ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE LITERATURE OF DISAFFECTION: POLITICAL DYSPHORIA AND BRITISH MODERNISM AFTER 1930

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This dissertation argues that "disaffection" is an overlooked but foundational posture of mid-twentieth-century British and Anglophone literature. Previously misdiagnosed as quietism or apathy, disaffection instead describes how many late modernist writers mediated between their ideological misgivings and the pressure to respond to dire political crises, from the Second World War to the creation of new postcolonial nations. Stylists of disaffection—such as Henry Green, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and V. S. Naipaul—grappled with how limiting cultural assumptions, for instance, about class and nation, seemed to inhere in particular aesthetic techniques like stream of consciousness or realism. Disaffected literature appeals to but then disrupts a given technique's projection of these assumptions and the social totality that they imagine. This literary "bait-and-switch" creates a feeling of dysphoria whereby readers experience a text unnervingly different from what they had been led to expect. Recognizing the formative work of literary disaffection in late

modernism offers an original way to conceptualize the transition between modernist and postmodernist literature in the twentieth century.

THE LITERATURE OF DISAFFECTION: POLITICAL DYSPHORIA AND BRITISH MODERNISM AFTER 1930

by

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Introduction
Late Modernism's Dissenters

Is literary modernism a politically-progressive force? For British authors writing between the 1930s and 1960s—a period often known as "late modernism"—this question about the politics of modernist form was foremost in their minds, and their respective answers were very much dependent on whether and how they construed themselves as writing "after" modernism. This dissertation positions "disaffection" as one particularly prevalent literary movement that addresses this question about the relationship between formal technique and political commitment during late modernism, the period after modernism had become the status quo.[1] Late-

[1] "Late modernism" is more frequently applied to British literature than to American, and this has something to do with "lateness." While an ascendant United States looked to the future with hope, a melancholy Britain lingered over past glory of social, cultural, and political import. For example, in *Intricate Thicket: Reading Late Modernist Poetries* (2015), Mark Scroggins bristles against periodizing the midcentury. What unites the authors in his study, he claims, is a materialist poetics that is a holdover from "high" modernism. However, Scroggins's assertion is particular to poets writing and publishing in America (for him, authors such as Anne Carson, Charles Olson, George Oppen, and Louis Zukofsky, among others). In the U.S., this materialist poetics was buoyed by postwar economic expansion. That is, just like in Britain decades prior, an imperative to "make it new" in the midcentury by paying attention to things themselves was possible because of the economic and cultural environment. In the 1930s and after, Britain lacked the luxury of such an *avant-garde*. "Late modernism," then, is more applicable to midcentury British literature insofar as this tends to be both thematically and formally "late"—that is, retrospective and less experimental. Tyrus Miller argues that late modernism develops an automatic subjectivity that was previously latent in modernism, while Marina MacKay conceives of late modernism as a series of "aesthetic habits which were familiar from the 1920s that found their political realization when modernism reached middle age twenty years later" (17). As a varietal of late modernism, the literature of disaffection differs from Miller's and MacKay's theorizations. Disaffection is not a continuation, replication, reapplication, or homecoming of modernism; rather, it is a rejection of modernism as a set of insufficient perceptual strategies for contemporaneous cultural crises. Kristin Bluemel has also offered "intermodernism" as an alternative to "late modernism." For Bluemel, "intermodernism" refers to a periodizing concept, an aesthetic category, and an ideological structure, and institutional index for midcentury literature. This term strikes me as less useful than "late modernism" insofar it seems designed to elide social and cultural differences between authors in order to arrive at a unifying theory of midcentury literature. Indeed, "intermodernism" began with the question of organizing every literature "that does not fit the familiar frameworks deployed by scholars of Bloomsbury experimentalism or Auden's generation, of revolutionary or reactionary prose, or Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, or Beckett" (*George* 2). Despite my preference for "late modernism," however, I should note that the literature of disaffection does strive to

modernist authors felt pressure to respond to dire political crises, such as the impending Second World War, the postwar consolidation of Soviet power, and the diminution of empire coupled with the existence of newly postcolonial nations.[2] The literature of disaffection registers the qualms that key late-modernist authors felt about whether and how to address such situations—that is, about whether one ought to write politically-engaged literature and, if so, by what means. For authors like Henry Green, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and V. S. Naipaul, writing "after" modernism was particularly troubling because the available literary means seemed insufficient for responding to contemporary crises. Facing literary forms freighted with implicit political agendas, from stream of consciousness's salvific class-leveling to literary impressionism's colonial authority, the literature of disaffection dissents.

Colloquially, the word "disaffection" suggests private aversion or quiet antipathy. Just so, the literature of disaffection is marked by a seemingly reluctant expression of distaste that is symptomatic of the insufficiency of available literary forms. Such reluctance arises through the work's subversion of readerly expectation. Disaffection cites existing literary conventions (of impressionism, realism, or stream-of-consciousness narration) before it works to undermine these. It unmoors its audience from stable reading practices, resulting in frustration. The text baits the reader into misreading, yet this misreading seems aware of its own failure to communicate. What lies beneath the surface of this seemingly self-reflexive

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define a connection between social formations and midcentury aesthetics, and so would certainly fit within Bluemel's definition of a broad intermodernist regime.

[2] MacKay discusses the centrality of WWII to British late modernism, while Jed Esty argues that late-modernist literature is governed by the retrenchment of empire and, as a consequence, by a newly-anthropological way of looking at England (as one country among many rather than as an invisible norm).

projection of failure? Such a strategy is indicative of how the literature of disaffection purports to accept one set of allegiances even as it retains another, alternately soliciting and frustrating readerly expectation. This dissertation chronicles those "other" allegiances by tracing disaffection's various subterfugal forms.

As a response to modernism, the literature of disaffection differs from the committed writing of what Samuel Hynes has called the "Auden generation" of the 1930s and 1940s—specifically W. H. Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis, Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNeice, and Stephen Spender. For this "generation," the political exigencies of the Spanish Civil War, the seeming inevitability of the Second World War, and the greater historical struggle of the proletariat required a repudiation of modernism's formal accomplishments in the 1910s and 1920s. These authors felt that modernist abstraction did not "make men aware of the need for action, and of what action means"; it neglected to assert "a direct relation between literature and action in the public world" (Hynes 13). "All I have is a voice," and it must "Show an affirming flame," Auden writes in "September 1, 1939," his poem marking the beginning of World War II (lines 78, 99). "Such "affirm[ation]," Hynes argues, is an aesthetic method that instructs without resorting to preachiness, operating like a parable. The social function of literature ought to "render the feeling of human issues, not an interpretation of them," just as a parable suggests that the listener draw a particular conclusion without the tale itself providing analysis, thus allowing for a lesson to be arrived at independently (15).[3] Like Auden in "September 1, 1939," the literature of

[3] Subsequent studies of political commitment either explore a different, non-Oxbridge set of authors or seek a broader definition of the kinds of literary forms that constitute commitment. Bluemel considers a coterie of left-leaning writers—Mulk Raj Anand, Inez Holden, George Orwell, and Stevie Smith—whom she identifies as "radical eccentrics," authors reflective of "non-modernist cultural activity" of

disaffection is "Beleaguered by… / Negation and despair" (lines 97-98). Like Auden, its authors perceive how "Defenceless under the night / Our world in stupor lies" (lines 89-90). However, the literature of disaffection does not consequently affirm the lone voice crying out in the darkness. Unlike Auden's parabolic form, disaffection responds by appearing to conform before subsequently subverting existing literary conventions, and it does so with an eye to challenging existing social and political conventions.

Disaffection thus constitutes a different response to the midcentury's culture of crisis. Indeed, as I explain below, disaffection bristles against this very notion of response, since "response" implies a connection between literature and the world, which disaffection will not stipulate. If the Auden generation represents how the 1930s seemed to require immediate action, then disaffection represents a different historical rejoinder. It is not assured that a positive alternative to existing literary forms can be found. The literature of disaffection registers the anxiety for collective action without confidence in the specific means of occasioning this. What is happening is unacceptable, but—just as important—the possible solutions are insufficient.

Often, the complexity of this reaction is misdiagnosed as apathy. For example, Richard Overy argues that the 1930s are characterized by the spread of a fashionable morbidity. "Just as a crowd gathers dismayed but fascinated to watch a disastrous

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the 1930s and 1940s through their use of satire (primarily) invested to varying degrees in socialism. More recently, Benjamin Kohlmann argues for greater nuance in the definition of midcentury political writing, since what might initially appear to be, for example, a bourgeois overture to aesthetic autonomy could in fact be an expression of anxiety about literature's political efficacy. Both of these studies extend the work of Hynes and of Valerie Cunningham, whose comprehensive *British Writers of the Thirties* remains a persuasive chronicle of the movements and disputes that spurred authors to take sides. However, even the more capacious definitions of political writing in the midcentury tend to minimize the extent to which, for the literature of disaffection, self-regard *is* its political content.

fire," Overy writes, "so the inter-war intelligentsia wanted to be at the front of the throng of onlookers if civilization crashed" (49). The novelist Nancy Mitford uses the same metaphor in *Highland Fling* (1931). In that novel, history is a house on fire: Scottish villagers gather around a castle as its artifacts, collected from all eras of British history, burn before them. They hardly lift a finger. One of the castle's inhabitants, harboring a great passion for the Victorians, attempts to salvage a few 19th century artifacts to no avail. Everyone agrees that the pieces are irredeemably ugly and of little value, a history hardly worth saving. Here Overy and Mitford diagnose a kind of collective apathetic decadence. Mitford's blasé villagers represent a nation idling before an ashy future as current events incinerate the past's inheritance. Despite those who would desire to "save this country from her shameful apathy"—these words uttered by the leader of a satirical fascist organization in another of Mitford's novels, *Wigs on the Green* (1935)—resignation rather than revolution seemed to be the operative affect (10). Even after some of the decade's dilemmas were nominally solved by world war, critics still posited apathy's supremacy. WWII might have seemed to take care of bellicose totalitarian regimes, an economic slump, and a general purposelessness or existential malaise in one fell swoop. However, in 1945, Cyril Connolly was still lamenting "the irritable lassitude, brain-fatigue, apathy and humdrummery of English writers," while in the same issue of *Horizon*, John Russell bemoaned "the glaze of apathy or frustration through which English writers in our time have mostly regarded it [that time]" (296, 319).

Disaffection is a third way between the quietism of apathetically watching the century burn and the "affirming flame" of Auden's leftist socialism. It sees

modernism's characteristic abstraction (rather than verisimilitude) as countenancing a problematic relationship between text and world. As I will explain in greater depth in Chapter One, the literature of disaffection ultimately objects to modernism's fetishization of directness, or the way that, despite its turn from realism, modernism replicates the mimetic impulse. In other words, what modernism's multiple movements—Eliot's classicism, Poundian imagism's "direct treatment of a thing," Proust's stream of consciousness narration, or Lawrence's primitivism—all share is the expression of a universalizing impulse to arrive at the direct communication of essential reality, or what Edmund Wilson first labelled a metaphysics of symbolism. The literature of disaffection, however, does not desire to arrive at a clearer or more real depiction of the world. Rather, the problem that the literature of disaffection faces is how to represent a political feeling whose character is precisely the uninterpretability of events. Its works imply that any aesthetic "solution" must grapple with how existing forms inflect what it is possible to say. This is very different from the attempt to better unite representation and the world (e.g., Auden's parable that would tacitly convey political content). Instead, by appealing to and undermining existing literary forms, disaffection halts the reapplication of a philosophy of modernism to modernism. Put another way: if modernism's fetishization of directness is predicated upon an antifoundationalism (to paraphrase David Kadlec), then disaffection's answer is not to up the ante by reapplying antifoundationalism to itself. Instead, disaffection is modest. It does not desire to "make it new" but rather queries the existing modes of cultural expression.

Chapter One of this study addresses one of the more puzzling novels of the 1930s: Henry Green's *Party Going* (1939). I argue that *Party Going*'s enigmatic resistance to interpretation is in fact a deliberate subversion of modernist stream-of-consciousness narrative technique. For Green, disaffecting from stream-of-consciousness narration discloses the unworkable nature of a class politics implicit in stream of consciousness itself. I juxtapose *Party Going* with Virginia Woolf's articulations of stream of consciousness in her 1924 essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (and its revision, "Modern Fiction" [1925]) as well as her novel *Jacob's Room* (1922) in order to show how Green foregrounds the ineffectuality of stream-of-consciousness narration for facilitating communication between the upper- and lower-classes in the novel. Correspondingly, in Chapter Two, I examine how Woolf, by the late 1930s, herself disaffects from her earlier sentiments. In *Between the Acts* (1941), her final novel, Woolf develops an argument from her essay *Three Guineas* (1938). In *Three Guineas*, she claims that patriarchy is a kind of internalized fascism, or what she elsewhere calls a "subconscious Hitlerism." *Between the Acts* extends this argument to include animals and insects, suggesting that "subconscious Hitlerism" also manifests itself in speciesism. Through the character of a modernist playwright (a would-be Brecht who concludes her pageant by holding up mirrors to the audience), *Between the Acts* connects this speciesism to modernist theories of "recognition." Ultimately, Woolf's novel disaffects from "recognition" by turning its own conclusion into a "failed" play that literally raises a curtain on the reader, an act that confronts its reader-cum-audience member with modernism's inherent perceptual fascism.

Unfortunately, World War II does not resolve the fraught relationship between the effectiveness of available formal techniques and one's desired expression. In particular, Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948), which is the focus of Chapter Three, presents Cold War international relations as a problem of literary realism's presentation of a "whole" picture. I argue that *The Heat of the Day* objects to Soviet-style *realpolitik* via its disaffection from literary realism. For Bowen, both political and literary realism are Machiavellian in their emphasis on effect. Both assume that the end justifies the means because both argue that comprehension of a "whole" picture, whether of a struggle for power in *realpolitik* or of a reality effect in literary realism, renders moot the specific method for arriving at this result. *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection from literary realism testifies to Bowen's postwar desire for a return to focus on means—that is, to a "principled" liberal internationalism rather than *realpolitik*. International governance concerns V. S. Naipaul, too, in *The Mimic Men* (1967), a novel about the rise and fall of a government official in a newly-postcolonial Caribbean nation (a loosely-fictionalized version of Trinidad). In Chapter Four, I trace how *The Mimic Men* disaffects from literary impressionism's distinctive "frankness" (as defined by Ford Madox Ford) by subsuming the work's own narration within the tale itself. In Naipaul's hands, the act of narration becomes, in other words, another impressionist object. But the result is not a playful postmodernist "meta-impressionism." Rather, *The Mimic Men* evinces a bewildering instability. The novel's disaffection from impressionism highlights how impressionism's frankness harbors pretensions to a universal cultural currency that the postcolonial subject is *de facto* unable to achieve.

Although each of these works responds to a contemporaneous political crisis, crisis does not simply or directly dictate the mode of response. Rather, Green, Woolf, Bowen, and Naipaul each initiate what we might think of as a longer con, one that exposes the insufficiency of existing literary forms. Whereas the Auden generation responds almost immediately to political stimuli (Hynes 10), the literature of disaffection often comes about after a long and troubled gestation—sometimes the longest and most difficult of the author's career. Green pondered *Party Going* over the course of the 1930s; Woolf wrested *Between the Acts* from her difficulties with *The Years* and *Three Guineas*; and Bowen struggled with rewriting the prewar chapters of *The Heat of the Day* in the late 1940s. Such lengthy composition processes are indicative of the complexity of the problem each author posed for him- or herself. Each text grapples with how formal choices extend a conceptual problem—assumptions about class, species, or nationality—that seem to inhere in form itself. The literature of disaffection disrupts a given technique's implicit projection of social totality by appealing to and undermining the customs, conventions, or expectations of that technique. What results is a feeling of unease or dysphoria whereby readers experience a text unnervingly different from what they had been led to expect.

Conventional definitions of disaffection reflect this feeling of form's insufficiency. The *OED* lists three: one, "the condition of being evilly affected physically," is obsolete; the other two are the "absence or alienation of affection or kindly feeling; dislike; hostility" and "political alienation and discontent; a spirit of disloyalty to the government or existing authority." In the final of these three

definitions—that is, in the political sense—disaffection is not outright hostility or overt dissent. Rather, it is a *spirit* of disloyalty. It is an internal rejection of the terms and conditions to which one is subject. Disaffection is less an overthrow than an undermining; it is less a revolution than a subversion of authority from within. Here we find the "dis" of disaffection, with its sense of "two ways": like its Greek ancestor (bis-, bi-), it connotes both a negative force of feeling along with a sense of duality or ambivalence. Somewhat paradoxically, that is, disaffection rejects through repetition. Janus-faced, its dissent is to occupy the threshold of allegiance.

At the same time, the "affection" of disaffection is what gives it away. The long con of its appeal to and frustration of literary convention reflects the sense in which one *becomes* disaffected through a series of events. Colloquially, "disaffected" tends to be a state that one achieves rather than something that one is. This concept of "affection" as accumulation or accretion comes from Deleuze, for whom "affect" results in "force," "feeling," or "affection." Brian Massumi notes that affect is power (*puissance*), or "a capacity to affect or be affected," while affection is force (*pouvoir*), or "an instituted and reproducible relation of force, a selective concretization of potential" (xvii). To explain affection as "force" is particularly fruitful because it denotes how the literature of disaffection dawns on a reader as an accumulation of effects—how, that is, one *becomes* disaffected. The reader comes to understand a text's disaffection only over time. In this sense, disaffection is more appropriate to ordinariness than to crisis: an accumulation of events in one's daily life might cause one to become disaffected.[4] Yet the disaffected party is still subject to the existing

[4] There is little scholarship on "affection" proper because, for Deleuze, affection is part of the problem. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, affection stands in for the hierarchical "arborescent system" of organized

authority to which he or she is spiritually disloyal. Disaffection is thus a kind of bad faith—the dissenter exists in a state that is contrary to the existing authority. The dissent is partial, since one needn't actually *act* in order to *be* in a state of disloyalty. The disaffected might be around us all the time, nominally fitting in, actually feeling otherwise. From this angle, disaffection looks like a kind of inverse ideology. That is, if ideology describes why one might act contrary to one's own interests or how one is unconscious to one's own actions ("They know not what they are doing" [Marx] or "They know what they are doing, but still…" [Žižek]), then disaffection names how one is conscious of one's own (perhaps existential) inactions: "They know what they are not doing." Disaffection's danger is this demurral. It is threatening because it absents itself from the very terms by which it would be interpellated or, put another way, from the necessary responsiveness that accompanies being "hailed" (as Althusser describes it).

This slowness of disaffection's long con explains why it exists almost exclusively in fiction. While it is not theoretically impossible that disaffection could arise in verse, the compression of poetry's language lends itself far less readily to the types of reading practices that disaffection appeals to and subsequently frustrates. That is, poetry creates a different kind of readerly attunement than the ones required for disaffection's elaboration. Auden articulates this difference between prose and verse perfectly in, of all things, a poem. "The Novelist" (1938), a poem for Christopher Isherwood, identifies the mood of the novel reader as boredom.

State philosophy that affect—rhizomatic rather than arborescent, nomadic rather than organized—bypasses. Embracing affection would thus seem to court trouble. As far as I know, there is only one essay that explicitly sets out to recuperate affection's authority on these terms, in which Megan Watkins teases out affection's implications for pedagogical technique.

Novelistic conventions invite the reader into a sense of security and trust. Whereas the poet is able to capture momentous feeling, he writes, the novelist represents ordinary experience. The poet trades in the epic, the tragic, and (most of all) the expressive; he ought to "amaze us like a thunderstorm, / Or die so young, or live for years alone" (lines 4-5). The novelist, on the other hand, must temper such expressivity and "learn / How to be plain and awkward, how to be / One after whom none think it worth to turn" (lines 6-8). That is, whereas the poet is not called upon—let alone equipped—to represent the mundane, the novelist's theme and process are ordinariness. Only by being unobtrusive can the novelist capture those around him, "For, to achieve his highest wish, he must / Become the whole of boredom" (lines 9-10). We might say that the novel feigns boredom as a way of complying with readerly expectation—were it otherwise, whose nerves could withstand so many thunderclaps? Auden probably has literary realism in mind, but prose's propensity to boredom is nevertheless important to disaffection insofar as we construe the adherence to custom, convention, or expectation as a kind of "boredom." In this idiom, then, if prose is what feigns to comply, then disaffection is what feigns to feign. The thunderclaps of poetry lend themselves neither to the novel's boring representations of the mundane nor to disaffection's dissimulations thereof. With its double move, disaffection exposes the novel's original artifice.

While the concept of dissent or disloyalty is not new, the literature of disaffection is particular to mid-20th century because this is when the importance of loyalty becomes especially acute. Disaffection occupies a larger legal footprint beginning in 1934, with Parliament's passage of the Incitement to Disaffection Act,

which makes it illegal "to seduce any member of His Majesty's forces from his duty or allegiance to His Majesty" (sec 1). The precedent for this legislation is the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797, which made it illegal to induce the *action* of mutiny rather than to disturb the interior state of "allegiance." In other words, what became illegal in 1934 was not action but feeling: whereas the earlier Incitement to Mutiny Act covers seduction from "duty *and* allegiance," the Incitement to Disaffection Act encompasses the broader "duty *or* allegiance." Written over a decade later, in the early days of the Cold War, George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) explores the slippery slope forming around the question of disaffection: Orwell's protagonist, Winston Smith, must guard himself not only against seditious action but also against "crime*think*"—how, in other words, his affections could impact his national belonging. Lest Orwell seem too satirical, Britain had actually already taken this wartime idea one step further with the passage of the British Nationality Act of 1948. In this act, "disaffection" becomes a bar that naturalized citizens are forced to clear: one may be deprived of citizenship if one "has shown himself by act or speech to be disloyal or disaffected towards His Majesty" (sec 20, 3, a). Here we see disaffection's creep. As *Nineteen Eighty-Four* suggests, it is not only the treasonous act but also a *spirit* of disloyalty that must be controlled.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the best description of disaffection's spirit of disloyalty comes from T. S. Eliot's *Burnt Norton* (1936). Although the poem is strictly outside the formal boundaries of what I have defined as disaffection, *Burnt Norton* does succinctly capture how disaffection makes itself felt through an accretion of lack—that is, through its repeated failures to make good on the conventions to

which it appeals. *Burnt Norton* does not cite and subvert any particular poetic convention, but it does generate a sense of negativity analogous to that of disaffection. The poem seems to be insisting too much; the length of its description of what the landscape is *not* like ultimately has the effect of instilling this negativity.

> Here is a place of disaffection
> Time before and time after
> In a dim light: neither daylight
> Investing form with lucid stillness
> Turning shadow into transient beauty
> With slow rotation suggesting permanence
> Nor darkness to purify the soul
> Emptying the sensual with deprivation
> Cleansing affection from the temporal. (lines 90-98)

Here the three lines following "neither daylight" seem to detach themselves from the neither-nor syntax. The fact that the participles at the beginning of subsequent lines ("Investing" and "Turning") modify "daylight" is lost with the introduction of the prepositional phrase "With…" in the following line. This phrase is far enough removed from "neither daylight" that it feels concrete. The reader forgets that "slow rotation suggesting permanence" is a description of what does *not* exist. The syntax introduced by "neither" is a distant memory after the sheer number of words between "neither" and "permanence" as well as after performing the mental gymnastics of picturing the quasi-paradoxical abstractions in the intervening lines. Can "form" be "lucid" and still provide the structure that this word seems to connote? How can one give "transient beauty" to a "shadow" when the latter connotes a lack of depth that "beauty" would seem to require? In puzzling through the qualities of each noun in an effort to resolve these abstractions, the reader has lost the larger point: this image is not supposed to exist. How the poem piles such conceptually-tortuous images upon

one another ultimately works against the stated purpose of these lines. By describing what does not exist in such abundance, *Burnt Norton* generates something like disaffection: the accretion of detail leads to the hunch of dual meaning. The reader senses another intention apart from the stated. Here is a place of disaffection.

Burnt Norton is Eliot's first major work after *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), and this placement within his oeuvre speaks to how disaffection differs from its common misdiagnosis as apathy. Whereas *Burnt Norton*'s description of disaffection above suggests the ghostly presence of negativity, *Ash-Wednesday* wallows in abnegation. The speaker in *Ash-Wednesday* prostrates himself, not daring to hope—the poem's first three lines begin "Because I do not hope," and the first lines of its final section repeat this syntax.[5] In this sense, *Ash-Wednesday* lacks development: the speaker's meditations ultimately leave him in the same place as when the poem began. Just as the ashes of the holiday Ash Wednesday serve to humble the worshipper before the symbol his or her earthly end, so too does *Ash-Wednesday* impart a feeling of impotence and supplication. The speaker of *Ash-Wednesday* feels that he is meant to be elsewhere: "The right time and the right place are not here," he intones (90). What *is* "here" is futureless. "Here" is a garden desiccated of the future's suspense, in which "time is only time / And place is always and only place / And what is actual is actual only for one time" (83). "Here" is purgatory, the ascent from which is "beyond

[5] Composed between 1927 and 1930, *Ash-Wednesday* refers to two events in Eliot's life in the late 1920s, so when the speaker feels that he has no particular agency over his circumstances and waits to receive a salvation to which he has no particular right or claim, scholars generally see this as reflecting Eliot's personal life. First, Eliot quietly (and later famously) converts to Anglicanism in 1927, at which point he begins to live as an ascetic in an exhibition of remorse. Second, the dissolution of Eliot's marriage to Viv and his attempt to rekindle an earlier romance with Emily Hale, a woman who he knew as an undergraduate at Harvard, left him in a purgatorial state, unwilling to act on his wife's behalf and uncertain of whether his love would now be requited. Although Eliot expresses regret about leaving Viv, in practice he is apathetic and makes no moves to save his marriage.

both hope and despair" as the speaker squares himself to his ashy fate (87). Why hope? the speaker wonders: Why despair? Instead, embrace the stasis of apathy by which one's ashes will again settle into ashes: "This is the time of tension between dying and birth," the speaker groans, "Teach us to sit still" (92, 93).

Whereas *Ash-Wednesday* represents a parched void, *Burnt Norton* offers a garden of disaffection, whose negativity is not absence but self-contradiction through accretion. In contrast to *Ash-Wednesday*'s hopeless, futureless present—"what is actual is actual only for one time"—*Burnt Norton*'s bower is full: "all is always now" the speaker claims (19). As with *Burnt Norton*'s place of disaffection above, here the description of what is *not* seems to protest too much:

> Footfalls echo in the memory
> Down the passage which we did not take
> Towards the door we never opened
> Into the rose-garden. My words echo
> Thus, in your mind. (lines 11-15)

Eliot's later poem figures itself as an exploration of tones "not take[n]." The desiccated timelessness of apathy in *Ash-Wednesday* becomes an acknowledgement in *Burnt Norton* that "Only through time time is conquered." Similarly, of disaffection, we might say that only *through* convention—that is, only by appealing to and subverting convention—is convention exposed.

Methodologically, disaffection is particularly tricky. If its disloyalty rests in the practice of subverting readerly expectation, how do we know when it occurs? If disaffection is intended to be misrecognized only for a certain length of time by a certain reader, how do we know who that reader is and whether enough time has passed? How do we know that what we are reading is disaffection, or how do we

know that what we assume is conventional is not actually subversive? Phrased a bit more sharply: is disaffection just a cover for bad literature read hypercritically? How do we know that our reading skills aren't paranoid—or aren't paranoid enough? On the one hand, we can never know with perfect assurance. A great deal of midcentury works and movements are outside the scope of this study on disaffection for the seemingly simple reason that they do not appeal formally to existing conventions as a means to subverting them. By the same token, there may be a great deal of midcentury works that have us fooled; we think we know them, but they are actually perfidious. The rub of disaffection is the permanent possibility that disaffection is far more widespread that you realized—that you are, as a reader, unworthy.

On the other hand, the works in this dissertation provide relatively overt signals about their formal and thematic engagement with reading practices. *Party Going,* for instance, in an explicit reference to its reversal of stream of consciousness narration, likens a "stream" in a park to a character's thoughts. Similarly, *Between the Acts* includes a doppelganger for the modernist author in the form of its "very up to date" playwright Miss La Trobe. *The Heat of the Day* is filled with sidelong glances to its own craftedness (e.g. a narratorial aside comparing the protagonist's life to "the ideal book about nothing"), while *The Mimic Men*'s narrator overtly ponders the difficulties of narrating his life by trying to bracket certain portions "in parentheses." These instances speak to how disaffection's mode of accretion makes itself noticeable. The works in this dissertation tend to be semantically slippery insofar as they give themselves to multiple, contradictory readings. They sell the proverbial lie by choosing the largest possible one: generic convention itself.

This theorization of the experience of disaffection follows Sianne Ngai's discussion of "disconcertedness" in *Ugly Feelings*. Ngai defines disconcertedness as the moment (particularly, for her, in film noir) when the viewer feels pressure to justify the narrative perspective or to pin down the extent to which the gaze is subjective. Like disaffection, disconcertedness attends a failure of orientation with regard to narration. Where disaffection and disconcertedness differ is in the accretion of the former. Ngai conceptualizes her ugly feelings as like affect in the sense that they are less narratively-structured. With disaffection, however, the readerly feeling of disorientation arises not from a lack of narrative direction but from an amassing of customs, conventions, or expectations that go unfulfilled—indeed, almost exclusively narrative ones. In other words, disaffection is narratively over-structured insofar as it initiates formal devices that it subsequently subverts. It is not merely a representation of ambience or atmosphere. Rather, disaffection is an undermined overture.

As a historical response to modernism, disaffection's foremost concern is how form itself limits certain kinds of response. Such a view goes notably against the grain of midcentury thought. Even critics as different as F. R. Leavis and Cyril Connolly both implicitly assume that the individual work arises out of a cultural condition and that "culture" is something worth attempting to control. The two men nominally disagree about specific stylistic choices. Leavis wants to promote a "great tradition"—Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad—at the expense of the self-involved moderns, while Connolly looks with hope to contemporary authors of the 1940s to restore representations of vibrant individuality.[6] Yet both men share a sense of the relationship between literature and "culture," or, we

[6] See Leavis's *The Great Tradition* (1948) and Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* (1938).

might say, of culture's distinguishability as a discrete object. If we get the culture correct, they argue, the best literature will follow. Connolly's analogy is a bird of prey: literature will extricate itself from its current "bad patch" as soon as "the tide of events sweeps round the lonely stumps on which our cormorants have been sitting and gives them a fishing-ground" ("Writers" 143). The author waits above and feeds on culture. The individual is able to perceive culture and respond to it.

