,” 246).

<sup>417</sup> In an essay the following year on Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Strachey touts, tongue likely lodged in cheek, the heroic archival work by Gosse that brought new poems by Beddoes to light.

<sup>418</sup> “[W]ith such scanty and unexciting materials,” as Strachey puts it in the original essay, “no biographer can say very much about what Sir Thomas Browne did; it is quite easy, however, to expatiate about what he wrote” (see “Sir Thomas Browne,” 33.). In his correspondence with Gosse, Strachey puts the point even more plainly: “[t]he Glasgow merchant who read *Don Juan* and asked at the end whether the author was a married man was surely in need of some enlightenment;” this is not, however, the case for Browne (quoted in Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 138.).

<sup>419</sup> “Sir Thomas Browne,” 34.

possible. But *Eminent Victorians* supplies no such context. From the first lines of his preface, we never know when Strachey is being sincere.

Critics have called this pose “ironic.” But barren of reference, where exactly does the irony reside? The impact of irony, whether situational, dramatic, or verbal, is usually meant to be unmistakable; it depends, as William Empson holds in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, on being “noticed.”<sup>420</sup> Richard A. Hutch suggests that Strachey instead invents a supplementary category, “strategic irony,” which he defines as “a sophisticated form of hostility... a feigned ignorance designed to confound or provoke.”<sup>421</sup> This better captures Strachey’s sweep; the pose he strikes is held from first to last. And yet, given his quarrel with Gosse, why should Strachey “feign” ignorance at all? Embracing ignorance, in its actual, active form, is what differentiates Strachey from the likes of Gosse. (Mutual animosity between Strachey and Gosse would endure. Gosse subsequently savaged *Eminent Victorians* in the *Edinburgh Review*. His method? To lift passages from Strachey, and to suggest areas where the author could have supplied more accurate examples.)<sup>422</sup> Unlike Gosse, Strachey never need claim to know everything. Letting style speak for itself, the scholarship of those like Gosse not only becomes unnecessary — it becomes unlearned. “The general reader,” Michael Holroyd notes, “was taught to think of *Eminent Victorians* as a ‘debunking’ biography.” As Holroyd elaborates, although now “pejorative” in meaning, “debunking” was first “an American colloquialism” for taking “the bunkum or humbug out of a subject.”<sup>423</sup> Strachey’s subjects — Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr. Arnold, General Gordon — had all been set down before by more solemn scholars. Strachey’s treatment delivers no new knowledge, but only finds a way to unlearn the earlier impressions. Nothing need be “feigned” about that preference.

This pose, however, ultimately places Strachey in a kind of double bind. Style offers a solution to traditional historiography, a way of extending unlearning to academic discourse. But it also creates his most pressing problem, for his style makes it difficult to take even the most sincere claims to stupidity seriously. To settle Strachey’s authentic interests, we thus must somehow get behind his style, identifying the context that the consistent posture of his prose excludes. This task becomes possible, strangely, only when Strachey’s prose is at its worst, when his palpable distaste for his subject allows his style to slip. In his portrait of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the educationalist and headmaster of Rugby School, Strachey makes several choices at odds with the rest of *Eminent Victorians*. Most plainly, Dr. Arnold was barely even a Victorian; when he was born, George III was still on the throne; his tenure at Rugby began under George IV; and at his death, Victoria’s reign was not yet five years old. Given his obvious unfitness as a representative of the period,<sup>424</sup> Arnold can

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<sup>420</sup> *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Penguin, 1995 [1935]), 51.

<sup>421</sup> “Strategic Irony,” 2.

<sup>422</sup> See Edmund Gosse, “The Agony of the Victorian Age,” *Edinburgh Review* (Oct. 1, 1918). The best of these is a full page of quotations on Tennyson — from Lord Selborne, Benjamin Jowett, Frederick Myers, the Duke of Argyll, Lord Macaulay — that would have supported Strachey’s characterization of the encomiums brought to much biography (*Ibid.*, 282.). Gosse also bizarrely mentions that the longest of Strachey’s biographies, on Cardinal Manning, is “[b]riefer than the briefest of the ‘English Men of Letters’ series” (*Ibid.*, 284.), “bizarrely” because exhaustiveness was obviously not Strachey’s goal. One contributor to the English Men of Letters series, however, was Edmund Gosse. His contribution had been the book on Sir Thomas Browne.

<sup>423</sup> Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 424.

<sup>424</sup> Originally, when the project was still called *Victorian Silhouettes*, Strachey had counted on twelve subjects before realizing that treating so many would take too long. The initial list of candidates had

only have been chosen as one of Strachey's subjects to enforce some more specific point. The profile of Arnold is moreover the shortest in the entire collection, with the fewest references to source material. Indeed, as critics have observed, the chapter is essentially an extended paraphrase of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley's "School Life at Rugby" (1844), drawing on it for most of its biographical particulars.<sup>425</sup> All not owed to paraphrase apparently stems from Strachey's personal perspective. Yet nowhere else in *Eminent Victorians* does Strachey feel compelled to take this tack. This itself becomes the oddest thing about "Dr. Arnold," penultimate among the *Eminent Victorians* — that it *is* personal. The chapter closes by considering Dr. Arnold's role in shaping the "two poles" of public education, "the worship of athletics and the worship of good form" (188). "Yet," the chapter concludes, "it was not so before Dr. Arnold; will it always be so after him? We shall see" (188). *Eminent Victorians* looks back to debunk a bygone age. But "Dr. Arnold" alone is made to touch Strachey's own moment. Strachey's interest in education, unlike his interest in ecclesiastical life or the Crimea, is ongoing, and the terms of his treatment of Arnold spell out why parts of it would be worth resisting. Those terms, in fact, give us a guide to how Strachey's style works when it *does* succeed, and to how that resistance ripples through what follows, both for Strachey and for the style of Bloomsbury beyond.

If there is any irony at all to be found in Strachey's portrayal of Thomas Arnold, it is a product not of Strachey's invention, but of the mere facts of Arnold's life. Given the eventual contours of his biography, it is ironic that Arnold could have been considered an educational reformer early in his career, someone who, as the Provost of Oriel College predicted, promised to "change the face of education all through the public schools of England" (186). There is little time, however, for this irony to settle; Strachey quickly boils the case down to its literal dimensions, concluding that "so far as the actual machinery of education was concerned, Dr. Arnold not only failed to effect a change, but deliberately adhered to the old system" (186). In the educational timeline sketched in my introduction, that old system would have predated even Leonard Bast's grandparents. Arnold took charge of Rugby in 1828, when the "growing utilitarianism of the age" (166) had first begun to call the instrumental benefits of education into question. Arnold would be long dead before literacy would become widespread, let alone before its consequences could be of any concern. For now, practicality and efficiency were the rallying cries of reform, and the utilitarian temperament challenged the typical public school curriculum, "which excluded every branch of knowledge except classical philology" (166). Dr. Arnold, apparently, agreed with the spirit of reform, but the changes he brought to Rugby had little to do with the substance of what was taught.

He introduced modern history, modern languages, and mathematics into the school curriculum; but the results were not encouraging... The boys' main study remained the dead languages of Greece and Rome... 'The study of language,' he said, 'seems to me as if it was given for the very purpose of forming the human mind in youth.' (170-171)

Arnold was ahead of his time in only this one regard. Decades before the Forster Act could turn it into a national concern, Arnold's sole preoccupation laid in better shaping the character of his pupils.

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been Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, General Gordon, Henry Sidgwick, George Watts, Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Edward Cavendish, Charles Darwin, John Stuart Mill, Benjamin Jowett, Thomas Carlyle, Lord Dalhousie, and Thomas Arnold — in that order. Every one of these options save Arnold were Victorians in the literal sense. The first three candidates, of course, were actually included in *Eminent Victorians*. Special concession was apparently made, overlooking the incongruities, to include the last.

<sup>425</sup> See Park Honan, "Some Problems in Biography," *Victorian Studies* 16.4 (June 1973): 453.

What Strachey chiefly objects to about Arnold's tenure again and again returns to this question of character. "The moment was ripe" for some reconsideration of education's emphases (187). But "it was only natural that to one of [Arnold's] temperament and education it should have been the moral rather than the intellectual side of the question which impressed itself upon his mind" (166). "I repeat now," Arnold is quoted as declaring, "what we must look for here is, first, religious and moral principle; secondly, gentlemanly conduct; thirdly, intellectual ability" (167). The order of these imperatives is explicit. From firmer morality follows gentlemen. Only from gentlemen can intellect originate. Rugby under Arnold thus became an early model for marrying a subject's socialization to his intellectual efforts. Arnold's sole regret upon retirement was — and here, briefly, is Strachey at his best — that "[a]fter all his efforts, the absolute identity of Church and State remained as unrecognized as ever" (177). Rugby was to be an instrument of both, advancing Church and State's shared claims to their subjects.

This mission was not Arnold's innovation, nor, as we know, was he to be its final exponent. But Strachey's entire interest in Arnold, and his willingness to overlook Arnold's ill fit within the broader scheme of the book, comes down to the suggestion that Arnold was most responsible for its endurance into the Victorian age and beyond. "Had he set foot on reforms," had he merely altered the order of his imperatives to put ability above citizenship, love of literature above dead languages, "it seems probable that he might have succeeded in carrying the parents of England with him... Dr. Arnold's great reputation could hardly have been resisted. As it was, he threw the whole weight of his influence into the opposite scale, and the ancient system became more firmly established than ever" (187). Arnold's influence, unique among Strachey's portraits, would extend until Strachey's present day. What is most alarming about Arnold's enduring authority is its role in shaping entire generations of Englishmen — including, not least of all, Lytton Strachey. Holroyd, Strachey's biographer, concludes that Strachey's "dislike of Dr Arnold, the most influential teacher of the Victorians, was probably intensified by his own unhappy schooldays."<sup>426</sup> In his later studies, whether *Queen Victoria* or *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928), Strachey himself would make a case for psychological determinism in historiography;<sup>427</sup> the convergence here between the portrayal of Arnold and Strachey's own early education offers to explain the motives behind Strachey's style, supplying the context that his style otherwise elides.

With the sole exception of his years at Cambridge, Lytton Strachey's education was marked by unhappiness at both its end and its beginning. Upon graduation, he would be turned away by both the dons of Cambridge and by education's bureaucratic apparatus. Before Cambridge, he had in turn spent a dismal year at Abbotsholme, an institution referred to by its founder as "an Educational Laboratory," three more at Leamington College.<sup>428</sup> Despite his briefer enrollment, it was Abbotsholme that Strachey seemed to find most representative of his school days. Even at

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<sup>426</sup> Lytton Strachey: *The New Biography*, 421.

<sup>427</sup> As tends to be mentioned at moments like these, Strachey's brother James was a follower of Freud, an early analyst and, eventually, his English translator. James Strachey's connection to his brother's literary milieu is most comprehensively addressed by the editors of his selected correspondence, *Bloomsbury/Freud: The Letters of James and Alix Strachey, 1924-1925*, ed. Perry Meisel and Walter Kendrick (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

<sup>428</sup> Two further years at Liverpool University College — "among the bleakest of his life" (see Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 45.) — were nevertheless not enough for him to be accepted by Balliol, his brother's Oxford college. So insulted was Lady Strachey by the suggestion that Lytton would be a better fit for Lincoln College that she proposed sending him to Cambridge.



Cambridge, he incongruously “attended more than one of the annual Old Abbotsholmian dinners given at Christ’s College.”<sup>429</sup> The “laboratory” aspect of studies at Abbotsholme, as a glowing field report for *The Elementary School Teacher* would insist, were the results of instructional methods meant “to be judged[] not merely by the traditional standards of the universities, but by their adaptation to practical and social usefulness.”<sup>430</sup> In practice, this meant instilling social cohesion through collective manual labor and field drills. A prospectus introduced the year of Strachey’s attendance catalogued the most relevant aspects of the curriculum: “[d]igging in the Garden, damming streams in the Dingle, felling or planting trees, &c., the boy is learning the ways of Nature... [H]e is learning, likewise, the fundamental upon which rests all Human Society, by seeing for himself how all parts of this little Social Organism fit together.”<sup>431</sup> The prospectus divides “Physical and Manual Pursuits” into seven sub-headings; carpentry alone sprouts two separate divisions, “artistic” and “useful.” By contrast, the sole mention of books in the entire document, under the uniform heading of “Poetry, Art, Music, Social Recreation,” is that “[t]he boys hear good *Literature* read, and learn short extracts from the poets by heart.”<sup>432</sup> Hearing, reciting — neither, notably, makes allowance for reading or writing; even the “extracts” are “short.” In the history of the school where the prospectus is set down, Abbotsholme’s founder, Dr. Cecil Reddie, is moved to offer an apology simply for committing his account to paper: “words and books, less by quality than quantity, exert an exaggerated influence in our lives, producing new perils to body, mind, and character. Reading means sitting. Reading Words is not seeing Things.”<sup>433</sup>

Here was Dr. Arnold’s vision, stripped even of its affection for classical languages. Abbotsholme carried the socialization of its charges to the point of abstraction. Making better subjects was its only work. Indeed, as Holroyd intimates, the tasks that Strachey was put to served the perceived needs of the British Empire — felling trees, planting potatoes, were all advanced, “should it prove necessary,” as “a sound preparation for colonial life.”<sup>434</sup> Reddie makes this part of his mission explicit: “To help, in a humble corner, the creation of a nobler Englishman, to organize a nobler English-speaking Empire, to aid the Ascent of Man — this has been our sole aim.”<sup>435</sup> Abbotsholmians were meant not merely to be sounder citizens, but agents of empire — the same empire, we might further add, that Strachey would ridicule through General Gordon. The imagery that Patrick Geddes, the inspector sent to Abbotsholme for *The Elementary School Teacher*, brings to his report is notable for how it translates the rigors and rewards of toil into strictly military terms.