Disaffection is not so sure. In closing, I would like to present a representative disagreement between a midcentury poet and a critic. As with *Burnt Norton* above, the poem addressed here is not disaffection in the strict sense that the chapters elaborate. However, as poetry, it is also particularly useful in its density. If disaffection is difficult to introduce because of its inherent digressiveness, then poems attuned to disaffection's cultural problematic are especially worth pursuing due to their refreshing succinctness. A contentious exchange in the mid-1950s between the critic Martin Seymour-Smith and the poet Donald Davie encapsulates disaffection's argument against direct and immediate response. For Davie, it is no longer acceptable to be expressive without consideration of the larger social or political consequences of feeling. In *Departure*, a little magazine out of Oxford University that published primarily undergraduate work, Seymour-Smith singles out Davie as exemplary of a new and lamentable brand of soulless intellectualism. Like many young poets today, Davie is not concerned with "life" but is instead invested in "academic protest," which saps his poems of feeling and vitality (15). Seymour-Smith asserts that Davie "is constantly seeking a critico-academic excuse for postponing an attempt to write poetry of a wider [emotional] range" (16). Rather than impose a "critico-academic"

method from the top-down, Seymour-Smith claims, poems ought to begin from an individual emotion that, in the course of its expression, provides the form appropriate to it: "[T]he form grows out of the complexity and delicacy of the emotion" (16). Borrowing a line from Davie's poem "Remembering the Thirties"—"A neutral tone is nowadays preferred"—he bludgeons Davie with his own words: Seymour-Smith writes that neutrality in fact boils down to nothing more than mere cleverness, a poetry of "ready-made form-cages and those disciplinary instruments necessary for the mutation of cries of pain or love into neutral tones preferable to the donnish ear" (15). Donnish, neutral, critico-academic—poetry should escape these intellectual cages so that feeling might find its own wild and expressive forms.

In the subsequent volume, Davie issues a rebuttal. He defends his supposed imposition of ready-made metrical apparata on a historical basis. Has organic poetic form done anything worthwhile as of late? Or has it, in fact, led more or less to calamity? The certainty with which such individual expression proceeds is actually careless and historically irresponsible. In "Rejoinder to a Critic," Davie offers his refutation.

> You may be right: 'How can I dare to feel?'
> May be the only question I can pose,
> 'And haply by abstruse research to steal
> From my own nature all the natural man'
> *My* sole resource. And I do not suppose
> That others may not have a better plan.
>
> And yet I'll quote again, and gloss it too
> (You know by now my liking for collage):
> Donne could be daring, but he never knew,
> When he inquired, 'Who's injured by my love?'
> Love's radio-active fall-out on a large
> Expanse around the point it bursts above.

'Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?'
And recent history answers: Half Japan!
Not love, but hate? Well, both are versions of
The 'feeling' that you dare me to…Be dumb!
Appear concerned only to make it scan!
How dare we now be anything but numb?[7]

Here Davie concedes that others may indeed "have a better plan." Perhaps they know better how to generalize the nature of humanity from their own experience; "You may be right," he modestly admits. In recent history, however, "feeling" itself presents the problem of collateral damage. What Donne failed to realize is that affection is not merely personal—look at what affection ("love" or "hate") has brought to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In light of world war, feeling anything but numb is presumptuous. On the basis of the general wreckage of contemporary history, expressive feeling is dangerous and irresponsible. Davie does not shore fragments against his ruins, as a modernist Eliot had before him, but rather defends the constriction of idiosyncrasy in "Appear[ing] concerned only to make it scan." He reiterates this elsewhere, too, as similar accusations of mannerism motivate Davie's rebuttal to charges of intellectualism in his early poem "Method. For Ronald Gaskell": "For such a theme (atrocities) you find / My Style, you say, too neat and self-possessed. / I ought to show a more disordered mind" (43). Like Seymour-Smith, Gaskell believes that atrocities ought to find their own method. Anything that scans too neatly evinces the fact of a mind inappropriately ordered in the face of such horrifying subject matter. Yet for Davie, recent history requires some other style than the expressive. What is

[7] Originally published under the title "Rejoinder to Martin Seymour-Smith," the poem appears in *Collected Poems* as "Rejoinder to a Critic" (73-74). I have reproduced the latter, edited version here for purposes of clarity. The following are the differences between the *Collected Poems* version and the one in *Departure*: in line 5, Davie adds the italics to "My"; in line 8, Davie simplifies the phrase "liking for collage" from the original "*esprit de collage*"; in the third stanza, Davie adds quotation marks—one at the beginning of line 13 and two around the word "feeling" in line 16.

necessary is a style that, appearing perhaps to be apathetic, in fact undermines existing formal technique from within.

Henry Green certainly seems to head this necessity. In the next chapter, I show how *Party Going* appeals to modernist stream-of-consciousness technique even as it undermines it. For Davie, such disaffection would be necessary due to the historical imperative of atomic warfare. For Green, what is at stake in stream-of-consciousness narration is a picture of society that implicitly contains a salvific class politics.

Chapter 1
Re-versing the stream of consciousness: Henry Green's Aesthetics of Minimal Pluralism

A fog has suspended train service at Victoria station in Henry Green's *Party Going* (1939), and the number of frustrated passengers milling about only continues to grow. When, after two hours of inactivity, the departures board begins to change, *Party Going* twice records that "a huge wild roar broke from the crowd" (499, 512). This clamor is filtered through a group of wealthy Bright Young People who, likewise stranded, have decamped from the station platform to a railway hotel overlooking the increasing mass.[8] The cry of the lower-class commuters elicits a number of responses. It is odious; it is terrifying; it is hardly worth acknowledging at all. "Wild animals," exclaims Edwards, a servant to one of the upper-class men in the hotel rooms above (499). One of the women, Julia, subsequently thinks about how threatening the cry seemed: "Separated there they became people again and were no longer menaces as they had been in one mass when singing or all of their faces turning one way to a laugh or a scream" (524). Another man, Max, has just fallen asleep when the roar startles him. Neither he nor Amabel, the woman next to whom he was napping, give a second thought to the sound outside. What should one make of these representations? Given the threat that mass political movements offered to Europe in the 1930s, *Party Going*'s attitude toward these commuters would seem to

[8] "Bright Young People," or Bright Young Things, is how this group often self-identified. As D. J. Taylor suggests, this phrase became synonymous with an attitude as well as a generation (8-9).

dictate the novel's politics.[9] As the different reactions to the crowd's roar suggests, however, the novel's politics are less than straightforward. Although class tension is obviously central to *Party Going*, it is difficult to parse the novel's allegiances. *Party Going* adopts a number of different tones and attitudes toward each class. It seems equally scornful of and sympathetic to all. Compounding this difficulty is Green's unusual literary style. As the example of Julia's interior monologue above suggests, Green's sentences are themselves wild, featuring lush imagery and tortuous syntax. Here, for example, is the novel's meandering description of Max and Amabel falling asleep just prior to the crowd's roar: "It was so luxurious he nodded, perhaps it was also what she had put on her hair, very likely it may have been her sleep reaching out over him, but anyway he felt so right he slipped into it too and dropped off on those outspread wings into her sleep with his, like two soft evenings meeting" (512). At this moment, the narrative voice drifts sympathetically with Max into semi-consciousness. Yet, at other times, *Party Going* presents the Bright Young People as callous, vacuous, or shallow. How should one cope with the novel's implicit demand to square its sympathetic tone with its alternative representations of the cruel or clueless upper-class would-be travelers?

Party Going is protean, continually slipping one's attempts to pin down its politics. Sometimes it is lumped in with other novels of the 1930s about the Bright Young People, such as Nancy Mitford's *Highland Fling* (1931), Anthony Powell's *Afternoon Men* (1931), and Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930). Like these works,

[9] Most notably, Marina MacKay argues that *Party Going* contributes to Henry Green's larger aesthetic of "neutrality." This chapter builds on MacKay's thesis insofar as disaffection maps the conceptual terrain of Green's desire for the continuance of pre-war order without necessarily wanting to stipulate that class relations remain identical forever. Disaffection fleshes out the politics of Green's sympathetic representations of class difference.

Green's novel nominally takes as its subject matter the jollity and frivolousness of that smart set, both enamored by and scornful of its milieu. Unlike these novels, however, *Party Going* actually represents the lower-classes.[10] And the novel is stylistically quite different from these as well. Its formal density seems to place it alongside the decade's "important fiction," on par with other difficult novels by authors such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.[11] In this reading, *Party Going* typifies the holdover of an apolitical, mandarin, "high" modernist style.[12] This chapter argues that Green's novel is neither of these: it is not a charming satire of youth today, nor is it a self-serious work of modernism that would abstract itself from contemporary political exigences. Unlike the novels about and by the Bright Young People, it does not reaffirm the status quo, but unlike works in the tradition of high modernism, it does not opt out of the present's problems. Rather, *Party Going* is a novel of disaffection. Appealing to and frustrating conventions of modernist stream of consciousness narration, the novel distances itself from both the Bright Young People and the late-modernist mandarins. This chapter uses Woolf's aesthetic theory of modernism from the mid-1920s as a contrasting form and thought to show how *Party Going* elaborates its aesthetic of disaffection. By citing and subverting the stream-of-consciousness narration so central to Woolf's aesthetic, the novel makes a case against an implicitly salvific class politics inherent in this modernist technique. At the

[10] Green received instructions from his editor to anchor *Party Going* more firmly around the Bright Young People, cutting portions that examined characters of other classes in order to capitalize on the demand for vacuous upper-class caper, driven in large part by the success of Evelyn Waugh's novels (Treglown 107).
[11] In Katharine Bail Hoskins's comprehensive study of political writing in England during the Spanish Civil War, Green is bracketed as one author (along with Joyce, Woolf, Ivy Compton-Burnett, and Elizabeth Bowen) of important fiction that is apolitical (116).
[12] "Mandarin" (as opposed to "Vernacular") how Cyril Connolly describes the high literary style of modernism.

same time, *Party Going* does not argue on behalf of any concrete alternative. The nature of the novel's disaffection is only to lobby against what is undesirable. In subsequent interviews and radio broadcasts, Green articulates the *against*-ness of this disaffection: although he desires what I call a kind of minimal pluralism, he does not specifically propose a concrete means for bringing about this state of affairs. Instead, Green's minimal pluralism represents the merest articulation of common ground among subjects. Ultimately, I argue, in *Party Going*'s desire for this common ground, the novel expresses a form of nostalgia for the liberal rational subject; it constitutes, in other words, a rejection of modernism's rejection of liberalism.[13] In its negative but noncommittal response to the modernist innovations of previous decades, *Party Going* is the disaffective novel *par excellence* of the 1930s.

I first juxtapose Green's interviews and BBC broadcasts with two essays by Virginia Woolf—"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1924) and its subsequent development as "Modern Fiction" for *The Common Reader* (1925)—in order to show how Green differentiates his late-modernist disaffection from Woolf's modernist theory of fiction. In these interviews and broadcasts, Green appears to be in dialogue with Woolf's aesthetic theory, and we can begin to understand his theory of minimal pluralism through his engagement with "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and "Modern Fiction." Indeed, in Chapter Two, I will go on to illustrate how Woolf herself bristles against this earlier elaboration of her aesthetic theory; in her final novel, *Between the Acts* (1941), she positions modernism broadly-construed as problematic in a manner

[13] Vincent Sherry argues that modernism is a rejection of liberalism. Taken together, he claims, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf "reenact the disestablishment of a rationalistic attitude and practice in language, in the verbal culture of a war for which Liberal apologies and rationales provided the daily material of London journalism" (14).

similar to Green's own disaffection. Specifically, Green fears Woolf's theory run amok. Whereas Woolf's earlier essays argue that an author's job is to describe all of a character's (i.e., Mrs. Brown's) potential meanings, Green wants to rein in this enthusiasm. He wants character to remain reserved or unexamined, since the elaboration of a character's possible meanings standardizes and oppresses the reader, ruining a desirable pluralism of readers. An author's exploration of possible meanings, in other words, will miss the mark for some readers and thus foreclose the possibility of meaning for them. Instead, I argue, Green posits that character ought to be minimally represented such that it privately harbors a maximum number of potential meanings. I show how Green articulates this aesthetic theory as a negative maxim: an author should bind the description of his characters in order to provide the broadest possible field of meaning, restricting the exploration of so many Mrs. Browns in order to grant interpretative freedom to the reader. This definition of freedom is Green's minimal pluralism, and its upshot is to disclose the underside of Woolf's aesthetics. As I show, for Green, Woolf's exclusion of some readers from the outset assumes what society in its entirety ought to look like. Through a comparison of Green's interviews and radio broadcasts with Woolf's essays, we see how, for Green, Woolf's aesthetic theory improperly projects a social totality. It foists upon its reader a predefined connection between the "part" (Mrs. Brown) and the "whole" (society).

After expanding upon this theory of minimal pluralism, I return to *Party Going* and trace how it is actually a prior iteration of this quibble with Woolf's aesthetic theory. The novel's disaffection from stream-of-consciousness narration is,

in other words, an earlier version of the minimal pluralism that Green expresses in his broadcasts and interviews. But whereas Green's minimal pluralism is an aesthetic theory of authorial restraint that creates a common ground for interpretation, *Party Going* simply generates a longing for such a common ground in the reader by staging a "failure" of stream of consciousness. *Party Going* appeals to conventions of stream of consciousness that it ultimately frustrates, and this creates a desire for the text to read as it "ought" to. Another way of saying this is that the novel exposes how stream of consciousness normally operates by evoking and refusing to fulfill the expectations of such narration. Just as with Green's minimal pluralism, *Party Going*'s citation and subversion of stream of consciousness's conventions reveals how stream of consciousness projects a social totality. For Green, this projection is presumptuous. Stream of consciousness implicitly advocates a kind of class-leveling that, *Party Going* suggests, is terrifying in its attack on existing order. By appealing to and frustrating the operations by which stream of consciousness would project this social totality, the novel disarms stream of consciousness's salvific class politics. The novel is neither comfortable with the status quo (the decadent satire of the Bright Young People) nor is it invested in existing solutions (modernist stream of consciousness narration). Rather, when *Party Going* unmoors its reader from modernist reading practices, it creates a communicative void between text and reader that reflects the distance between upper and lower classes—a void that stream of consciousness implicitly works to eliminate. We might characterize the implicit nature of this elision as stream of consciousness's anarchical spirit: it does not adhere to common conventions for creating the broadest possible field of meaning (e.g., the

verisimilitude of literary realism) but instead relies upon the reader to intuit appropriate form from textual clues. Such a method is "anarchical" in the sense that the modernist text assumes that order and meaning will arise organically of its own accord, striking the reader who can correctly interpret the appropriate textual clues.[14] *Party Going* resists the anarchical means by which stream of consciousness tacitly suggests that stability might be achieved. Although Green's novel lacks a proactive agenda for bringing about social stability, it counteracts this antifoundationalism or revolutionary verve of modernism by subverting stream of consciousness from within. It thus represents an oblique desire for a culture united on the grounds of liberal rationality. In the chapter's final sections, I trace *Party Going*'s disaffection from stream of consciousness by comparing its imagery to the writings of William James, the pragmatist who made famous the notion that consciousness was like a stream.

I. Green's "oblique" minimal pluralism

"[T]he purpose of the novelist is to create, in the mind of the reader, life which is *not*, and which is non-representational," Green claims cryptically in a 1950 BBC broadcast, "A Novelist to His Readers: I" (*Surviving* 142, emphasis original). By "life which is *not*," Green appears to be making a relatively obvious ontological assertion: the novelist creates, in the mind of the reader, a life which is—in contrast to real or actual life—*not* alive. However, when we juxtapose this statement of craft to ones made by Woolf in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Green's claim is far more

[14] David Kadlec argues for the centrality of anarchism and pragmatism to modernist literature's development.

interesting. Through the few extant radio broadcasts and essays that Green composed in the early-to-mid 1950s, we can piece together his theory of an "oblique" minimal pluralism—a method for representing "life which is *not*"—and show how Green frames this theory against Woolf's famous elaboration of her own aesthetic. Ultimately, Green's aesthetic method harbors a politics that provides insight for *Party Going*'s own obliqueness, in which the novel disaffects from stream-of-consciousness narration not to implement a more radical version of modernist form but to tease (and refuse to satisfy) a desire for order and structure.

In a certain light, Green's method might look like a formal reinscription of modernism—that is, a more sophisticated fidelity to "real" experience. "Except in disaster," Green states in "Novelist: I," "life is oblique in its impact on upon people. And if this is so, then how can the novelist communicate obliquely with his readers and yet retain their interest, let alone do for them what I regard as indispensable, namely to quicken their unconscious imagination into life while reading?" (140). Here Green seems to desire an "oblique" literature that recreates life in all its mundanity. However, this literature also requires something more. Green wants to reconstruct the potentiality of life; he wants to craft the opacity or latency of unconscious feeling. This is what he labels "non-representational" above. For Green, the text does not simply present a picture of life but instead, obscurely, transmits it (even if such life is only in the mind of the reader and therefore ontologically non-existent). In the same broadcast, Green claims that "dialogue should not be capable of only *one meaning*, or mood" but should instead suggest that a character might be "in one of several moods, *or even in three or more moods at the same time* (138, 141,

emphases original). This creation of multiple moods in the reader is Green's oblique non-representational quickening of the unconscious. It is a latency of mood or a flexibility of possible interpretations.[15] In other contexts—a 1953 essay about the painter Matthew Smith and a 1958 interview with Terry Southern respectively—Green labels the obliqueness of his non-representational method as "percipience" or a "crabwise approach" (*Surviving* 166, 239).[16]

Superficially, this representation of "life which is *not*" might seem similar to the "unlimited capacity and infinite variety" that Woolf desires for Mrs. Brown—specifically, Woolf writes, Mrs. Brown is "capable of appearing in any place; wearing any dress; saying anything and doing heaven knows what" (24). In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf performs a thought experiment in which she lists myriad possibilities for Mrs. Brown's interior state that, she argues, the Edwardian novelist Arnold Bennett fails to consider in his stultifying insistence on adhering to the rules of (Victorian) realist representation. However, in the second of his pieces for the BBC, Green appears to want to differentiate his methodology from Woolf's. When we juxtapose "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" with Green's 1951 broadcast, "A Novelist to his Readers: II," we can see how the latter distinguishes his theory of fiction from Woolf's philosophy of the sympathetic imagination. Woolf claims that she wants her Mrs. Brown to contain "unlimited capacity and infinite variety," but she in fact interprets Mrs. Brown for her reader. To Green, this is an imposition.

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[15] This is what Green's intends in his later assertion from an interview with Terry Southern ("The Art of Fiction") that "what one writes has to be all things to all men"—not that there are ethical or moral expectations placed upon him but rather that interpretation should be open-ended (*Surviving* 240).
[16] The former descriptor is particularly provocative in its correspondence to the language of Deleuze and Guattari. "Percipience" would be non-representational in the sense, for Deleuze and Guattari, percepts are objectless and performative rather than referential. "As percepts," they write in *What Is Philosophy?*, "sensations are not perceptions referring to an object (reference): if they resemble something it is with a resemblance produced with their own methods" (166)

Instead, Green argues, reading ought to be its own performance of character-reading by the reader (rather than by the author, like Woolf claims). Ultimately, Green's disagreement with Woolf discloses the politics of his aesthetic method. "Character-reading" is traditionally associated with liberalism and the liberal rational subject insofar as each individual, having been presented with a clear picture or forthright image of another, ought to be free to make up his or her own mind about the other (Walter 27).

Green's broadcast features its own "Mrs. Brown." But Green's subject of character-study is not interrogated for the potential meanings of her actions—in Woolf's phrase, her "unlimited capacity and infinite variety"—but rather is suppressed into performing one action in the background of another narrative. In Green's broadcast, two men are discussing their relationship troubles on a bus when they notice a Mrs. Brown-like character waiving her handkerchief at a hospital window. In Green's ideal narrative, this "Mrs. Brown" takes a backseat. In the broadcast, he first describes the woman's curious actions before explaining how he thinks such a story *ought* to be told. Ultimately, Green argues, each reader ought to be allowed to interpret the woman's actions in his or her own way. The following is a comparison of the first sentences of each piece, the opening of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and the moment (prior to the narrative of the young men) when Green first describes his own "Mrs. Brown" character:

"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"

> One night some weeks ago, then, I was late for the train and jumped into the first carriage I came to. As I sat down I had the strange and uncomfortable feeling that I was interrupting a conversation between two people who were already sitting there. Not that they were young or happy. Far from it. They were both elderly, the woman over sixty, the man well over forty. They were sitting opposite each other, and the man, who had been leaning over and talking empathically to judge by his attitude and the flush on his face, sat back and became silent. I had disturbed him, and he was annoyed. (6)

"Novelist: II"

> One day this winter I was on the upper deck of a bus, in London, held up by traffic lights at Hyde Park Corner which, because I was going east, is, as most Londoners know, bounded to my far side, and to the right, by St George's Hospital. Across the aisle, in front, there sat a middle-aged woman waving her handkerchief slightly behind and away from me, that is towards the hospital. At that moment, as she was again to do later, she gave up. She turned round upon her fellow-passengers, who, so far as I could judge, had paid no attention, and gave us all collectively a shy, warm smile. (143)

Even as the details of each passage differ in their specificity—fittingly so, given that Green and Woolf arrive at different conclusions about the use of detail in fiction—these passages are remarkably similar in their presentation of the same *categories* of

detail at comparable moments. Both descriptions include a sense of time (day/night); season (winter/spring)[17]; mode of transportation (bus/train); movement and direction (statically east/rapidly east)[18]; age of the fellow passenger (middle-aged/elderly); the passenger's awareness of the author (unaware/disturbed); and the passenger's resultant demeanor (warm/annoyed). Most importantly, the purpose of detail in each example hinges on the passenger's use of a handkerchief. For Woolf, Mrs. Brown's handkerchief symbolizes what makes her describable. Watching the annoyed man speak sternly to the elderly woman, she states, "a very odd thing happened. Mrs. Brown took out a handkerchief and began to dab her eyes. She was crying. But she went on listening quite composedly to what he was saying" (8). For Woolf, the handkerchief invites speculation. What can account for the contradiction of Mrs. Brown's tears and her composedness? The handkerchief crystalizes her incongruities; Mrs. Brown is "very small, very tenacious; at once very frail and very heroic" (9). In other words, for Woolf, the handkerchief represents Mrs. Brown's "unlimited capacity and infinite variety." It suggests that Mrs. Brown embodies a simultaneous collection of potentials. In practice, however, this infinite variety manifests itself in particular interpretations. The writer should describe the world's Mrs. Browns in the hope of arriving at "the spirit we live by, life itself" (24). It ought to be of no concern, as it was to the Edwardian authors against whom Woolf is writing, that Mrs. Brown is not universally legible. "[O]ld Mrs. Brown's character will strike you very differently according to the age and country in which you happen to be born," Woolf writes, and for her, this difference is acceptable (10). Mrs. Brown ought to be represented in all

[17] Woolf presented "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" on May 18, 1924.
[18] Woolf carefully notes that she is traveling from Richmond Station past Clapham Junction toward Waterloo.

of her partiality. Woolf concludes by exhorting her reader to "Tolerate the spasmodic, the obscure, [and] the fragmentary"—that is, to tolerate authors' partial descriptions of their Mrs. Browns (24).

For Green, such representations are an intolerable imposition. Unlike Woolf's description of Mrs. Brown, Green claims of his handkerchief-waving subject that, "If I have told the incident right…then each generation could claim this lady in the bus for their own, from teenagers to grannies" (146). For Green, the detail must be free to mean different things to different readers: "[W]e must be able to share it in different ways, in opposites perhaps. Because we are all different," he states (146). Green here theorizes fiction as a plurality of readers. To explain this, he uses the example of the hospital mentioned above. A hospital, he notes, might mean any number of things to different readers. It might stand for death, healing, claustrophobia, the painfulness of pain, the vainglory of doctors, or the loveliness of nurses in starched cuffs. For Green, each of these possible meanings must be respected insofar as it is not specifically contradicted. In practice, this means that an author must be careful *not* to describe. An author must not bring all latency to light, lest certain readers' visions be destroyed—Green's implication being that Woolf's feminist "everything" tramples his own more pluralistic "anything." For Green, fidelity to the reader means restraint on the author's part. One should not assume what Woolf assumes. One should not assume that describing the world's Mrs. Browns leads to "life itself." In other words, for Green, the detail does not implicitly figure a comprehensive "whole" or social totality. Although this theory is somewhat similar to Roland Barthes's death of the author in the sense that Green minimizes the importance of specific meaning intended by an

author, Green's theory does not also adhere to Barthes's complementary birth of the reader. Rather, Green's author needs to provide an appropriate habitat for his reader. Green retains the author's centrality as an administrator of textual common ground. This seems to set quite a difficult task for the author, and Green's biography bears this out. He published his final novel in 1952, just after these broadcasts aired. Administering the viability of all potential interpretations, it seems, was actually the death of the author.

This disagreement between Green and Woolf over their respective Mrs. Browns is indicative of a larger philosophical disagreement about whether the text should appeal to its reader as a liberal rational subject. Their disagreement boils down to a question of who performs the inferential work of "character-reading" that is associated with liberal rationality. Namely, should the author provide a partial interpretation, as Woolf argues, or should the reader be liberated to do this himself, as Green suggests? Although "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" is most famous for its diagnosis that "on or about 1910 human character changed," it is not often acknowledged that Woolf premises this assertion on another: the skill of "character-reading" (4). "My first assertion," Woolf says, "is one that I think you will grant—that every one in this room is a judge of character. Indeed, it would be impossible to live for a year without disaster unless one practised character-reading and had some skill in the art." (4). For Woolf, character-reading is an author's duty insofar as she can only endeavor to represent Mrs. Brown in her spasmodic and fragmentary partiality. If done well, an author has succeeded in representing "life itself." Whereas Green argues that character-reading entails the authorial duty of creating a textual

common ground for multiple readers in different times and places, Woolf positions this duty as extra-authorial. For Woolf, it is too burdensome "to find a common ground between us, a convention which would not seem to you too odd, unreal, and far-fetched to believe in," she writes, "I admit that I shirked that arduous undertaking" (18). We can understand Woolf's "shirk[ing]" here as a rejection of how fiction would constitute the liberal rational reader. Woolf interprets Mrs. Brown for the reader, performing the work of "character-reading" rather than providing a "common ground" by which the reader might perform this him- or herself. Ultimately, for Green, this failure to provide common ground is an imposition on the reader, since Woolf's character-reading renders the rational dissent of the liberal outsider impossible. Moreover, Woolf's failure to provide an aesthetic common ground ramifies for a text's ability to represent society itself: by reading character *for* the reader, Woolf mandates his or her role. In Green's thinking, Woolf's aesthetic theory projects a social totality that unjustly burdens the world-be liberal rational reader of character. Instead, in his ideal conversation, Green sidelines his handkerchief-waving Mrs. Brown. He uses it as a foil for a conversation between two men on a bus (although Green would likely protest who is a foil for whom). These men notice and comment upon the woman, but their speculation and the narrator's description is bounded.

This disagreement parallels a larger midcentury discussion about liberalism and the importance of "culture" for society. If relegating Mrs. Brown to the background strikes one as gauche (at best) or downright offensive, perhaps we should contrast Green's negatively-defined minimal liberal pluralism with the stricter

definitions of "minority culture" from previous decades in works like F. R. Leavis's *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930) and T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). For these critics, a healthy society requires the propagation of an elite minority that is "outside" culture and who may therefore freely dissent. The problem with this model of culture is, of course, its elitism. It defines some lives as more valuable than others. Moreover, we might note, such elitism does so under the sign of egalitarianism, arguing that it knows what is collectively best for all.

A good example of this false egalitarianism of "minority culture"—that is, of the kind of culture to which Green's minimal pluralism does not aspire—may be found in Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall* (1928), the first novel of Green's good friend. In *Decline and Fall*, Waugh articulates the idea that "life" is something in which an elite few can participate even as he also asserts the fundamental equality of this participation. That is, "life" is available only to some but, within this subset, it is distributed equally. The novel compares life to a spinning carnival ride, a wheel whose centripetal force flings riders to the circumference. "People don't see that when they say 'life' they mean two different things," one character claims:

> They can mean simply existence, with its physiological implications of growth and organic change. They can't escape that—even by death, but because that's inevitable they think the other idea of life is too—the scrambling and excitement and bumps and the effort to get to the middle. And when we do get to the middle, it's just as if we never started. It's so odd.

> Now you're a person who was clearly meant to stay in the seats and sit still and if you get bored watch the others. (291)

Here Waugh stresses both egalitarian nature of "life" and justifies its stratification. The image of the spinning wheel suggests that "life" is the same for everyone striving to reach the middle, while the final sentence reinforces the idea that people are meant either to participate in or to be exempted from social life. "Life," then, is a construct predicated upon an initial formal operation of exclusion.

Compared to this defense of the structural inequality "minority culture," Henry Green's interviews and broadcasts are more modest. Green simply wants to ensure a space for a character's withdrawnness. Moreover, he professes to want this only as a theory of fiction. That is, unlike Waugh's character in *Decline and Fall*, who soliloquizes on "life," Green simply explains how literature can best maximize its appeal. Of course, one might object that Green's proposed method is absurd as a means to achieve his stated goal: reserving detail does not appeal to all potential readers in different times and places. Instead, it reproduces the fantasy of a universal reader who, in practice, is privileged. Green is effectively silencing the world's Mrs. Browns by tacitly performing the same exclusionary (or, we might say, disciplinary) operations that Waugh explicitly promulgates. Why should we give Green a pass for not being Evelyn Waugh? Is tacit repression more forgivable than outright fascism? Green might concede such critiques, yet his novels attest to anything but scorn for the lower classes. *Living* (1929) represents the struggles and successes of workers in a Birmingham iron foundry, while *Caught* (1943) and *Loving* (1945) chronicle the lives of laborers during World War II—respectively, of men in the Auxiliary Fire Service

during the Blitz and of servants in an Irish big house affected by the war. Across much of his work, Green appears invested in representing "life" beyond the upper-classes. Although his theory of minimal pluralism is fraught in its reliance on an author's paternalistic administration of representation, Green's "common ground" is also a negatively-defined space that would restrict authority.