Then haymaking had come... Never before had I seen a hay-field cleared with such order and rapid progress, yet all without the supervision of masters or the help of a farm laborer... The whole field was under the command of the ‘captain of haymaking,’ a senior boy, who had six squads, each under a corporal, one managing the cart, the rest loading or raking...<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>430</sup> Patrick Geddes, “The School at Abbotsholme, Conducted by Dr. Cecil Reddie [Part] I,” *The Elementary School Teacher* 5.6 (Feb. 1905), 323.

<sup>431</sup> Cecil Reddie, “The Revised Prospectus, September 1894,” in *Abbotsholme: 1889-1899, or Ten Years’ Work in an Educational Laboratory* (London, George Allen, 1900), 135.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>433</sup> *Abbotsholme: 1889-1899*, vii.

<sup>434</sup> Lytton Strachey: *The New Biography*, 32.

<sup>435</sup> *Abbotsholme: 1889-1899*, x.

<sup>436</sup> Geddes, “The School at Abbotsholme,” 323.

Abbotsholme's discipline is comprehensive enough that no active instruction is required for boys to behave like British Army regulars. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell nominated *Eminent Victorians* as an example of the War's tendency to inflect even unrelated texts.<sup>437</sup> The lines that Fussell draws on come from Strachey's preface, where he is outlining his preferred approach to history: "[the subtler historian] will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined" (9). These lines capture something of Strachey's style, and yet we cannot quite call them ironic. The experiences they echo still seem too raw, for early 1918, to be treated lightly. (One wonders at the reaction of Hugh Kingsmill; his gleeful anticipation of taking up "this old bore" had occurred at a prisoner of war camp in France.) There is instead a dead literalism to what Strachey is saying, and much like finding a way "behind" Strachey's style, granting Strachey some sincerity here is the surest means of resolving just what his prose is meant to accomplish. All the maneuvers that Strachey mentions, as Fussell notes, were significantly ones that the architects of the Great War had hoped — but conspicuously failed — to implement. Flanking, cunning, the unexpected: these were defeated by the enduring stalemate of the trenches. Strachey's aesthetic agenda aims not only to provide a more authentic approach to history. What Strachey calls "subtlety" also becomes an alternative to the failed policies of War, of Empire, of socialization — an array of forces that his training at Abbotsholme had emphatically united.

When Geddes ends his report on Abbotsholme by praising the school's attempt to enliven the life of the mind with the life of the body, "reuniting two sides of life at present too much divided," so that the "rustic is left rude" and the "scholar left bookish," what he owes to Abbotsholme is its refinement of a more perfect social type, "healthier" than either.<sup>438</sup> Abbotsholme's ideal, in other words, makes a pedagogical maxim out of what William Empson famously termed "pastoral."<sup>439</sup> But the attempt to locate the scholar in the rustic, the rustic in the scholar, is always, as Empson makes plain, its own process of socialization, a way of assimilating "more completely the effective elements of [ ] society."<sup>440</sup> "This was not a process that you could explain," Empson adds, "... it was already shown by the clash between style and theme."<sup>441</sup> Pastoral finds a way of making social values implicit through style. Should it be any surprise that style becomes Strachey's way of resisting this process? The perfect symmetry of social impulses that Abbotsholme made explicit — but one shared, at some level, by every education — explains why resistance to education cannot be met by intelligence alone. The "bookish[ness]" of the "scholar" is already built into the pastoral system. There is no "intelligent" response to a Dr. Arnold or to a Dr. Reddie. Intelligence, after all, is what they are inculcating. Any alternative must instead be staked on a "subtler" inversion of the prevailing style. "[I]gnorance," we will remember, is the "first requisite of the historian" (9). Strachey's style begins with that statement.

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<sup>437</sup> See *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 188.

<sup>438</sup> Geddes, "The School at Abottsholme," 328.

<sup>439</sup> This is also not far from what Strachey despairs in his closing passage on Arnold: that it was through Arnold that the "two poles" of public education, "the worship of athletics and the worship of good form" were enshrined (188). That Reddie championed agrarian labor because he disapproved of sport does not alter the point, indeed, it only emphasizes it, for Reddie only established a more thoroughly social elaboration of Arnold's original system.

<sup>440</sup> *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 25.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Such a systematic approach to unlearning saturates Strachey's habitual pose. Consider the passage where Strachey comes closest to his usual style by narrating Dr. Arnold's one regret, that for "all his efforts, the absolute identity of Church and State remained as unrecognized as ever" (177). There is nothing inherently combative in this sentence. The words could indeed pass as an honest approximation of Arnold's own sentiments, and a reader sympathetic to Arnold might actually agree to their merits. Rather than irony, Strachey's approach resembles what Empson calls "the 'device prior to irony,'" *prior* because it does not police the "judgment" on the back end of the joke.<sup>442</sup> "The fundamental impulse of irony," Empson concludes, "is to score off both the arguments that have been puzzling you, both sets of sympathies in your mind, both sorts of fools who will hear you."<sup>443</sup> By deferring judgment, Strachey's style skirts the totalizing tendencies of socialization, of education, of Arnold, and of Empire. It is for this reason that I have resisted characterizing Strachey's posture as "ironic," because the effect depends foremost on never acknowledging the joke. The "device prior to irony" might do as a label for Strachey's style, but the distinction is a fine one, and the term itself, of course, cumbersome. We could think of it instead as a choice of "tone," a tone that we can detect in Bloomsbury — in Keynes's descriptions, in Woolf's asides — even where there is no specific joke lurking. The meaning is not always ironic, but the posture is always the same.

The periodic poverty of style in Strachey's essay on "Dr. Arnold" is that there alone do we frequently come close to treading too heavily on the joke. When Strachey offers a bald judgment, when he diagnoses the depths at which Arnold "failed" (186), he attempts to meet Arnold's contradictions with mere "bookishness," and so threatens to be pulled back into a system of Arnold's making. It is only through tone, half granting conventions no matter how ridiculous, that Strachey manages to unlearn their influence. Even at the time Strachey must have understood that the rendition of Arnold was too naked to work as he wanted. Although Strachey later sent a copy of *Queen Victoria* to Abbotsholme's director, Charles Reddie, "he did not give his old headmaster a copy of *Eminent Victorians*."<sup>444</sup> We need not ask why. Presumably Reddie would have recognized himself behind Arnold's dying wish; as Geddes avers, the program at Abbotsholme aspired "in short, [to] living out day by day the unification of religion and of life."<sup>445</sup> The question thus becomes what *Queen Victoria* does differently, or differently enough. For by most measures, down to its physical dimensions, *Queen Victoria* merely enlarges, through the monarch, themes that Strachey had brought to the period's more minor voices. The eventual achievement of Strachey's style, however, is the fuller saturation of this same tone. "Dr. Arnold" puts too plainly something that *Queen Victoria*'s more polished posture helps conceal. *Queen Victoria* becomes a better instance of artlessness even as it makes that agenda more difficult to recognize. But the attempt was surely a success — Charles Reddie received *Queen Victoria* warmly; as Holroyd notes, Strachey was "complimented for his courage in praising at such a time the Prince Consort, a German."<sup>446</sup> It is the more appropriate that Reddie is never let in on the joke.

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<sup>442</sup> *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 51. It is outright ironic that Empson's book, so cumbersome for providing a definition of pastoral, is in fact a better treatise on irony than many works that actually make the attempt.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. I take Empson's "fundamental" to mean not "vital" or "essential," as we mean it now in the colloquial sense, but something closer to "primary," "foundational" — and hence why the device in question is "prior."

<sup>444</sup> Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 34.

<sup>445</sup> Geddes, "The School at Abbotsholme," 326.

<sup>446</sup> *Lytton Strachey: The New Biography*, 34.

Had Lytton Strachey endeavored to write a bona fide *Bildungsroman*, it could not have looked much different from *Queen Victoria*. A girl is born, bred to her purpose, grows in knowledge, and eventually develops a character to comport with the conventions of her society. Except that in this case the girl is a queen, and so she is not so much assimilated into society as she comes to personify it. Strachey's subject alone leaves him with the *Bildungsroman's* near ideal — character and society can converge no more perfectly. This is precisely where Strachey's portrait concludes: Victoria has become, plain enough, “a character,” one whose “outlines” “were firmly drawn” in “the popular imagination.”<sup>447</sup> “There she was, all of her—the Queen of England,<sup>448</sup> complete and obvious; the world might take her or leave her; she had nothing more to show, or to explain, or to modify; and, with her peerless carriage, she swept along her path” (150). In an actual *Bildungsroman*, to reach the point where character is “complete,” Victoria would traditionally pass through a series of educations. Such is the case here; so clear, in fact, is the pedagogy propelling her progress, that the first we hear of Victoria's upbringing is that her mother's “educational conceptions were those of Dr. Arnold” (15).

This fresh mention of the headmaster of Rugby looks different from the pages produced years prior. Strachey says nothing further about the merit of the Duchess of Kent's methods. No specific judgment, against Arnold or against the sovereign's entire educational program, is made. Prepared with the right context to appreciate Strachey's antipathy, we might understand that there is an irony lurking. But throughout, Strachey maintains the strict appearance of approval. Between “Dr. Arnold” and the headmaster's cameo here, in other words, Strachey's rhetorical strategy has shifted. As was the initial — but limited — appeal of the “device prior to irony,” any judgment will now be suspended endlessly. From Arnold, the biography will pass through a series of proxy educators: Victoria's governess, Baroness Lehzen; Lord Melbourne; Prince Albert's confidante, Baron Stockmar; the Prince himself. The cumulative impression throughout is that education remains untroubled and untroubling. To take in every word of *Queen Victoria* is to encounter only a record of Strachey's supposed consent to pedagogy's positive influence. Some of Strachey's readers surely understood the book as adopting an entirely uncritical line — *Queen Victoria* was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for excellence in otherwise conventional biography, and parts of the press were effusive in their admiration that the author “had abandoned satire for interpretation,” and although “the bands of education threatened for an instant to snap,” Strachey shows that she was “soon to be made fast to her destiny by fetters gladly, passionately worn.”<sup>449</sup> But acquaintance with enough context should convince us that this process is more problematic than it appears. The single volume called *Queen Victoria* essentially contains two separate texts, operating in parallel: the one that is written, and records nothing but education's many merits, and the unwritten one, by which the prevailing narrative is ironized. The tone used to treat ignorance in *Eminent Victorians* has now seeped into every sentence.

*Queen Victoria* generically resembles a *Bildungsroman*. Yet what readers encounter, when able to attend to the unspoken punchline, is instead a running revision of the pedagogical tradition. Strachey

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<sup>447</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Harcourt, 1921), 149. Subsequent quotations will refer to this edition parenthetically.

<sup>448</sup> We would not be wrong, I think, to hear here an anticipation of the last lines of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*.

<sup>449</sup> D. L. Murray, “Mr. Strachey's ‘Victoria,’” *The Times Literary Supplement* (April 7, 1921), 224. This is why critic D. C. Muecke's conviction that *Queen Victoria* is a prime example of the convergence of an author's opinion with his audience's (“Irony Marker,” 366-367.) is so obviously ridiculous.

continually sets scenes of instruction so familiar that they could have been lifted from a conduct book. The moment when a young Victoria, who had “been kept in ignorance of the station that she was likely to fill” (16), first learned that she was to be a queen is well known, and Strachey treats the entire incident as just that: a “well-known scene” (16). A “history lesson” follows, “the genealogical table of the Kings of England slipped beforehand by the governess into the book, the Princess’s surprise, her inquiries, her final realisation of the facts” (16). The entire sequence is squeezed into a single sentence. Even if we are hearing this story for the first time, we are nevertheless made to feel — indeed, *told* to feel — that we must have heard the whole thing before. The event is acknowledged, but its significance dispelled. Barry Spurr, one of Strachey’s most frequent commentators, has lamented that “the use of cliché appears to have grown on [Strachey] as his style matured and his confidence grew;” a “carefulness” when recycling tired formulations in *Eminent Victorians* is “absent” from his handling of the same phrases “in *Queen Victoria*.”<sup>450</sup> Spurr calls this Strachey’s late “staleness.”<sup>451</sup> Yet the staleness of the scene seems precisely what has attracted Strachey’s interest. Strachey’s treatment wears the “well-known” dimensions of Victoria’s education down to their sparsest expression. As when tweaking conventional treatments of Dr. Arnold, or volumes upon volumes on Cardinal Manning, here style lets us sense the inadequacy of this entire mode of characterization. What could be a better emblem of education, after all, than learning one’s literal place in the history of Europe? But Strachey’s untroubled tone turns what could be an axiom into, instead, a cliché. The style and the “staleness” are inseparable.

In this way, our inherited expectations for scenes such as these begin to look less legitimate. One element of the typical pedagogical tale, however, never appears at all. Lessons like this one are paraded by Victoria — but none ever seems to inspire any change in her character. Having learned of the crown awaiting her, Victoria’s response is limited to four words: “I will be good.” Strachey elaborates that

the words were something more than a conventional protestation, something more than the expression of a superimposed desire; they were, in their limitation and their intensity, their egotism and their humility, an instinctive summary of the dominating qualities of a life. (16)

Victoria is here all of eleven years old. In a moment, in a phrase, she has offered an “instinctive summary of the dominating qualities of a life,” a concrete assertion of her character. What, however, is to differentiate this showing from what Victoria will find more than a hundred pages and seventy years later, when she will “sw[EEP] along her path,” with “nothing more to show or to modify,” “complete and obvious” (151)? Across the span of her biography, Victoria has never changed, never altered. Her character is as complete at eleven as it is at eighty-one.