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that what we might see as tacit repression originates not solely from a dispositional or inherited conservatism but from a reaction to the political stresses of the 1930s. Many of the abhorrent political sympathies of midcentury authors (and philosophers, historians, scientists, and all the rest) are a response to feelings of helplessness and social dislocation—that is, a response to the need to order society properly. Such an explanation might not excuse an apologist for fascism like Waugh (or Martin Heidegger or Paul de Man), but it can provide context for Green's articulation of a conservative but less authoritarian liberalism. Green's minimal pluralism, then, constitutes an answer to the problem of historical self-consciousness that is specific to the midcentury. In a 1931 BBC broadcast, British historian Arnold Toynbee characterizes the heady passivity of those reaching maturity in the 1930s: "In our generation, we are conscious of being swept along a stream of dizzily rapid change … and if, instead, the current is going to carry us over a precipice, then we are convinced that our precipice is anyhow going to be the greatest fall of man there has ever been—a very Niagara" (quoted in Overy 48-49). Here Toynbee's choice of Niagara Falls provides a telling characterization of Green's mindset. Like all tourist traps, Niagara Falls is always informed by its reputation: one experiences the experience of the falls, an experience conditioned by

expectation. Toynbee's comparison between contemporary history and Niagara suggests that the experience of the 1930s was similarly conditioned for those of that generation. The nominal agents of history are not only rendered passive but come to expect a future fall. Their present inaction ("being swept along") is conditioned by the expectation of a future event. Indeed, one of the clearer expressions of this gloomy anticipation is Green's memoir, *Pack My Bag* (1940), written prematurely under the assumption of imminent death. Yet Toynbee's diagnosis further suggests that this mindset is self-reinforcing. His description of what initially seemed like simple passivity becomes a kind of will-to-precipice that is quasi-intentional ("we are convinced") and proprietary ("our precipice"). This complex is thus actually something of a projection. What might seem like passive resignation is in fact a personalized intensity—"personalized" in the sense that the individual projects an outcome that begets the nominally external force that renders the agent passive. This is to say: it seemed unlikely to Green and to many others that the world's political crises were going to resolve themselves organically. How can one step out of this powerful stream? Not, Green's minimal pluralism suggests, via stream-of-consciousness narration. His wish for a set of common ground rules—for a pluralistic space defined by negative prohibitions in an effort to avoid individual suppression—looks somewhat more modest in light of Toynbee's characterization of society.

In the second half of this chapter, I argue that *Party Going*'s disaffection shows itself to be a logical predecessor to Green's minimal pluralism. In fact, the novel is even more complexly negative, since its aim is not to present a minimally-pluralist common ground for character but rather, through an appeal to and frustration

of aesthetic conventions associated with stream of consciousness, to make the reader sense the lack of such a common ground and, I argue, hunger for it. By engendering this desire, *Party Going* represents the situation of "our generation" by recreating Toynbee's feeling of historical rudderlessness. In other words, insofar as the novel's disaffection from stream of consciousness elicits an ultimately unfulfilled readerly desire for structure and order—a desire that mirrors Green's own—the novel constitutes a representation of the decade's overwhelming feeling of helplessness. At the same time, this feeling is potentially generative rather than merely bleak or nihilistic, as Green's broadcasts and interviews suggest. Ultimately, by resisting stream-of-consciousness narration, *Party Going* discloses a relationship between the individual and society that modernism assumes. Seen in this way, the novel appears to strike an uneasy balance between the reactionary conservatism of someone like Evelyn Waugh and the fashionable class-leveling sympathies of contemporary progressive authors writing in the shadow of modernism—what I outline in the Introduction to this dissertation as the Auden generation. While Green's novel resists the latter's vision of modernism's implicit populism, it does not also therefore present a positive defense of elitism. Before explicating the novel's disaffective technique, however, I first unpack in greater depth the politics of Woolf's aesthetic theory to which Green is responding. How does stream of consciousness harbor an implicit class-leveling agenda? I then contrast Woolf's aesthetic theory (and its particular expression in the novel *Jacob's Room*) to *Party Going*. When juxtaposed to *Jacob's Room*, an exemplar of stream-of-consciousness technique, the goal of *Party Going*'s disaffective method becomes apparent.

II. Stream of consciousness's classless "whole"

In the conclusion to *Mimesis* (1946), Erich Auerbach uses *Madame Bovary* as a foil for characterizing Woolf's formal method in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). Like Woolf's novel, *Madame Bovary* revels in the quotidian and dallies over the ordinary without necessarily forwarding the plot. Unlike *To the Lighthouse*, however, *Madame Bovary* is also driven by an imperative to "exterior completeness"—that is, to the chronological presentation of a plot that has a conclusion or "turning point of destiny" (547-8). For Auerbach, the presentation of subjective epiphany in Woolf, Joyce, and Proust—that is, in modernist fiction broadly construed—replaces this exterior imperative to connect character and event. Rather, readers of literary modernism experience their own moment of recognition through the encounter of a character's epiphany. As a result, Auerbach writes, "our lives appear in our own conception as total entities" (549). For Auerbach, an account of subjective epiphany *is* an event. This is a common characterization of modernist fiction. Beginning with Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle*, the modernist novel has been understood as a product and extension of continental symbolist poetry. Freed from the necessity to embed character in the historical event, modernist fiction can begin to approach the representation of pure form. This is what occasions Woolf's famous assertions in "Modern Fiction" that the author is no longer beholden to representing "a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged" (150). Instead, she argues, the author may now represent an "unknown and uncircumscribed spirit"—namely, she says, life. Life is purer; it is unadulterated by the historical event. "[L]ife," she writes, "is a luminous

halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (150). Modernist fiction—particularly modernist stream-of-consciousness narrative technique—is the representation of this subjective "halo" that "surround[s]" us. Life is constancy, whether the surrounding halo or the flowing stream. For both Auerbach and Woolf, despite the "uncircumscribed" nature of life, the modernist representation of its characters' interior states nevertheless constitutes a totality. Such "completeness" is what modernism shares with prior fiction. In other words, both *Madame Bovary* and *To the Lighthouse* strive for integrity. The difference is that one is objective and the other subjective. Modernist fiction simply substitutes one whole for another: in the place of destiny, epiphany.

To a greater or lesser extent, all of the authors in this dissertation engage with this familiar history of modernist integrity. V. S. Naipaul's narrator in *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh, dramatizes his yearning for organic cultural "completeness" in his subversions of impressionism; Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* stages "integrity" in Cold War international relations as a problem of literary realism's presentation of a "whole" picture; and Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* expresses misgivings about what the resolutely human quality of such integrity implies (since the "recognition" of modernist epiphany seems also to backdoor a problematic worldview that overlooks animal being). As we saw above, Henry Green carries on an extended conversation with Woolf and her characterization of modernist fiction's "luminous halo" or, in the phrasing of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," how the representation of particular lives might come to represent "life itself." *Party Going*, I argue, is the forerunner to this conversation. It purposefully frustrates a reader who,

because of the novel's pretense to modernist form, also therefore expects aesthetic integrity. Unlike *To the Lighthouse* (to use Auerbach's example), *Party Going* feels open-ended. It lacks the climax of epiphany. Without an equivalent to Lily Briscoe's epiphanic declaration, "I have had my vision," *Party Going* just seems to keep on going. By citing and subverting the conventions of stream of consciousness narration, Green's novel exposes its own uneasy relationship to aesthetic integrity and suggests a difference between the previous decades (the 1910s and 20s) and Green's present one (the 1930s). The novel represents the loss of faith in fiction's ability to escape history—that is, the loss of belief in aesthetic autonomy. This is a faith still held by Auerbach, who finds in modernism the Hegelian advancement of historical progress, in which fiction's continued representation of subjective experience will inevitably lead, he argues, to the realization of what we all share in common. Modernism, Auerbach writes, is an "unprejudiced" and "exploratory" form of representation that trends toward bringing about the elimination of class (552). "The strata of societies and their different ways of life have become inextricably mingled," he optimistically concludes: "There are no longer even exotic peoples" (552). *Party Going* shares no such faith in future unity. When we juxtapose Green's novel to Woolf aesthetic theory, I argue, *Party Going* looks like a rejection of modernism's implicit class politics.

We might see the politics of Woolf's aesthetic theory as symptomatic of a failure of the long dominant liberal human subject, constitutively rational, intentional, and self-present. Indeed, throughout Woolf's work, we find the desire to represent the opposite of this: the irrational, the unconscious, and the sensual (that is, the world's

Mrs. Browns). Originating in theories of liberty from the 17th and 18th centuries—from John Locke's consenting individual in the social contract to Immanuel Kant's universal ethical subject—liberalism found its fullest expression in the American and French Revolutions of 1776 and 1789 respectively, from which it progressed in the 19th century across much of the world. By the 20th century, however, cracks were beginning to show in the facade of Victorian liberalism. The demise of the British Empire, the increasing unionization of workers (culminating in the General Strike in 1926), and the successes of women's suffrage each suggested that liberalism's supposed egalitarianism was in fact available primarily to white, upper-class men. Literary modernism registers this change in complicated and even contradictory ways. Vincent Sherry argues that, because T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Virginia Woolf understood World War I as a direct consequence of liberalism's emphasis on the moral rectitude of rational thought, modernism itself constitutes a rejection of liberalism, as its authors show up the moral hypocrisy of liberalism's "discourses of right reason" (64). In particular, modernist impressionism or stream-of-consciousness narration makes visible other modes of being than the autonomous willing subject, such as the individual who is prey to unconscious desires or to mass psychology. However, the relationship between modernism and liberalism is more complicated than this seemingly straightforward denunciation, since modernism appears to extend and even replicate liberal rationality through its fetishization of directness. That is, across its various manifestations, what most modernisms share is the expression of a universalizing impulse to arrive at the direct communication of essential reality.[19]

[19] Edmund Wilson outlines this "metaphysics of symbolism" throughout *Axel's Castle*, but he does so explicitly with regard to stream-of-consciousness narration on 129-131.

Modernism is thus formally invested in the very kind of transhistorical project that made Victorian liberalism so objectionable. Georg Lukács offers this critique in the 1930s: the bourgeois distillation of pure style strips away historical specificity, which in turn makes modernism mobilizable to unseemly (read: fascist) political ends. For Lukács, the form adequate to representing social reality is not modernism but realism. This disagreement about the politics of modernist form continues from the 1950s into the 1970s: Theodor Adorno will subsequently recuperate modernism's autonomy of form as that which ensures its political independence, while Fredric Jameson argues that such autonomy is illusory, modernist aesthetics being but a symptom of historical circumstance. Yet for both Adorno and Jameson, liberalism is still at stake. Adorno's autonomy of form never quite escapes its correspondence to the liberal individual's self-sufficiency, and Jameson's political unconscious never quite accounts for the political projects that those modernists themselves believed they were undertaking.

Indeed, it is something like Lukács's objection to modernism to which Green's minimal pluralism—and, I ultimately argue, *Party Going*—responds. Lukács argues that modernism only expresses the alienation of modernity rather than (like realism) the underlying truth of social relations. Lukács is thus an empiricist: he believes that a unified reality underlies everything and that, provided the correct way of seeing, one can comprehend this reality directly. *Party Going* similarly suggests that modernism is inadequate to the contemporary historical moment. The salvific class-leveling supposedly incumbent to stream-of-consciousness narration will not address itself to the cloud that portends growing political rupture (whether in a railway station or in Europe). In other words, for both Lukács and Green, aesthetic

integrity is exterior to the reader. Whereas modernism requires the reader to piece together inductively the aesthetic whole, Lukács's realism and Green's disaffection both place their hopes in the work of art's integrity. The two men have different goals in mind, but they are not as dissimilar as one might assume. Although Green does not want to bring about the true democracy of Marxist socialism (like Lukács), he does want to posit the existence of social truths that connect us (even if he does not believe, like Lukács, in *the* social truth). Both men want literature to ameliorate a feeling of disconnection. Such a connection is the point of Green's minimal pluralism.

We can see Woolf's thematic interest in the salvific upshot of modernist form—that is, in how a reader pieces together the aesthetic whole inductively—through her lifelong interest in the formal operations of inclusion and inclusivity. How, she wonders, can society best acknowledge the "outsider" without also trampling their difference? Often this outsider is a woman, like Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), the nameless woman-without-a-country in *Three Guineas* (1938), or any number of female characters from her fiction (Rezia in *Mrs. Dalloway* [1925], Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*, and Miss La Trobe in *Between the Acts* [1941]). Other times such outsiders are individuals of lower class and lesser education, like the common reader, or—as I argue in Chapter Two on Woolf's late work—animals and insects. In each case, however, Woolf is invested in showing how character is knowable in non-traditional ways (for example, how the spasmodic and fragmentary in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" above has the capability to best capture "life itself"). The narrator of *Jacob's Room* twice explains this anarchical

aspect of modernism: "It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done" (29, 162). In *Jacob's Room*, the integrity of representation comes about inductively, when a reader "follow[s] hints" that gesture implicitly toward the aesthetic whole, rather than through the experience of a well-articulated aesthetic methodology applied from the top-down, such as Bennett's realism. What Green rejects in Woolf's methodology is the "must" of "one must follow hints." For Green, this is an improper imposition upon the reader. As we will see subsequently, Woolf's mandate to "follow hints" is also the object of *Party Going*'s disaffection, as the novel's hints unspool indefinitely, thereby frustrating a reader steeped in modernist aesthetics who expects such hints to coalesce into an aesthetic whole.

But to what extent does Woolf's formal interest in outsider-dom actually manifest itself in terms of class? Alex Zwerdling convincingly argues that Woolf was of two minds about her own middle-class station and upper middle-class upbringing. Although she felt guilty about her privileged place within the class system, she also appears compelled, given the intractability of this system, to defend her own position. On the one hand, then, a reading of Woolf's diary yields any number of passages betraying her discomfort or (at times) disgust with the lower-classes, and many critics have argued that Woolf fails to convincingly imagine and represent any lower-class character. On the other hand, Woolf is aware of her own shortcomings of sympathy, and she makes a good faith effort to represent the problems of the class system, if not the poor themselves. Thus we see a number of characters experience a breakthrough of class awareness (most notably Clarissa Dalloway), and we find Woolf eager to

haunt London's streets in search of and receptive to "real life." As Quentin Bell notes, Woolf's move with Vanessa Bell to the bohemian Bloomsbury entailed significant social risk, and her marriage to a Jewish socialist was hardly orthodox. In Woolf's own time, too, scholars were sensitive to the importance of class in her work. For example, the first book-length study on Woolf notes a delicate balance between conflicting views of class. "She looks upon contemporary England," Winifred Holtby writes in 1932, "and sees how, if the poor to-day are shut out, the well-to-do are shut in" (57). Whether or not Woolf is efficacious in representing "the poor to-day," her heart nevertheless resides with the downtrodden. It is to this end, Holtby argues, that Woolf develops her aesthetic method:

> In short, she welcomes the pooling of experience, she welcomes the breaking down of barriers, she welcomes innovations in technique and innovations in social custom. She does not regard our present disabilities as permanent, and her optimism is founded on no superficial tolerance, but on a sober and reasoned theory of art. For she has repudiated the more brittle individualism of her contemporaries. (59)

Through literary innovation, the contemporaneous critic argues, Woolf can break both aesthetic and social barriers, for stream of consciousness's impressionistic technique "pool[s]" collective "experience." Woolf's innovations in technique are more or less a direct response to barriers erected by "the well-to-do" against "the poor to-day."

We find a wonderful example of this relationship between narrative technique and the dissolution of class barriers in *Jacob's Room*, a hallmark of stream-of-consciousness narration and a text with which *Party Going* appears to be in

conversation. For the narrator of *Jacob's Room*, the overwhelming amount of impressionistic detail—gathered through a shifting and varied focalization and free indirect discourse—yields a kind of class-leveling. Nowhere is this clearer than when Jacob attends the opera. The narrator describes how Jacob flouts the system of classification built into the very infrastructure of the concert hall. Normally, the narrator claims, one's impressions may be dismissed, since the opera has found and imposed a class system that sorts through them by proxy: "Only to prevent us from being submerged by chaos, nature and society between them have arranged a system of classification which is simplicity itself; stalls, boxes, amphitheatre, gallery. The moulds are filled nightly. There is no need to distinguish details" (69). What a relief it is, the narrator cheekily suggests, to know one's place, to fit the mould. Then one is not so bothered by the chaos of sensation. Jacob, however, is not so easily classifiable. He is a series of fragments resisting the moulds that would render him knowable in a straightforward way. The narrator claims to have confidence that *some* word sums up Jacob entirely, but Jacob's fragmentary details resist any such assignation:

> one would have found it difficult to say which seat in the opera house was his, stalls, gallery, or dress circle. A writer? He lacked self-consciousness. A painter? There was something in the shape of his hands (he was descended on his mother's side from a family of the greatest antiquity and deepest obscurity) which indicated taste. Then his mouth—but surely, of all futile occupations this of cataloguing features is the worst. One word is sufficient. But if one cannot find it? (71)

Or, to put this another way, as the narrator notes when an elderly woman furtively watches Jacob reading on a train: "Nobody sees any one as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole—they see all sorts of things—they see themselves" (29). As the setting of a railway carriage may suggest, this scene is like the one in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Just as the fragment in that essay captures "life itself," so too does seeing "all sorts of things" in *Jacob's Room* communicate the larger "whole." Ideally, this whole is classless in the dual sense of the narrator's description of the opera—that is, resisting classification due to how it flouts a class system inherent in the infrastructure itself. Such moments suggest the relative classlessness of the difficult "whole" that Woolf has in mind as stream of consciousness's overarching structure. The novel constitutes a picture of "life itself" through its multiple focalizing perspectives, including descriptions of and by characters who are female and queer and who come from a variety of class backgrounds.

From its nascence, Woolf seems to have intended that *Jacob's Room* would capture this barrier-less whole. In the famous diary entry where she records the flash of insight that begets the novel, Woolf stresses how the form of *Jacob's Room* was conceived whole-cloth. She describes on January 26, 1920 what she hopes will be the "looseness" and "lightness" of the form, famously writing that her "approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humour, everything as bright as fire in the mist." Less frequently noted is the connection between this "everything" and Woolf's assertions immediately prior in the same entry. Although the form of *Jacob's Room* is to be

structure-less, the purpose behind this form is the intuition of a larger whole. Woolf wonders about the new approach: "doesn't that get closer and yet keep form and speed, and enclose everything, everything?" The reason for eschewing a scaffold is so that "everything" can be enclosed more effectively. Here Woolf's desire to present "everything as bright as fire in the mist" recalls her metaphor of the "luminous halo" in "Modern Fiction." Moreover, as we will see below, this description also resonates with the "halo" with which William James describes stream of consciousness. In other words, despite stream-of-consciousness narration's fragmentation, lack of scaffold, or "uncircumscribed spirit," Woolf's method aims at providing a clearer view of "everything."

Party Going is composed against this understanding of stream-of-consciousness narration's politics—that is, against the salvific classlessness suggested here by *Jacob's Room* and above by the contemporaneous critic (Holtby). Indeed, in one description of the lower-class commuters, *Party Going* stages in miniature the social problem that liberalism ought to address. Initially, the commuters seem to respond with instinctual fellow-feeling to their growing sense of crisis. "At first," the narrator states, "there had been patient jokes and then some community singing" (496). However, this community breaks down when the commuters begin to lose patience with one another. Here *Party Going* suggests that an organic unity among the lower-classes on the platform is impossible. The novel thematically opposes the salvific view of class proffered by stream of consciousness:

> Again, being in it, how was it possible for them to view themselves as part of that vast assembly for even when they had tried singing they had only heard

> those next to them; it was impossible to tell if all had joined except when, perhaps at the end of a verse, one section made themselves heard as they were late and had not yet finished. Then everyone knew everyone was singing but this feeling did not last and soon they did not agree about songs, that section would be going on while another sang one of their own. Then no one sang at all. (496)

The desire that goes unfulfilled here is for organization. What the lower-classes require is a means for communicating with one another; what they need is an imposition of authority to organize them. The novel notes that the mere self-knowledge of this group as a group is insufficient, since this "feeling" wears off. Unlike in *Jacob's Room*, where an individual in a railway carriage looking at Jacob "see[s] a whole," in *Party Going* the individuals in the railway station, despite sensing the whole, cannot make sense of it. The crowd lacks a common ground for communicating; it cannot self-organize. Moreover, the commuters lack the dissenting outsider of liberalism who might provide organization for and communication among them. Left unstated is a condemnation of the Bright Young People. Surely, with their view from the hotel above, they could assist those on the platform.

Party Going characterizes this failure to organize as casting a pall over the novel's events. As a collective, the commuters are deathly. They are like a headstone, "ruins in the wet, places that is where life has been" (497). Here the novel represents something like the death of communication—indeed, of the very vibrancy that so charges Woolf. What is necessary for "life," *Party Going* suggests, is some sort of minimal organization. And this organization cannot arise organically from within,

since the fact of everyone speaking at once ultimately silences the entire community. The "whole" cannot be intuited based on a view of "all sorts of things." To extend this further, if representing "life" entails breaking down class barriers (according to Woolf), then it follows that Green's reversal of this breakdown might involve representations of deathliness. *Party Going*'s generation of the desire for a minimal pluralism, for a renewed feeling of structure and connection, might represent how existing barriers stifle their constituents, preventing the circulation of people and ideas.

Party Going's disaffection from the salvific class politics of such an aesthetic theory occurs in explicit relation to stream-of-consciousness narration itself. Below, I initially compare *Party Going*'s description of a literal stream to the description of a stream in *Jacob's Room*. With *Party Going*'s specific reference to this "stream," we see how Green's novel subverts stream of consciousness's syntactical "flow." I then show how the concept of a flowing perceptual "stream" relies on assumptions, coming from William James, about the nature of individual units of perception and their relationship to a larger field of experience. *Party Going*'s disaffection from stream of consciousness amounts to a challenge to this unit's very unity. Whereas a novel like *Jacob's Room* presents Jacob's unknowability as a series of fragments that implicitly coalesce into a larger "whole," *Party Going* presents a subversion of the very fragmentary nature of these fragments. Green's novel continues to remake what the reader had thought were definitive units. Just when the narrator suggests that a larger "whole" might be possible, *Party Going* rebuffs one's attempts to grasp the individual parts themselves. What is ultimately at stake in this method, I argue, is the

creation of an unruly "failure" to communicate that engenders a readerly desire for structure and order.

III. James's substantive unit

From the outset, Green's novel signals an interest in tweaking how the fragments of stream of consciousness resolve themselves into a "whole." In fact, in its description of a literal stream, *Party Going* appears to be referencing a similar description found in *Jacob's Room*. Early in *Party Going*, Julia walks to Victoria Station amid bustling rush hour traffic. As she recalls a dispute with Max, the object of her desire, Julia decides to leave the street and cut through Green Park—an appropriate choice, given the self-reflexive overtones of this passage. The narrator describes the park's erratic illumination by the headlights of passing vehicles while also comparing these lights to the fragmentary thoughts of stream-of-consciousness narration:

> These lights would come like thoughts in darkness, in a stream; a flash and then each was away. Looking round, and she was always glancing back, she would now and then see loving couples dimly two by two; in flashes their faces and anything white in their clothes picked up what light was at moments reflected down on them.
>
> What a fuss and trouble it had been, and how terrible it all was she thought of Max, and then it was a stretch of water she was going by and lights still curved overhead as drivers sounded horns and birds, deceived by darkness, woken by these lights, stirred in

their sleep, mesmerized in darkness. (389)

This passage, with its insertion of the first person into the third, appears to proceed via the standard indirect discourse of stream of consciousness narration. However, the second paragraph contains an odd hiccup. As Julia's thoughts drift to Max, she stumbles upon the park's water, with the "it" in "it was a stretch of water" taking an uncertain antecedent. An initial reading treats this third "it" like the previous two: "it" denotes an impression, how the "fuss and trouble" of "terrible" prior events inflect the Julia-Max interpersonal situation, the effect being a comparison of Julia's thoughts to water. However, the sense of the passage demands a second reading, since the third "it" in fact refers not to prior events but to Julia's stroll at present through the park. Rereading the third "it" rebuffs the reader from an expected entrance into Julia's thought. We are left with a simple statement of fact: "it was a stretch of water she was going by." Yet it is no coincidence that this confusion follows an odd reversal of vehicle and tenor in the prior paragraph, in which "light" and a "stream" move like "thoughts." Just as the third "it" expels us from Julia's consciousness, placing the reader next to the stream, so too does the first paragraph reverse our expectations by stipulating "thought" as the metaphorical convention.

This passage echoes one from *Jacob's Room*. In the same manner that Julia worries about whether or not Max will join the traveling party—and, if he does not, about his potential faithlessness—so too does *Jacob's Room* describe how Jacob witnesses the infidelity of his lover, Florinda. Jacob sees Florinda in the street with another man, and the novel subsequently describes a dark afternoon in a wooded area

lit solely by automobile headlights. As in the passage from *Party Going*, the scene from *Jacob's Room* opens by explicitly describing a stream:

> The stream crept along by the road unseen by any one. Sticks and leaves caught in the frozen grass. The sky was sullen grey and the trees of black iron. Uncompromising was the severity of the country. At four o'clock the snow was again falling. The day had gone out.
>
> A window tinged yellow about two feet across alone combated the white fields and the black trees….At six o'clock a man's figure carrying a lantern crossed the field….A raft of twig stayed upon a stone, suddenly detached itself, and floated towards the culvert….A load of snow slipped and fell from a fir branch….Later there was a mournful cry….A motor car came along the road shoving the dark before it….The dark shut down behind it…. (102)

In both scenes, the description is of an isolated and ambiguously ominous wood, and in both cases, the day has "gone out." Indeed, in *Party Going*, "gone out" takes multiple objects: after the cars' headlights momentarily illuminate the wood, they are "gone out beyond her," while Julia also suspects that Max has told his servant (Edwards) not to disclose his whereabouts, "leaving that man of his, Edwards, to say he had gone out" (389). Moreover, in both novels, it is unusually dark for the time of day. In *Jacob's Room* it is four o'clock, while in *Party Going* it is "so strange and dreadful to be walking here in darkness when it was only half-past four" (390). And just as *Party Going*'s light fails to fill the entire park, so too does the light in *Jacob's Room* "shov[e] the dark before it" while "The dark shut[s] down behind it…." Most important, of course, is the "stream." Whereas *Jacob's Room* describes a literal

stream via a metaphorical narrative stream, *Party Going* analogizes a literal stream *to* the metaphorical stream of Julia's thoughts.

Party Going's literalized metaphor recalls the original descriptions of stream of consciousness by William James. James's stream of consciousness names the hectic "world of pure experience," a fluid and flowing state of flux that humans order by selecting particular sensations on which to focus. For James, the world is a "stream" that humans come to know through their individual and partial interventions of "consciousness." In other words, "consciousness" is what orders the stream of experience. Humans intervene in the world by perceptually managing parts of its chaos rather than, for example, perceiving an entire world that we subsequently represent to ourselves (empiricism, or what James calls "rationalism") or solipsistically creating the world itself from our own perceptions (what is known as idealism). Against these two competing theories of perception—that either we know the world itself through empirical data (rationalism) or the world is coterminous with one's own mind (idealism)—James offers a theory of "pragmatism." He wants to know how we engage with the world meaningfully rather than whether or not the world is ontologically objective. Since human perception *is* its own functionality, he names his theory pragmatism. Human perception is a process applied to the world rather than a representation of the world. "[F]*or rationalism*," James writes, "*reality is ready-made and compete from all eternity, while for pragmatism it is still in the making, and awaits part of its completion from the future*" (*Pragmatism* 113). Unlike the rationalist model of perception, James's stream of consciousness posits a mutually constituting give-and-take between humans and the world.

Party Going discloses a fundamental tension at the heart of James's stream of consciousness: it seems impossible that, as described, the perceptual part and the larger "whole" of the world can coexist. If the world of pure experience is a riot of constant change, how does human perception, as a force for managing this otherwise overwhelming experience, recognize the formal object itself? What gives perception its boundaries? James makes a tacit assertion about the formal quality of perception: one simply knows or intuits how to recognize certain *kinds* of things. In this way, stream of consciousness evinces something like a radical empiricism. It assumes that perception abides by an "inner continuity pulverized into units of sameness, each counted and accounted for" (Barnard 47). The fact that perception has a "unit" is problematic for James's assertion that pure experience is overwhelming. The stream in James's stream of consciousness is less immersive if the perceiver can gain enough distance from pure experience to assess what is a unit.

This is the very problem that Toynbee described above with regard to history: the "stream" of history is inescapably self-perpetuating unless one stipulates from the outset some sort of formal perspectival distance. Like James, Toynbee describes a perception of chaos that seems to request management by an individual perceiver. Toynbee's perceiver, however, fails to order the stream, and this results in a feeling of passivity. Moreover, Toynbee's perceiver feeds this failure back into itself, so that the feeling of passivity leads to a projection of further passivity. For Toynbee, the perceiver "convinced" of future failure asserts control over the stream by acknowledging the inevitability of "our precipice," thus ensuring the very failure that one's control is attempting to ameliorate. In Toynbee's description, the perceiver

experiences a fundamental disconnect between the individual event and the flow of history more broadly. The management of both streams—that is, of James's world of pure experience and of Toynbee's historical aimlessness—depends fundamentally on whether one asserts the possibility of recognizing the particular (perceptual, historical) unit from the outset.