Here is the great peculiarity of *Queen Victoria*. Although its heroine is seemingly married to the *Bildungsroman*’s highest ideal, none of the educations applied, whether practiced by Dr. Arnold or Prince Albert, make any mark on her character. A *Bildungsroman* is not merely a novel of “education,” but a novel of “formation,” of “development.” Yet the queen’s character remains unmoved. By the *Bildungsroman*’s standards, Victoria might have no character at all; already complete, no form is required to fix her. And yet, of course, Strachey continues to let the form repeat itself, always affirming an end that it never in fact achieves. This is the unwritten underside to the biography’s every event, the punchline concealed beneath Strachey’s overt approval. Tone, Strachey’s particular choice of style, allows unlearning to unfurl because it allows readers to witness the inadequacy of the pedagogical model as it continually, endlessly exhausts itself. Education, so stylized, proves its own

<sup>450</sup> “Camp Mandarin: The Prose Style of Lytton Strachey,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 22.1 (1990), 39, 40.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

stupidity. As befitting a queen — an icon of a nation, an age, but more than that, a people — Victoria cannot help but be exemplary. But the character that *Queen Victoria* consistently captures becomes, paradoxically, an icon for shirking society's every claim. Unchanged by whatever would shape her, society itself must be shaped to suit Strachey's Victoria better. All affairs of state, as in Lord Melbourne's appeal to better handle the Hastings scandal or the bedchamber crisis, cannot touch her. Had she been led by those "siren voices," "the development of her character, the history of her life, would have been completely changed" (45). Would have been; but was not.

Yet if Victoria is Strachey's higher ideal for character, is this not a different ideal from the one once offered by Isabel Archer, during Victoria's real reign? Isabel's attempt to unlearn her earlier influences is what makes her story compelling. Artlessness not only consolidates her character — to sympathize with Isabel allows us to understand artlessness's appeal. Here, however, some of this central sympathy has been lost. Where James and Lawrence had allowed the stakes of character to alter their forms, to dictate the shape of their stories, Victoria, as a personality, is a virtual nullity. (Could she even wield this power, could she command this interest, had she not lent her name to the age?) By the standards of the *Bildungsroman*, she is barely a character, but so she remains even by the standards of artlessness. Education cannot influence her, but neither does she have anything at all to unlearn. Strachey's style merely organizes unlearning around her. What unlearning Victoria allows is our own alone. The great difference between artlessness's inflection of character and its late turn towards style might come down to this distinction. Where character closely tracks the interest of its subject, a style that admits unlearning can only be applied to readers. Victoria herself remains indifferent to any questions of character, but readers familiar with conventional treatments of Victoria, as we might find them in Strachey's copious bibliography, see every existing narrative bled off.

If Bloomsbury, as I had intimated earlier, is better known for its commitment to style than to character, then Victoria helps explain why style alone remains recognizable. Artlessness stands as an attempt to liberate character from the socialization that attends education, but although Strachey's tone establishes a parallel text through which socialization comes to exorcise itself, Victoria appears equally inert whichever text we read. It is the style, not the sovereign, that survives the second reading. *Queen Victoria* is a form quite literally without function, with no purpose beyond promoting the uselessness of its purported pedagogy. Artlessness is achieved; but only if style subsumes character entirely.

How different this portrait of Victoria looks from Henry James's depiction of Isabel Archer gives us a sense of how far the priorities of artlessness have shifted since the earlier part of the period. The essential elements all endure. Strachey remains suspicious of socialization. Ignorance is afforded antithetical merit. And character becomes the site for their inevitable conflict. That these stakes continue to be pressing, for Strachey as much as James, is what allows us to recognize such dissimilar stylists as participants in a common movement. The most meaningful part of *Queen Victoria's* accession to ignorance, however, is not what we encounter through the Queen, but what we realize, having closed its pages, we have never read. The inevitable education that we expect from such a story is emptied out by Strachey's rhetoric. But ignorance never appears in its place. Strachey's style commands attention. Yet artlessness exists only on the other side of every silence.

With style all that survives, it is little wonder that Strachey's aesthetic comes to be associated primarily with smartness. The problem in choosing between ignorance and intelligence is that the choice seems obvious, seems to have been made for us already. We see the influence of this thinking everywhere, even in the phrases that I have plucked from Empson: the "fundamental impulse of irony," Empson holds, is to score off "both sorts of fools who will hear you."<sup>452</sup> In Empson's

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<sup>452</sup> *Some Versions of Pastoral*, 56.

pastoral, where the virtues of the high are owed to the low, and vice versa, we are meant to see Falstaff and Hotspur as possessing mutual merits whatever the difference in language that divides them. But “fools” will always remain worthy of scorn, for we can never not think of intelligence as the ultimate virtue. Any style at all, whether Falstaff’s or Hotspur’s, high or low, always looks like proof of intelligence. When noting the “staleness” of Strachey’s late prose, Barry Spurr is similarly moved to think it a “deliberate relaxation of style rather than an unconscious lapse in creativity.”<sup>453</sup> That staleness is *itself* the style is unthinkable. “Style,” in this understanding, must be “creativ[e],” original, and even the prevailing pastiche that I am ascribing to Strachey’s every sentence can only, for Spurr, be an aberration.

The style of *Queen Victoria* is not responsible for the equation between artistry and intelligence, but it does make it all the easier. For by never betraying the punchline, Strachey can never let ignorance announce its own merits. Identifying ignorance as Strachey’s signature requires acknowledging something at odds with every explicit utterance. If there are two texts to *Queen Victoria*, the written and unwritten, then there are two approaches to reading its rhetoric. We could simply swallow Strachey’s continued affirmations, and think, like Cecil Reddie, that the biography is a moving tribute to a sovereign’s intellectual progress. But if we take the other approach, and see it all as subtly stylized, we would still be liable to salute Strachey for making his point so smartly. When style is the only thing for us to see, what then? I can imagine my own reader being persuaded by my accounts of Isabel and Leonard Bast and Ursula Brangwen, because it becomes easier to endorse ignorance when its pursuit aligns with the desires of the characters whose plights continue to move us. But in Strachey’s late mode, artlessness is abstract. Ignorance survives, but only as style. How can we tell whether to care about the Queen if the Queen herself does not care?

But the Queen, whatever our feelings, is dead. As with Arnold and Manning before her, Strachey can count on many of his readers having preconceived narratives of her life’s story already in mind. Even unlearning a fraction of them might count as a significant victory. A potential problem occurs, however, when the same type of character is dropped into a different domain, where a character’s profile must be tested against ongoing events. A novel, as we will see in Woolf, offers one such world, for until its final moments, a work of fiction is almost endlessly expansive: a character like Victoria is harder to paint when there is no ready horizon to define her against. An equally difficult domain to treat in these terms is the world of active policy discussions. The same style that benefits Victoria produces possibly cataclysmic consequences when brought to the first men of Europe in John Maynard Keynes’s *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. If a style of artlessness leaves characters largely immutable, their behaviors quickly reduce to knowable dimensions. It is one thing to revise a people’s opinion of their departed sovereign. But a vision of the human condition as unalterable is the last thing anyone could desire if hoping to destabilize an approaching status quo. Rather than simply perpetuating Strachey’s tone, Keynes’s characterization of the Paris Peace Conference must thus give ignorance additional dimensions by letting it actively unfold over time. What Keynes calls “the character of the Peace” is a vision of what Victoria might have accomplished had she herself not only had to unlearn, but to live.

## II. *The Character of the Peace: Maynard Keynes and Time*

Reading John Maynard Keynes’s account of the Paris Peace Conference, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), it is hard to imagine anything stupider than the resulting Treaty of Versailles. Despite ample evidence that the Germans could not pay for the full cost of the war, the

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<sup>453</sup> Spurr, “Camp Mandarin,” 41.

Allies — driven by Georges Clemenceau, propelled by David Lloyd George's promises to his electorate, and aided by Woodrow Wilson's indecision — imposed a Carthaginian peace on the Germans that would eventually, as Keynes predicted, lead to spiraling inflation in the Weimar Republic and the destabilization of the global economy. But even without the advantage of retrospect, with which the awaiting Depression makes Keynes's conclusions appear especially prescient, Keynes's first readers could still not have escaped the sense that the author was at pains to decry ignorance wherever he saw it. In an early chapter, Keynes asserts that the pre-war economic landscape, with its illusion of endless growth was sustained by the "ignorance or powerlessness" of the working classes.<sup>454</sup> Europe moreover must be saved from the politicians because she is "the mother of art and of knowledge" (268). The book's final page borrows from Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" to despair — and warn — that Europe's leaders "know not what they do" (279). Most famous of Keynes's attacks on ignorance, however, is his protracted criticism of Wilson, which revolves in large part around a discrepancy between Europe's immense estimates of the President's intelligence and its ultimately paltry resources. In Wilson, the Allies had hoped for a hero with "the objectivity, the cultivation, and the wide knowledge of the student" (36); "[a]fter all," Keynes later adds, here "was a man who had spent much of his life at a University" (38). Yet the Wilson that Keynes witnessed lacked "that dominating intellectual equipment which would have been necessary to cope with the subtle and dangerous spellbinders" that surrounded him (36). "The President was not equipped with this simple and usual artfulness. His mind was too slow and unresourceful" (40).

This final condemnation contains my own title, inverted: what Wilson lacked was "artfulness." My prior chapters have tracked ignorance's evolving importance for modernist character from Henry James to Keynes's doorstep, but surely this instance of artlessness appears far from favorable. Keynes's Wilson is at worst the villain, at best (and here is that word again) a fool. Subsequent commentators, including Keynes's own biographer, have admitted that this account of Wilson is misleading.<sup>455</sup> Yet regardless of whether Wilson was in truth too simple to navigate the negotiations, the pains that Keynes takes with the portrayal have long been seen as central to his economic philosophy. Literary critics to take up Keynes have often singled out these character sketches of Wilson and Clemenceau as evidence of a conviction that "personalities" are what most "shape the economic consequences of the peace."<sup>456</sup> Leon Edel savors how Keynes's "capacity for grasping detail" causes him to devote excessive attention to both men's hands:<sup>457</sup> Clemenceau's, "never uncovered," in grey suede gloves (26), Wilson's, "though capable and fairly strong," obviously "wanting" in "finesse" (37). Already even Wilson's fingertips have betrayed a certain slowness. The hands prefigure the personalities, and the personalities, more so than any policy, are what prepared the Peace. The awaiting economic reality, in other words, is an expression, for Keynes, of character.

In truth, these determinations were doubtlessly not made so quickly. The Paris Peace Conference spanned hundreds of meetings over a matter of months. At different moments, different advisors were competing for their leaders' ears. Yet Keynes compresses the timeline into a few cursory characterizations. This is what, for many critics, constitutes Keynes's genius — his

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<sup>454</sup> *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), 17. Subsequent citations from this work will be made parenthetically in the text.

<sup>455</sup> See Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: 1883-1946: Economist, Philosopher, Statesman* (London: Penguin, 2005), 249. For a more detailed discussion of precisely where Keynes got Wilson wrong, see also 244-245.

<sup>456</sup> Edward L. Bishop, "The Subject in *Jacob's Room*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 38.1 (1992): 160.

<sup>457</sup> See Leon Edel, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1979), 236-237.



ability to find artful expressions for economic issues.<sup>458</sup> Inevitably much of this talent is attributed to the influence of Keynes's Bloomsbury contemporaries; the weight that Keynes places on individual idiosyncrasies is said to resemble the method that Strachey had pioneered in *Eminent Victorians* just a year earlier.<sup>459</sup> But Keynes's tendency to pare character down to its barest dimensions could also be given a different name, based on a label invented years later by another Bloomsbury associate, E. M. Forster: Keynes's characters are all invariably "flat." As Forster would put it in *Aspects of the Novel*, flat characters are famously "constructed [a]round a single idea or quality;" a Mrs. Micawber or a Legrandin, whose essential traits can be expressed in a sentence, are instances of the type.<sup>460</sup> However, as Forster further reminds, flatness always doubles as an implicit claim about a character's capacity for development, as a question of a character's exposure to the tolls of time. Flat characters "never need reintroducing, never run away, have not to be watched for development;" they "remain in [the reader's] mind as unalterable."<sup>461</sup> Whatever the changes registered over the life of Proust's narrator, however many years separate their first meeting and their last, Legrandin will always remain Legrandin. By supposing that the personalities of those negotiating the Peace are set in stone, Keynes thus seems to assert that they are equally "unalterable," equally exempt from temporal transformation. Legrandin is, statically, a snob. Woodrow Wilson is statically sluggish.

When Crauford Goodwin alleges that the consistency of Keynes's characterization spells his contribution to "Bloomsbury style,"<sup>462</sup> we could in fact see Wilson's reliable dullness as a useful index of what is ever meant by "Bloomsbury style" to begin with. Wilson's flat dimensions offer a near perfect example of how we are often taught to think about modernism's treatment of character. It is fitting that Forster's archetype for flatness is Proust's Legrandin, for my reader might remember that the same character had earlier allowed Gerard Genette to argue that Proust's discourse precludes "substantial and well-defined *characters* in the realistic sense of the term."<sup>463</sup> The modernist break with realism, in this understanding, is distinguished by its disinclination to treat character as

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<sup>458</sup> For all the fits that certain of Keynes's constructions give professional economists, like the famous phrase "animal spirits," it is telling that the phrase nevertheless retains recognizable roots in Jane Austen and *Robinson Crusoe*, Disraeli and Dickens. See, for these first three, William Safire, "Animal Spirits," *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 2009. The last comes from *David Copperfield*: "I still believe [Steerforth], in virtue of his carriage, his animal spirits, his delightful voice, his handsome face and figure, and for aught I know, of some inborn power of attraction besides (which I think a few people possess), to have carried a spell with him to which it was a natural weakness to yield, and which not many persons could withstand" (*David Copperfield* [New York: Modern Library, 2000], 99). David's experience in fact seems to capture something close to Keynes's sense: if animal spirits are the unseen motors of human behavior, Steerforth's animal spirits are signified not only by his unrelenting rapaciousness, but by his ability to so easily influence *David's* behavior in turn.

<sup>459</sup> See Crauford D. Goodwin, "The Art of an Ethical Life: Keynes and Bloomsbury" in *The Cambridge Companion to Keynes*, ed. Roger E. Backhouse and Bradley W. Bateman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 234. See also Holroyd's "Introduction" to *Eminent Victorians*, xii, or Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes*, 234.

<sup>460</sup> E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Harcourt, 1955), 67.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>462</sup> "The Art of an Ethical Life," 234.

<sup>463</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 185.

anything more than a construct: the flatness of a Legrandin — or a Wilson — allows style to draw more attention to itself. There are no characters in Proust, Genette contends, because even their idiosyncrasies are subsumed by Proust's own style.<sup>464</sup> This style then also presupposes something about the stylist's singular sophistication, his mastery over his foreshortened subjects. No one thinks Legrandin a snob because he rails against snobbery so violently, and although no deception should be simpler to see through, the ruse holds for everyone he encounters — with the narrow exception of the narrator.<sup>465</sup> “Marcel” alone is smart enough to sense Legrandin's hypocrisy, and from the moment its truth is divined, Legrandin's character remains unalterable. Every subsequent appearance becomes colored by the contrast between what Legrandin takes for granted and what the narrator uniquely knows — and shows — better. If it is hard to imagine anything stupider than the Paris Peace Conference, it is equally taxing to imagine anything “smarter” than *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. It is not only that Keynes claims that Clemenceau and Wilson are misguided, or that they lacked the acumen to examine the facts. Keynes's characterization further perpetuates the impression, letting his own style shine the more that the first men of Europe are flattened. “Bloomsbury style” enjoys the vantage point of a Proust, from which the stylist proves his smartness.

This picture is surely in line with what critics would claim of “Bloomsbury,” at least of “Bloomsbury” as a generic, homogenous body, carefully encased (as I have often done here) within quotation marks. Yet is it an accurate account of the specific approaches or individual motives pursued by Keynes and his peers? Foremost among Keynes's influences for Wilson and Lloyd George and all the rest, let us recall, is supposedly Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*. But as Strachey's antagonism towards Arnold implies, and his later portrait of Victoria proves, this reading of Strachey's style is itself built around a misconception. The consistency of Strachey's tone blinds us to his commitment to character. Whether in Strachey or Keynes, we simply assume that Bloomsbury privileges its own perspicacity because of a distance enacted between the author's style and his subject. Come *Queen Victoria*, tone is all that we see; the changes that the tone itself has brought to character are blanched out by the brilliance of its style. But if Victoria and Dr. Arnold would ultimately inspire Keynes's Wilson and Lloyd George, the terms applied here to Keynes might give us a different way of contextualizing Strachey's earlier approach to his subjects, and thus a different way of explaining how the styles of Strachey and Keynes eventually meet.

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<sup>464</sup> This, I imagine, is what Genette means when he suggests that “Legrandin talks like Legrandin (in other words, like Proust imitating Legrandin)” (Ibid). The triumph of Proustian style is that Proust's ability to distill Legrandin down to a few essential qualities extends even to the consistent quality of Legrandin's speech.

<sup>465</sup> The excuses that the narrator's family is eager to make for Legrandin's behavior after he publicly avoids meeting their eyes receives almost as much attention as the behavior itself. “I would be especially sorry to know he is vexed,’ said my father, ‘because of the fact that among all those people dressed up in their Sunday best there is something about him... that is so uncontrived, so truly simple...’

But the family council was unanimously of the opinion that my father was imagining things” (Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. Lydia Davis [New York: Penguin, 2002], 122). Even pages later, when the narrator avers that “we had to change our minds definitively about Legrandin” (127), no one actually appears to do so. Legrandin repeats the same behavior, but the narrator's “grandmother refused to believe he had been impolite... In fact, my father himself, though he was the one most irritated by Legrandin's attitude, may still have harbored a last doubt as to what it meant” (129).

The tone that Strachey had brought to *Queen Victoria*, I had previously alleged, allowed two texts to exist in parallel: an overt one, which approvingly chronicled Victoria's every development, and an unspoken one, through which each education was shown to come to nothing. The first builds a *Bildungsroman*; the second, and more essential one, shows us a sovereign unmoved by socialization, "complete and obvious," with "nothing more to show, or to explain, or to modify."<sup>466</sup> Another way to put this would be to say that Victoria, in this last reading, is left as fundamentally "flat" as a Legrandin. *Queen Victoria* essentially trades on the felt difference between Forster's two approaches to character. The apparent text pretends towards the "roundness" we expect at the end of the pedagogical process. It is just this roundness, however, that is dispelled by the implicit subtext. Victoria's character never changes, never modifies. She remains, to quote Forster, "unalterable,"<sup>467</sup> but with one wrinkle — her character *does* still have "to be watched for development."<sup>468</sup> The failure to live up to that development, however, becomes the biography's essential point.

Artlessness, for Strachey, thus amounts to a delicate double game between round and flat methods of characterization. The aspiration towards roundness is foregrounded, but only so that it can be exhausted by Victoria's persistent flatness. The method that is most *prominent* is not strictly the one that is most *valued*. Might it be possible to say the same of Keynes? In Keynes's case, however, it is suddenly flatness that we see everywhere, suddenly flatness that looks most limited. The peculiarity of a straightforward comparison between both authors' characters is that what seems most valuable in Victoria appears utterly ridiculous in Wilson. From 1918 to 1919, rather than seeing both authors as engaged in an inevitable common style, Strachey and Keynes appear to be oscillating between opposing approaches to character, struggling to weigh the benefits of the round against the flat. In neither case is the more prominent method the privileged one. But if flatness is in fact faulty, the question becomes what Keynes's preferred alternative would be.

The account of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* that I have been giving, that Wilson and Lloyd George, as characters, are made to carry near totemic significance, has troubled professional economists far more than literary critics. For Keynes is not merely a modernist, as we understand that term in its artistic sense, but a forerunner of modernist economics. Although the similarity in terminologies is imperfect, what is seen to be modern in Keynes is his fidelity to Enlightenment epistemologies "such as empiricism and rationalism,"<sup>469</sup> his "belief in the progress and accumulation of knowledge" through rational testing.<sup>470</sup> A conviction that knowledge is a positive end is perhaps the one thing that economic modernism and conventional understandings of literary modernism most share. (In literary studies, we simply maintain different standards for how knowledge is shown; James Joyce's supposed fetish for the esoteric is as present in *Ulysses*'s formal complexity as it is in his desire to look up last names in the Dublin directory. This is *Ulysses*'s own proxy for the "accumulation of knowledge.") Economist Arjo Klamer makes the case that both literary and economic modernism arrive at their respective fields of knowledge by extracting "universal

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<sup>466</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Queen Victoria* (New York: Harcourt, 1921), 150.

<sup>467</sup> Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 69.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>469</sup> David F. Ruccio and Jack Amariglio, *Postmodern Moments in Modernist Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 87.

<sup>470</sup> Matthias Klaes, "Keynes Between Modernism and Postmodernism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Keynes*, ed. Roger E. Backhouse and Bradley W. Bateman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 259.

characteristics” from “deep structures.”<sup>471</sup> In neither is there any “need for differentiation in the form of characterizations of surface phenomena. Any character dissolves in the process.”<sup>472</sup> But if “the modernist project aims beyond characterizations of temporal and particular phenomena to cast its nets in the deep waters where the truth must lurk,”<sup>473</sup> why should Keynes place such stock in the President’s slow hands at all? To resort to such “shallow” structures<sup>474</sup> is to ignore any deeper reading of the negotiations’ competing calculations, for as we have seen, Keynes’s Peace Conference is, in fact, a fiction. Keynes’s characterizations reduce the work of days and weeks to instantaneous assumptions. The “depth” that gets left out is one of economic’s key variables: time, as it unfolds over the long run.

Keynes, of course, could not have thought of himself as a “modernist” economist, any more than Virginia Woolf would have thought of herself as a “modernist” of another stripe. But that Keynes is essentially credited with helping invent the field that Klamer describes should remind us that the unfit or unfamiliar elements of Keynes’s thought reflects an early moment in the history of both fields, when their priorities were still taking shape. What keeps Keynes from embracing modernist principles at this moment, Klamer claims, are his “doubts” about “the possibility of understanding the economy on the basis of time-invariant structures.”<sup>475</sup> It is not just character that is holding Keynes back, but his rigid and flattened conception of it. Indeed, towards the end of his life, Keynes himself would admit as much, seeing his notion of individual character as nothing less than an unfortunate byproduct of his own education. Although Keynes’s prose always gives the impression of immense erudition, “My Early Beliefs,” an essay read before Bloomsbury’s Memoir Club in 1938, suggests instead that ignorance, artlessness, might have been a preferable outlet for avoiding the very kind of blinkered thinking that the young Keynes had succumbed to, and that the principal powers at Paris had put directly into practice.

Like his audience that night in Bloomsbury, Keynes’s life could have been fuel for its own *Bildungsroman*. Early intelligence; Cambridge; insight; achievement. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, which was a commercial triumph, marked Keynes’s graduation to this final phase. But in his contribution to the Bloomsbury’s Memoir Club, Keynes appeared willing to reject the ideals that he and his friends had entertained after Cambridge. His reading, appropriately enough, was occasioned by David Garnett’s discussion, during the previous meeting, of the end of his friendship with D. H.

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<sup>471</sup> Arjo Klamer, “Late Modernism and the Loss of Character in Economics” in *Postmodernism, Economics, and Knowledge*, ed. Stephen Cullenberg, Jack Amariglio and David F. Ruccio (London: Routledge, 2001), 79.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid. The “loss of character” that Klamer’s title ascribes to modernist economics is not dissimilar from what Gerard Genette would claim of Proust, or from what my previous parenthetical suggests about Joyce. As style assumes a greater scope, “deep structures” of representation take the place of unitary characterizations. This is just, however, the account that Strachey and Keynes’s sensitivity towards character seems to challenge.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Although the terminological divide between economic and literary modernism is seemingly vast, we might note that what Klamer would call “shallow” is an almost exact proxy for what Forster calls “flat.” Both, of course, are spatial metaphors for the superficial, something that omits additional dimensions. In each case, however, the missing dimension is not spatial, but *temporal*. Flat characters do not develop; shallow structures limit themselves to synchronic phenomena.

<sup>475</sup> Klaes, “Keynes Between Modernism and Postmodernism,” 260.

Lawrence. Yet Keynes, remembering a meeting with Lawrence and Bertrand Russell at Cambridge in 1915,<sup>476</sup> thought to offer Lawrence a qualified defense. Lawrence — as my prior chapter’s discussion of his correspondence with Russell should better represent — had been incensed by the intellectual aridity of the two Cambridge men, and although Keynes could recall little of the actual discussion, he now proposed that there was “generally” “something true and right in what Lawrence felt.”<sup>477</sup>

The Cambridge of Keynes and his friends in 1915 had been “disposed to repudiate very strongly the idea that useful knowledge could be preferable to useless knowledge.”<sup>478</sup> Knowledge alone warranted exercise in its own right. Acolytes, all, of the Cambridge philosopher G. E. Moore, Keynes and Russell and Woolf and Strachey had shared a conviction that “[n]othing mattered except states of mind,” — Moore’s term of art — “our own and other people’s of course, but chiefly our own. These states of mind were not associated with action or achievement or with consequences. They consisted in timeless, passionate states of contemplation and communion, largely unattached to ‘before’ and ‘after.’”<sup>479</sup> It was an attempt to recreate such a state of perfect contemplation that Lawrence, apparently, had witnessed. In a letter to Ottoline Morrell shortly after his meeting with Keynes, Lawrence complained that the Cambridge types talked “endlessly, but endlessly... They are cased each in a hard little shell of his own, and out of this they talk words... It is this horror of little swarming selves that I can’t stand.”<sup>480</sup> Lawrence’s description can be considered an extreme example of the characterological consequences of intellection; the abstraction practiced by the Cambridge set had not only helped to transform them into fuller thinkers, but had literally formed them in a physical sense into polished carapaces of sophisticated talk. What Lawrence had observed, Keynes himself would later recognize: “[a]s cause and consequence of our general state of mind, we completely misunderstood human nature, including our own. The rationality which we attributed to it led to a superficiality, not only of judgment, but also of feeling.”<sup>481</sup>

As for the best and worst of us, Bloomsbury’s character had been learned. But only in 1938 could Keynes acknowledge what that education had overlooked. Based on Lawrence’s mention of hardened “selves,” and based on Keynes’s breezy aside — “other people’s” states of mind mattered, “of course, but chiefly our own” — it is easy to see Keynes objecting only to egoism. This indeed, is what Leon Edel concludes in the climactic scene of his collective biography, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*, to be “the world’s later accusation” — that Bloomsbury was so insular that it could not think beyond its borders.<sup>482</sup> Yet if Edel’s account is the one that Keynes offers, it would have the curious effect of rejecting the results of Bloomsbury’s intellection while nevertheless still valorizing the intellection itself. Edel ultimately insists that Bloomsbury “possessed something else, which some of

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<sup>476</sup> Keynes at first insists that the meeting took place in 1914, even though “Bunny [David Garnett] seems to suggest 1915” (“My Early Beliefs in *Two Memoirs* [London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949], 79). In this case, as Lawrence’s correspondence shows, it was Garnett who remembered rightly.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>480</sup> “To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 19 April 1915; Greatham, Pulborough, Sussex,” in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, 319. It is worth noting that this “endlessly, but endlessly” is echoed in *Women in Love*’s description of Sir Joshua Malleston, the novel’s nominal surrogate for Bertrand Russell (see *Women in Love*, 98).