Party Going similarly questions the ability of stream-of-consciousness narration to figure a relationship between the individual and culture. We might say that the problem identified by Toynbee is the problem to which *Party Going*'s disaffection also addresses itself—namely, the application of a philosophy of modernism to its formal apparatus. Just as Toynbee describes how passivity begets further passivity, so too (Green suggests) does modernism's reapplication of antifoundational form to itself only yield the same unsatisfactory antifoundationalism. Modernism's use of the fragment, or its reliance on a readerly intuition of aesthetic integrity, is one such "stream." For Toynbee and Green, the "stream" does not order itself organically, and the "whole" does not arise of its own induction. *Party Going*'s solution is to subvert this stream of consciousness from within, appealing to the conventions of a reading practice that it does not fulfill. It creates the expectation of modernist aesthetic integrity on which it then purposefully fails to follow through. By kindling this desire for aesthetic integrity, *Party Going* implicitly suggests the importance of a minimally-pluralist external order or, to borrow James's language, of rationalism. Indeed, in the word "rationalism" we see the correspondence between perceptual empiricism and liberalism—a shared investment in rationality—that so troubles Woolf and other modernist authors.

We might see the implicitly rationalist aspect of *Party Going* as a referendum on the frequent statements made by the narrator of *Jacob's Room* about the unknowability of others' minds. For Woolf, this unknowability is part of the fragmentary aspect of representing Jacob. The narrator frequently describes Jacob as "unconscious" or, once, "extraordinarily vacant" (31). "Whether we know what was in his mind," the narrator of *Jacob's Room* asserts, "is another question"—a question that the narrator fails to answer (98). *Party Going* seems to parody this aspect of Woolf's novel. "I don't know," Julia states, "don't you be too sure. What do we know about anyone?" (434). Similarly, the narrator of *Party Going* states, "In this way also he showed again how impossible it is to tell what others are thinking or what, in ordinary life, brings people to do what they are doing" (466). In *Party Going*, as in *Jacob's Room*, the unknowability of others' minds stands in thematically for the aesthetic fragment.

However, whereas Woolf's novel suggests that fragments produce a "whole," *Party Going* cites and subverts how stream of consciousness narration "leaps" from object to fragmentary object. It invites the reader to perceive objects that correlate to interior states before syntactically reversing this effect. What remains is a curious and frustrating inability to compile an aesthetic "whole" from the novel's fragments due to the fact that the fragments themselves—that is, the analogs for the Jamesian unit—are dissolved. For example, after a detailed explanation about the motivations of Amabel's various interactions with members of the group, Green launches into a lengthy denarration of these motives:

> At the same time no one can be sure they know what others are thinking any more than anyone can say where someone is when they are asleep. And if behind that blank face and closed eyelids and a faint smile on closed lips they are wandering it may be in Tartary, it is their stillness which makes it all possible to one's wildest dreams.
>
> In her silence and in seeming unapproachable, although he realized it might be studied, and Alex admired her so much he was almost jealous of her, it seemed to him she was not unlike ground so high, so remote it had never been broken and that her outward beauty lay in that if any man had marked her with intimacy as one treads on snow, then that trace which would be left could not fail to invest him, whoever he might be, with some part of those unvulgar heights so covered, not so much of that last field of snow before any summit as of a high memory unvisited, and kept.
>
> He realized she always worked on him by being there and this woke him to how
>
> embarrassed they all were except for Angela and Amabel. (463)

In the first paragraph, the looseness of Green's shuttling between singular ("one," "anyone") and plural ("they," "their") obscures the fact of precisely who is dreaming. Most likely, an observer tries to ascertain the dreamt location of a sleeper, yet it is also possible—given the confused antecedents of "their stillness" and "one's wildest dreams"—that a sleeper is uncertain of his or her own location (presumably because the sleeper resides in the dream location). Still, with this uncertainty in mind, we can posit that the former is more likely and that the first paragraph describes the existence

of some sort of dream-transference in which a sleeper's lack of outward behavior ("stillness") causes an observer to dream as well. Alex admires Amabel in just this way in the second paragraph. Green initiates an analogy between Amabel and a snowy mountain: she is "silent" and "unapproachable," so that if any man should impress her, that man would be marked by the residue of her unmarked-ness. The readerly confusion of this moment is similar to that of when Julia first walks through Green Park as *Party Going* reverses vehicle and tenor in the metaphor comparing the "stream" to both "light" and "thought." Here, in marking Amabel, the man is the one who is marked, and whereas he is marked by the fact of his marking, she remains ambiguously unmarked, lofty and "unvulgar." Compounding this circularity is the fact that what marks Amabel's loftiness is not fresh snow but an "unvisited" memory "kept" apart from perception. That is, Amabel is not even like an untrodden mountain that marks its traveler—rather, the mountain is an unreachable memory. In other words, Green establishes Amabel's interiority as unapproachable and then, in unraveling his own analogy, performs this unapproachability. And so, Alex, having been formally rebuffed (or perhaps rebuffing himself, since the inability to differentiate between these is the very point of the passage) wakes in the third paragraph. He is the one who has been lost in a reverie, metaphorically asleep. The transition from the first to the second paragraph led us to believe that Alex was observing, but his waking in the third paragraph reverses the sense of the prior two. The novel returns the reader to the beginning of the scene, performing an impenetrable interiority. Unlike in *Jacob's Room*, where the narrator explicitly notes Jacob's unconsciousness, here the unit of perception has itself be dissolved. *Party*

Going initiates indirect discourse only to make its object disappear, enveloping it in concentric paradoxes of who is "marked" and who is asleep—that is, who focalizes the description in the first place. The paragraphs appear to invite the reader to compose an aesthetic whole, but the novel does not move from one object to another. Rather, *Party Going* actively disengages at the sentence-level such that each "part" or unit is undermined by a subsequent part, leaving a glaze of impermeability across the entire passage.

This passage and other similar ones in *Party Going* fail to "flow" in the way that one expects from stream of consciousness, thereby subverting that mode of narration. In his definitions of stream of consciousness, James uses a number of different examples to explain this flowing interplay of figure (or "unit") and ground (or raw experience), and when *Party Going* subverts stream-of-consciousness narration, it often refers to one of James's similes. As we have seen, for literary modernism in general, "light" is a favorite image for characterizing shifts of consciousness. The "luminous halo" of Woolf's "Modern Fiction" finds its precedent in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where the narrator famously describes Marlow's narrative style as "in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine" (6). Such terms come right out of James's *Principles of Psychology*: the transitive aspects of thought are "psychic overtones, halos, suffusions, or fringes," "the overtone, halo, or fringe," and "the halo of felt relations" (269, 281, 256). Sometimes, James says, the mind is like a sculptor who crafts a statue out of marble: everyone receives the same raw block of sensations, but each mind finds within this marble a different form

(*Principles* 288). Or the mind is like the viewer of a kaleidoscope that turns at a uniform pace: while the entire field of colors and shapes steadily rearrange themselves, each viewer focuses on the particular movement of individual items (*Principles* 246). Or the mind is like a bird, whose "alternation of flights and perchings" represents our inattention and attention—what James labels the "transitive" and "substantive" parts of mind respectively (*Principles* 243). "As our mental fields succeed one another," he writes, "each has its centre of interest, around which the objects of which we are less and less attentively conscious fade to a margin so faint that its limits are unassignable" (*Varieties* 226). While the mind contains "substantive" vessels of attention, it also contains a "transitive" flow of inattention that might, at any time, be sculpted, centered, perched, or otherwise gathered into an object of attention. This is happening constantly, as the "flow" of the stream of consciousness implies, so that what had been an object of attention begins to fade again to the margin of inattention. *Party Going* invites and rebuffs our focus on such "substantive" objects. It stymies itself when—as with the "unvisited" and "kept" Amabel or, on a smaller scale, the third "it" referring to Julia's Green Park stroll—its narrative technique appears to take an object it subsequently and retroactively erases.

Each of the examples from *Party Going* in the following section generates a desire for aesthetic integrity that the passage fails to fulfill. During these moments, the novel creates an unordered moment like that of Toynbee's stream and thus, I argue, gestures toward the importance of a liberal rational basis for communication or—we might say—the necessity of a kind of minimal pluralism. As with Amabel's "unvisited" and "kept" quality above, the reader reels as the substantive unit of

perception dissolves. What remains is the sensuous, the unconscious, and the irrational. What remains, in other words, are the very qualities whose disorder a renewed liberalism would solve.

IV. *Party Going*'s disaffection

Nowhere is the sensuousness of *Party Going*'s resistance to the substantive "unit" of perception more apparent than when it describes Amabel as she emerges from her bath. The novel meticulously records the different attentions that Amabel shows to each part of her body as she dries off, and it appears to invite the reader into a studied voyeurism. However, this description also undermines its own conclusion, ultimately suggesting that the substantive object is misleading. As with *Party Going*'s generation of the unconscious and irrational below, here the novel dissolves the boundaries of the perceptual unit or fragment that would otherwise implicitly constitute stream-of-consciousness narration's aesthetic "whole."

Amabel begins as a "faint pink mass," the mirrored walls of the bathroom having steamed up, yet as the steam dissipates we come to see more of her (479). *Party Going* carefully and specifically composes her out of transitive obliqueness, itemizing her individual parts. She removes color from these successively, "polishing her shoulders now and her neck was paling from red into pink and then suddenly it would go white" and paying individual attention to her stomach ("wiped unsmiling upwards to make it thin"), breasts ("wiped them with as much care as she would puppies after she has given them their bath"), and legs ("to dry her legs she hissed like grooms do") (480). This passage is one that John Updike singles out as indicative

of Green's sensuality, a moment transcendent and imbued with meaning, as if we are privy to "a divine event, which we, unlike Acteon, may witness without being torn to pieces" (13). Having pieced Amabel together, *Party Going* suggests that we are seduced—as Updike certainly was—into thinking that we know her. We feel that Amabel is comfortably objectified as equal parts polishable stone, malleable putty, amiable puppy, and tamable horse. The scene concludes by referring to this very expectation: "She stood out as though so much health, such abundance and happiness should have never clothes to hide it. Indeed she looked as though she were alone in the world she was so good, and so good that she looked mild, which she was not" (480). Here the novel acknowledges that the reader has been seduced into believing that clarity is virtuous. From her cloud of steam Amabel seems progressively more knowable until, finally, she is standing out "alone in the world" as though perfectly self-evident. However, the novel's re-membering is in fact misleading, since seeing Amabel as if whole creates a false effect that emphasizes what "she was not." The vision that Updike so values—that is, the increasing clarity of seeing Amabel whiten piece by piece—actually obfuscates and obscures. Instead we are abandoned amid Amabel's transitive sensuousness. Moreover, the novel seems aware of this description's disaffection from the Jamesian substantive unit of stream of consciousness. Insofar as the narrator describes Amabel "polishing" herself and "mov[ing] her toes as if she was moulding something," *Party Going*'s invitation to construct her is like James's sculptor who begins with raw matter and forms it into a figure.

Just so, when Max remembers Amabel shortly thereafter, *Party Going* performs a dissolution of the "part" that would otherwise, in stream-of-consciousness narration, constitute the "whole." In his memory, Max's perception of Amabel is a reticence to differentiate figure from ground. As when *Party Going* rebuffs knowledge of the "unvisited" Amabel, here Max thinks of her as an indiscrete or raw perceptual ground. And just as with Alex in the face of the "kept" Amabel, here too are Max's thoughts shut down. He enters the hotel room and, lost in thought, reflects upon Amabel—only, unlike the bathroom mirrors, he does so without piecing her into an object:

> Max came back to be with them, unseeing. Now that he had heard Amabel and that he knew she was in her bath undressed, it seemed to him that when they had been together she had warmed him every side. When he opened his eyes close beside her in the flat she had blotted out the light, only where her eye would be he could see dazzle, all the rest of her mountain face had been that dark acreage against him. He had lain in the shadow of it under softly beaten wings of her breathing, and his thoughts, hatching up out of sleep, had bundled back into the other darkness of her plumes. So being entirely delivered over he had lain still, he remembered, because he had been told by that dazzle her eyelids were not down so that she lay still awake.
>
> He wanted her. (482)

Unlike the narrator gazing at Amabel in the prior sense, Max is "unseeing." Accordingly, his memory of Amabel is that she possesses neither boundaries nor facets; she is instead immersive, "warm[ing] him every side." So, too, when Max

looks at her, he does not see a face or an eye but an effect—a "dazzle" in the place "where her eye would be." This opacity consumes Max's thoughts: the "darkness of her plumes" envelops his attention to detail in the manner that the steam thwarts the scopophilic narrator in the prior scene. That is, unlike when Amabel dries off, Max here is "delivered over" to the indistinctness of ground, focusing on no object in particular. His realization at the paragraph's end (that Amabel's eyes are open) originates in an acknowledgment that the effect of "dazzle" denotes a substantive object (her eye). With a shock of desire, Max is returned to objectification. Here *Party Going* performs Max's perception of Amabel as a kind of effect ("dazzle") without cause in a particular object or as a kind of transitory indistinctness. Moreover, in another possible reference to William James, Max's thought is like a bird alighting. The "softly beaten wings" of Amabel's breath become the bird of Max's thoughts, "hatching" in his mind. Yet *Party Going* steers this sentence in an unnerving direction. The metaphor goes up in smoke when the wings of Amabel's breath become the indistinct "darkness of her plumes"—a reference, it seems, to the "dark acreage" of Amabel in the sentence prior. The passage thus creates a kind of palimpsest. The sentence invites a reading that it fails to provide, with the avian metaphor literally becoming the "darkness of her plumes" but also anticipating a misreading of "plumes" as "plumage." This is *Party Going*'s disaffective technique; the novel leaves its reader with the ghost of expectation. This passage's performance of Amabel's indistinctness swims against stream of consciousness's substantive "unit" that inductively gestures toward a work's aesthetic integrity.

The novel generates a similar readerly desire for order with its treatment of the unconscious. As with "plumes" and "plumage" above, the unit of conscious perception erodes such that it is only vaguely suggestive, begging for rational structure. In the following example, *Party Going* dissolves a situation's boundaries by using words to describe this situation that are similar to those that had previously been used to describe a character's memory. The effect is of déjà vu: the situation feels like a memory actualized, but only in part. As with the description of Amabel "unvisited" and "kept," the novel seems to move the reader in reverse, referring us back a handful of paragraphs prior. The scene consists of two moments: in the first, Alex is lost in thought, and in the second, Amabel begins to paint her nails. Left alone with Angela, Julia, and Amabel, Alex begins to ponder the interpersonal dynamics by which these ladies compete for the attention of Max. He thinks to himself that women are "like camels, they could go on for days without one sup of encouragement. Under their humps they had tanks of self-confidence so that they could cross any desert area of arid prickly pear without one compliment, or dewdrop as they called it in his family, to uphold them" (494). Shortly thereafter, Amabel, bored, decides to paint her nails: "Already the acetone she had filled this room with its smell of peardrops like a terrible desert blossom. He coughed, it stifled him" (495). The sentence describing Amabel painting her nails requires multiple readings. Initially, it reads like a kind of portmanteau sentence: the words "had filled" parse as if in the perfect tense, so that when we arrives at "its," the sentence seems to take a second subject ("its smell") and the subsequent clause dangles verbless ("its smell of peardrops like a terrible desert blossom"). The latter becomes a strange cluster of adjectives and nouns insisting only

on the mere fact of its existence; the phrase "she had filled this room with" appears to initiate an objective infinitive that never arrives. The sentence thus refers us back to its beginning. Upon a second reading, we can see that "had" and "filled" are not in the perfect tense but are distinct from each other, so that the subject of the entire sentence is the phrase "the acetone she had." We are initially led down a syntactical cul-de-sac that can only be exited with a second reading. Just as jarring is how the sentence's word choice repurposes Alex's memory. As we saw in the first sentence above, Alex's family calls compliments "dewdrops." *Party Going* subsequently combines "dewdrops" with the desert's "arid prickly pear" to create the compound "peardrops," an internal juxtaposition of dry and wet that is "like a terrible desert blossom." The near-repeated words enact an uncanny familiarity, an object vaguely reminiscent of something prior. Together, all of this ought to characterize the scent of acetone. Is it chemical? Is it organic? It is peardrop, a real-remembered wet-dry smell that calls attention to itself through syntactical obscurity. While less obviously Jamesian, we might nevertheless think of "peardrops" as somewhat kaleidoscopic, a kind of succession of self-subverting substantive units.

Like Alex's cough stifled by Amabel's nail polish, the novel shortly thereafter describes the London fog as a series of coils or curls that "caught their throats" and "tore at your lungs" (495). *Party Going* occasionally marks such hauntings as explicitly unconscious. One character (Robert) becomes unnerved by the realization that, when the party sends him out to find Max, he runs into Julia's servant (the aptly-named Miss Fellowes), and Robert begins subsequently to think that he has been looking for her the entire time. "But that's just it, Robert," his wife, Evelyn, says,

"you had cause to think of her because you had probably seen her unconsciously as you came in, though you did not realize it at the time, and that is what made you ask after her" (422). *Party Going* refers its reader back to earlier moments just as Robert is referred; both are unsettled by the sudden hunch that this image or series of words is familiar. But there is no object on which to focus; there are only abstractions—pear, fog, drop, desert—that in the disguise of their repetition make one grasp after something that, like Robert, "you had no reason to think of" (422).

We might finally characterize the novel's plotting in general as the staging of irrationality. *Party Going* summons its reader to supply the rational connections in the chain of its events' causal cascade, yet the novel ultimately works to subvert such an operation. Just as the novel above invites Amabel's knowability by chronicling her individual parts or encourages its reader to pursue a prior order that never actually existed, so too does *Party Going*'s narrative voice work to undermine a feeling of authorial control that it had previously forwarded. At the conclusion to the first portion of the novel, all of the characters have been introduced and the narrator has begun to describe their multiple purposes: Evelyn has found Claire next to Julia's luggage and sent out Robert to find Max; Max is en route to the station believing that he has successfully deceived Amabel into thinking that he is headed to the airport; Alex, having shown up at Max's flat only to realize that Max has already departed, is exhorting his taxi to hurry to the station; Julia is strolling through Green Park. At this moment, *Party Going* authoritatively summarizes such bustle as if it unfolds inevitably into future events. The narrator's suggestion is that the individual characters are each part of a larger order. The reader suddenly feels in the control of a

fable, one told linearly and with an organic ending, as the novel lurches into the present tense:

> So now at last all of this party is in one place, and, even if they have not yet all of them come across each other, their baggage is collected in the Registration Hall. Where, earlier, hundreds had made their way to this station thousands were coming in now, it was the end of a day for them, the beginning of a time for our party. (402)

The present tense suggests a detached narrative perspective unbound by fog, and the word "yet" similarly implies foreknowledge of events to come—that is, the characters have not *yet* come across each other, but they will. Similarly, the scene in the station only represents "the beginning of a time." The characters are registered; they are "our party." In the following sentence, however, after a section break, *Party Going* belies the confidence of its voice by ruminating upon the same scene as a failure of authority. It works to undo the established rational tone, as the "thousands" pouring into the station become unknowable rather than registered. "Anyone who found herself alone with Julia could not help feeling they had been left in charge," the section begins. Just as nobody was in charge of communication among the "ruin[ed]" lower-classes above—"places that is where life has been"—so too here are the Bright Young People described as wandering about a disorganized cemetery.

> Again there was so much luggage round about in piles like an exaggerated grave yard, with the owners of it and their porters like mourners with the undertakers' men, and so much agitation on one hand with subdued respectful

> indifference on the other that this uneasiness had at last been passed on to Claire. Several other passengers were nearly in hysterics. (402)

Here, in the place of a commanding voice that assures "our" group's continuity, *Party Going* positions a chaos of multiple intensities, high-pitched "hysterics" simultaneous with low-grade "uneasiness." The baggage is not neatly registered but strewn "round about" in "exaggerated" and inexact "piles," and the "Again" that opens the first sentence after "left in charge" figures a weariness with disorder, like "mourners" in the face of futility, as if fighting death's inexorability. This frenzy suggests that the prior calm was but a fabrication of how pieces would come together to form a whole. As with its representation of Amabel emerging from the bath, the novel adopts the tone of a rational outsider who orders experience before reversing this, scattering the substantive objects that would otherwise constitute a whole.

It was not always thus. We can see the development of this disaffection—this tonal presentation of irrationality at the level of plot—in "Excursion," an early unpublished version of *Party Going* written in 1930 as a short sketch. Ostensibly, the two stories are quite similar: characters mill about a crowded train station, waiting for their sojourns to begin at the start of a holiday weekend. However, while *Party Going*'s chaos is unmanageable and menacing, the pre-travel frenzy of "Excursion" is a knowable brand of business-as-usual. Unlike in *Party Going*, characters in "Excursion" who misplace personal items readily find them—one woman who loses her ticket, it turns out, has simply packed it in the wrong pocket. Similarly, the travelers who happen to run into one another at the station all know each other already. Indeed, the characters in "Excursion" place a great emphasis on being

neighborly and judge one another for their "immoral" failings of neighborliness (*Surviving* 72). "Neighbours were neighbours and they had been invited," one traveler complains with self-pity. "They [the inviters] didn't behave Christian," she gripes (69). Here neighborliness stands in for the kind of tacit governance or order implemented by liberal rationality. Overall, the effect of "Excursion" is not a presentation of the breakdown of community but of a comfortable and even efficient frenzy.

The differences between representations of authority in *Party Going* and "Excursion" highlight how the former community—one that relies on an assumption of organic integrity—is chaotic, disordered, and failing. In *Party Going*, just before "all of this party is in one place," Alex arrives at the station and jumps out of his taxi hurriedly, neglecting to pay for it. "Now where's a bloody copper?" the driver exclaims, "hysterically angry" and "call[ing] out warnings to everyone near about Alex," moving his vehicle "nine feet forward to where he thought it would cause more obstruction" (402). Nobody pays attention. The driver pursues Alex on foot into the station's chaos. A similar disturbance occurs in "Excursion" but with remarkably different effect. Rather than attempting to create a disturbance that subsequently goes unnoticed, in "Excursion" the shrill alarm of "Thief" causes the crowd to coalesce. Unlike in *Party Going*, the crowd assumes its duty almost automatically. "Excursion" narrates the moment in the third-person plural:

> Then a cry. Shouting. Then murmur stopped which had been from crowd all over … the trolley man cried "Thief" and "Thief." On each side turned they all of them towards trolley and closed in towards it, straining circling white

> faces. At back they stood on benches, some jumped, all closed in round the trolley, pressing. Here and there cried they asking what it was and policeman who had been by Pendletons and had come past the barriers made way for himself through them to centre. Woman right in centre by trolley talked very high and fast. Station Master also was making way for himself through them and some porters in a bunch but crowd pressed thick, very silent. (70-71)

Here the crowd acts in unison. When they recognize a disturbance, everyone becomes silent and attentive. This in turn gives way to an assertion of authority by the police officer and the station master, which arises organically from the crowd. Here authority extends naturally from and originates spontaneously in the community. Just so, once the officer addresses the situation, the crowd, once again unthreatened, begins to break "slowly up into thick groups again" (71). In "Excursion," a focal point of communal attention and authority arises spontaneously because the characters understand their "part" within the communal "whole."

Party Going provides no such recourse to authority for clear-cut resolution. In the case of Alex neglecting to pay his taxi driver, the novel explicitly fails to provide insight about why the conflict is settled. When the taxi driver confronts Alex, the former is suddenly and inexplicably appeased: "His [Alex's] answer was to move with the taxi driver out of earshot, where they went on gesticulating, though it was obvious now that they were suddenly on the best of terms" (409). Here the narrator's "obvious" logical turn is anything but. How did the two hash out their differences? A porter asserts that he saw Alex fail to pay the driver, while Evelyn raises the question of whether current taxi prices are fair in the first place. Meanwhile, Alex appeals to

the fact that it would be illogical for him to bilk his driver without the opportunity of a getaway—given, in other words, that the trains are not running and the station is a dead-end. The conflict between Alex and the driver is thus settled without agreement as to even the grounds of disagreement (since Alex, Evelyn, and the porter all make different logical appeals). Against all odds, and without any rational common ground on which to discuss their problem, Alex and the driver resolve their dispute. These differences between "Excursion" and *Party Going* are yet one more example of how the novel generates a desire for rational order that it fails to fulfill. At the level of plot, the novel's disaffection from stream of consciousness's organic "whole" is in full force as it only feigns allegiance to rationality.

V. Jacobs' rooms

This instantiation of irrationality (and *Party Going*'s disaffection more broadly) is designed, I argue, to recreate the feeling and problem of Toynbee's historical stream. Despite kindling an unfulfilled desire for aesthetic order, *Party Going* does not posit that its Bright Young People have the answers. Rather, the argument that arises from the novel's disaffection is couched negatively—that is, the reader of stream-of-consciousness narration is politically ineffectual, deluding him- or herself into thinking that he or she has gained insight to the "whole" of society. But does *Party Going*'s disaffection posit any specific solution? Unlike how, in Chapter Two, Woolf's disaffection in *Between the Acts* presents itself as a kind of positive solution that "breaks through" the problem of fascistic form, *Party Going* is less optimistic and progressive. For Green, the upper-classes are no more capable of

providing order than the commuters below. Indeed, *Party Going* suggests, the Bright Young People are just as lifeless as the unsinging masses waiting on the platforms "like ruins in the wet, places that is where life has been" (497). The upper-class men and women waiting in the hotel are similarly inert. In their conformity, they are no more capable of the rational outsider's fertile dissent than the lower-classes:

> If people then who see much of each other come to do their rooms up the same, all one can say is they are like household servants in a prince's service, all in his livery. But in the same way that some footmen will prefer to wear livery because there can then be no question of their having to provide clothes so, by going to the same decorator, these people avoided any sort of trouble over what might bother them, such as doing up their rooms themselves, and by so doing they proclaimed their service to the kind of way they lived or rather to the kind of way they passed the time. (457)

Here the repetition of "livery" culminates in a damning description of the way the Bright Young People "lived": both livery and life are a uniform that one wears, whether to work or to "pass the time." Although literally and figuratively above the commuters amassing below, the upper-class are likewise lifeless. They are wracked with conformity, decorating their offices in precisely the same manner as one another. *Party Going* is explicit that this conformity is not any hard-earned collective authenticity. On the contrary, these characters are shallow. The depth of character that Green desires is nowhere to be found: "What few books there were [in their offices] bore the same titles and these were dummies…they were only bindings" (457). The offices similarly contain armchairs "covered with thick *fake* Spanish brocade"

alongside a matching "*fake* Spanish table with ironwork, silver ashtrays, everything heavy and thick, all of it *fake*" (397-398, emphasis mine). Such conformity of inauthenticity is symptomatic of the generation, according to *Party Going*, since apart from this particular group, there are "in London at this time more than one hundred rooms identical with these" (457). Thus, not only are these characters *not* a collection of Jacobs awaiting the sympathetic assembly of a reader who intuits an organic social whole, but their rooms are not even like Jacob's room. To the contrary, their rooms bespeak their lifelessness and lack of depth. *Party Going* wants no part of Woolf's description of Jacob and his cohort as book-like. "Each had his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart," the narrator of *Jacob's Room* explains, "and his friends could only read the title, James Spalding, or Charles Budgeon, and the passengers going the opposite way could read nothing at all" (65). *Jacob's Room* has mixed feelings about Jacob himself: the patriarchy that offers him inherent advantages and allows him to remain insensitive or unfeeling is also the same system that sends him to war. After his death, only the room remains; Jacob's room is a symbol of how readers might begin to piece together this character in all his complexity. On the other hand, *Party Going* refuses to admit the meaningfulness of the rooms of so many Jacobs. The rooms of the Bright Young People represent not a possible avenue for making *Party Going*'s characters whole but rather a lack of cultural depth. Their offices represent the failure of a minimal shared common ground from which collective action might be possible. In this way, we can see that Green's novel possesses neither an apology for its Bright Young People nor a reductive sympathy for the middle- and lower-classes. Instead, *Party Going* constitutes an

argument in the negative against the implicit salvific politics of modernist stream-of-consciousness narration.

Although *Party Going* never represents the afterlives of its deathly characters, the novel's own afterlife is worth pursuing. Green's argument seems to have struck a nerve with Evelyn Waugh, who responds in *Put Out More Flags* (1942) with an Amabel-like bathing scene of his own. If Green won't come to a conclusion, Waugh will—*Put Out More Flags* rejects the fecklessness of *Party Going*'s disaffection. For Waugh, Green's negative argument leads only to declinism. His stand-in for Amabel is the equally wealthy Angela Lyne. Like Amabel, Angela employs the trendiest interior designers, but unlike Green's characters in the hotel, this fact speaks only to her trendiness (rather than to her vacuity). "The decorators had been at work there while she was in France," Waugh's narrator explains, "the style was what passes for Empire in the fashionable world. Next year, had there been no war, she would have had it done over again during August" (148). Angela's social status is also similar to Amabel's. She is a kind of tabloid celebrity, a Bright Young Person providing fodder for the gossip columns. Like Amabel, Angela must present a specific image for public consumption, since "girls in the party noticed Angela's earrings; they noticed everything about her clothes; she was the best-dressed woman there, as she usually was wherever she went" (150). Most tellingly, like Amabel in *Party Going*, Angela draws herself a bath. But here is none of the sensuality of Amabel's toweling off. Instead, Angela Lyne foresees her own death. "Steam from the bath formed in a mist, and later in great beads of water, on the side of the glass," the novel states in an echo of *Party Going*:

> She noticed in the last intense scrutiny before her mirrors that her mouth was beginning to droop a little at the corners. It was not the disappointed pout that she knew in so many of her friends; it was as the droop you sometimes saw in death masks…which told those waiting round the bed that the will to live was gone. (149-150).

Here Angela can hardly face herself. Whereas Green's Amabel takes pleasure in piecing herself together, Angela is falling apart. Waugh translates the mock-jollity of Green's Bright Young People into an alcoholic depression. The stress of impending war is taking its toll on Angela. She secludes herself in her bedroom, exclaiming to no one in particular: "'Maginot Line—Angela Lyne—both lines of least resistance,' and laughed at her joke until the tears came and suddenly she found herself weeping in earnest" (191-192).

Waugh's wartime rebuttal speaks to the delicacy of *Party Going*'s disaffective "failure" to arrive at a resolution. For all of its linguistic complexity, *Party Going* can look like feeble weeping. And Green himself perhaps comes to agree. After World War II, he degenerates into alcoholism, penning his final novel in the early 1950s. In *Doting* (1952), a character pessimistically concludes that knowing what will not work does not also therefore yield a positive solution. The fact that "at the time everything has always seemed awful" provides no consolation or impetus to seize the day (15). Rather, this woman simply orders another round of drinks. Although Waugh's satire perverts disaffection into apathetic self-pity—and despite the extent to which Green's biography might appear to validate this judgment—*Party Going* nevertheless stands as a complex response of the 1930s to the previous decades of literary

experimentation. As we shall see in the next chapter, like Henry Green, Virginia Woolf has her own disaffective response to the aesthetic theories of her early- and midcareer. In response to fascist politics on the eve of World War II, *Between the Acts* engineers its own aesthetics of "failure."

Chapter 2
Virginia Woolf's Late Aesthetics of "Failure"

"Failure" is how Virginia Woolf characterizes *The Years* (1937) immediately subsequent to its publication; her fictional playwright in *Between the Acts* (1941), Miss La Trobe, describes the pageant-play around which that novel revolves with the same word. Woolf writes privately and (relatively) publically about her disappointment with *The Years*: three weeks after its publication, she acknowledges in a letter to Stephen Spender that "Of course I completely failed," and one week before the novel is scheduled to be published, she similarly jots in her diary, "I myself know why its [sic] a failure, & that its failure is deliberate" (L 6.116, D 5.65). Her choice of the word "deliberate" here is instructive, suggesting not the intention to fail but a failure of intent. As a transferred epithet, it implies that what is "deliberate" is not the fact of *The Years*' failure but, rather, the very method of the novel's composition.[20] While she seeks an anti-didactic technique that will reflect the novel's antifascist content, communicating this method to the reader is impossible without reproducing the very didacticism that the novel deplores. "Deliberate" thus characterizes *The Years* as careful—too careful—a method become overly coy.[21] On

[20] Victoria Middleton argues that "deliberate" modifies "failure" as a description of *The Years*' technique—that is, the novel fails on purpose. According to her, this manifests itself in the deliberately chaotic repetition of choice images and phrases as well as in the parodic overuse of adverbs to modify dialogue (163, 167). However, as I explain below, it makes less sense to resuscitate the novel on these grounds—as a "self-aware" failure rather than an unironic one—than it does to restore it to the original conditions of its composition. In other words, because Woolf's intended vision was generic pastiche in the service of political aims, "deliberate" does not describe the authorial intent for *The Years* to succeed at failing but rather why the novel fails in this endeavor. Neither Woolf's diary nor the novel itself, I believe, substantiates the claim that *The Years* is a good bad novel.

[21] *The Years*' "failure" did not hinder its popularity or Woolf's, particularly in the United States, where it was her best-selling to date. Compared to her previous novel, *The Waves*, which sold 10,117 copies in England and 10,380 copies in the U.S., *The Years* sold 13,005 in England and a whopping 30,904 copies in the U.S. (144). Leonard Woolf gives a complete account of the Woolfs' finances and

the other hand, Woolf's subsequent and final novel, *Between the Acts*, seems to sublimate this failure of deliberation. The subtlety of the political content in Miss La Trobe's pageant—a history of England up to and including the "Present Day"—fails to reach its audience when a village rector interferes, but the novel also translates Miss La Trobe's "failure" through its self-reflexive conclusion. The novel's final sentences portend a future conversation between a married couple, Isa and Giles, two characters in the novel: "Then the curtain rose. They spoke" (149). Here *Between the Acts* raises a literal curtain on its reader; the novel seems to insist on comparing itself to Miss La Trobe's prior pageant. Are we, as the reader-cum-audience member, clueless and confused like Miss La Trobe's audience? Are we missing what *Between the Acts* wants to say, or to the contrary, are we confident that we understand the lesson of a novel that so overtly signals the presence of meaning?

In this chapter, I argue that Woolf positions these two questions as fundamentally related. In the wake of *The Years*' failure, *Between the Acts* literalizes the relationship between form and meaning as an aesthetics of "failure." By raising the curtain on the reader, the novel thematically suggests its own failure by conflating Miss La Trobe with the author of *Between the Acts*. This suggestion is self-defeating, however, since a reader who can understand the novel's desire to fail attests to the fact that the novel has actually succeeded. This contradiction is why "failure" is in scare-quotes. The novel's aesthetics of "failure" foregrounds the conventions by which failure *would* occur, and in this sense *Between the Acts* is a novel of disaffection. It "fails," I argue, in order to critique what Peter Nicholls has defined as

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Virginia's book sales on pages 141 through 148 of his autobiography. And although good sales don't amount to a good art or a good life, Leonard notes that "life is easier on £3,000 a year than it is on £1,000" (145). *The Years* changed the material circumstances of their life together.

modernism's "masterful" relationship between author and reader.[22] This chapter traces the evolution of *Between the Acts*' disaffection from *The Years*' failed attempt at an antifascist aesthetic. Scholarship has argued that *Between the Acts* is an extension of Woolf's late-career antifascism, but the novel's disaffection suggests the novel is less straightforwardly antifascist.[23] Rather, I argue, *Between the Acts* demonstrates a more complex relationship between politics and aesthetics. Like the other works of disaffection in this dissertation, Woolf's final novel exhibits an aesthetic ambivalence necessary to the reframing of a political problem. In other words, it recasts a political problem as a question of appropriate form. For Woolf, modernism's "mastery" of its reader—that is, its reliance on readerly "recognition"—makes it an untenable option for representing her antifascist agenda. At the same time, Woolf cannot create an alternative set of aesthetic conventions that would help her escape this bind. *Between the Acts* thus disaffects from modernism. Its self-reflexive conclusion appeals to the reader who would be inclined "naturalize" the novel or justify the ontological consistency of its narrator—that is, a reader who would be inclined to submit to authorial mastery—while it also frustrates that reader's ability to do so successfully. Through the character of Miss La Trobe, I argue, the reader escapes this bind and comes to understand *Between the Acts*' aesthetics of "failure."

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[22] Specifically, Nicholls argues that Baudelaire, as a founding exemplar of modernism, employs irony as a "masterful style" that asserts his "superiority" over the Red-haired Beggar Girl, establishing a tacit frame between author and subject matter (3).

[23] Scholarship disagrees about *Between the Acts*' relationship to fascism: the novel either embraces the fragment as antifascist aesthetic (see Froula, Joplin, Pridmore-Brown, Rosenfeld, and Sears) or presents a more conservative, pragmatic anti-utopianism (see Esty, MacKay, and Whittier-Ferguson). Recent interpretations of "nature" in the novel—of Woolf's absorption of the natural sciences (Alt) or her campy parody of Darwin's state of nature (See)—do not contextualize *Between the Acts*' world as informed by Woolf's anxiety over the connection between fascism and modernist aesthetics.

Miss La Trobe is also the conduit for understanding the political upshot of this disaffective technique: a critique of speciesism. In the second half of this chapter, I show how *Between the Acts* implies that Miss La Trobe's aesthetic perception is fruitful due to how it employs an epistemology that does not require "recognition." I argue that Woolf's novel uncovers an epistemic fascism inherent in the concept of recognition itself, which the novel characterizes as important both to modernist aesthetics and to a definition of being human. This mode is of a piece Woolf's argument in *Three Guineas* (1938), her feminist, anti-war polemic: the problem of political fascism is a question of formal inclusion. In *Three Guineas*, addressing fascism first requires including women within society; patriarchy is fascism internalized. In *Between the Acts*, Miss La Trobe represents the possibility of extending this argument even further. When *Between the Acts*' conclusion raises its literal curtain, the novel asks us to recognize ourselves as modernist readers whose "recognition" the novel characterizes as distinctly human. This conclusion creates an epistemic house of mirrors, staging a moment in which we recognize ourselves recognizing. In this manner, *Between the Acts*' disaffection engineers "failure" in an attempt to push beyond it, arriving at something like the anti-didactic form that Woolf so desired for *The Years*. In other words, *Between the Acts* extends the argument of *Three Guineas* to speciesism, broadening Woolf's previous assertions about fascism's reach.

I first show how Woolf struggles with transmitting antifascist feeling during the composition process of *The Years*. Like many midcentury authors—in particular, the so-called Auden generation that I discuss in the Introduction—Woolf desired a

form that would instruct without being didactic. *The Years*' failure, I argue, arises from Woolf's perceived inability to build this anti-didactic lesson into the novel's concluding section; *The Years*' failure is a problem of the relationship between politics and aesthetics. Woolf concludes the novel with a series of choruses that obliquely signal their instructive method as they attempt to draw the reader into singing along with them. Although these choruses fail, they provide Woolf the opportunity to rethink both style and message. In the second half of this chapter, I show how *Between the Acts*' disaffection evolves from *The Years*' choric form. Woolf's final novel, I argue, appeals to and frustrates our recognition of tonal distance that modernism's masterful style requires. By resisting "recognition," the novel generates a paradox: the reader recognizes the problem of recognition itself. Staging recognition in this manner thematizes how an inclusive and antifascist society might look. *Between the Acts* represents humans alongside animals and insects, and Miss La Trobe embodies a new means of perceiving these as a collective. The novel suggests that her means of looking is more inclusive than that of her counterpart, Mrs. Manresa, who resists acknowledging animals and insects. Ultimately, I argue, *Between the Acts* points toward the paradoxical possibility of recognizing those animals and insects whose inclusion within society would require scaling back recognition altogether.

I. Anti-didacticism and choric form

We find the history for *Between the Acts*' disaffection in Woolf's failed attempts at anti-didacticism in *The Years*' choruses. In the early 1930s, Woolf desires

to remake fiction entirely. Drafts of *The Years* find Woolf juggling formal diversity and political seriousness, as she initially conceives of the project as an "Essay-Novel" whose form will unite style and message. *The Years* was to be Woolf's most "important" novel yet. In her diary entry for November 2, 1932—the entry in which she first reveals that the intended form of *The Years* is the Essay-Novel—she suggests that the importance of this new work arises from the novel's politics. Woolf writes: "I brood & chew & dream, & be entirely natural, feeling as I do for the first time that this book is important. Why do I feel this, & I never felt it in the least about the others? I have joined Pippa's Society; we dined with Pippa…" (D 4.130). Pippa is Philippa Strachey, sister of Lytton Strachey and Secretary to the National Society for Women's Service (NSWS). In January 1931, Pippa invites Woolf to read a paper to the NSWS, and this provides the germ for what would, six and seven years later respectively, be published as *The Years* and *Three Guineas*, the "Novel" and "Essay" halves of the work's original compound form.[24] In Woolf's diary entry, we can see the importance of Pippa's event to the trajectory of Woolf's thought. What provides the transition, we might ask, between the feeling that *The Years* is more important than her other books and the statement of fact that she has joined Pippa's NSWS? The content of her paper, of course! This is the earnestness in which *The Years* begins. From the outset, Woolf distinguishes this novel from her earlier one on the basis of the political work it is to perform.

[24] In order to eliminate unnecessary confusion, I will use *The Years* to refer to all drafts of the novel. However, Woolf did change the title frequently throughout the composition process, and in the diary entries that chronicle the early days of the novel, Woolf refers to it as either *The Pargiters* or *Here and Now*.

Her method for achieving such seriousness, for creating a work both politically informative and aesthetically delicate, is to incorporate an essay's potential to instruct while remaining grounded in fiction. For Woolf, the Essay-Novel is a new form that strives to "be bold & adventurous" in representing "the whole of present society—nothing less: facts, as well as the vision" (D 4.151). With its component parts representing fact and vision respectively, the Essay-Novel should "take in everything" and address how the past fifty years led to the present "with the most powerful & agile leaps, like a chamois across the precipices from 1880 to here & now" (D 4.129). Here, in positioning a "whole" that "take[s] in everything," Woolf demonstrates an understanding of modernism like the concept of stream-of-consciousness narration that, in Chapter One, Henry Green was resisting. Originally, for Woolf, the intention for the Essay-Novel's technical agility is generic diversity. She desires that *The Years* "should aim at immense breadth & immense intensity" and "should include satire, comedy, poetry, narrative…a play, letters, poems" (D 4.152). The purpose of taking in everything, then, is nothing less than the creation of a hybrid form that aspires to instruct and delight. Woolf struggles, however, when she perceives that the Essay and Novel sections fail to speak to one another. *The Years*, initially conceived as an essay, becomes her most realist novel.[25] In the divorce of the Essay-Novel, Woolf sides with Novel and redacts even traces of the instructive Essays. These she attempts to fold into the descriptions of setting, particularly the material changes to life in London, with which most of *The Years*' chapters begin.

[25] While Woolf intends that *The Years* should be a novel of "fact" rather than of "vision," she does not intend that realist fictional portions should stand apart from their instructive counterpart. The problem that she never solved was how to grant "intellectual argument in the form of art: I mean how give ordinary waking Arnold Bennett life the form of art?" (D 4.161).

More seriously, she tempers her antiwar commentary in the 1917 and 1921 sections, effectively eliminating the contemporary social and political relevance that she so desired for *The Years* at its inception.[26] Why did she do so? What brings Woolf to this compromise?

One answer is that fascism presents itself as a problem of technique during the novel's composition. Initial drafts of *The Years* provide political commentary, but Woolf wrestles with the potential for didacticism, coded as fascist, in a number of her late writings. While her ambition includes a vision of "the whole of present society," crafting this whole requires that the novel "be dealt with in a masterly manner," which in turn leads to a concern that the work will not be sufficiently moving (D 4.151, 4.170). In other words, the problem becomes the relation between aesthetics and politics, in particular the potential for "masterly" fascist form. "I'm afraid of the didactic," she writes in January of 1933, and four months later she's still worrying the issue: she asks, "How am I to get the depth without becoming static? …[T]here are to be millions of ideas but no preaching" (D 4.145, 4.152). Here we see that Woolf aligns stasis with "preaching," and, by extension, "depth" with the more visionary work of "ideas." Although she has a specific message to impart, she cannot count on readers to recognize it from the Essay-Novel's intraplay—not, at least, without telegraphing the relationship of its pieces to one another. The problem seems to be the "leaps" with which *The Years* would cover its "immense breadth": Woolf cannot lead her reader across the generic chasms without resorting to didacticism.

[26] Grace Radin notes that Woolf cut two long internal monologues that would have given thematic coherence to the novel, "a decision which further diminished the presentation of antiwar views and limited the reader's understanding of Eleanor's development" (150). Radin characterizes the excision of antiwar arguments as "puzzling" and speculates that "since the novel had been started in 1932 and was being revised until 1936, the changing times may have given a different color to the issue" (149).

Such preaching is more than just thematically fascist. In her 1940 essay "The Leaning Tower," Woolf equates "the pedagogic [and] the didactic" qualities of the 1930s poets with a "loud-speaker strain that dominates their poetry" (175). Similarly, in imagining what post-WWII society might be like for the writer, she hopes that it will "shift from his shoulders the burden of didacticism, of propaganda" (179). In aligning "didacticism" with a technique of fascist politics—bullhorn propaganda—Woolf is explicit about what she wants to avoid and why. Indeed, by November 1935, she finds herself unable to unite *The Years*' competing strains. "I pay the penalty of mixing fact and fiction," she writes, "one cannot control this terrible fluctuation between the 2 worlds" (D 4.350). The "leaps" that Woolf initially intends will bind the work have all but disappeared—fact and fiction are "worlds" apart—and in the place of synthesis there is only "fluctuation." Her anti-didactic, antifascist aesthetic is under siege. Although Woolf excises the essays and their more overt political content, there is another technique that she employs in the service of an antifascist aesthetic: the chorus. Theoretically, for Woolf, a chorus should enable *The Years*, particularly its final chapter, titled "Present Day," to transmit serious political content without relying on a didactic, authorial center. Indeed, it is this resistance to a narrative center—Woolf employs multiple choruses rather than a single instructive voice in *The Years*' final chapter—that makes "Present Day" a curious way to conclude. Ultimately, I argue, this indirect choric method places a burden on the reader. It is from this technique that *Between the Acts* will subsequently disaffect.

While the method of "Present Day" suggests the presence of meaning, its lack of plot confounds the reader's expectation thereof. "Present Day" introduces

characters whose purpose the reader cannot decipher and revisits ones who we may have forgotten. It weaves the interactions of certain pairs—Eleanor and North, North and Sara, Eleanor and Peggy—before all come together at a party, which lasts until dawn. Then both the party and the novel end. In other words, one might say that nothing "happens" here: there are no conflicts to resolve, and the only narrative tension is implicit—namely, if we have followed this family through the generations, how then do the earlier years inform the present and what can we extrapolate from them about the future? According to Woolf's diary, "Present Day" ought to "compose into one vast many sided group at the end; and then shift the stress from present to future…the future was gradually to dawn" (L 6.116). The success of this climax relies upon induction. The reader, recognizing the repetition of certain motifs or phrases from earlier in the novel, pieces together the clues to uncover "possibly the recurrence of some pattern" (L 6.116). Here "possibly" suggests Woolf's own uncertainty. In August 1934, Woolf explains that her intention for the final section is "a song for 4 voices," a drama alongside the generalizing function that the "Essay" portion would have otherwise fulfilled:

> (but I am thinking all the time of what is to end Here & Now. I want a Chorus. a general statement. a song for 4 voices. how am I to get it? I am now almost within sight of the end. racing along: becoming more & more dramatic.
>
> And how to make the transition from the colloquial to the lyrical, from the particular to the general?) (D 4.236)

We can see here how Woolf intends her final section to summarize and reflect what has come before: "Present Day" should transmute the past, turning it into a "general

statement," a "lyric" applicable to the here and now. This is likely why Woolf refuses to specify an exact year for the chapter. "Present Day," she says, is happening right now, and it should speak in its immediacy. All of the past, to this point unclear, has led to this, but its meaning is also unclear. Although "Present Day" does *feel* like meaning is happening, and a final chapter certainly ought to be where the loose ends are tied up, it is wholly unclear which "recurrence[s]" of the pattern are meaningful. A little didacticism, we think, would be welcome.

This model, reprising particular images from earlier chapters to show how the past culminates in the present and implies the future, is what *The Years* calls a chorus, and its intention is to provide the function of instruction without resorting to the didactic. Jane Marcus argues that the cacophony of *The Years* as a whole constitutes a chorus, that the novel represents London's marginalized as a collective voice in "an aesthetic for the inarticulate" or "an opera for the oppressed" (280, 293). I agree that for Woolf the function of a chorus is social inclusion (just as, in Chapter One, the result of the stream-of-consciousness narrative technique against which Henry Green bristles is a salvific class-leveling). However, I find *The Years* to be more specific about the message behind its choric form. The novel characterizes the "Present Day" chapter as a chorus whose purpose is to respond to the threat of fascism before WWII. The final pages of "Present Day" contain three instances of a chorus, each a tableau of failed instruction. This suggests that, for *The Years*, method is paramount. The extent to which *The Years* thinks through the relationship between method and content lays the groundwork for Woolf's subsequent disaffection in *Between the Acts*. *The Years*' choruses and their collective failure are sublimated into *Between the Acts*'

self-reflexive "failure"—that is, into its consideration of the epistemic violence of modernist form itself.

II. *The Years*' choruses

In her 1925 essay from *The Common Reader*, "On not knowing Greek," Woolf explains that the chorus was important to Greek drama because of the art form's inherently performed character: the Greek viewer was required to be able to focus on the larger whole rather than, as in the current age of the novel, the detail. This earlier theorization of the chorus attempts to subvert didacticism by entertaining a contradiction about the chorus's ability to instruct without resorting to a single point of view. Its self-contradictory character is why Woolf chooses to conclude *The Years* with multiple choruses. "Without interrupting the movement of the whole," she writes, the chorus provides "what was general and poetic, comment, not action" (46). She seems to have in mind something approaching the authorial voice, but she is frustratingly ambiguous on this matter. The chorus is a group "who can comment, or sum up, or allow the poet to speak himself or supply, by contrast, another side to his conception" (46). This definition could hardly be more diffuse: commentary is different from summary, which are both in turn different from "contrast" or providing a juxtaposition or alternative facet. Indeed, as the paragraph proceeds, it becomes increasingly unclear whether the chorus itself stands as the locus of meaning or whether the combination of chorus and dramatic action allow the *viewer* the opportunity to compose meaning. Woolf ultimately declares: "One must be able to pass easily into those [choric] ecstasies, those wild and apparently irrelevant

utterances, those sometimes obvious and commonplace statements, to decide their relevance or irrelevance, and give them their relation to the play as a whole" (47). What is bewildering about this description is how Woolf believes the viewer to be capable of simultaneously experiencing and contextualizing ecstasy. One must "pass into" ecstasy before "deciding" upon the relevance of its content, its "utterances" and "statements." Woolf calls this "giv[ing] them their relation," or as she describes it later, "plac[ing] together two apparently unrelated statements and trust[ing] you [the viewer] to pull them together" (48). While this description makes sense as a model for theater in general, it is less clear why such an experience is ecstatic. How can one stand beside oneself, lost in the chorus's utterances, *and* perform the seemingly self-centered function of consolidating meaning? In what sense does the chorus instruct? Although it is the source of meaning, she says, the chorus is also meaningless in itself insofar as it can contain irrelevances.[27] This contradiction inherent in Woolf's definition of the chorus is why, I believe, she finds herself invested in it when writing "Present Day" almost a decade later. *The Years* requires a chorus that can lead without overt instruction and teach without becoming didactic, a choric "leap" that every good viewer will intuitively understand. This model of an "intuitive" chorus is close to Julia Kristeva's theorization, in which the chorus is both Imaginary and Symbolic, with all of the contradiction that this combination entails.[28] As the

[27] This definition strikes a balance between two others, one that considers the entire play as mimetic—the chorus stands in for the ideal viewer, which the audience watches—and another that sees the chorus as the invitation to audience participation, which the drama itself requires. The latter of these is Nietzsche's Dionysian model, in which the chorus "is an abandonment of individuality by entering another character" and breaks down, according to Nietzsche, the "modern" idea that the viewer "must always remain aware that he is watching a work of art" (43, 37).

[28] In Kristeva's scheme, the *chora* stands for a pre-symbolic realm of meaning—a rethinking of the Lacanian Imaginary—that nevertheless always parallels the symbolic. The *chora* is a "rhythmic space," "a vocal or kinetic rhythm," or "rhythmic but nonexpressive totality" (26, 26, 40). As a space

ambiguities in "On not knowing Greek" suggest, the incitement of "intuition" is more complicated than it might initially seem.

The conclusion of "Present Day" presents a chorus at every turn. Ideally, for Woolf, their functions are to provide instruction without resorting to didacticism. Most obviously, in the novel's final pages, a group of children—a literal chorus—begins to sing to the departing guests. To the adults in the room, their song is grating and nonsensical, serving only to make them uncomfortable:

> Etho passo tanno hai,
>
> Fai donk to tu do,
>
> Mai to, kai to, lai to see
>
> Toh dom to tuh do— (407)

The children's song appears to be a mix of Greek (with its "ai" endings—"hai," "fai," etc.), Latin (with its "o" endings—"Etho passo tanno") and, as the characters themselves note, Cockney; in this regard, the song tends to erase class differences. More important, however, is the song's meaninglessness. "There was something horrible in the noise they made," the narrator states, "It was so shrill, so discordant, and so meaningless" (408). This meaninglessness suggests that the adults are missing something, for the children understand one another perfectly: beginning in unison, they "attack" the second verse "with one impulse," and they stop simultaneously even though, to the adults, they "seemed to be in the middle of a verse" (407, 408). That

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without expressive content, "the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration" but also "*function*[s] *synchronically within the signifying-process*" (26, 29). In other words, it is a realm of meaning running parallel to but also providing the possibility for (and even the destruction of) symbolic meaning. As far as literature is concerned, Kristeva has in mind a work like *Ulysses*, which "modifies linguistic structures" in a "total exploration of the signifying process" (88). By the same token, however, such a work has limited applied value, since its linguistic creativity "has a tendency to dispense with political and social signifieds" (88). "Present Day" is not choric in this way, but it does strive to create a larger whole that would remake the transmission of meaning. But remember: it's a failure.

such a "shriek" is coordinated implies that it has an external referent, an entity accessible to the children that escapes adult registration. It implies the existence of a parallel realm of meaning comprising only, to quote Kristeva about the *chora*, "vocal or kinetic rhythm" (26). Although ostensibly meaningless, this chorus unnerves because it suggests that the failure of communication rests with the adults; ending their song with the word "didax," the children suggest that they *could* instruct, if only the adults knew how to listen (408).

Similarly, the moments in "Present Day" that explicitly mention a chorus double as moments in which Woolf toys with the possibility of didacticism before dismissing it. In their ambivalence, these choric moments are the predecessors to *Between the Acts*' disaffection. However, they are also merely mimetic; they do not appeal to and frustrate conventions of modernist reading practice but, rather, rely on the reader to intuit a larger whole. The remainder of this section focuses on three choruses in particular that appear just prior to the nonsensical children's chorus above and that each present a moment of failed instruction. In the first, North, who has recently returned from Africa and often finds himself disoriented by London's culture and speed, becomes almost childish in asking his learned uncle, Edward, to teach him. Not only does Edward refuse, but their exchange is framed as a kind of tableau for Eleanor, who has just woken up. What is noteworthy here is the layering: a scene in which a character (North) desires instruction but does not receive it becomes a scene for another character (Eleanor) who desires information about her brother but is thwarted as well. These failures of instruction are contextualized by a second example, in which Brown attempts a grandiose speech that is punctuated by the

shattering of glass (rather than the clinking of glasses).[29] The two examples are ultimately framed by a larger chorus for London itself, in which "Present Day" attempts, in the language of Woolf's diary entry, to "shift the stress from present to future." Combined, they show how Woolf signals *The Years*' method of intuitive "leap": the supposedly anti-didactic (but nevertheless instructive) nature of the choric leap allows Woolf to blur the distinction between context and content. The end of this is twofold: first, Woolf can argue against fascism and, second, she does not have to argue against fascism. In other words, *The Years* would contain an antifascist message and would also embody an antifascist aesthetic mode that could "contain" an argument without actually arguing it.

To return to the first example, as North asks his uncle Edward to teach him about "the chorus," Eleanor desires to hear Edward speak more personally about how he wishes his life had been different. In the end, both are thwarted; neither moment contains the desired instruction. I cite a lengthy passage from *The Years* here in order to show the full trajectory of Eleanor's thought, which is necessary to understand how instruction is deflated. In the example, Eleanor struggles to "fill" the moment with "understanding" after she has herself failed to understand a conversation between North and Edward—all of this broken by a character's refusal to explain "the chorus." Having dozed off at the party, Eleanor wakes up confused: "But where was she? In what room?" (404). Slowly Eleanor begins to recognize the objects onto which she opens her eyes:

[29] Some characters in *The Years* have multiple names, to say nothing of the differences between the names in the manuscript and published versions of the novel. Sara, who is close to Brown, calls him by his Christian name "Nicholas," but since most of the characters call him "Brown," I refer to him as Brown throughout for the sake of clarity.

She saw all the heads in a circle. At first they were without identity. Then she recognised them. That was Rose; that was Martin; that was Morris.…

He [North] was sitting on the floor at Edward's feet with his hands bound round his knees, and he gave little jerks and looked up at him as if he appealed to him about something.

"Uncle Edward," she heard him say, "tell me this…"

He was like a child asking to be told a story.

"Tell me this," he repeated, giving another little jerk. "You're a scholar. About the classics now. Aeschylus. Sophocles. Pindar."

Edward bent towards him.

"And the chorus," North jerked on again. She leant toward them. "The chorus—" North repeated.

"My dear boy," she heard Edward say as he smiled benignly down at him, "don't ask me. I was never a great hand at that. No, if I'd had my way"—he paused and passed his hand over his forehead—"I should have been…" A burst of laughter drowned his words. She could not catch the end of the sentence. What had he said—what had he wished to be? She had lost his words.

There must be another life, she thought, sinking back into her chair, exasperated. Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people. She felt as if she were standing on the edge of a precipice with her hair blown back; she was about to grasp something that just evaded her. There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken.

> We know nothing, even about ourselves. We're only just beginning, she thought, to understand, here and there. She hollowed her hands in her lap, just as Rose had hollowed hers round her ears. She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present, and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding.
>
> "Edward," she began, trying to attract his attention. But he was not listening to her…It's useless, she thought, opening her hands. It must drop. It must fall. (404-6)

Our initial hunch might be to consider this passage important for the lone fact that it contains two mentions of one of the working titles for *The Years*: "Here and Now."[30] But "here and now" is difficult to understand: what is *really* happening here and now "evade[s]" Eleanor, even as she is convinced that there "must be" something. What is the precipice at which she stands? What realization does Eleanor feel she is on the verge of understanding? Certainly the extent to which she pines "to enclose the present moment…to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present, and the future" bears a remarkable similarity to Woolf's own language about her desire for *The Years*: "to give the whole of present society," including everything "from 1880 to here & now" (D 4.151, 4.129). Extending this analogy, we might note that Eleanor, like Woolf, only wants to pass on her realization to another. Eleanor tries to tell Edward, but the moment deflates; we might feel, like Edward, that we are not

[30] See n5 above. The composition history also speaks to this passage's importance. In the draft, just prior to the passage quoted here, Eleanor "shut[s] her hands on the coins she was holding" as she begins to wake (404). These coins, according to Woolf's diary, were at one point the mental shorthand for *The Years*' conclusion (D 4.237), although they were originally to be held by the Sara/Elvira character (Radin 104).

listening appropriately as readers. As a scene packed with resonance, what instruction does it inductively provide for a reader of *The Years*? The multiple repetitions of "hollow"—Eleanor thinks that her hands hollow themselves around the "present moment"—might initially suggest a lack of substance to her thought. Perhaps this moment is fundamentally about nothing. That is, if Eleanor is correct that "we know nothing, even about ourselves," then she has delegitimized herself. Why should we trust what she thinks she knows? Because, Woolf suggests, Eleanor's failure is of communication rather than of understanding. At the end of the paragraph, the rolling appositional phrases that follow the sequence of sentences set aside with semicolons imply that Eleanor does indeed effectively "enclose the present moment." The problem, then, is not that *she* knows nothing but that "*we* know nothing." Eleanor's epiphany maintains its integrity until the moment that she attempts to communicate it to Edward. Only then does she despair and "open her hands," allowing her revelation to "fall." In other words, understanding's evanescence reveals itself at the moment of instruction. Like the children's chorus, Eleanor's failure is one of communication rather than self-understanding. Moreover, the passage complicates this moment by couching it within another conversation, one in which Eleanor is on the receiving end of a failure to communicate: after Edward refuses to instruct North about the chorus, Eleanor is denied her own understanding of Edward. Finally, surrounding all of this is a dramatization of Eleanor's subsequent conclusion (we struggle to know even "ourselves") in the form of her initial misrecognition of people whom she has known most of her life ("At first they were without identity"). A failure to instruct within a

failed moment of instruction within temporary misrecognition: the layers of this scene exemplify Woolf's theorization of a chorus's anti-didacticism.