<sup>481</sup> “My Early Beliefs,” 100.

<sup>482</sup> *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*, 261.

their peers in Cambridge did not have,” but this mysterious quantity is nothing more than an “awareness of beauty as idea and beauty as vision” that could be “superimposed upon Cambridge intellectuality.”<sup>483</sup> Although Keynes states that his education had led him astray, Edel is convinced that the common criticism of Bloomsbury should simply be turned into something to cheer. In his own account in “My Early Beliefs,” Keynes suggests a more abiding concern with both how his character had been formed, and also how that experience had taught him to understand the process of character formation in turn. So deep was the Cambridge inclination towards abstraction that, as Keynes initially noted, states of mind remained “timeless,” “largely unattached to ‘before’ and ‘after.’”<sup>484</sup> In all the examples that Keynes provides to dismiss his early fascination with Moore’s “states of mind,” the common, missing element is always time. The “value of the state of mind of being in love,” to the young followers of Moore, “did not depend much[] on what happened, or how one felt about it a year later.”<sup>485</sup> “[W]as a violent love affair which lasts a short time better than a more tepid one which endured longer? We were inclined to think it was.”<sup>486</sup> Having dipped back into Moore’s *Principia Ethica* (1902) as he was getting the essay in order, Keynes discovered that Moore’s system was a sheer fantasy, “existing in a timeless ecstasy.”<sup>487</sup>

Cambridge had taught Keynes, in other words, that time was inessential. All “human nature” was essentially static, essentially flat. The limitations of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, which emerged not long after Keynes had left Cambridge, remained bound then by Keynes’s immature outlook. That Keynes felt compelled enough in 1938 to declaim this outlook in front of his most intimate friends should suggest a subsequent shift in sentiments. With the benefit of hindsight — which is to say, of time itself — Keynes can appreciate that an enduring love might be better than a violent passion. But that Keynes explicitly requested that the essay be published after his death (alongside “Dr. Melchior”) further suggests that he was concerned at how his prior treatment of time might taint his legacy. Wilson and Clemenceau would have looked wrong to the Keynes of 1938 — not merely wrong in their ideas (this certainly would have held true since 1919), but wrong in their very depiction. The later readings of Edel and Bishop and Goodwin prove that Keynes was right to worry. Yet like the blinding quality of Strachey’s style, which makes it difficult to detect the authenticity of his interests, these critics have only accounted for half of what Keynes created. A dissatisfaction with the tendency to treat human behavior as if it unfolded in a “timeless ecstasy” had surely been present even in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, where it is the failure to account for time that produces the most catastrophic consequences. The first lines of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* begin with a peculiar pronouncement: “The power to become habituated to his surroundings is a marked characteristic of mankind... We assume some of the most peculiar and temporary of our late advantages as natural, permanent, and to be depended on, and we lay our plans accordingly” (1).<sup>488</sup> Had we paid no mind to the book’s title — these, after all, are its earliest

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>484</sup> “My Early Beliefs,” 83.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>488</sup> There is a parallel with Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* even here — the first lines of both books seem ill at odds with how the books are subsequently interpreted. Despite affirming, in his earliest sentence, that whatever we assume to be permanent is misguided, critics insist that this is how

words — we might be fooled into thinking that this was a treatise on developmental psychology, on character formation, on education. Keynes's early chapters concern Europe before the War, and where Europe had erred was in assuming that it had, since 1870, reached a plateau of economic prosperity. The temporary stability brought about by industrialization and colonial exploitation was not only endlessly sustainable; it had been so long guaranteed that it had always seemed so.<sup>489</sup> Those that brought the war about behaved as though the story of scarcity and struggle and fixed inputs was over. Europe imagined that she had settled into "permanent" quiescence. Her *Bildungsroman* had already ended. No further "development" was necessary in this reading of Europe's history, because, as in the final pages of a *Wilhelm Meister*, society had already secured its highest ideal.

That the First World War should have shaken this faith goes without saying. Yet the men with Keynes in Paris, the men most responsible for the terms of the Treaty, were committed to reverting to the same worldview. For all the attention directed at Wilson's dithering or Lloyd George's cravenness, Keynes is clear that it was Clemenceau who controlled the terms of negotiations. In Keynes's earliest portrait of the assembled heads of state, Clemenceau's "principles for the Peace" (29) are given through Clemenceau's own imagined monologue:

The politics of power are inevitable, and there is nothing very new to learn about this war or the end it was fought for; England had destroyed, as in each preceding century, a trade rival; a mighty chapter had been closed in the secular struggle between the glories of Germany and of France... [B]ut it would be stupid to believe that there is much room in the world, as it really is, for such affairs as the League of Nations, or any sense in the principle of self-determination except as an ingenious formula for rearranging the balance of power... (30)

Nowhere does Keynes provide such an intimate description of positions that he cannot possibly condone. But as in Strachey, the passage is obscured by an archness particular to Bloomsbury. There are just sentiments in what Clemenceau proposes; England *had* destroyed, as in each preceding century, a trade rival; Germany and France's secular struggle *would* resume (although Keynes could not know it) as soon as the Peace had given way. Yet each assertion is fed to the fire of Keynes's withering sarcasm all the same. So high is the temperature, in fact, that critics eager to tout Keynes's intellect might miss what else Keynes is willing to sacrifice: intelligence itself. Clemenceau's is the consummate intellect; there can be "nothing very new to learn" from this war because Clemenceau already knows it; those who disagree with him are dismissed as "stupid." But this wisdom leads Clemenceau to the same calculus as to those who had first provoked the war. Behind Clemenceau's convictions is an assumption that world politics are immutable, timeless. Nothing in Europe has changed for centuries. The negotiations are at best a thought experiment, an intellectual exercise in drawing the most favorable immediate gains, since in the long run the centuries will simply prevail. Keynes's Clemenceau — the Tiger, the "spellbinder" (36), the heel — sounds, in short, not unlike the Keynes or Russell of 1915, as admitted by the Keynes of 1938. Time's toll simply does not enter into his equation.

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Keynes handles character. If the fault of Strachey's style is that he can never be taken seriously, we might marvel that the same slight is applied to Keynes.

<sup>489</sup> Keynes gives this timeline more concrete terms, elaborating that the "economic Eldorado" in which most of his readers were brought up "lost sight of a view of the world which filled with deep-seated melancholy the founders of our Political Economy. Before the eighteenth century mankind entertained no false hopes. To lay an end to the illusions which grew popular at that age's latter end, Malthus disclosed a Devil. For half a century all serious economical writings held that Devil in clear prospect. For the next half century he was chained up and out of sight" (8).

Every term of the Treaty that Keynes decries reflects not just a privileging of short-term benefits over long-, but a blitheness towards temporality in the first place. Germany will be saddled with extraordinary debt despite her obvious inability to pay; interest on her debt will accrue so quickly that she will be “skin[ned]” alive “in perpetuity” (155). A provision permitting the seizure of German interests in neutral countries “would appear to extend not only to property existing at the date of the Peace, but also to any which may be created or acquired at any time” until the Treaty takes effect (71-72). Rather than absolving one another’s debts, the victorious powers will create a currency crunch that will “never” allow world commerce “to move again, unless we can free our limbs from these paper shackles” (262). Time is disregarded; a pretended perpetuity triumphs. The great promise of Wilson’s League of Nations seems to be that it escapes this formula: by attempting to neutralize future disputes, the League of Nations at least acknowledges Europe’s continued development. But the League was eventually repurposed by Clemenceau to possess a “fatal bias towards the status quo;” so neutered, Clemenceau could “make of it another Holy Alliance for the perpetuation of the economic ruin of their enemies and the Balance of Power in their own interests which they believe themselves to have established by the peace” (243). This is the ideal end of every *Bildungsroman*, its imperative: fit elements absorbed, improper elements expunged. But the stasis that characterizes Clemenceau’s Peace is not an end, it is an enabling condition. The Holy Alliance was forged in 1815; the conditions of 1919 are to be no different. Nothing ever changes, nothing has ever changed. The story of the Paris Peace Conference, as told by Clemenceau, is a completed *Bildungsroman* from first to last. We end where we began, with society sewn up.

As the essential author of the Peace, Clemenceau approaches Europe’s past and present just like Keynes himself seems to paint Clemenceau’s character. Foregone conclusions follow from the flatness each enforces. How could Keynes possibly, however, himself subscribe to a conception of character so antithetical to his every interest? Put this way, the contradiction smacks of repression; it seems that it is Keynes as much as Clemenceau who “knows not what [he] do[es].” But it is telling, I think, that critics preoccupied with Keynes’s characterization have never yet even identified the contradiction. Something about Keynes leads critics like those noted earlier to gravitate towards how the personalities of the Peace are portrayed while ignoring his every other utterance. We have seen this same tendency applied to Strachey: whatever seems identifiable as a stylistic signature is privileged over any competing claim. Just as a deliberate “staleness” seems unconscionable to those that admire Strachey’s bravura, that Keynes’s characterizations are nevertheless vivid, nevertheless amusing, seems to grant them weight even over explicit ideological claims. The critical hazard of making assumption about “Bloomsbury style” is that it flattens available interpretations ever so much as Clemenceau.

Correcting Strachey’s case had only required inverting the proprieties that he had pretended to trumpet. The pedagogical model that Victoria had seemed committed toward was ultimately defused by a countervailing one, which, read rightly, exhausted itself in ignorance. Does Keynes, however, have a countervailing concept of character to compete with Clemenceau’s? The only parties that people his pages possess the same flat features that Clemenceau ascribes to Europe’s history. Yet as in *Queen Victoria*, Keynes’s subversive sense of character unfolds at such a scale that it is possibly impossible to see it up close. “The great events of history,” Keynes holds in the book’s first pages, “are often due to secular changes in the growth of population and other fundamental economic causes, which, escaping by their gradual character the notice of contemporary observers, are attributed to the follies of statesmen or the fanaticism of atheists” (12). Shortly thereafter he holds that “the extraordinary occurrences of the past two years in Russia... may owe more to the deep influences of expanding numbers [of population] than to Lenin or to Nicholas” (12-13). By this standard, any commentator seduced by Keynes’s depiction of Wilson over the past hundred years would have remained as blind to the “gradual” (which is to say, temporal) nature of Keynes’s



critique as his “contemporary” observers. Keynes’s sense of “character” is not confined to Wilson or Clemenceau. Here he deploys the term as an attribute only of abstract forces; it is the “gradual character” of “other fundamental economic causes” to which war and peace are owed.

Keynes does advance an alternative concept of “character” — only it is a fundamentally different kind of character from what Wilson (or Lenin or Nicholas II) can supply. Observers in Keynes’s time as much as ours are liable to owe disproportionate importance to the idiosyncrasies of individual actors rather than accounting for the “gradual character” that truly shapes events. This character, in fact, has a name, one that Keynes proposes, between his second and third chapters, will make up the book’s central subject: “the actual character of the Peace” (23). Keynes resorts to this precise phrase, “the character of the Peace,” repeatedly (23, 34, 51). In each, “the character of the Peace” recurs as a reminder of past promises and future prospects: “the enemy had laid down his arms” because the “general character of the Peace” offered a “fair hope for a restoration of the broken current of life” (34); “two rival schemes for the future polity of the world,” Wilson’s Fourteen Points and Clemenceau’s Carthaginian Peace, could vie for supremacy, but only one comported with what any person but Clemenceau comprehended as the original “character of the Peace” (51). Insofar as all “following chapters” after its first mention aim to animate this “character of the Peace,” every critique of Clemenceau, every jab at Wilson’s staidness, seeks to reinsert a dynamic appreciation of time back into Keynes’s account. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, in full, formalizes a tension between two competing time scales, two possible treatments of time: one, advanced by the Allies, that reads Europe’s history with the complacency owed to a *Bildungsroman* past its end, and the alternative, advanced by Keynes, that seeks to unseat this assumption by reminding that the story is ongoing. Keynes, of course, was no novelist, but the “character of the Peace” can be considered a literal character, in the specific literary sense. Clemenceau’s conviction is flat, Keynes’s round. Just as Strachey had fashioned *Queen Victoria* as an inversion of conventional accounts of characters, Keynes’s “character of the Peace” becomes itself an argument against the kinds of characters that it contains.