Eleanor's assertion about ourselves—"we know nothing, even about ourselves"—occurs in proximity to another example of a chorus in which a character makes pronouncements about "ourselves." *The Years* seems quite clear about the scope of this chorus: London is the drama, and our characters' party is part of the city's chorus, with the stakes being nothing less than humanity's future. As with Eleanor's thoughts above and the supposedly "meaningless" children's chorus, this passage seems to mark itself as a potential location for meaning. As dawn approaches and the party wraps up, the narrator explains that the noises of a London morning constitute a chorus in themselves:

> Their laughter ceased. Feet thudded, dancing on the floor above. A siren hooted on the river. A van crashed down the street in the distance. There was a rush and quiver of sound; something seemed to be released; it was as if the life of the day were about to begin, and this were the chorus, the cry, the chirp, the stir, which salutes the London dawn. (403)

Here the passage draws attention to itself as a description of an event that is *just like* an event that is about to burst with meaning. It "seems," the passage emphasizes, that these sounds are about to "release something"; it is "as if" they greet the day. As this section continues, the simile is reflected in the conditional phrasing with which one character asks Brown what he would have said had his toast continued uninterrupted. He grandly lists "our host and hostess" as well as "the house" before drifting toward the less concrete:

"And finally," he took his glass in his hand, "I was going to drink to the human race. The human race," he continued, raising his glass to his lips, "which is now in its infancy, may it grow to maturity! Ladies and gentlemen!" he exclaimed, half rising and expanding his waistcoat, "I drink to that!"

He brought his glass down with a thump on the table. It broke. (404)

Here the chaos of the London chorus reaches its apex. Greeting dawn is the "thud" of dancing feet, the "hoot" of a siren, the "crash" of a van, and a human voice: *to ourselves!* he toasts. And before we can begin to think that "Present Day" itself might have grand ideas about the future of the human race, Brown punctuates his speech with the drunken shattering of glass.[31] As with Eleanor above, the moment when the chorus ought to fulfill its instructive function is self-consciously anti-didactic.

In "On not knowing Greek," Woolf suggests that the chorus's anti-didactic strategy makes it a particularly useful tool for representing war, and the Greeks, she claims, would have been better able to confront World War I with their dramatic sophistication. A decade later, Woolf's purpose for the chorus is also a communal confrontation of world war. In the "1918" section that precedes "Present Day," the armistice is celebrated ominously with the continued discharge of munitions: "The war was over…The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed" (289). A diffuse fascism seems to pervade "Present Day" London as well. Driving around the city, North becomes disoriented when he stumbles upon fascist iconography:

[31] Radin argues that the glass-shattering in the scene is not ironic or even disruptive; rather, she says, it represents "the Jewish marriage ritual that symbolizes fertility" and, moreover, that humanity is here mitzvahed into maturity, as the glass broken is the thirteenth (108-9). Perhaps. However, without the symbolism, it is more likely that this noise merely punctuates the entirety of the city's earlier chorus.

> "Where the dickens am I now?" he asked, peering at the name on the street corner. Somebody had chalked a circle on the wall with a jagged line in it. He looked down the long vista. Door after door, window after window, repeated the same pattern. There was a red-yellow glow over it all, for the sun was sinking through the London dust. (294)

Here *The Years* represents a frightening ubiquity of fascism. The circle with a jagged line through it is the icon of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), and, in North's eyes, this graffito extends endlessly into the sunset. Moreover, because the BUF symbol is typically represented as a white line on a background of red, the passage implies that fascism is pervasive, even atmospheric: the sunset's glow transmutes the symbols from the windows to the air.[32] In Woolf's life, too, the growth of fascism from an offshoot of Labour—the New Party, which ultimately became the BUF—was particularly alarming.[33] Historically, the BUF was supported by Mussolini, and he too makes an appearance. Like the image of fascism retreating into and fusing with the red sunset, Mussolini arises from a seemingly unavoidable background. A taxi rings for Peggy and Eleanor to usher them to the party, and as they make to leave, Eleanor surveys her living room and becomes emotionally captured by an image of fascism:

> She glanced about to make sure that she had forgotten nothing. She stopped suddenly. Her eye had been caught by the evening paper, which lay on the floor with its broad bar of print and its blurred photograph. She picked it up.

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[32] Eleanor's redacted interior monologue also includes an image of the BUF as "a line of scaffolding zigzag[s] across the sky." She thinks that the there is "something violent and crazy in the crooked lines…something violent and crazy in the whole world tonight. It was tumbling and falling, pitching forward to disaster. The crazy lines of the scaffolding, the jagged outline of the broken wall, the bestial shouts of the young men, made her feel that there was no order, no purpose in the world, but all was tumbling to ruin beneath a perfectly indifferent polished moon" (Radin 179).

[33] See Anna Snaith for a succinct explanation of this history (particularly 627-629).

"What a face!" she exclaimed, flattening it out on the table.

As far as Peggy could see, but she was short-sighted, it was the usual evening paper's blurred picture of a fat man gesticulating.

"Damned—" Eleanor shot out suddenly, "bully!" She tore the paper across with one sweep of her hand and flung it on the floor. Peggy was shocked. A little shiver ran over her skin as the paper tore. The word "damned" on her aunt's lips had shocked her. (313)

Peggy's reaction to Eleanor's outburst is telling: Eleanor seems out of line, expressing an especially strong emotion in response to what has become ordinary (since the paper's imagery is that of a "usual evening"). However, Eleanor has had enough. As she surveys the room for a signal that she might be ready to leave, her glance is ensnared by the newspaper. The passive voice here—"Her eye had been caught…"—is especially telling: it links fascism's large-scale movements to a tyranny of the everyday. Mussolini has invaded her living room as well, controlling her feeling about whether or not she is prepared to act (i.e. to leave the flat). Like North's encounter of iconography above, Eleanor experiences fascism as atmospheric.[34]

In "Present Day," then, fascism presses upon and oppresses its characters, providing the theme for and stylistic concern of *The Years*. The novel's conclusion

[34] The manuscript provides stronger evidence of Mussolini's emotional pervasiveness, presenting Eleanor's encounter with the photograph as more explicitly ominous. "Just before picking up the paper," Radin notes, Eleanor sees "the grey head of the dead sailor bobbing in the water" (93). The connection between Mussolini and the dead sailor suggests that "they are both death's heads, one from the past and one soon to come" (93). However, in the published version of *The Years*, Woolf redacts this explicit connection in favor of a less preachy and ultimately implied "argument" against fascism. While we still see Eleanor claim that her supposed overreaction "means the end of everything we cared for…Freedom and justice," Woolf is far less overt than in the manuscript about the link between a particular form of fascism and death (314-315). Instead, like with the chorus, *The Years*' message is implied.

deliberately avoids every tendency to center itself around a character (particularly Eleanor) or moment (particularly Eleanor's epiphany and Brown's speech). Indeed, the manuscript version of *The Years* shows that these two examples, when Eleanor awakes and when Brown makes a toast, once held greater prominence. Grace Radin notes that Woolf "deliberately suppressed the tendency to center the final chapter first on Eleanor and then on Nicholas's [Brown's] speech" (110). "[S]ome sense of pattern was suggested in the MS by the way the family gathered around Eleanor, making her its center," Radin writes, "but this effect is almost lost in *The Years*" (108). In other words, what conceptually links these two scenes as decentered is their shared idea about the chorus's anti-didacticism. *The Years* elides its more explicit objections to fascism while creating a series of choruses that decenter its concluding section. In this way, Woolf attempts to marry form and function. She hopes that her deliberate representation of fascism's danger can circumvent its fascist poetic counterpart. By her own standard, she fails.

III. *Between the Acts*' rising curtain

Between the Acts translates *The Years*' failed choric form into an aesthetics of "failure" that addresses the very relationship between style and message, refashioning itself in relation to what Woolf perceives as a fascism that inheres in modernism itself. In this section, I argue that *Between the Acts* articulates an antifascist style of "failure" that, through its citation and subversion of a modernist aesthetics of recognition, generates a mode of epistemological receptivity that circumvents modernism's "masterful" style. *Between the Acts*, I claim, quite radically suggests

that the purpose of this newly-receptive aesthetic mode is to receive animals and insects into society anew. Put another way: Woolf's final novel constitutes an expanded application of and solution to what, in "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," she calls "subconscious Hitlerism," or a generalized male aggression that must be rooted out systemically in order to avoid war (245). *Three Guineas* maintains that such a mindset can only be eliminated with the simultaneous destruction of the patriarchy. *Between the Acts*, I argue, implies that eradicating "subconscious Hitlerism" also requires a re-formed relationship to animals and insects.

Between the Acts is centered on the failed pageant-play of the "very up to date" modernist playwright, Miss La Trobe (124). Miss La Trobe seems to be a sublimation of Woolf's experience with the earlier "deliberate" composition process of *The Years*. In the first place, as Woolf was revising *The Years* in late 1935, she considers turning the novel into a drama: Woolf "think[s] it would be better acted," and she promises her niece that she "shall make the end into a play for you to act" (L 5.445). Likewise, both *The Years* and Miss La Trobe's pageant chart progress through history with distinct scenes: in the case of the novel, the history of a family from 1880 through at least 1930 in eleven discrete sections, and in the pageant, a history of England in five acts plus a prologue. Thematically, too, both works culminate in addressing the same subject-matter: ourselves. Eleanor's assertion in *The Years*—"we know nothing; even about ourselves"—finds its way into the "present time" portion of Miss La Trobe's pageant.[35] The actors form a wall of mirrors, and a megaphone

[35] Eleanor's assertion about "ourselves" reflects a refrain running throughout *The Years*' "Present Day" section. For example, Brown and Sara characters wonder, "if we don't know ourselves how can we know other people," and "how can we make laws, religions, that fit, that fit, when we don't know ourselves?" (299)

from the bushes instructs the audience to "*Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by* (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) *orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?*" (127). This concern for the relationship between "*ourselves*" and "*civilization*" seems to ask the audience to consider what the very position of looking overlooks. How can these uncivil parts constitute a "civilized" whole? What does Miss La Trobe want us to see in "*ourselves*"?

Miss La Trobe's pageant fails; the audience misses her message. "If they had understood her meaning; if they had known their parts…" Miss La Trobe thinks, "it would have been a better gift" (142). Here the first "they" refers to the audience, while the second "they" could refer to either audience or her actors. This ambiguity suggests that the audience is integral to the larger purpose of Miss La Trobe's pageant. By implying that she directs the audience as much as the actors, Miss La Trobe positions the audience as active participants. Perhaps Woolf even intends to pun on "their" (i.e., "if they had known they're parts"): the audience *has* parts or roles in the pageant while they also *are* parts—scraps, orts and fragments. In this case, what the audience fails to grasp is that their feeling of being fractured calls them to a specific role. Miss La Trobe's pageant fails because, like *The Years*, the pageant's inductive form misses its audience. A minister, Reverend Streatfield, takes the stage in the hope of summarizing the play. "I have been asking myself," he says, "what meaning, or message, this pageant was meant to convey" (130). An audience member grouses that "Miss Whatshername should have come forward and not left it to the rector" (134). Other characters, as they depart, similarly grope for interpretation; they

cannot separate the potential meaning Miss La Trobe's pageant from the Reverend's speech: "Did you understand the meaning? Well, he said she meant we all act all parts…" (134).[36]

Miss La Trobe's pageant is a literal failure of choric form in the sense that the audience, missing "*ourselves*" in the mirrors, does not grasp its meaning, but *Between the Acts* also stages a similar moment for its reader. Without wishing to minimize studies that focus on the cultural importance of Miss La Trobe's pageant-play, one of the most remarkable qualities of *Between the Acts* is its narrative digressiveness, its focus on what occurs "between the acts."[37] It is quite unlike Woolf's two previous major novels, *The Years* and *The Waves* (1931).[38] In its impressionism, *Between the Acts* is closest to *Mrs. Dalloway*, but the narrator of *Between the Acts* roams much farther afield. Characters stroll the grounds murmuring to themselves; leaves rustle while warplanes whir overhead; architecture is described and paintings are experienced; rooms remain empty. The narrator assumes a satellite's view of earth, rising into the darkness of space, or speculates freely in the first persons singular and plural.[39] Compared to *Mrs. Dalloway*, then, the narrator's impressions in *Between the*

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[36] Melba Cuddy-Keane argues that the fact of correspondence between Streatfield's sermon and various characters' thoughts suggests that his character is redeemed as one among many "constant but imperfect attempts to achieve understanding" (277). Although Cuddy-Keane does find the form of his sermon "ridiculous," she does not go far enough in parsing this form's effect on the villagers or in emphasizing how his lecture, as a lecture, forecloses potential alternative modes of thinking.

[37] Zwerdling is one of the first to argue that the pageant stands not in contrast to but as a prehistory for the fragmentation of modern life, and Esty's persuasive reading builds on this by historicizing the pageant's competing nationalist and antinationalist impulses.

[38] Although *The Years* stands out as Woolf's most realist novel, there is a certain continuity of technique between the phrases that Woolf intended to resonate throughout the novel and her use of leitmotif in *The Waves*, often considered her most experimental work.

[39] There are a number of examples of such speculation by the narrator, but here are two. First, as Isa and William Dodge converse, the narrator inserts herself: "He smiled. She smiled. They were conspirators; each murmuring some song my uncle taught me" (72). Here "me" especially stands out because of its juxtaposition to the declension of "he, she, they." Second, when describing the pageant's crowd, the narrator ambiguously refers to herself: "Yet somehow they felt—how could one put it—a

Acts are unhinged and editorializing. This unsystematic deployment of perspective—vacillating between individual and collective, conscious and unconscious—culminates in the novel's unusual conclusion, when *Between the Acts* elides Woolf's fictional playwright with the author who pens the novel itself.

In *Between the Acts*' final scene, Isa, a middle-aged woman unhappy with her marriage, and Giles, her domineering husband, spend their evening in the sitting room. The other inhabitants having gone to sleep, the novel describes pair becoming mythical. They represent something more than themselves. Moreover, Isa and Giles not only become larger in stature, but they literally grow:

> Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.
>
> Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (148-9)

This conclusion, before the curtain rises, transports reader and character back to a time before civilization. The room and its inhabitants take on mythical proportions both figuratively and literally, for, with each clause, the passage becomes less easily justifiable as mere metaphor. First the window becomes sky; then the house falls away; then roads in general vanish, as the disappearance of "the" house has become a

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little not quite here or there. As if the play had jerked the ball out of the cup; as if what I call myself was still floating unattached, and didn't settle. Not quite themselves, they felt. Or was it simply that they felt clothes conscious?" (102). While the "I" in this example can be justified as indirect discourse, the narrator seems to take pains, as in the earlier example, to establish this "I" as different from the third person pronouns "one" and "they." That is, if the example is indirect discourse, the passage vacillates rapidly from third person to first person and back to third person again in three sentences.

disappearance of all "houses." The suggestion is that society in general has dissolved. A night that could be any—"It was night"—becomes a pluperfect tableau for the first humans: "It was *the* night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks." Here the disappearing "houses" and "roads" transform into "caves" and "rocks." The shift in perspective is enormous, as the novel invites readers of *Between the Acts* to perceive its characters from a prehistoric view. We look down, alongside the cave dwellers, on Isa and Giles. The individual reader, sitting apart, suddenly becomes coopted into a dramatic work.

The question, then, is how far this conceit extends. While the reader is obviously not experiencing a play, the novel's conclusion also should not be minimized as a detached, merely playful experience of reading about reading. It is possible that Miss La Trobe authors the novel's conclusion. Indeed, *Between the Acts*' conclusion is complicated by the fact that it appears to be scripted by Miss La Trobe herself. In the preceding scene, believing her pageant a "failure," Miss La Trobe finds the inspiration for her next drama as she walks to her lodging:

> It was growing dark. Since there were no clouds to trouble the sky, the blue was bluer, the green greener. There was no longer a view—no Folly, no spire of Bolney Minster. It was land merely, no land in particular. She put down her case and stood looking at the land. Then something rose to the surface.
>
> "I should group them," she murmured, "here." It would be midnight; there would be two figures, half concealed by a rock. The curtain would rise. What would the first words be? The words escaped her. (142-143)

Here we can see how the countryside catalyzes a moment of creation for the playwright as well as how this subsequently informs the novel's conclusion. The vastness of a cloudless sky prefigures Isa's and Giles's lack of shelter, and the disappearance of the horizon's typical view, which turns this "land in particular" into "land merely," suggests the shift from a night in 1939 to a broadly allegorical one. More importantly, this passage finds Miss La Trobe imagining the very tableau of *Between the Acts*' conclusion: "two figures" like those of Isa and Giles are "half concealed by a rock" akin to the cave dwellers' haunt. Then a curtain rises; dialogue is to be exchanged.

Between the Acts concludes by ambiguously beginning to transform the novel into a drama. Even before its curtain rises, the final paragraphs of *Between the Acts* contain self-reflexive rumblings. The narrator claims that Lucy, the sister of the Oliver family's patriarch, "looked like a tragic figure from another play," and the composition history of the novel suggests that Woolf intends to emphasize the ontological instability of this scene, since the published version substitutes "another" for the indefinite article "a" found in the penultimate draft (*Pointz Hall* x). Similarly, sentences earlier, the characters all watch Miss La Trobe's pageant as if it is a physical object, the setting sun: "They all looked at the play; Isa, Giles and Mr. Oliver. Each of course saw something different. In another moment it would be beneath the horizon, gone to join the other plays" (144). Here the play, despite each character's differing interpretation, appears to retire to some sort of land of prior plays. This might be yesterday and nowhere—but perhaps, the novel strangely suggests, the play persists. Finally, Isa ruminates about the seemingly crafted nature

of her life. She ponders the desirability of "a new plot" (146). In the afterglow of Miss La Trobe's pageant, she expresses a wish that "the author [would come] out from the bushes" (146).

These descriptions render *Between the Acts*' conclusion equivocally self-reflexive. The rising curtain is imagined diegetically by Miss La Trobe, yet it is perpetrated upon the reader without warning. It is liminal, a threshold between text and reality. It may or may not gesture at its own artificiality. It frames the novel where no frame was needed. As a moment ambiguously written by Miss La Trobe—an author with an established proclivity for concluding work with a self-reflexive frame—the novel's conclusion seems to comment on its own technical practice. It baits the reader-cum-audience member into the ontological project of recognizing it as *fabula* or *szujet*, as tale or telling. If the pageant's purpose is to encourage the audience to question the connections between large-scale politics and the everyday, for what reason does *Between the Acts* create and break a fourth wall? Just as Miss La Trobe calls upon her audience to consider themselves as "*scraps, orts and fragments*," so too does *Between the Acts* seem to summon its reader to consider "*ourselves*."

The novel's conclusion, I argue, appeals to and frustrates the reader familiar with modernist reading practices—in particular, with a reader trained in modernist aesthetics of "recognition." As a formal technique, recognition is so broad a concept that it may seem odd to find it articulated as integral to modernism. In Chapter One, however, we saw how stream-of-consciousness's inductive move from part to whole might be characterized as a kind of readerly recognition. Often, as in the above

paragraph, recognition is discussed in relation to a "frame": when a work's frame is subsumed within its content, a way of ordering the text must arise from within. This definition stretches as far back as Adorno, who argues that modernism's reliance on recognition—its willingness to jettison the didactic frame—enables its political autonomy. And as we have already suggested, what Peter Nicholls's many modernisms share is an instantiation of "masterly" irony, a tonal frame from within. Rita Felski, too, has argued that modernism transfers the recognition that characters used to achieve (in Victorian texts) to the reader. "Indeed," Felski maintains, "in the absence of such a mechanism it would be hard to explain the resonance of modernist texts" (42).[40] Ultimately, *Between the Acts*' final curtain suggests that its readers recognize "*ourselves*" as recognizing modernist readers.[41]

Between the Acts' conclusion also characterizes this recognition as a speciesism whose epistemic violence is equivalent to that of the patriarchy and the

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[40] Beyond this, recognition is spoken of in many ways. Aristotle's *Poetics* addresses recognition, or *anagnôrisis*, as a plot device in which a character undergoes "a change from ignorance to knowledge" (52a). Traditionally, recognition has been overlooked, since it often takes the form of a *deus ex machina*—artificiality being the death knell of Aristotelian tragedy, in which plot events should be both necessary and probable. Such recognition is of interest to this essay only in the sense that, as Terence Cave has noted, it is the one plot device that shows the seams of plot *as such*, since it is "both formal device and vehicle for themes of knowledge," combining "structure and theme, poetics and interpretation" (4, 3). More recently, with the "ethical turn," recognition has acquired particular importance as an expression of *thumos* from the other. See Honneth for theorization of a progressive recognition that takes as its domain self-realization as much as intersubjectivity, and see Yar for the attempt to develop Honneth into a more dynamic process than the "disenchanted vision of equilibristic exchange" (71). While Honneth's conception of recognition does give *Between the Acts*' aesthetic recognition its ethical stakes, insofar as recognition entails acknowledgement as much as mere perception, this usage is also freighted with a philosophical legacy of Hegel's master-slave dialectic that is more robust than that of a disaffected Woolf.

[41] With regard to animals in particular, Carrie Rohman notes that modernism's willingness to dissolve the boundary between subject and frame allows for animals' formal representation; unlike Victorianism, which displays only a thematic and metaphorical interest in animals, modernism is where "animality is instantiated in the language" (27). In other words, modernism's formal fragmentation, often conceptualized as the entrance into literature of the unconscious, allows for animals' appearance insofar as the unconscious is a repository of animal instinct repressed through evolution. Although *Between the Acts*' disaffection finds Woolf unwilling to agree with this progressive projection of modernism's politics, for Rohman, modernism in particular nevertheless places pressure on recognition due to the presence of animality.

British Empire. Just before *Between the Acts*' self-reflexive curtain rises, the novel contextualizes its concluding tableau by combining animal imagery with a reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. For Woolf, I argue, the awareness of recognition that the rising curtain generates is conditioned by that Conrad's thematic investment in exposing the willful ideological blind spots on which society is founded. Just as, for Marlow, society outsources its violence—"a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another" —so too does *Between the Acts*' conclusion prod its reader to consider what violence he or she are tacitly party to (87). Isa and Giles are still alone in the sitting room:

> Giles crumpled the newspaper and turned out the light. Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night. (148)

The reference to Conrad's novel—particularly after Lucy has just been reading her Outline of History about how England "was then a swamp [and] [t]hick forests covered the land"—suggests that this passage recalls how the history of Empire bears upon 1939. Readers are invited to remember Marlow's famous claim that England was also once "one of the dark places of the earth" (148). Certainly, *Heart of Darkness*' theme—that one should examine the underpinnings of one's own ideological position—accords with that of Miss La Trobe's pageant. In *Between the Acts*' conclusion, however, Woolf layers this theme, applying it to a number of

possible identities: British and female, yes, but also human. Notice that the phrases most proximal to "heart of darkness"—those that describe the living field and an intraspecies fight—evoke images of animal life. Moreover, these differ from an otherwise strikingly similar passage in the "Present Day" section of *The Years*, in which the Peggy character hears "The far-away sounds, the suggestion they brought in of other worlds, indifferent to this world, of people toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkness, in the depths of night" (368). Whereas what surrounds the reference to Conrad in *The Years* emphasizes human labor, *Between the Acts* transforms this passage into one about the intersection of human and animal worlds: in the place of "depths," a "field," and in the place of "people toiling," a fight between foxes. The word "bared" above even seems to inaugurate a metaphor between emotion, whether "enmity" or "love," and teeth. So while scholarship finds imperial overtones in the "embrace" between Isa and Giles, we can also see Woolf appending to this critique of patriarchy and imperialism the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. When the curtain rises, then, *Between the Acts* seems to align its disaffection from modernist recognition with being-human as well.

As I have already suggested, this is a line of thought that begins in *Three Guineas* immediately after the publication of *The Years*. "[T]he vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you, not by us," Woolf admonishes her male interlocutor at the beginning of *Three Guineas* (6). She then elaborates, "The number of animals killed in England for sport during the past century must be beyond computation. 1,212 head of game is given as the average for a day's shooting at Chatsworth in 1909" (146). Here animals are the sad sacrifice to a "subconscious

Hitlerism" cultivated in men. However, beyond this sympathetic computation, Woolf's use of the word "anthropocentric" in a footnote immediately prior to this math is striking. "Our ideology," she claims, "is still so inveterately anthropocentric" (146). While this remark is nominally about patriarchy, why does Woolf, a good student of Greek, choose *anthropos*, denoting "human" rather than "male," over any number of other Greek nouns that have a usage restricted to "male," such as *aner*/*andros*? Why not, in fact, use the Latin *patria*, as she does numerous times throughout *Three Guineas*?[42] As a reader of Darwin in the late 1930s, Woolf would have understood "anthropocentric" as a pejorative descriptor for deniers of natural selection. So why pretend, in an essay about "the hypnotic power of dominance" by which facts escape notice, that "human" can stand in for "man" (150)? Here Woolf's nonstandard use of "anthropocentric" harbors otherwise-hidden animals. Whereas *Three Guineas* only gestures to this line of argument, I argue, *Between the Acts* pursues it more fully.

Woolf's final novel, I argue below, represents its modernist playwright attempting to engineer a new means of recognizing. Although Miss La Trobe's pageant represents the failure of *The Years*, her receptivity to animals and insects suggests a new way to approach perceiving the world. Her pageant's failure becomes *Between the Acts*' "failure." Indeed, the novel implies that its own political content requires this aesthetics of "failure" insofar as it both rejects and replicates modernism. In this sense, I argue in the chapter's final paragraphs, the "failure" of *Between the*

[42] Woolf usually chooses the adjectival phrase "patriarchal system" (64, 67, 68) or "patriarchal state" (102).

Acts is a model for a paradoxically "successful" disaffection: one that manages to communicate in spite of and through its formal obfuscations.

IV. *Between the Acts*' receptivity

Three Guineas is prescient of poststructuralism's "ethical turn" in its concern for alterity. The essay's solution—the formation of a "Society of Outsiders" who will work for the betterment of society—is eerily similar to, for example, Gayatri Spivak's insistence on guarding the margin.[43] At issue is legibility: how can one recognize the "other" while allowing for alterity to be "other" in its own way? By what means can one circumvent the violence of assimilation into dominant culture? Animals are traditionally the most illegible. When Emmanuel Levinas privileges the human face as the site of ethical encounter, he abjects animals entirely; there is no question or possibility of ethics with regard to nonhumans.[44] Recent debates in animal studies address this question of means: is recognition desirable or even possible in face of animals' "concealment" or "withdrawal"?[45] In *The Open*, Giorgio Agamben theorizes the alterity of nonhuman animals as concealment by extending his biopolitical study of *zoe*, or "bare life," to animals through Heideggerian phenomenology. According to Agamben, animals are concealed in their "captivation" to their particular sensory world (*Umwelt*); they do not see "the open" or recognize *as such*. Agamben calls the operation by which humanity defines itself against this "lack" of animals the

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[43] See Spivak 131-132 and Ray's reading of guarding the margin as this relates to Spivak's "worlding."
[44] Levinas is quite clear that the stakes of the ethical encounter are human. "The epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity," he says; it is therefore "the whole of humanity which looks at us" (213). Elsewhere he is restrictive: "it is only man who could be absolutely foreign to me" (73).
[45] Radical "withdrawal" also defines the objects of parallel disciplines, such as the plant in plant studies (Marder) or the object in so-called object-oriented ontology (Harman).

"anthropological machine." While Agamben's solution to this construct—leave animals "outside of being"—forecloses recognition as an ethical operation, Martha Nussbaum argues to the contrary: recognition does not distort animals' alterity but rather constitutes the very process of primary inclusion by which we might begin to engage with them. She argues that, beginning from a list of capabilities, humans can recognize different subjects, including animals, as bound by different kinds of need. Donna Haraway's study of the materiality of companion species disarms this question of inclusion. She minimizes the importance of recognition as a volitional act, since humans and nonhumans are already involved in mutual exchange by virtue of "becoming with" one another (16). In place of recognition, Haraway offers "regard," a kind of retrospective arrangement in which "[p]artners do not preexist their relating" (165).

Traditionally, the ability to recognize distinguishes humans from animals; this is sometimes expressed as humanity's access to the *as such*.[46] Just as Agamben asserts that animals do not access the *as such* of the open, Derrida notes that the animal is "deprived of access in its very opening to the being of the entity as such, to being as such, to the 'as such' of what is" (388). Humans, on the other hand, do recognize *as such*. For Linnaeus, this is the very definition of a human being, whose taxonomy is *homo sapiens*, the being with the power to recognize itself. As Agamben points out, such a definition is of course circular, since what a human being recognizes is a being with the capacity to recognize, and so on. Likewise, Heidegger defines this distinctly human capacity as *logos*, or the synthetic facility for "letting

[46] Of course, this distinction holds for plants and objects as well. See Marder's definition of the vegetal soul as "being *qua* being-with" (51) and Harman's "non-relational" world of objects (187).

something be seen in its *togetherness* [*Beisammen*] with something—letting it be seen *as* something" (56). As Heidegger's definition implies, this *logos* is tied up in facility with language. For example, in what Wittgenstein calls the "picture-theory of language," propositions are thought to comprise discrete objects, which must first be grasped as such and then wielded instrumentally.[47]

Between the Acts summons this instrumental theory of language—that it recognizes *as such*—at the beginning of the novel, when a short description of women walking in a garden acknowledges the expectation that language ought to refer to an object or objects. In this scene, nurses charged with caring for Bartholomew Oliver's grandson—the child of his son, Giles, and his daughter-in-law, Isa—wander the grounds of Pointz Hall. As they return toward the Hall, the novel describes their conversation as beyond instrumentality. They "were talking—not shaping pellets of information or handing ideas from one to another, but rolling words, like sweets on their tongues, which, as they thinned to transparency, gave off pink, green, and sweetness" (7-8). While some might read this as yet another instance of Woolf's unfortunate class politics, the nurses here are no less articulate than any other character who wanders murmuring through *Between the Acts.* Indeed, their speech is pure pleasure in expression. They do not convey "information," "ideas," or pre-formed messages to one another, but, rather, they "roll" words around as if consuming candy. Their words are textural on the tongue; they are visual, "thinning to transparency" and giving off colors, "pink, green"; and they have taste, "sweets" that express "sweetness." More than mere conveyance, more than an auditory "pellet"

[47] Before his own "anthropological turn" to theorize language as use, Wittgenstein traces this picture-theory of language back to Augustine at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*.

surrounding an object, the words exist merely as pleasure in expression, their "object" inseparable from their use. Here is *Between the Acts*' disaffective mode in miniature, citing and explicitly rejecting any recognition that defines the picture-theory of language.

This depiction matters because *Between the Acts* later compares these women, in their language-use, to animals. Taken together, these passages aspire to what Woolf, in her diary, calls "human naturalist notes," a phrase suggesting her desire to see human beings both intra- and inter-specially, both anthropologically and naturalistically (D 5.339).[48] In a passage similarly synesthetic to the above, butterflies flock to and consume the "sweet" colors in the clothes of the pageant's players. Before the pageant, the actors lay out their costumes.

> The clothes were strewn on the grass. Cardboard crowns, swords made of silver paper, turbans that were sixpenny dish cloths, lay on the grass or were flung on the bushes. There were pools of red and purple in the shade; flashes of silver in the sun. The dresses attracted the butterflies. Red and silver, blue and yellow gave off warmth and sweetness. Red Admirals gluttonously absorbed the richness from dish cloths, cabbage whites drank icy coolness from silver paper. Flitting, tasting, returning, they sampled the colors. (43-44)

This passage shares with that of the woman above an ingestion of "sweetness": the languor with which the Red Admirals proceed—how they "gluttonously" take in as

[48] Woolf uses this phrase after finding herself overwhelmed by how the "rhythm" of composing *Pointz Hall* bleeds into everyday life. She says that she would like to write a "mental history" that describes this experience of being caught up. In other words, as a "mental history," the notes of the human naturalist would not examine thoughts so much as people specifically *not* thinking, people caught in habit or rhythm—people, in other words, between intentional states. In this regard, *Between the Acts*' participation in what Esty diagnoses as the late modernist "anthropological turn" also finds expression in another object, the repatriation of humans to the category of nonhuman animals.

much “richness” as they like and how, dilettantish, they “sample” the colors—reflects the women’s candied tongues above. It is almost as if the butterflies themselves speak—all the more so given their subsequent juxtaposition to human characters, who struggle to resist their attraction to the colors of the landscape.

> Mrs. Swithin and William surveyed the view aloofly, and with detachment.
>
> How tempting, how very tempting, to let the view triumph; to reflect its ripple; to let their own minds ripple; to let outlines elongate and pitch over—so—with a sudden jerk.
>
> Mrs. Manresa yielded, pitched, plunged, then pulled herself up.
>
> “What a view!” she exclaimed, pretending to dust the ashes of her cigarette, but in truth concealing her yawn. Then she sighed, pretending to express not her own drowsiness, but something connected with what she felt about views.
>
> Nobody answered her. The flat fields glared green yellow, blue yellow, red yellow,
>
> then blue again. The repetition was senseless, hideous, stupefying. (46)

The “tempting” quality of this view’s color reflects what “attracted” the butterflies to the players’ clothes. The characters must make a concerted effort if they wish to remain “detach[ed]” rather than be “plunged” into it, for the view appears unable to be contextualized: whatever “aloof” and “survey[ing]” mechanisms Mrs. Swithin and William might employ, the view obviates outlines. It triumphs over the capacity to recognize it. Even Mrs. Manresa, who does manage to pull herself from its sway, cannot say it is like anything else, cannot express her feelings about it; rather, she can only point it out—“What a view!” In this sense, the view has an unassailable

integrity: the view is the view. Mrs. Manresa's compulsion to exclaim suggests her discomfort with dwelling in an unintentional, unrecognizing state: she must "pretend" not to have given herself over to what lies "between the acts," so to speak. Yet this is where most of the humans reside: "Nobody answer[s] her" because these characters have retreated to a "senseless" place of withdrawal. The humans' passivity is like the butterflies' sampling of color: the former have "yielded, pitched, plunged, then pulled [themselves] up" just as the latter are "flitting, tasting, returning, and sampling"; and the former are prey to "green yellow, blue yellow, red yellow" just as latter cannot resist the "red and silver, blue and yellow." Here the novel presents recognition just as it presents the women's "pellets of information" above. Invoking the terms by which to recognize the view, *Between the Acts*' disaffection ultimately rejects them. Despite Mrs. Manresa's exclamatory attempt, the human characters relent, gluttonous and stupefied, to the view's unbounded quality.

In fact, Mrs. Manresa appears to be recognition embodied. Ultimately, I argue, *Between the Acts* valorizes a form of receptivity whose exemplar is Miss La Trobe rather than Mrs. Manresa's recognition. We can see Mrs. Manresa's exclamation above as an attempt to uphold the relation of exception that, according to Agamben and Derrida, defines the human. As Agamben has shown in his work on sovereignty, to recognize is also always to tacitly define the object to which it does not apply, thus entering into a problematic relation of non-relation. What supports this relation of non-relation is a distinction between types of life: *bios* is life recognized, life within the *polis* and covered under law, while *zoe* is the opposite—unrecognized, mere, or

bare life.[49] The anthropological machine, then, establishes a distinction like the one that the sovereign creates between *bios* and *zoe*; a human is the being who recognizes who belongs. Mrs. Manresa operates as one such anthropological machine. As her name suggests, Mrs. Manresa is humanity reified, a man-*res*. Believing that she can navigate any social situation, Mrs. Manresa fancies herself above context, exceptional. At the same time, she asserts that this quality of consummate malleability is her own facility with tapping into "just human nature," an opinion that she voices in distinction to Lucy Swithin, whom she scorns. While the latter distractedly watches birds fluttering around a reception in the barn, Mrs. Manresa compares herself favorably to Lucy. Mrs. Manresa's greatness is her ability to relate to anyone and everyone:

> The old lady, gazing at the swallows, looked too refined. "Refeened"—Mrs. Manresa qualified the word to her own advantage, thus confirming her approval of the wild child she was, whose nature was somehow "just human nature." Somehow she could span the old lady's "refeenment," also the boy's fun—Where was that nice fellow Giles? She couldn't see him; nor Bill either. The villagers still hung back. They must have someone to start the ball rolling.
>
> "Well, I'm dying for my tea!" she said in her public voice; and strode forward. (70-71)

Here "just human nature" is Mrs. Manresa's personal shorthand for her own ability to get along in any situation, whether with the boys (Giles and William Dodge) or with the "refeened" Mrs. Swithin. Mrs. Manresa is merely human and so can pass in any context; for her, "just human nature" means that her behavior is able to be universally

[49] See the introduction to Agamben's *Homo Sacer.*

normalized. However, as this passage suggests, what "just human nature" means in practice is not that Mrs. Manresa can adapt, but instead that she actively defines a situation. "Well, I'm dying for my tea!" she exclaims. She leads and "the rest follow"; she thinks, "It's all my eye about democracy" (71). In her exclamations—about tea here, about the view above—Mrs. Manresa is the one who upholds convention, yet she defines this quality as supreme flexibility in the face of convention. She is exceptional in her ability to be unexceptional, unconventional in her ability to be the most conventional. In other words, Mrs. Manresa's "just human nature" is the tautology of Agamben's relation of non-relation.

This diagnosis suggests that *Between the Acts* depicts Mrs. Manresa's "human nature" as *un*just. With her views on "democracy" and leading "the rest," she is a far cry from the spirit of *Three Guineas*' progressive inclusivity. Instead, Mrs. Manresa refuses to engage with this question during *Between the Acts*' pageant. When Miss La Trobe summons mirrors onstage in order to reflect an image of the audience back to itself, everyone except Mrs. Manresa is uncomfortable: "All evaded or shaded themselves—save Mrs. Manresa who, facing herself in the glass, used it as a glass; had out her mirror; powdered her nose" (126). Miss La Trobe's mirrors suggest that the director desires for the audience to see how they constitute a collective, a sentiment reinforced by her megaphonic voice from the bushes, imploring the audience not to "*hide among rags. Or let our cloth protect us*" but rather to consider specific villagers, "*sheep*," "*dogs*," and "*ourselves, ladies and gentlemen*!" (127). However, Mrs. Manresa's initial reaction is to avoid this contextualization by reflecting only herself. She vainly recognizes only herself recognizing. Moreover,

Between the Acts hints at the violence of this perspective. After Miss La Trobe insists that the audience confront their internalized fascism, that of the "*gun slayers*" and "*bomb droppers*" who "*do openly what we do slyly*," Mrs. Manresa is the only audience member whose individual reaction the narrator records. While the other viewers merge with the anonymity of a chorus, Mrs. Manresa cries, her "tears ravag[ing] her powder" (128). In other words, in response to Miss La Trobe's question about "*ourselves*," Mrs. Manresa's concealer, that symbol of her aloofness and "just human nature," breaks down.

Whether burying her nose in a compact or attempting to control the tenor of a social interaction, Mrs. Manresa is closed to any phenomenal experience that is not of a predetermined type. In this sense, she represents the "dominance" of human recognition. However, *Between the Acts* also posits a receptivity before recognition that arises from human participation in the withdrawal of nonhuman animals. By juxtaposing butterflies sampling color and humans entranced by a view, the novel suggests that both share this receptive quality. Indeed, a number of the definitions of recognition above allow for this reorientation toward receptivity. For example, in *The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)*, Derrida's phenomenal experience requires a kind of initial withdrawal. He recounts the moment when, emerging naked from his bath, he is arrested by the gaze of his cat, and he wonders whether this moment is one of being *seen seen*, that is, one in which his cat does not merely look at him but instead sees Derrida as a seen entity. Yet there is no possibility of staging this moment in advance. The animal sees Derrida *seen* because Derrida is withdrawn in advance. Similarly, although Heidegger's argument about the impoverishment of

animals disallows them from experiencing the world as *Dasein*, his definition of *logos* above, as "letting something be seen," contains a primary passivity not accounted for in his descriptions of existential moods such as boredom or angst. In other words, Derrida presents us with the receptivity toward which Heidegger gestures. Derrida is *in* the world but not, as Heidegger's analyses of *Stimmung* or ready-to-hand suggest, *beyond* it in such a way that the world recedes (as is the case with boredom or angst). This is to say: *Between the Acts*' humans plunged into the view are Derrida naked. The novel's characters are side-by-side with animals and receptive to modes of being-human before recognition.

Between the Acts establishes how humans withdraw from recognition at its outset. As with Mrs. Manresa's later exclamations, the novel opens with human characters attempting to recognize and being met with silence. In the opening scene, a neighbor, Mrs. Haines, makes "affected" patter and tries to establish the evening as of a type: "What a subject to talk about on a night like this!" she exclaims. Yet rather than elaborate on what kind of night this is, *Between the Acts* represents her withdrawal into receptivity:

> "What a subject to talk about on a night like this!"
>
> Then there was silence; and a cow coughed; and that led her to say how odd it was, as a child, she never feared cows, only horses. But, then, as a small child in a perambulator, a great cart-horse had brushed within an inch of her face. Her family, she told the old man in the arm-chair, had lived near Liskeard for many centuries. There were the graves in the churchyard to prove it.

> A bird chuckled outside. "A nightingale?" asked Mrs. Haines. No, nightingales didn't come so far north. It was a daylight bird, chuckling over the substance and succulence of the day, over worms, snails, grit, even in sleep. (3)

Here Mrs. Haines's attempt at recognition meets animals (a cow's cough and a bird's chuckle) as she progresses from exclamation to question. Her exclamation engenders "silence," while the second, less affected attempt—"A nightingale?"—is met with "sleep." Although "silence" and "sleep" might appear to be equally unresponsive, we can see in the novel's revision history how "sleep" suggests more strongly for Woolf a sense of what humans share with animals. An early typescript of the novel, at that time titled *Pointz Hall*, contains a section, labeled "Prayer to the Night Bird," in which the narrator implores the bird to teach "us," like Derrida, a receptivity in nakedness. This prayer requests that the Night Bird

> come, and tweak and twitter and free our long ears clutted up with fur; in which dust that no housemaid can broom away has lodged; tweak us awake this jocund night of early summer and remind us of the ~~cold~~ <grass> under our feet; ~~of our nakedness;~~ how the sole of the foot and all the skin is bare, and the hairs are still capable of sensation; while our tongues shape the smoke in our brains into talk about herring and cesspools. (34-35)

Although the hortatory voice of this passage does not find its way into the published version, many of its details—discussion of the cesspool, Isa's lunch order (sole, not herring), and of course the nightingale itself—do. More importantly, the passage's portrayal of sleepiness in the human characters' interrelations does survive and helps

us to interpret the tone and theme of the opening. The bird's role is to "remind" humans of the feel of skin against grass and to make their "clutted" ears receptive—a task that the human housemaid cannot perform. Like the "sweetness" of the words rolled around by the nurses above, the humans' "talk" here originates in a diffuse "smoke" rather than in a discrete picture. Ultimately, this passage emphasizes what enthrallment to the view suggests: the humans should remember a "capab[ility] of sensation" that "we" share with nonhuman animals. That the narrator's prayer calls for a body capable of sensation suggests the existence of a receptivity prior to recognition, one that is connected to the lives of animals. Indeed, in its disaffective manner, the novel here explicitly cites "recognition" in opposition to the nonhuman "capab[ility] of sensation." At the conclusion of this opening incident, it is none other than the exclamatory Mrs. Haines who feels excluded: "Please, Mrs. Giles Oliver, do me the kindness to recognize my existence" (5).

If Mrs. Haines momentarily shifts toward receptivity, *Between the Acts* positions Miss La Trobe as the more consistent exemplar of this state. In contrast to Mrs. Manresa's exclamations—her unjust sovereignty in the form of "What a view!" or "Well, I'm dying for my tea"—Miss La Trobe does not enforce recognition. Rather, her engagement with the world is one of sensitivity; she feels her way through the pageant, for example, groping for where it should go, uncertain of but receptive to its possible futures.

> Miss La Trobe stopped her pacing and surveyed the scene. "It has the makings…" she murmured. For another play always lay behind the play she had just written. Shading her eyes, she looked. The butterflies circling; the

> light changing; the children leaping; the mothers laughing—"No, I don't get it," she muttered and resumed her pacing. (44)

At first glance, this passage is deceptively simple: Miss La Trobe looks, waits, and relents when nothing comes to her—she doesn't "get it." Important, however, is her reconsideration. Although Miss La Trobe surveys the scene, and although she is receptive to the possibility of recognizing it ("It has the makings…"), she nevertheless finds it unrecognizable. Indeed, the fact that she shades her eyes here recalls the passage immediately prior: Miss La Trobe stalks the ground, the novel notes, "shading her eyes in the attitude proper to an Admiral on his quarterdeck" (43). Marshaling her resources, the actors and their costumes, she is described in militaristic terms, yet the outcome of this admiralty is a willingness to let things appear on their own terms—or not. "No, I don't get it," she concludes. In a moment of would-be recognition, Miss La Trobe withdraws; like Derrida's willingness to be *seen*, there is nothing willful about it.

Between the Acts once again connects this withdrawal to the experience of nonhuman animals. Between Miss La Trobe's two shadings of the eyes, we find the description of butterflies above and also the gluttonous Red Admiral. Although scholarship has noted that Miss La Trobe's martial portrayal connects her directorial style to fascism, absent from this observation is its context: Miss La Trobe's admiralty is tempered by its affinity with the Red Admiral, whose enjoyment of the costumes' colors suggests receptivity within authoritativeness. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the Latin name of the Red Admiral is *Vanessa atalanta*, a butterfly

named after the great, but not completely indomitable, female hunter. "Admiralty," then, labels a position of "looking toward" that allows for greater receptivity.

In her diary, too, Woolf links receptivity and the Red Admiral. In October 1940, she describes what she labels a "red admiral & apple day" (5.332). What this involves, she writes, is "filling my mind slowly" or "letting my mind feed like the Red Admiral," and she compares this receptivity to watching a view: this is her "perfect day—a red admiral feasting on an apple day. A red rotten apple lying in the grass; butterfly on it, beyond a soft blue warm coloured down & field. Everything dropping through soft air to rest on the earth" (5.330). Here Woolf watches the Red Admiral and the "soft blue warm coloured" view with a receptivity that we find in Miss La Trobe's admiralty. As a corrective to Mrs. Manresa's exclamation—"What a view!"—*Between the Acts* posits Miss La Trobe's reserved muttering—"No, I don't get it." The novel's concluding curtain likewise encourages readers to ask whether or not they "get it" and, if so, to participate in the paradoxical withdrawal that "getting it" requests.

Between the Acts' ending brings Miss La Trobe's "admiralty" to bear upon what Woolf sees as a fascist modernism. Unlike Henry Green's minimal pluralism in Chapter One, *Between the Acts*' disaffection here seems to harbor more of a positive agenda. Whereas none of *Party Going*'s Bright Young People resolves the tension in Victoria station (a proxy for the political build up to world war), here Woolf's disaffection from modernism "succeeds" by positioning Miss La Trobe as both problem and solution—that is, as both authoritarian modernist admiral and as an admirer authorized in her receptivity to the withdrawnness of animal life. Although

Between the Acts does not ultimately escape the conventions of modernism that it wishes to subvert, the novel is also therefore clearer in its gesture toward a possible resolution. As we will see in Chapter Three, this passion for clarity is the very problem that Elizabeth Bowen feels she must combat in the postwar political environment. *The Heat of the Day* is Bowen's intervention in international relations, as the novel disaffects from literary realism in the service of expressing her reservations about another realism: political realism or *realpolitik*.

Chapter 3
Existentialism and Realpolitik in Elizabeth Bowen's Postwar Writing

Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948) is a novel of disaffection. On the one hand, this might seem like an obvious claim: the novel's plot concerns the actions of Stella Rodney once she finds out that her lover, Robert Kelway, may be a Nazi spy. Stella is presented this information by a British spy named Harrison, who tries to leverage his future silence about Robert's duplicity into a sexual relationship with Stella. In other words, in the face of Robert's treason, Harrison forces Stella to choose her own betrayal: loving Robert means betraying her country, while loving Britain means betraying her lover. Everyone is disaffected because, potentially, everyone's interests run counter to their actions or stated intentions. On the other hand, *The Heat of the Day* is also a novel of disaffection insofar as it is a kind of formal double agent. The novel appears to solicit realism in order to represent Blitz-era London, but, I argue, that is only appearance.[50] The novel also subtly but systematically subverts realism as a means of expressing its postwar anxieties, particularly its concern about the breakdown of international relations during the nascent Cold War. While *The Heat of the Day* is often cited as the quintessential novel of the civilian affective experience of the Blitz,[51] its plot is actually as proper to the postwar period (in which a majority of the novel was composed) as it is to the war

[50] While claims that *The Heat of the Day* is verisimilar of wartime experience led to the impression that the novel aspires to realism—a prejudice only reinforced by Bowen's self-consciously middlebrow plotting and subject matter—recent scholarship challenges this characterization and seeks to account for Bowen's complicated relationship to realism. See particularly Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, Neil Corcoran, Maud Ellmann.

[51] Anthony Burgess claims that "No novel has better caught the atmosphere of London during the Second World War," and Hermione Lee likewise justifies what have been considered the novel's affectations or stylistic impenetrability as the very qualities that "express the oddness and the dislocation of the war-time experience" (45, 165).

years themselves.[52] The novel's disaffection from literary realism is actually indicative of Bowen's distaste for another kind of realism—political realism, particularly the British response to Soviet-style *realpolitik* in the Cold War's infancy. Stella's resistance to both Robert and Harrison—men who are each vying to convince her that their view of "reality" is the correct one—corresponds to the novel's larger resistance to political realism. For Bowen, both political and literary realism are suspect because of their emphasis on outcome. In *realpolitik*, the end justifies the means, while literary realism's "reality effect" similarly tries to make transparent its aesthetic method. Through its disaffective realist technique, *The Heat of the Day* refocuses on means (rather than ends) as subject matter. Its disaffection stages Bowen's postwar anxiety about the breakdown of method in postwar international relations—specifically, the failure of liberal internationalism, which strives to ensure a common (legal, moral) ground for negotiation, in the face of *realpolitik*, which posits that nations are nothing but "interests" locked in a Machiavellian struggle for "power."[53] This essay not only shows that *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection from realism undermines political realism's view of "England" as a collection of interests. It also traces how Bowen derives her disaffective method from, of all sources, midcentury existentialist fiction.[54] While it might seem unusual that Bowen would find inspiration for the future of internationalism in something as radically

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[52] Bowen had only drafted the novel's first five chapters by 1944. Victoria Glendinning notes that, upon returning to these after the war, Bowen "had thought it would only be necessary to glance through the early chapters, but she found in fact a fundamental necessity to write" (187). Allan Hepburn is the lone scholar who writes about The Heat of the Day as a postwar novel.

[53] Ian Hall provides a particularly clear elaboration of the relationship between liberal internationalism and political realism in postwar Britain.

[54] While scholarship will at times informally characterize the novel as existential, no one has yet to suggest that *The Heat of the Day* is explicitly influenced by Sartre. The closest is Sinead Mooney on Bowen's "Beckettian affinities." In *Intrigue*, Allan Hepburn argues that *The Heat of the Day* is ideologically opposed to Sartre's definition of "character" in *Being and Nothingness* (160-161).

individualist as existentialism, her postwar reviews of novels by Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre reveal that she finds in these works an implicit call to collective international action. For Bowen, what undergirds both existentialist fiction—particularly Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Age of Reason* (*L'Âge de Raison* [1945]), which she reviewed for *Tatler* magazine in early 1947—and *The Heat of the Day*'s project of subverting realism is an aesthetic that positions internationalist response as the product of individual responsibility. When viewed as a novel of the burgeoning Cold War, *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection begins to look like an oblique argument against political realism and in favor of a classically liberal, internationalist approach toward European peace after World War II.

The first two chapters of this dissertation suggest that disaffection is a feeling proper to the 1930s and early 1940s, with their heady crescendo to world war, but disaffection is also a postwar concern. *The Heat of the Day* attests to the fact that war neither ended the need for political writing nor alleviated authors' ideological uncertainties about their own specific formal interventions. The postwar terrain is still, in the words of T. S. Eliot's *Burnt Norton*, that of "a place of disaffection / Time before and time after / In a dim light" (lines 90-92). That is, the postwar problem remains understanding how past actions and future events inform the present of knowing where one is coming from and what one intends. In *The Heat of the Day*, London is just such a place of disaffection. When Robert confides his treason to Stella, she speculates that their relationship is only possible in such a hazy, amnesiac locale: "She could remember nothing before everything had had this poignancy … She could not believe they had not, in those two years, drawn on the virtue of what

was round them, *the* virtue peculiar to where they were" (309). Although this description applies more broadly to the World War II-era, including the buildup in the 1930s and the Blitz itself, Stella's exquisite feeling also characterizes the poignant beginnings of the Cold War in the second half of the 1940s. Moreover, the legal definition of disaffection was expanded in 1948 with the passage of the British Nationality Act, which stipulated that naturalized citizens may be deprived of citizenship if they have "shown himself by act or speech to be disloyal or disaffected towards His Majesty" (sec 20, 3, a). Postwar Britain, then, is also a "place of disaffection."

In literature, disaffection differs from the committed forms that commonly characterize midcentury writing. While studies by Valerie Cunningham, Samuel Hynes, and, more recently, Kristin Bluemel and Benjamin Kohlmann examine how modernist forms were extended by authors to political ends, disaffection names how existing aesthetic techniques were adopted, mimicked, and subsequently unraveled by some of these same authors. Unlike, for example, the slyly didactic "parabolic" forms of Hynes's "Auden generation," disaffection places its reader in a muddle by subverting given literary forms, foregrounding their otherwise invisible formal persuasiveness. Disaffection's demurrals are neither purely symptomatic nor politically efficacious in a direct way; it neither makes a clear claims about how literature represents a time nor argues about how literature can influence the future, as Eliot's lines above suggest ("Time before and time after / In a dim light"). Instead, disaffection uncovers how existing literary forms compel or inhibit particular modes of thinking and being, as Virginia Woolf's engagement with modernist "recognition"

in Chapter Two suggests, even as it also obliquely nods toward a provisional and often feeble solution. This means that the literature of disaffection examines how a given aesthetic form augments or delimits what is possible. In the case of *The Heat of the Day*, Bowen subverts literary realism, in the form of the spy-thriller plot and traditional descriptions of setting or a character's motivation, as an analog for her resistance to the pressures of contemporary postwar political realism, and she does so by borrowing methods from existentialist fiction. This analogy, and the literature of disaffection more broadly, is subtle. Its effects, if one perceives them at all, sneak up on a reader, just as disaffection itself is only spiritual disloyalty rather than overt mutiny. As I suggest in the Introduction, disaffection in these terms begins to look like an aesthetic aimed at disinterpellation.

In this chapter, I argue that *The Heat of the Day* is exemplary of how some midcentury works, particularly those that appear to register apathy or lassitude, might in fact harbor hidden affiliations, an unrobust but nevertheless earnest aesthetic of disaffection. In literary realism, Bowen finds a formal proxy for representing the coerciveness of political realism's supposed invisibility. I first show how *The Heat of the Day*'s seemingly-simple description of a conversation between Stella and Harrison actually foregrounds a readerly awareness of the conventions of aesthetic realism itself. Moreover, this scene originates in Sartre's *The Age of Reason*. Sartre's influence, I argue, speaks to Bowen's aim: *The Heat of the Day*'s appeal to and frustration of realist representation formalizes the existential awareness of the "nothingness" of being that Sartre's characters experience. Indeed, in this chapter's second section, I suggest that Sartre's influence accounts for *The Heat of the Day*'s

larger preoccupation with "nothing." By examining the novel's composition process, we can see how Bowen specifically weaves "nothing" into her novel. For Bowen, the readerly experience of "nothing" is an analog for the Sartrean existential experience of nothingness. For Sartre, this experience is historically-inflected, and the same is true for Bowen's novel. In the chapter's final section, I read *The Heat of the Day*'s conclusion alongside Bowen's postwar essays and correspondence in order to connect her novel's disaffection from realism with internationalist sympathies after World War II. Ultimately, I argue, what might look like the retrospective apathy of "that particular psychic London" is in fact the oblique practice of liberal internationalist principle (100).

I. "Interests" in political and literary realism

The Heat of the Day's disaffection from literary realism is a rejection of political realism, whose stand-ins are Harrison and Robert. Both men desire that the world be perceived on their terms, albeit in different ways, and Stella refuses to accept either. She resists Harrison's zero-sum logic, in which commitment to one's lover is a betrayal of one's country and vice versa, and she rejects Robert's justification of his fascist sympathies, in which the strong have a natural superiority over the weak, independent of any nationality or governmental institutions. Indeed, *The Heat of the Day* suggests that these perspectives are two sides of the same coin, since both men view the world as comprising individual actors with "interests." For Robert, "there are no more countries left; nothing but names" (301). He asks Stella rhetorically, "What country have you and I outside this room?" and he asserts that

everyone has "a right to [their] own side" (301, 306). This worldview is coercive because it presents as natural the undermining of any governance or common ground by which two people might come to agree; it makes invisible the extent to which it dissolves the means of interpersonal exchange. Similarly, for Harrison, the world comprises interests. Nothing, not even love, falls outside this logic, as he notes upon first meeting Stella: "Your interest in Robert has, with everything else concerning him, been of some interest elsewhere for quite a time now" (41-42). Harrison's equation of these two definitions of "interest" (Stella's romantic feeling and an organization's sense that it has a stake or is invested) is very much in the vein of political realism. A similar discussion between Harrison and Stella about whether or not Robert is "an actor" takes on the same valence, as Stella begins from a different definition of "actor" than Harrison. The latter assumes that everyone has his or her own interests at heart, whereas Stella is still invested in authenticity:

> "Actor? How should I of all people know? He has never had any reason to act with me."
>
> "No," he [Harrison] said thoughtfully. "No, I suppose not." (38-39)

Indeed, *The Heat of the Day* expressly asserts that the visions of these two men boil down to the same thing. Harrison's first name is Robert, so that, as Stella notes once Robert reveals his treason to her, the two become interchangeable: "It seemed to her it was Robert who had been the Harrison" (310). Here "Harrison" is a formal category ("the" Harrison) rather than a predicate. "Harrison" is an imposition of the logic of political realism.

Political realism, or *realpolitik*, emphasizes how nations are individual actors driven by a collection of interests in search of power. It garnered a bad name in the 1930s for its association with appeasement—Chamberlain incorrectly assessed Hitler's interests—but it regained popularity in the following decade during the Paris Peace Conference, when the West found itself confronted with the consolidation of Soviet power. Indeed, this construction "the West" is one of *realpolitik*, since the U.S., the U.K., and Western Europe came together through similar interests rather than through shared governance. The competing theory to *realpolitik* in the midcentury is liberalism or internationalism, which strove to ensure a common ground for negotiation and understanding—a goal that, political realists would argue, is naïve and dangerously idealistic. The difference between these two visions is one of means: whereas realism conceives of international relations as a struggle that is knowable through behavioral science between "interests" for "power," the liberal approach, suspicious of such scientistic methodology, concerns itself with "principle" through the establishment and management of proper institutions. Harrison perfectly exemplifies the political realist's perceptual confidence when he asserts, "I've never yet known a man not change his behaviour once he's known he's watched: it's exactly changes like that that are being watched for. No, *he'd* let us know the instant that he'd been tipped the wink" (38). On the other hand, liberalism, originating in theories of individualism and governance from Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, endeavors to guarantee the means for free diplomatic discourse (just as, in Chapter One, liberalism signified the possible establishment of a "common ground" for communication between the wealthy upper-class travelers and the lower-class

commuters in Henry Green's *Party Going*). For political realists, the stereotype of liberalism is one of ineffectual moralizing and shaming without recourse to action. For liberal internationalists, the stereotype of political realism is one of paranoia and craven short-sightedness. In reality, both descriptions are unfair: liberalism often establishes its institutions not out of altruistic universalism but out of more self-interest than it readily admits, and realism often describes a complex matrix of interests—including the social and the idealistic or notional—that can be far more pluralist in practice. Bowen would have been quite familiar with this postwar philosophical rift. As a close friend of the liberal political philosopher Isaiah Berlin and as a lover of the Canadian diplomat Charles Ritchie (to whom I will return later), she knew the differences between classical British theories of liberal international relations and those of the newer *realpolitik* that were gaining influence as the United States and the Soviet Union solidified the Cold War's terms. As I argue in this chapter's final section, Bowen references this concept of *realpolitik* in *The Heat of the Day*'s concluding tableau.