So much makes Keynes seem like an obvious agent of intelligence: his worries over what went wrong with Wilson, the disdain that his style maps to his subjects, even the numerous charts and figures that he marshals to prove where his enemies went wrong. But the immutability of Clemenceau’s convictions creates a body of knowledge that Keynes’s rhetoric must foremost unlearn. In this context, intelligence is not an asset, it is a liability, because intelligence in Clemenceau’s mold is just what allows the leaders of Europe to presuppose that “it would be stupid to believe” in a different future (30). Contemporary economists are convinced that Keynes falls back on antiquated concepts like characterization and “the psychological dimension of economic actors”<sup>490</sup> in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* because he has not yet arrived at a modernist’s outlook, whereby knowledge is objectively extracted from “deep structures.”<sup>491</sup> Even economists of an older vintage than Keynes had long accepted and “been guided, at least in part, by the presumption of certain knowledge (or, at a minimum, the possibility of such knowledge) predicated on a distanced, objective cognitive relation to the world.”<sup>492</sup> Understanding the “character of the Peace” as the final form of Keynes’s thoughts on character, however, reveals that this is not just a question of which facts and figures are most appropriate, but an ambivalence as to whether

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<sup>490</sup> Klamer in Klaes, “Keynes Between Modernism and Postmodernism,” 260.

<sup>491</sup> Klamer, “Late Modernism and the Loss of Character in Economics,” 79.

<sup>492</sup> David F. Ruccio and Jack Amariglio, *Postmodern Moments in Modernist Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 55.

knowledge itself is advantageous. Any “certain knowledge” becomes suspect, for it is precisely Clemenceau’s calculated certainty of Europe’s affairs that allows him to see the same conditions applied endlessly.

Economists such as Klamer had resisted Keynes’s typically flat characterizations because Keynes had seemed so stubbornly committed to synchrony, seemed unwilling to think in longitudinal terms indifferent to specific actors. But “the character of the Peace” affords us a type of characterization that admits just these terms. What makes such a prospect hostile to most economic — or indeed, simply academic — accounts, however, is that such a figure resists rational quantification or explanation. The “character of the Peace” is not defined by what it knows, but by what it does not know, what it refuses to assume. As Avital Ronell had earlier warned, it is ignorance, not knowledge, that is “forever on the prowl,” ready to dissolve any certainty it encounters.<sup>493</sup> Clemenceau’s was a world without ignorance, a world only of fixed dimensions. Keynes’s “character” becomes a way to countermand those assumptions.

Looking back from 1938, of course Keynes could find “something true and right in what Lawrence felt.”<sup>494</sup> The Keynes of 1919 and the Lawrence of *Women in Love* had approached the First World War along parallel tracks. (Tracks, perhaps, that were never acknowledged because the two had fallen out of touch after 1915, due not only to Lawrence’s reaction at his Cambridge reception, but his quarrel with Russell and, ultimately, Ottoline Morrell.) The vision of Europe’s character advanced by Clemenceau is almost a shadow version of Lawrence’s characterization in *Women in Love*. Ursula Brangwen and Rupert Birkin remain constant so that socialization, including that wrought by the War, can lay no claim to them. But Clemenceau imagines a world that remains unchanging only because it has always been suitably socialized. The real Peace of Paris should be D. H. Lawrence’s nightmare, and Keynes, even in 1919, attempted to render it as horrifying as possible. But like Lawrence too, Keynes’s way out of the prevailing social reality takes a curious shape. The question that Ursula and Rupert had provoked is whether such awkward constructs really resemble “people” in any recognizable way. Keynes leaves us with a character, “the character of the Peace,” that likewise looks like no character we have ever seen. It is ignorant, willing to face the future with no recourse to Clemenceau’s certainties, but also, quite literally, inhuman.

The confusion of economists or literary theorists when confronting Keynes’s characterization is thus eminently understandable, for as with Strachey, the kind of character that is most essential conflicts with the one that it is easiest to see. The real “character of the Peace” requires looking past the silver-haired heads of state. (Keynes’s vision of history is finally Tolstoyan; great events are not caused by Great Men, but by influences that are forever uncertain. Nevertheless, he, with Tolstoy, runs the risk of letting his reader be distracted by the brush of Napoleon’s hand against a soldier’s buttons.)<sup>495</sup> With Keynes, as with Strachey, artlessness becomes a way of subverting the usual *forms* of characterization rather than offering specific characters as unassailable examples.

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<sup>493</sup> Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>494</sup> “My Early Beliefs,” 80

<sup>495</sup> “The little white hand, with the order in it, just touched the button of the soldier Lazarev. It was as though Napoleon knew that it was enough for his, Napoleon’s, hand to deign to touch the soldier’s breast, for that soldier to be happy, rewarded, and distinguished from every one in the world. Napoleon merely laid the cross on Lazarev’s breast, and, dropping his hand, turned to Alexander, as though he knew that cross would be sure to stick on Lazarev’s breast. The cross did, in fact, stick on” (Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Constance Garnett [New York: Modern Library, 2004], 466). Part of the power of this passage is a trick of translation, which the later translation of Pevear and Volokhonsky makes obvious: the “cross did stick, *because* obliging Russian and French

As often as Bloomsbury is charged with intellectual elitism, there is an irony in that Keynes's depiction of the Paris Peace Conference became a popular triumph. (As Skidelsky itemizes, the book sold "well over 100,000 copies" globally in less than a year, and Keynes would essentially live on the proceeds until they were squandered in speculations.)<sup>496</sup> But Keynes's success obscures that the enthusiasm might have been misplaced. The book's appeal came, Skidelsky cannot help adding, because Keynes "had spoken like an angel with the knowledge of an expert."<sup>497</sup> We might pause to consider whether this phrase captures the book's contemporary appeal, or only the later opinions of critical commentators. But in either case, the suggestion seems to be that the public turned to *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* as a proxy for forming their own opinions. The limitation of Strachey's *Victoria* is that it allowed its readers alone — and only certain readers at that — to unlearn, leaving its chief character to simply represent a concept. Keynes would turn the process over, fashioning a character that, through the reincorporation of time, could unlearn the assumptions of his book's every other actor. Yet the effect on his readers was possibly more opaque than in Strachey's case. With so many characters so easily flattened, the stylist still seems to command some superiority over his subjects. Again the prior analogy with Proust seems appropriate. It might be suggested that by stripping Legrandin down to one dimension, and repeating the process with everyone from Charlus to Swann, the narrator is able not only to sharpen his own style, not only to prove his own intellect, but also to reinforce his own roundness. One wonders whether this is not always the case with the round and the flat, whether David Copperfield becomes rounder by cutting Mrs. Micawber down to size. With different terminology, this system resembles the concept of "character space" articulated by Alex Woloch. But because Woloch's account in *The One vs. the Many* stops short of the twentieth-century, it might be imagined that what distinguishes modernist fiction is a perceived diminution of collective character space altogether. In Keynes, flattening Wilson and Clemenceau does not necessarily create greater space for the "character of the Peace," even if it should — it invites readers to salute the roundness of the author's own authority. The impression of Keynes's intellect, like Proust's narrator, simply takes up too much room. The question that we come to in Virginia Woolf then is whether we even see the figures in a later modernist novel like *To the Lighthouse* as autonomous characters, or whether we cede more space to the voices that animates time's passing. What comes to be the place of character when the stylist alone seems whole?

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hands instantly picked it up and fastened it to the tunic" (my emphasis; *War and Peace* trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky [New York: Knopf, 2007], 415), an important qualification that Constance Garnett banishes to the next paragraph. I have nevertheless chosen Garnett's translation here for a certain symmetry. Constance was the mother of David Garnett, whose reflections on D. H. Lawrence had caused Keynes to prepare "My Early Beliefs." It is Garnett's version of *War and Peace* that Keynes's contemporaries would have read. Even as Tolstoy avows, repeatedly, that the influence of isolated individuals has no bearing on world events, scenes like this one tempt his translators into giving his Great Men nearly magical powers. The explicit ideology says one thing; the representation, however, seems to occasionally tip towards another.

<sup>496</sup> *John Maynard Keynes*, 244.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

### III. “This Impersonal Thing” – Temporality and the Persistence of Character in “Time Passes”

“In a novel,” E. M. Forster concluded in *Aspects of the Novel*, “there is always a clock.”<sup>498</sup> “It is always possible for you or me in daily life to deny that time exists and act accordingly even if we become unintelligible and are sent...to what they choose to call a lunatic asylum. But it is never possible for a novelist to deny time inside the fabric of his novel.”<sup>499</sup> Forster here goes on to catalogue a number of authors who may have “dislike[d]” their clocks — Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights*, Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*, Proust. But the thesis, he ultimately determines, is inviolable.

The lectures that would eventually become *Aspects of the Novel* were first delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in the spring of 1927. One novelist that Forster might have numbered among the enemies of “the clock” could well have been his friend, Virginia Woolf, whose *To the Lighthouse*, with its iconic middle section, “Time Passes,” was published in May of that same year. Although the first section of *To the Lighthouse* contains a fairly pedestrian domestic drama, with snapshots of a single day in the life of the Ramsay family at their vacation home in the Hebrides, “Time Passes” upends the novel’s clock, letting ten years pass while the Ramsay home stands empty, with only the wind and a few housekeepers for company. The characters that we have known — Mrs. Ramsay, her children, her guests — appear only in bracketed passages between longer descriptive segments, such as the one that abruptly strips the novel of its seeming protagonist:

The nights now are full of wind and destruction; the trees plunge and bend and their leaves fly helter skelter until the lawn is plastered with them and they lie packed in gutters and choke rain pipes and scatter damp paths... Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer.

[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]<sup>500</sup>

The violence that passages like this induce on the reader’s sense of time — not only their breach of novelistic custom, but also the sudden emotional toll that they require — famously serves as a parallel to the trauma of the First World War.

Although born only two years apart, Forster and Woolf stand on opposite ends of modernism: his career as a novelist was effectively finished by 1924; her output before 1925 could still be considered “early,” with her most innovative output — *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves* — still to come. Forster, in his way, is the last Victorian — or better yet, the last Regency novelist, the last author to write almost entirely in the style of Jane Austen. The clock is so essential to Forster because character — its incremental development, its “roundness” — is, both in *Aspects of the Novel* and his fiction, his privileged literary domain. “Time” is essential for Forster because time alone lets character be tested.

By contrast, what makes “Time Passes” so wrenching is the violence that its temporality does to the character system that had held its first part together. Because a novel is so often linked to its protagonists’ development, sub-plots promised in the first part of *To the Lighthouse* had seemed almost certain to be fulfilled later on. From what we could tell from the first section, Mrs. Ramsay was the book’s central figure; but “Time Passes” suddenly scatters any expectations that we may

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<sup>498</sup> *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Harcourt, 1955), 29.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> *To the Lighthouse* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1981 [1927]), 128. Subsequent references to *To the Lighthouse* will be abbreviated to “TTL” parenthetically in the main text.

have had. In her diary, shortly before beginning composition of *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf recorded that the middle section would be “this impersonal thing, which I’m dared to do by my friends, the flight of time, & the consequent break of unity in my design.”<sup>501</sup> In that word, “impersonal,” Woolf seems to suggest a prose free from people. Yet even before this phrase, she reflects that the entire novel — not just “Time Passes” — will contain “character boiled down.”<sup>502</sup> Character might be absent from “Time Passes,” but it will be concentrated in the novel’s full form. How then, we might ask, is the product preserved? What (or who) does the “boil[ing]?”

The place of character in *To the Lighthouse* can be glimpsed by seeing “Time Passes” as less a rejection of Forster’s approach to both character and of time than a mere elaboration, a literal sequel, to a Forster novel that Woolf had once reviewed, *Howards End*, and the novel with which this project began. Critics remain convinced that there is no such thing as modernist character. But behind Woolf’s bracketed passages, the barren rooms, is character, boiled down, and the shared history between the two novels uniquely allows us to recognize how modernist character took shape and how, behind those brackets, those rooms, it ultimately became obscured.

As important as the “clock” is to Forster, it should barely surprise that Forster’s own in *Howards End* is impeccable, ticking away in the background even when we do not hear it toll every hour. The novel opens with the words “One might as well begin with Helen’s letters to her sister,” letters that begin with two pieces of information — a name, “Howards End,” and a date, “Tuesday.” The next letter is “Friday,” the next “Sunday.” This early part of the novel sets the stage for what follows, so one might as well begin by rehearsing the details — details that were omitted from my introduction, which had attempted to reimagine *Howards End* as the singular story of Leonard Bast. Helen Schlegel, visiting friends, the Wilcoxes, falls in love with their son. All of the action in this part of the novel takes place via correspondence, and so nominally offstage, but when the Schlegels’ aunt rushes to stop Helen from making a catastrophic mistake, she remembers — even though we, the readers, can scarcely have attended to what took place when — that Helen has only known the Wilcox son, “since Wednesday.”<sup>503</sup> Forster’s readers are allowed, in other words, to take the steady tread of time’s passage for granted, and even as the novel begins to chronicle larger spans of time — not days, but months, years — Forster’s narrator can be counted on to be silently keeping time for us.

Gradually, the march of days and months becomes linked to a single set of circumstances, a single character. Shortly after the epistolary debacle, Helen, while attending the symphony, will accidentally steal the umbrella of Leonard Bast, the young clerk who is attempting to acquire culture by reading Ruskin and listening to Beethoven. It is Leonard who lets us glimpse why time and character are codependent for Forster. Since Leonard’s attempt to refashion himself, through education, becomes the novel’s orienting event, its time is thus anchored to a relentless developmental logic. But as my introduction had tracked, critics have soured on the terms of Leonard’s depiction. Despite an occupation that, by all logic, should place him firmly on the lower rungs of the middle class, Leonard lives in what looks like abject poverty, in a near windowless basement flat with a woman, Jacky, who the novel leads us to believe may once have been a prostitute.

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<sup>501</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie, Vol. III: 1925-1930 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980), 36.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>503</sup> Forster, *Howards End* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 17. Subsequent citations from the novel will refer to this edition parenthetically as “HE.”

This is all that Forster ever lets us glimpse of Leonard's life, so that despite his own attempts at self-betterment, the unexpected reappearances of Jacky Bast serve as the most persistent reminder of the wretchedness of Leonard's circumstances. Midway through the novel, the narrator will characterize Jacky outright as "bestially stupid" (HE 192), but our first glimpse of her comes from a photograph, which "had been taken at the time when young ladies called Jacky were often photographed with their mouths open. Teeth of dazzling whiteness extended along either of Jacky's jaws" (41). But when Jacky herself enters the room (where Leonard, of course, has been reading Ruskin), she is presented as

[t]he face of the photograph, but older, and the teeth were not so numerous as the photographer had suggested, and certainly not so white. Yes, Jacky was past her prime, whatever that prime may have been. She was descending quicker than most women into the colourless years... She was now a massive woman of thirty three. (43-44)

If my introduction had reimagined *Howards End* as the story not of the Schlegel sisters but of Leonard Bast, we might now appreciate the degree to which Leonard's own characterization is tied to his attempts to distance himself from Jacky. Her story becomes an extension of Leonard's development, and it is largely the march of those "colourless years" that register the novel's passage of time. "Over two years passed" (91) between Chapter 12 and Chapter 13, we learn, an interval that is only interrupted when Jacky finds the Schlegel sisters' visiting card in Leonard's possession and shows up to make a scene. Jacky's interference, in other words, provides an alibi for the persistence of the novel's plot. Readers catch up with the Basts and with the novel's clock in concert. Helen and Margaret decide that they must do something to help Leonard up the social ladder, so pass along a business tip, courtesy of the Wilcoxes, which proves ruinous. Leonard loses his position, and at Helen's provocation, arrives at a Wilcox wedding to air his grievance, with Jacky in tow. After Jacky has passed out drunk in the other room, in a tête-à-tête that will eventually lead to the two seducing one another, Helen asks Leonard how long he and Jacky have been married, which he reveals has been "[n]early three years" (202). Although *Howards End* has basically wedded its form to Leonard's attempted *Bildung*, it is strangely his marriage that becomes Forster's chief chronological marker.

All of this — the drunkenness, the teeth, the colourlessness — is surely unpleasant enough for the critics who had bristled at Forster's perceived classism. My introduction had taken pains to uncover the impetus towards artlessness briefly embodied by Leonard Bast. But Jacky Bast's depiction is not at all so redemptive. Indeed, even the climactic death of Leonard, which for the first time allows him to find his own voice, distinct from the books by which he has built himself up until that point, maintains little interest in Jacky's individuality or actualization. Although her husband has essentially been murdered, the widowed Jacky Bast, bizarrely, is never seen again. The novel's final scene occurs "the following spring" (224), once Helen's child has been born. Even dead, Leonard is capable of producing temporal markers: in case we have failed to keep track, we are finally told that the novel's first events had taken place "four years ago" (232). But Jacky has vanished into the margins.

Virginia Woolf memorably claimed that it was "on or about December 1910" that "human character changed" and modern art and literature were swept into being.<sup>504</sup> There is thus an almost uncanny sense in which *Howards End*, released October 18<sup>th</sup> of that year, betokens the last breaths of both realist modes of representation and realist conceptions of character. Although the two authors were friends, in a review of *Howards End*, Woolf expressed her dissatisfaction not merely with Forster's characterization writ large, but with Leonard Bast in particular. "The bookcase which falls upon Leonard Bast in *Howards End* should perhaps come down upon him with all the dead weight

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<sup>504</sup> Woolf, *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 4.

of smoke-dried culture... We qualify these statements, for indeed we are not quite sure whether we have guessed right.”<sup>505</sup> “[Forster] has...a power of creating characters in a few strokes which live in an atmosphere of their own... But his vision is of a peculiar kind and his message of an elusive nature.”<sup>506</sup> Forster, for his part, turned *Woolf’s* characterization into a point of contestation, complaining even after her death that Woolf “dreams, designs, jokes, invokes, observes, details, but she does not tell a story or weave a plot, and—can she create character? That is her problem’s centre... if one is writing about human beings, one does want them to seem alive.”<sup>507</sup>

Forster would not be alone in making this assessment. Critics are united in finding that what makes Woolf’s art, and “Time Passes” in particular, distinctive is an abandonment of the teleology of development on which Forster — in Leonard, in the *Bildung* built into *The Longest Journey*, in all his novels — had depended. The “point of “Time Passes,”” Ann Banfield concludes, is that “the characters remain ignorant of time’s passing.”<sup>508</sup> Banfield approvingly quotes Avrom Fleishman, who holds that “the characters [of *To the Lighthouse* writ large] do not develop in a linear sequence from one section to another.”<sup>509</sup> The discontinuity of the characters’ development is abetted by the fact that Woolf’s clock is silenced for so long. The kind of recurring temporal markers that Forster had introduced at every appearance of Leonard and Jacky Bast are largely absent from *To the Lighthouse*. Although we know that “ten years” (ITL 147) pass between Part I, “The Window,” and Part III, “The Lighthouse,” and that the First World War occurs some time across “Time Passes,” the actual dates divided by those ten years are actually more difficult to place. David Bradshaw, the editor to the Oxford University Press edition of *To the Lighthouse*, holds that the lines “then indeed peace had come” in the final section of “Time Passes” signify the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June, 1919, thus “strongly suggest[ing]” that the end of “Time Passes” takes place in September, 1919.<sup>510</sup> Yet just the prior sentence had been set “one evening in September” (141), as Lily Briscoe makes her way back to the Ramsays’ vacation home in preparation for the novel’s final section. Although Woolf appears indifferent to specific time scales, she remains sensitive, at least, to their sequencing; it would be inconsistent at best, incoherent at worst, for the “peace” announced moments later to signify an event that had taken place in June, months earlier.

The mood of the novel’s closing section, “The Lighthouse,” is moreover not exactly celebratory. It would seem ill-fitting at best for Mr. Ramsay to mark the end of the war that had killed his son with a jaunt to his family’s summer home at the first moment that travel by sea became convenient. More likely, I suspect, is that the earliest September, commemorated in “The Window,” takes place just before the outbreak of the war, in September of 1913, and that the “peace” that comes at the end of “Time Passes” is not a literal peace, signed over by Keynes’s heads of state, but a strictly symbolic restoration of order. By that logic, the return to the Ramsay house would take place some time after 1919, as late as 1923. Time does pass, as in the extract from Mrs Ramsay’s death that we

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<sup>505</sup> Virginia Woolf, “The Novels of E. M. Forster” in *The Death of the Moth and other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942), 169.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>507</sup> Forster, “Virginia Woolf: The Rede Lecture, delivered in the Senate House, Cambridge,” in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), 250.

<sup>508</sup> Banfield, “Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time,” *Poetics Today* 24:3 (Fall 2003): 503.

<sup>509</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>510</sup> See Bradshaw’s note in *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 192.

have already witnessed. But the way that time can be registered on characters has been turned around. The toll of time in the section is in fact recorded, by and large, only on inanimate objects — plates shattering, boards loosening, a shawl waving to and fro.

This reading of “Time Passes,” however, skirts a central reality, one nearly as troubling to critics as the treatment that Forster doles out on Leonard Bast. For there *are* humans, proper humans, in “Time Passes,” in the figure of the housekeepers who arrive, between seasons, to prepare the Ramsays’ home for their return, but who are treated as nearly as lifeless as the wind blowing through the vacant house. The portrait of these two women is scarcely flattering. The preliminary description offered of the first, Mrs. McNab, is that “she was witless, she knew it;” when she sings sentences later, the sound “coming from the toothless, bonneted, care-taking woman, was robbed of meaning, was like the voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself” (TTL 130). No one in the novel, not even the opium-stained Augustus Carmichael, comes in for such an unappealing characterization. By putting Mrs. McNab front and center in a segment conspicuously devoid of human activity, Woolf becomes open to the same types of criticism directed at Forster and towards Bloomsbury at large: that she is so indifferent to the plight of the uneducated, the poor, that Mrs. McNab, as Mary Lou Emery has averred,<sup>511</sup> barely counts as human.

Although dramatized through different representational modes, what most troubles in Woolf’s depiction of Mrs. McNab is the same thing that, in Forster, had so troubled generations of critics: the inability to imagine any alternative to the “wretchedness” of the lower orders.<sup>512</sup> Someone like Mrs. McNab might be witless, but Woolf, critics charge, is not interested in why that might be so, or in what an emotional life for such a character might have looked like. Jane Austen, at least, had elided the world of servants entirely; while no longer writing like Austen, while finding innovative ways of managing the depiction of human consciousness, Woolf appears not only blind to the reality that allows her protagonists to live in comfort,<sup>513</sup> but actively hostile to it. The high style that Woolf deploys to treat her other, better-schooled characters — a philosopher, his student, a poet, a painter — would, in this understanding, only register her resistance to witlessness more forcefully. Even a sympathetic portrait of Mrs. McNab could never, conceivably, be read by Mrs. McNab.

Whatever we conclude about Woolf’s opinion of the poor, it is worth appreciating, however, that Mrs. McNab does not stand alone in her work. When it comes time to restore the Ramsays’ home to order, to prepare for their return for the novel’s final section, Mrs. McNab enlists an additional helper: a Mrs. Bast. Unlike her companion, Mrs. Bast *does* bring with her a personal history and an inner life that the novel makes explicit. She has a son, George, who comes to help the women cut back the grass (139). Ten years before, during the events of the novel’s first section, she had resided in Glasgow (140). Admittedly this is not much material, but it is far more than is ever said of Mrs. McNab, more in fact than is said of Augustus Carmichael. Mrs. Bast, simply, is a character, one in the older, recognizable model that Woolf supposedly abandons, and one whose place in the novel offers an alternative understanding of what witlessness can accomplish. And Woolf’s particular choice of name, Mrs. Bast, seems to call up a whole other history, one that extends back to another Mrs. Bast in an analogous situation, in a novel written by Woolf’s friend, a

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<sup>511</sup> Emery, “‘Robbed of Meaning’: The Work at the Center of *To the Lighthouse*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 38.1 (Spring 1992): 221.

<sup>512</sup> Frank Kermode, *Concerning E. M. Forster* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 101.

<sup>513</sup> Mrs. McNab is the first glimpse we are afforded into the mechanism that lets the Ramsays’ household run. A cook, Mildred, communicates with Mrs. Ramsay through messengers, but never appears.



novel that Woolf herself had reviewed while singling out a single character for a particular fault. In Woolf's manuscripts to the novel, Mrs. McNab is often referred to as "old Maggie;"<sup>514</sup> a trace of the name survives in the published version with a fleeting mention of "Maggie" just after Mrs. Bast's introduction (140). But Mrs. Bast is never, in any instance, provided with a given name. The name that suggests itself to readers familiar with *Howards End*, to readers of Bloomsbury, to readers of the twentieth-century novel, of course, is Jacky — Jacky Bast, the wife of Leonard, who had disappeared long before the final pages of Forster's novel, never to be seen again. Seeing the two novels as touching — seeing *To the Lighthouse*, in fact, as a *literal* sequel to *Howards End* — brings new coherence to Woolf's clock, and gives us a different sense of how the novel offers "character, boiled down."<sup>515</sup>

Jacky Bast's abrupt appearance at a house in the Hebrides in the years following the First World War is not as far-fetched as it might appear. When Jacky is first introduced in *Howards End*, she is said, recall, to be a "massive woman of thirty-three" (HE 44). Leonard and Jacky are not married when the novel begins, but "[o]ver two years" pass between Chapters 12 and Chapter 13 (91); by the time of Leonard's affair with Helen, he has been married "[n]early three years" (202). The novel ends four years after its first pages. Forster's clock is not only keen internally; it provides several markers that let us place its wider history more precisely. Allusion is made to Kaiser Wilhelm (131), and to a Dutch Bible brought back from the Boer War (139), which ended in 1902. The novel ends with premonitions (presciently enough) of an approaching war on the horizon, so it scarcely makes sense for the novel to take place any time *after* its actual publication date, which would put Forster in the curious position of setting a novel in the future while pretending to no knowledge of future events. If we can thus take the novel's publication date as the end point of its events, Jacky Bast is thirty-seven at novel's end in 1910. (I am not entirely committed to 1910 as the last date of the novel's events, but the Dutch Bible does certify that it must take place after 1902. If *Howards End* is said to end any year between 1902 and 1910, Jacky would only be *older* than my estimate, which, for these purposes, would only make my case more forcefully.)

In *To the Lighthouse*, the Ramsays' home is restored to order "ten years" (TTL 147) after the events of "The Window," before Andrew Ramsay's death and before the outbreak of the War in the summer of 1914. With the novel's initial section set in September, we can imagine that its first scenes take place, at latest, some time in September, 1913, with "The Lighthouse" set to take place in 1923. A mature Jacky Bast, who had spent time in Glasgow following her husband's death, would at that point be fifty years old.

Is fifty old enough to make Jacky Bast the accomplice to an old "toothless" woman? Both, the novel tells us, are "old; they were stiff; their legs ached" (139). In January of 1919, herself about to turn thirty-seven, Woolf wrote a note in her diary to her imagined fifty-year-old self declaring that "fifty was elderly."<sup>516</sup> Some years later, Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway too is said to be "old," even if only "fifty-two, to be precise."<sup>517</sup> According to the Office for National Statistics, life expectancy at birth

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<sup>514</sup> See Woolf's notebooks for *To the Lighthouse*, *Notebook 3* (New York Public Library: The Berg Collection, 1926), Folio 83/177 and 89/180. *Notebook 3* contains two separate foliation numbers per page.

<sup>515</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 36.

<sup>516</sup> Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, ed. Leonard Woolf (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1982), 7-8.

<sup>517</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1981), 193.

for women in the United Kingdom in 1911 was only 53 years, and 60 years by 1921.<sup>518</sup> The Office for National Statistics only has data beginning in 1911 — to correspond to Jacky Bast’s hypothetical birth in 1873 — but there is no year prior to 1921 when life expectancy was over 60 years. A fifty year old Jacky Bast, by Woolf’s own measure or by the measure of her peers, would be old. And Jacky’s life, to be sure, was not easy. Remember that in her first appearance in *Howards End*, Forster informs us that “Jacky was past her prime... She was descending quicker than most women into the colourless years” (HE 43). At thirty-three she looked “older” than Leonard’s photograph, “and the teeth were not so numerous as the photographer had suggested” (43) — that someone like her, as Woolf has it, would be “toothless” should not be surprising. My conviction is thus not only that Mrs. Bast and Jacky Bast are the same character, but that her sudden reappearance here brings final clarity to the persistence of characterization even across “Time Passes.”

The great difficulty of Leonard Bast, in both his fictional life and in the posthumous criticism leveled at Forster’s portrayal, came down to the relentlessness of the pedagogical model that Forster had submitted him to. I. A. Richards noted<sup>519</sup> that what makes Forster’s portrayal so offensive is that, with Leonard’s developmental logic exhausted, Forster feels that he simply has to bring the novel to an end. The closing pages of the novel, which find the Schlegel sisters watching reapers cutting hay while Helen exclaims that they have “seen to the very end, and it’ll be such a crop of hay as never!” (293), strikes an awkward note given that one character, at least, has not at all “seen to the very end,” nor been seen. That the novel has failed to account for the whereabouts or wellbeing of Leonard’s widow is just one of the unpleasant truths that Helen’s final exclamation seems to drown out. The *Bildungsroman* model, which had linked Leonard’s development to his education, is simply the one that Forster had inherited. Leonard’s death can be seen as the moment when this model stopped looking ideal, when it had outlived its usefulness — but with no real suggestion yet as to what should take its place. It would take the Isabel Archer of the New York Edition (a version of the novel that Forster never read) to outline artlessness as a better ideal, an Ursula Brangwen to give it a more extensive definition. It is fitting that the late return of Jacky Bast, even in the middle of a novel that formally seems to have disavowed all interest in traditional characterization, is able to fulfill what Leonard Bast had once provisionally promised.

Unlike Forster’s Leonard, Woolf’s Mrs. Bast does seem to seed new possibilities for what character can accomplish: or rather, seems to offer fresh possibilities precisely by preserving and subverting the old ones. Part of what makes “Time Passes” so wrenching, as we have seen, is the very real violence that the novel visits on even the fragile character system of its first part. Mrs. Ramsay simply vanishes. It is hard for the first-time reader to take this in without an active sense of loss. Whatever certain expectations for the direction of the plot the reader had carried from the first part of the novel — what will become of a romance or of Mrs. Ramsay’s marriage — are simply rendered meaningless. When Mrs. Bast appears, however, she brings a different perspective to these events. What we are told, repeatedly, is simply that she “didn’t know” (TTL 140) — didn’t know Mrs Ramsay’s fate, “had never known [the Ramsays]; had lived in Glasgow at the time” (140). (It is here that I should note that, back in *Howards End*, when it is suddenly revealed that Henry Wilcox had once conducted an affair with Jacky Bast, his business is said to be taking him away to Scotland.) Years before, in *Howards End*, Forster’s Jacky Bast had insisted on an understanding that was, in fact, the exact opposite of the one espoused here. Although we ourselves do not witness the scene, we

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<sup>518</sup> “Chapter 4: Mortality,” *National Population Projections, 2012-Based Reference Volume* (Office for National Statistics: March 28, 2014), 2. These statistics are consistent with the ONS figures released in previous reports; while projections are revised, the historical data is not.

<sup>519</sup> See Richards, “A Passage to Forster,” *The Forum* 78.6 (Dec. 1927): 20.

are told that when confronting Helen she “kept repeating” “I know what I know” (HE 97). “In vain,” Helen editorializes, “I asked her what she did know. Some knew what others knew, and others didn’t, and if they didn’t then others again had better be careful. Oh dear, she was incompetent!” (97). That Jacky seems to insist so assiduously on what she *knows* seems a cruel parody of the pedagogical impulse that has animated Jacky and her husband since the beginning. But here, in Mrs. Bast, *not* knowing is allowed to be adequate. It is in fact an asset.

Ann Banfield, recall, had written that “Time Passes” is distinguished by the “characters[.] remain[ing] ignorant of time’s passing.” But Mrs. Bast, in turn, remains well aware of her place in time — those years spent in Glasgow — it is only of *them* — the novel’s other characters, and consequently, its rupture — that she remains ignorant. Not knowing — and it is worth noting that while I’ve rearranged the order of these sentences, their repeated beat occurs within a paragraph of one another — allows Mrs. Bast to comprehend events with a cohesion that the novel itself lacks, but that the novel *needs* in order to bring its first and third sections back together. Her existence, her persistence since *Howards End*, the very kind of arithmetic that this persistence permits us to work out, allows us to appreciate that Woolf too possess a clock, that Woolf too has kept time coherent even as its tolling has seemed erratic. And it is her labor, preparing the home for the Ramsays’ return, that allows *To the Lighthouse* to take its distinctive shape. Despite Forster’s harsh words about Woolf’s characterization, his sole approving comment about Woolf’s approach to people is directed at *To the Lighthouse*, which he qualifies as a “much greater achievement, partly because the characters in it, Mr and Mrs Ramsay, are so interesting. They hold us, we think of them away from their surroundings.”<sup>520</sup> For all the disruption that “Time Passes” betokens, it is Mrs. Bast’s labor that lets us see character enduring despite its ostensible interruption.

It is possibly telling that in her original review of *Howards End*, Woolf had objected to the death of Leonard Bast by declaring that the bookcase that comes down upon Leonard “*should* perhaps come down upon him with all the dead weight of smoke-dried culture” (my italics). Woolf is not merely intimating that Forster’s dispatching of Leonard is hackneyed or sends the wrong message about literacy. She is suggesting that the moral might have been made more forcefully. What Forster would have been better to have resisted — “perhaps,” Woolf is willing to admit, *was* resisting — is not education itself, but the immense and unshakeable weight of accreted culture. Mrs. Bast’s perspective — not, like Jacky, “knowing what [she] know[s]” (HE 97), but instead “never know[ing] the family” (TTL 140) — alone lets us appreciate what it would be like to abandon the seemingly certain knowledge that had governed our earlier expectations for the novel’s form.

We, as readers ourselves, are encouraged to accept ignorance, to be comfortable “never know[ing].” It is “smoke-dried culture” that has led us to think that Prue Ramsay must be wed, or that Mrs. Ramsay’s marriage must alternate endlessly between happiness and unhappiness. The developmental model, which imagines characters progressing endlessly toward predictable ends, is, Mrs. Bast allows us to glimpse, pernicious. “Time Passes” severs our connection to that teleological model. But that does not mean that the novel abandons its commitment to people. While never knowing the family, while laying no claim to certainty, Mrs. Bast sets the groundwork for what comes next. *To the Lighthouse*’s third section, after all, continues for another seventy pages with all the accreted expectations of the first part now utterly discarded. What we witness over those final pages are not “voices,” not “characteristics,” but characters, shaken by their experiences, but now able to be comprehended in a new light. Indeed, what “Time Passes” lets us glimpse is how vital characters’ lives are, important enough that they might continue even when the author who first penned them has forgotten them entirely, enduring enough that they might live on in the pages of other authors.

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<sup>520</sup> Forster, “Virginia Woolf,” 247.

Mrs. Bast does not, like Leonard, die beneath a fallen bookcase, or like Rupert Birkin, find herself floored by her friend's seeming suicide. She does not learn that her husband hates her, like Isabel Archer, only to fight her way free from that knowledge and — perhaps — to return to him in an enigmatic ending. Woolf's Mrs. Bast has essentially solved all of the developmental difficulties that her forebears needed to unlearn their way free from. Her character is not formed or deformed by her *Bildung*. Rather, her character simply persists.

Unlike Strachey or Keynes, Woolf's evolution of artlessness is not a self-correction to her own earlier work. For that reason, it is more difficult for critics to recognize the significance of Woolf's Mrs. Bast and to draw the connection back to Jacky. But like those other Bloomsbury authors, her version of artlessness becomes eclipsed by the more elaborate style around it. The fragmentation of time in "Time Passes" is poetic. Its preservation, from *Howards End* to Woolf's novel — a kind of stability built not on experimental language but on actuarial tables — is entirely prosaic. To generations of critics, Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast lack meaning because they are not penned with the same élan as Lily Briscoe. (Indeed, in most accounts, only Mrs. McNab is even mentioned at all.) But this privileging of the most elaborate writing, the most complicated characterizations, presupposes the very "difficult" form that critics claim to be constitutive of modernism. Mrs. Bast's import to "Time Passes," to say nothing of the history of the novel, is missed because it is not part of what critics are predisposed to find worthwhile.

The only critic that I am aware of to have even spotted the oddness of Mrs. Bast's name in the middle of Virginia Woolf's novel is Elizabeth Heine, who suggests parenthetically, and with tongue lodged largely in cheek, that "perhaps" the "fate of... Leonard Bast's widow" is to become "one of the worn and incompetent cleaning women who bring the island house back to life after the war."<sup>521</sup> But Heine's phrasing potentially exposes why the convergence has never been pursued, and why it is that value would seldom be owed to Woolf's appropriation of Forster's character. For by what possible measure are we meant to see the two cleaning women as "worn and incompetent?" They do their work competently enough, despite their aches and pains. The house is restored to as close to its original state as possible, and when the Ramsays return, their only complaint is that *they* have changed, not the place that was prepared for them. "Incompetent" is in fact Helen Schlegel's word, Forster's word, for Jacky Bast's pretended knowledge. ("Oh dear she was incompetent!") Heine's slight seems simply reflexive: Mrs. Bast is incompetent, by Heine's measure, in comparison to Lily Briscoe, Mr. Ramsay. Bloomsbury only seems to so often celebrate intellection because artlessness is less likely to win critical acclaim.

A similar bias, it should now be clear, has saturated not only critical accounts of Bloomsbury, but every critical reading in this project. Critics find Isabel Archer smart — rather than impeded by her own education — because of course intelligence should be prized. It is, after all, the critic's own currency. Even in finding a place for artlessness in "Time Passes," Woolf appears unwilling to advertise it prominently enough that its merit can be unequivocally intuited. The same can be said of Strachey and Keynes, who clearly had issues with the pedagogical process as their society practiced it, but who limited their pioneering to their respective genres and fields. This dissertation has dwelt for so long on isolated moments — the first experiments in stream of consciousness narration, the impossible elision of the First World War, the only human figures in "Time Passes" — because the uniqueness of the moments alone makes a powerful case for their significance, whatever the silences that surround them. With no other characters appearing outside of brackets in "Time Passes," the presence of Mrs. Bast and Mrs. McNab ought to betoken some actual and constructive work. They

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<sup>521</sup> Heine, "The Significance of Structure in the Novels of E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 16.4 (1973): 298.

need not be there for the novel's second section to function as it does, but they are there, and so their presence suggests something of substance. There, indeed, is "character boiled down."<sup>522</sup> But Woolf is subtle to a fault. In *To the Lighthouse*, artlessness becomes much like the wind that knocks the Ramsays' china to the floor: capable of moving objects, powerful, but for all that, nevertheless invisible.

However, where my chapters on James and Lawrence had turned on revisions to the same novel, as each author recognized the inadequacy of an earlier representational system, or where Strachey and Keynes had forged new territory for artlessness by correcting aspects of their earlier opinions, Woolf's artlessness alone is founded on the continued coherence of the novel as a genre and of character as constitutive of it. Character persists, whatever other experiments Woolf undertakes. The form need not turn itself inside out, as in Lawrence. Forgetting Forster's bad ending and finding a better one is worth performing, even if no one immediately recognizes the obvious parallels, never countenances them. As an amendment of her friend and fellow writer, turning the artificially toothy Jacky Bast into the toothless caretaker of the Ramsays' legacy is likely the "smartest" trick of all. Whole literary traditions are founded on such allusions and close correctives; whole novels have entered the curriculum (*Wide Sargasso Sea* comes to mind) largely because of them. Yet Woolf never openly owns the allusion. Like Mrs. Bast, she too seems to have little use for smartness, seems to derive some small satisfaction from not "knowing the family" — in this case the family of Bloomsbury, the family of fictions that she shares with Forster. The final artlessness of "Time Passes" is that it eludes even the singular sophistication of a common "Bloomsbury style" by allowing its smartest performance to pass unremarked.

Where Forster ends his novel on what might be an artificially chipper note, with Helen and her son in a bucolic paradise, watching reapers cheerily at work, let me close by simply considering Mrs. Bast's last appearance in *To the Lighthouse*:

Ah, said Mrs. Bast, they'd find it changed. She leant out of the window. She watched her son George scything the grass. They might well ask, what had been done to it? ...

They'd find it changed. She watched her son scything. He was a great one for work—one of the quiet ones. Well they must be getting along with the cupboards, she supposed. They hauled themselves up. (TTL 140-141)

This scene effectively emulates Forster's ending, with hay being cut while the survivors of a passing era look on, only now it is Mrs. Bast herself, not the well-read Helen, who is present to witness it. The work is not easy. But the important thing is that it persists. Where Forster's novel simply ends with reapers making hay on the horizon, in Woolf's case, even as time passes, there is more story still to come.

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<sup>522</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 106.

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