First, however, it is important to detail to detail how *The Heat of the Day* foregrounds political realism's emphasis on "interest" or motivation through its disaffective literary realism. Although the novel initially feigns to offer a character's reason for acting, it in fact offers a kind of placeholder or null field for it. The novel might appear realist at a glance, but its effect is actually to force readerly awareness of the very categories of description that realism ought to provide invisibly. In other words, if we define literary realism as predicated upon (a) an absence of metaphysical speculation by an author or narrator, (b) an imperative that characters' interests

appear natural, (c) and the representation of physically-familiar space, then *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection from realism discloses these conventions of plot, character, and setting by showing them *as* conventions and violating them in the process. Although this might sound complicated, it is in fact quite easy to spot once it dawns upon a reader to do so—that is, once it becomes evident that Bowen is explicitly frustrating one's ability to relate to her characters and picture her scenes.

The most prominent example of *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection is when, at its nominal climax, the novel calls attention to its characters' lack of motivating interest. When Stella meets Louie Louis, a working-class Londoner whose plotline has, to this point, remained exclusive from Stella's, *The Heat of the Day* recalls a nearly identical scene in Sartre's *The Age of Reason*, namely in the way that Bowen foregrounds Stella's and Louie's lack of a compelling reason to act or "interest." With Louie's arrival, it is as if the novel is subverting realism in the same way that Stella is resisting Harrison's imposition of the logic of political realism. This nominal climax seems aware of its novelistic importance insofar as it emphasizes its own meaningfulness. Stella, looking around a nightclub, experiences the sensation that *something* ought to happen, but what? She begins to feel as if nothing interests anyone in the bar.

> She looked round the room. …She got the impression that news unheard by her had detonated dully among these people, without causing a blink to the lights or a shock to anyone. Perhaps the fact was that the seeing of everybody by everybody else with such awful nearness and clearness was already enough. They were neither smart nor shabby, drunk nor sober, saved nor

> damned—born extras, if anything too many. But nobody is hired to play for nothing however small a part: she wondered what tonight's inducement could be—here and there somebody looked around, uncertain, as though the inducement were breaking down. Was it possible that some major entrance could be overdue? How if Robert were to walk in? (260-1)

Here the first sentences suggest that the characters, "born extras," betray their lack of depth by appearing in no way singular, "neither smart nor shabby, drunk nor sober." Moreover, while they are presumably not "play[ing] for nothing," the novel refuses to provide any "inducement" or motivation. With these details, or really the lack of them, realist conventions of character seem to be "breaking down." The "extras" lack both literal and metaphorical depth. They are flat like scenery or supernumeraries, "flat" in the sense outlined famously by E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*.[55] Indeed, *The Heat of the Day* uses "flat" with a purpose. The scenic characters move their lips but fail to speak; their "mouths worked hard to put out never much more than silence—sound itself seemed flattened out by the glare" (252). Plot, too, becomes an overt topic of speculation. The "extras" appear nervous and "uncertain," and Stella mistakes this feeling for a premonition of Robert's entrance. What is in fact about to happen is that Stella will cross paths with Louie for the first and only time. It is as if Stella intuits the reader's own sense of expectation rather than the nothingness of the room around her.

[55] Bowen writes about Forster's piece during the composition period of *The Heat of the Day*. In "Notes on Writing a Novel" (1945), she cites Forster's flat-round distinction to argue that the "ideal novel" ought to contain characters with at least some possibility of acting otherwise. They must have a minimal "number of alternatives" (38).

In the larger scene, Stella is dining with Harrison, whom Louie eventually recognizes from a prior encounter in the novel's opening chapter. At the moment of Stella's intuition, from across the room, Louie's "interest" becomes the subject of conjecture:

> Louie, at these words—or at what must have been their vibration, for they could not have reached her end of the room—pivoted round on the stool on which she sat. Holding on with one hand to the rail of the counter, she leaned backwards to stare at Harrison's table as though it might mean something—and, as soon became evident, it did. (261)

For Louie, the table is meaningful because she recognizes Harrison from their earlier conversation. For the reader, though, this moment unites the tendrils of the novel's plot. The meeting of Stella and Louie is charged even before Louie knows why she turns around (as the couple's conversation "could not have reached her end of the room") and before she knows why she focuses on a particular spot (as it only "might mean something"). Here the text explicitly raises the question of motivating interest even as it fails to provide any for its characters. The plot is not realist, not an "unmanipulated, natural chain of events"; it is an opaque, self-referential presentation of the plot's insufficiency (A. Lee 11). The novel, in other words, cites realism's convention only to subvert it, allowing the audience to perceive a foregrounding of "interest" that ought to appear transparent or natural.

Contributing to this effect is how *The Heat of the Day* pairs its exposure of motivating interest with the bar's abeyance of spatial depth. Not only does the novel foreground how "nothing" compels its characters, but it also questions the very

dimensionality of the space in which these events occur. The narrator states that the area seems explicitly constructed for such a scene, since the club has "no air of having existed before tonight" (251). Moreover, *The Heat of the Day* calls attention to the bar's details while simultaneously noting that such detail does not matter in its specificity. The effect is of a novel overtly refusing to communicate its effect:

> Wherever she turned her eyes detail took on an uncanny salience—she marked the taut grimace with which a man carrying two full glasses to a table kept a cigarette down to its last inch between his lips. Not a person did betray, by one or another glaring peculiarity, the fact of being human: her intimidating sensation of being crowded must have been due to this, for there were not so very many people here. The phenomenon was the lighting, more powerful even than could be accounted for by the bald white globes screwed aching to the low white ceiling—there survived in here not one shadow: every one had been ferreted out and killed. (252)

This passage refuses to present, let alone explain, specific details for "salience" following its explicit claim that detail is meaningful. Stella feels crowded, but no detail can account for this sensation. Although compelled to rationalize this phenomenon, Stella cannot do so: something "more powerful" than the lighting has quashed her fellow customers' shadows, which have been, in the passive voice, "ferreted out and killed."

This passage echoes one from *The Age of Reason*. Completed in 1941, *The Age of Reason* is Sartre's intervention in a seemingly inevitable march to world war. It juxtaposes the ennui of its protagonist, Mathieu Delarue, with his failure to commit

to the socialist cause in Spain, and it represents a turning point in Sartre's thinking: in the 1940s, Sartre's philosophy increasingly emphasizes responsibility rather than simply resting on a diagnosis of existential despair.[56] *The Age of Reason* is thus aimed at transforming apathy into action.[57] Just as Stella surveys the basement establishment before proceeding further into the room, so too does Mathieu eerily examine a club where he meets his friends. He hesitates to enter; he lingers in the doorway, listening to "confused sounds, a tango." Then he is suddenly inside:

> And then—it happened in an instant, just as a sleeper suddenly finds himself on his feet in the morning without knowing how he got there: he had pulled the green curtain aside, walked down seventeen steps, and emerged into a scarlet, echoing cellar, picked out with patches of unwholesome white—the tablecloths. At the far end of the cellar silk-shirted gauchos were playing dance-music on a platform. Before him stood a throng of people, motionless, decorous, and apparently expectant: they were dancers; they looked like gloomy victims of an interminable destiny. (213-214)

The pace of this passage reflects those from *The Heat of the Day* above. For a time, nothing happens—Mathieu is waiting. Suddenly his actions occur in a passive flurry. Like the explicit lack of motivation in *The Heat of the Day*, Mathieu's sleepiness is an absence imputed to the surrounding patrons. Just as above there is an "inducement,"

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[56] Jeff Malpas notes that, after *Nausea* (*La Nausée*, [1938]) and a collection of short stories, *The Wall* (*Le Mur*, [1939]), "increasingly it is the *response* to absurdity that takes precedence over the mere experience" (301, emphasis original). Michelle Darnell similarly argues that Sartre's thought turns in the 1940s insofar as *The Age of Reason* develops the conclusions of *Being and Nothingness* rather than simply exemplifying them. Sartre would not be closely associated with socialism until after the publication of "What is Literature?" ("Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" [1947]), which was translated into English in 1950.

[57] *The Age of Reason* represents the Spanish situation without complexity or the acknowledgement that support for the Soviets was a divisive issue within the socialist cause. That is, for Mathieu, resisting royalist fascism is as simple as supporting socialism.

so too are diners in *The Age of Reason* marked as extras, as a set of unmoving ornaments awaiting their part ("motionless, decorous, and apparently expectant"). For Sartre, the club's patrons are trying in vain to unsaddle their hearts weighted with existential dread. For Bowen, the effect is more alienating because directed to an aesthetic end. *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection adopts the pressure of *The Age of Reason*'s characters to acknowledge the conventions by which they live and translates this into a subversion of realism with which the reader must grapple. Yet both novels desire to connect the personal to the international community. For Sartre, Mathieu senses the importance of something greater, "something vaguer and more comprehensive: his life, Europe" (308). For Bowen, disaffection results in an awareness that realism (both literary and political) problematically assumes its own methodological self-evidence.

It also seems possible that Bowen is simultaneously evoking the example that Sartre uses to define "nothing" in *Being and Nothingness*: looking for, and not seeing, one's friend in a café. "It is certain that the café by itself with its patrons, its tables, its booths, its mirrors, its lights, its smoky atmosphere, and the sounds of voices, rattling saucers, and footsteps which fill it—the café is a fullness of being," Sartre writes (41). As he looks for his friend (Pierre), however, Sartre begins to feel the café recede into nothingness: "I am witness to the successive disappearance of all the objects which I look at—in particular of the faces, which detain me for an instant (Could this be Pierre?) and which as quickly decompose precisely because they 'are not' the face of Pierre" (41). For Sartre (from *The Age of Reason* onward), this awareness of

"nothing" comes to imply political commitment. For Bowen, too, responsibility is the upshot of *The Heat of the Day*'s estranging effects.

Patrons, tables, lights, smokiness—such are the kinds of details that Bowen finds both alienating and in need of response. Their "uncanny salience" is the crux of existential alienation as well as commitment. In her 1963 afterward to *Bowen's Court* (1942)—Bowen's history of her family and its Big House in Cork, Ireland—she similarly describes how details make one reel with responsibility. "In the savage and austere light of a burning world, details leaped out with significance," Bowen writes, as if quoting from *The Heat of the Day*'s description of its café patrons: "Nothing that ever happened, nothing that was ever even willed, planned or envisaged, could seem irrelevant. War is not an accident: it is an outcome. One cannot look too far back to ask, of what?" (454). Here Bowen asserts her family's responsibility in terms very close to Sartre's. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre writes, "Thus there are no *accidents* in life; a community event which suddenly bursts forth and involves me in it does not come from the outside. If I am mobilized in a war, this war is *my* war" (708, emphasis original). Just so, the meaningfulness of detail is how it commissions at every moment an awareness of commitment. Although the Bowens seem "unhistoric," although they seem to have made no great imprint on the world, they are nevertheless responsible even in their lives' minutiae. Bowen insists: "Their assertions, their compliances, their refusals as men and women went, year by year, generation by generation, to give history direction … Each of the family, in their different manners, were more than their time's products; they were its agents" (452). To some, perhaps, the Big House might symbolize how the Bowen family was

determined by historical conditions. For Bowen, however, Bowen's Court engenders the awareness of individual responsibility no matter the material circumstance.

Regardless of whether or not Bowen ever read *Being and Nothingness*—the similarity of Bowen's and Sartre's sentences about the "accidental" quality of war suggests that this is at least possible—the connection between *The Heat of Day* and *The Age of Reason* is more than merely thematic. Bowen likely draws the very phrase "the heat of the day" from Sartre's novel. If true, this would suggest that the readerly alienation spurred by *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection from realism *is* the titular "heat of the day." Sartre writes:

> She thought: "Midday!" The ceiling was gray like the sky at dawn, but the heat was of midday. (84)
>
> Two o'clock, the moment of the day when the heat was most menacing, it curled and crackled down the center of the street like a long electric spark. (143)
>
> The room smelt oppressive. All *the heat of the day* had settled into its depths, like the lees in a bottle. (358, emphasis mine)

Although events in Sartre's novel occur over the course of forty-eight hours, characters compare the current hour to "the heat of the day" at all times of day, with the result that "the heat of the day" becomes a general psychological condition. W. J. McCormack provocatively suggests that the phrase "heat of the day" comes from a speech given at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Upon the camp's liberation in 1946, a British commanding officer tells the former prisoners that they may lead in

the camp's demolition, since they experienced "the heat and burden of the day" (216). For McCormack, the title *The Heat of the Day* constitutes an ironic comment on Bowen's part: the suffering of Londoners during World War II cannot possibly compare to that of the camp victims, whose anguish is far greater. To the contrary, I argue that the likely provenance of "the heat of the day" in *The Age of Reason* suggests not the coolness of ironic detachment but an overheated alienation. At a glance, its oppressiveness seems to stand in for a stereotype of existentialism, in which one is forced to confront a lack of metaphysical meaning in one's own life. In the 1940s and after, however—particularly in *The Age of Reason* and its sequel, *The Reprieve* (*Le Sursis* [1945])—Sartre couples the existential confrontation of "nothingness," the lack of meaning in one's own life, with an awareness that individual responsibility must prompt international response. "The heat of the day" thus represents more than a caricature of nihilistic ennui: it stands for how radical individualism begets collective international action.

In her postwar reviews of existentialist fiction, including *The Age of Reason*, Bowen explicitly connects the estranging techniques of these novels to a desire for liberal international relations. Her review of Albert Camus's *The Outsider* is perhaps the origin of her disaffective technique, since she emphasizes the extent to which *The Outsider* engages with what is "normal" or conventional. Bowen takes great pains to clarify that Camus's alienating effects are a generalizable interrogation of social convention itself rather than, say, the moral castigation of a lone actor in the form of Meursault, Camus's protagonist. Meursault, she argues, fails "to make the expected, and therefore orthodox, emotional responses," and this presents the reader with the

question: “what *is* normality?” (119, emphasis original). Like the would-be modernist playwright in Woolf’s *Between the Acts*, Meursault holds up a mirror to society’s conventional responses. “In how many of those who make them,” Bowen asks, “are they pure conventions, a bid for the approval of society?” (119). Subsequently, Bowen praises both *The Age of Reason* and *The Reprieve* not only for their reflections on conventionality but for their refraction of world events. She lauds *The Age of Reason*’s method—juxtaposing Mathieu’s ennui and the Spanish Civil War—when she justifies the novel’s “harsh and sordid” plot and “repellant” characters as that which allows for a “dynamic [and] deeply disturbing” portrait of the “world-war clouds of 1939,” and she is even more enthusiastic about Sartre’s follow-up. In *The Reprieve*, a large cast of geographically-scattered characters—including such historical figures as Neville Chamberlain, Adolf Hitler, and Carl Schmitt—participate in a swirl of collective experience by which each participant is part of a greater whole prior to the fateful signing of the Munich Agreement in 1938 (the titular “reprieve”). Every European, Sartre writes in *The Reprieve*, “realizes its existence as a cell in a gigantic and invisible coral” (326). For Bowen, by “transcending national speech” with “the language of the time rather than of country,” *The Reprieve* eludes definition as an exclusively French novel and presents a laudable pan-European consciousness. The historical situatedness of *The Reprieve* makes explicit what Mathieu’s inability to commit in *The Age of Reason* already implied: a worldview scorning nationalist “interests” in its articulation of an international common ground that exceeds the interests of the individual or the lone nation. Taken together, Bowen’s reviews cite

existentialist methods as a means of channeling her vision of Sartre's increased emphasis on responsibility on an international scale.

II. Disaffection at Holme Dene

Bowen's Court's assertion above about the relationship between a house and the necessity of commitment recalls depictions in *The Heat of the Day* of Robert's family home, Holme Dene. As I have suggested, the convention that *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection is most invested in uncovering is nationalism or "Englishness." Just as the novel's bar scene exposed "interest" as an otherwise invisible realist convention, so too does *The Heat of the Day* represent "England"—insofar as nationality is a motivating force for action—as merely conventional. Stella and Robert twice travel to see Robert's mother and sister at Holme Dene in the Home Counties, and a number of scholars have argued that the novel equates Robert's undesirable fascism with the definition and discipline of the English middle-class subject as perpetuated through Robert's domineering mother. Bowen's depiction of the house itself, however, complicates this conclusion. What results from these visits is a representation of physical space that—as with "interest" in the bar scene above—foregrounds a readerly expectation of how realist description *ought* to operate. Although the novel might appear to suggest that Robert's upbringing in the English suburban bourgeoisie causes his treason or inevitably locks him into particular actions, *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffective realism in fact shows "Englishness" as a convention (rather than as an invisible or natural set of "interests"). That is, the novel's depiction of "England" foregrounds its conventionality, implying the

conventionality of nationalism and national interest as well. Its disaffection disrupts the formal conventions of realism that would have allowed a reader to impute responsibility simply to a way of life.

What binds *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection to novelistic conventions of character and scene is the fact that Bowen herself defines these conventions as *the* specifically *English* characteristics of the novel. Realism, as Fredric Jameson notes, is an epistemological construct—its transparency is relative to "the dominant modes of cultural representation in the respective society"—so one objection to the claim that *The Heat of the Day* subverts realism's conventions might be that this subversion, too, is conceptually relative (Jameson 124, Eyssteinson 195). However, in *English Novelists* (1946), Bowen's pleasantly toothless tour through the rise of the novel (from Defoe to Woolf and Forster), she summarizes the particularly English contribution to the novel:

> Looking back, we may say that the English novelists have, from the eighteenth century up to some years ago, excelled in the creation of character, and, secondarily, in the drawing of scenes, rather than in the analysis of ideas and passions. They have left us a gallery of immortal English creatures—eccentrics, haphazard fine young men, fantasists, optimists, blackguards, silly women, dashing bad women, lovely spirited gals; they have
> left us English landscapes as various as ever came from the sweep of an English brush. (46)

Here Bowen endeavors to define the novel's Englishness as an anthropological exercise in studying "the English," and it follows from this characterization that

subversions of realist character or scene would be a *de facto* critique of Englishness itself. Indeed, in a 1946 letter to Charles Ritchie, Bowen is even more suggestive about the relationship between national character and literary form. "What a curious country England is," she exclaims, "more uncanny than France and more deceptive, because of its apparent prosaicness, than Ireland" (*Love's* 101, emphasis original). Here "England" is especially curious because it feigns self-evidence. Presenting a façade akin to literary transparency, England is deceptively unassuming. In *The Heat of the Day*, disaffection is what discloses this prosaicness as merely apparent.

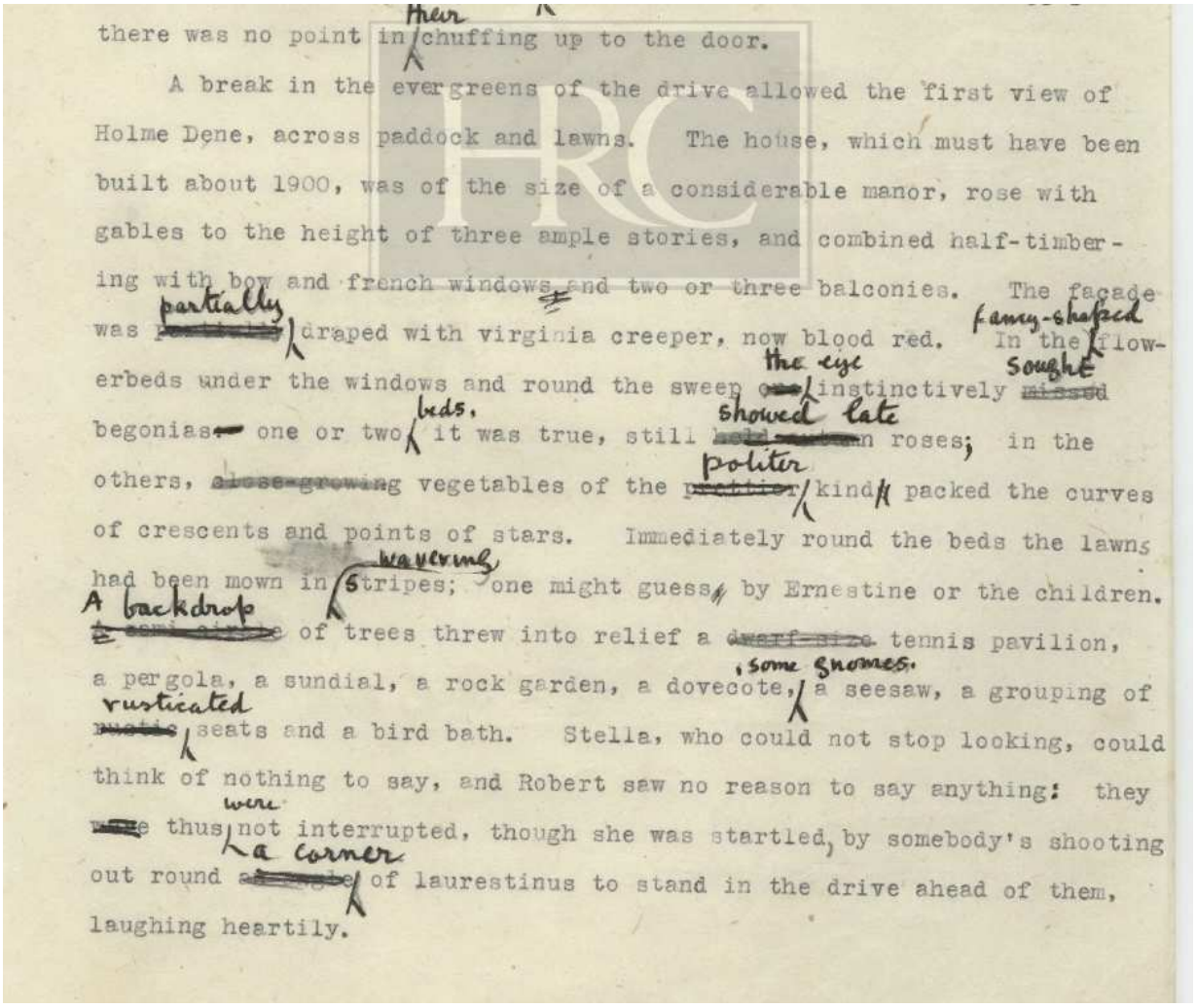
The novel characterizes Robert's village as comfortably English, a stereotype of hearth and home, while also suggesting a contradiction in its supposed authenticity. From the train station's elevated platform, Stella and Robert can see "one kind of pattern of English life at its most coherent and reassuring. The platforms themselves seemed to bear the mark of breadwinners' contented evening returns—*here* no one did anything but keep house" (113-114, emphasis original). English life is home, complete with housekeeping and breadwinning. However, this description is at odds with itself, since the station also symbolizes "the two most poignant seasons—in spring, in autumn everything telegraphs its mystery to your senses; nothing is trite. And more: in these years, the idea of war made you see any peaceful scene at it were through glass" (114). Here the description emphasizes the mediation of "English life" through both sight (glass) and sound (the telegraph). The English countryside is never quite "coherent" or "reassuring." A level of remove is always implicit from the first encounter.

Just as with the evacuation of characters' motivating interests above, the description of Holme Dene's exterior summons and subsequently undermines realism's conventional representation of physical space. At first glance, *The Heat of the Day*'s description might seem typically realist in the sense of being laden with transparently meaningful detail. However, the details that describe the space stand out precisely in their featurelessness and failure to evoke. The following description of Holme Dene describes the house even as it draws attention to the conventions of doing so.

> A break in the evergreens of the drive allowed the first view of Holme Dene, across paddock and lawns. The house, which must have been built about 1900, was of the size of a considerable manor, rose with gables to the height of three ample stories, and combined half-timbering with bow and French windows and two or three balconies. The façade was partially draped with virginia creeper, now blood red. In the fancy-shaped flowerbeds under the windows and round the sweep the eye instinctively sought begonias—one or two beds, it was true, still showed late roses; in the others, vegetables of the politer kind packed the curves of crescents and points of stars. Immediately round the beds the lawns had been mown in wavering stripes; one might guess by Ernestine or the children. A backdrop of trees threw into relief a tennis pavilion, a pergola, a sundial, a rock garden, a dovecote, some gnomes, a seesaw, a grouping of rusticated seats and a bird-bath. Stella, who could not stop looking, could think of nothing to say, and Robert saw no reason to say anything: they thus were not interrupted, though she was startled, by

somebody's shooting round a corner of laurustinus to stand in the drive ahead of them, laughing heartily. (115-6)

Although this description has a considerable volume of detail, these facts are not especially evocative. The list of items that are present in the yard—eight items—is impossibly long and neglects to imply, say, how the items might be arranged in a way that gives a sense of the inhabitants' character. More tellingly, the details of the house, despite their prodigiousness, are vague. Holme Dene has an indeterminate number of balconies ("two or three"), flowerbeds ("one or two"), and gnomes ("some"). The ultimate effect is not what the details evoke but an awareness that they ought to be evocative. With the phrase "the eye instinctively sought begonias," Bowen explicitly cites readerly expectation, yet this goes unfulfilled. And with seeming impatience, the text acknowledges its performance of the inferential work of realism, "guess[ing]" that the lawn has been mowed by Robert's sister or her children. Finally, the paragraph concludes by drawing our attention to the conventionality of indirect discourse itself: it seems as if Stella and Robert would stand by indefinitely, starting mutely and saying nothing.



there was no point in their chuffing up to the door.

A break in the evergreens of the drive allowed the first view of Holme Dene, across paddock and lawns. The house, which must have been built about 1900, was of the size of a considerable manor, rose with gables to the height of three ample stories, and combined half-timbering with bow and french windows and two or three balconies. The facade was partially draped with virginia creeper, now blood red. In the flowerbeds under the windows and round the sweep one instinctively sought fancy-shaped begonias — one or two beds, it was true, still held the eye autumn roses; in the others, showed late vegetables of the politer kind packed the curves of crescents and points of stars. Immediately round the beds the lawns had been mown in wavering stripes; one might guess by Ernestine or the children. A backdrop of trees threw into relief a tennis pavilion, a pergola, a sundial, a rock garden, a dovecote, some gnomes, a seesaw, a grouping of rusticated seats and a bird bath. Stella, who could not stop looking, could think of nothing to say, and Robert saw no reason to say anything: they were thus not interrupted, though she was startled by somebody's shooting out round a corner of laurestinus to stand in the drive ahead of them, laughing heartily.

figure 1 (HRC 5.3)

More interesting is how many of these obscurities are intentionally edited into the published version of the scene during the postwar period (figure 1). The lawn is not just mowed in stripes but in uneven, "wavering" stripes. The more specific "semi-circle" of trees gives way to a monolithic "backdrop." Bowen pluralizes "lawns" and adds an indiscriminate number, "some," gnomes. She calls attention to the effect the scene has by adding the adjective "fancy-shaped" and by changing the verb in "held autumn roses" to "showed late roses." Similarly, she emphasizes the visual surface of things by editing "one" to "the eye"; by changing "rustic," which merely denotes age

or rough quality, to "rusticated," which implies a projection of age; and by turning "prettier" into "politer," the former denoting a simple assessment of beauty and the latter suggesting an awareness of being received. In short, to paraphrase *Burnt Norton*, the yard has the look of a yard that is looked at. And like the footfalls leading to Eliot's rose garden of potential, Holme Dene is an echo, always aware of and already adjusted by its own reception. The coherence and reassurance of "English" life appears to be breaking down.

Moreover, when the novel reprises this description, the second portrayal—equally incoherent—implies that an authentic Holme Dene *used* to exist but has been, for Stella, lost. Unsurprisingly, the second description trots out the tired comparison between realist text and a window:

> She looked out of the window, down at the betrayed garden, in which the gnomes, bird-bath and rustic seats now seemed to hover indeterminately. From this attic height you looked through the tops of trees; their illusion of forest-like density was lost; their thinning foliage stood out tattered against the sky. There were no rooks. Seen through transparent dusk the pattern of flowerbeds in the lawn looked impermanent, and those pallid roses seemed to have lingered on only because they were not only for this year but for this *place*, ever, the final ones. (133, emphasis original)

This passage more obviously references conventions of realism, beginning with the word "betrayed," which suggests that the landscape itself has come uncovered. Objects from the first description suddenly float groundless, "hover[ing] indeterminately" as if space itself has ceased to be. Likewise, the forest that the trees

previously suggested—supposedly—is exposed as mere "illusion." Yet what is "forest-like" here has always been a flat "backdrop." The garden's "betrayal," then, is anything but: it has always existed for effect. While this passage calls attention to its own lost suggestiveness, and so to realist convention as such, the garden's initial description never claimed such an effect in the first place. The English garden was never authentic. Indeed, except in its unnerving lack of particulars ("some," "two or three," etc.), Holme Dene is nearly identical to another postwar performance of Englishness. Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* (1948) describes a home in Southern California that reminds its protagonist of "what in England he would have taken for the country seat of an Edwardian financier"—specifically, the lawn contains "a sunken herb garden, a sundial, a bird-bath and fountain, a rustic seat and a pigeon-cote" (35). Here the naturalization of Englishness appears exportable.

A further comparison of the manuscript and published versions of this chapter—the first one written by Bowen after she resumes the novel in late 1944—suggests the extent to which she wished to generate alienation at even the sentence level. Bowen edits a host of tortuous double negatives into the published version. Their effect, I argue below, is to translate the existentialism of Sartre's characters in *The Age of Reason* into a yawning gulf of negativity on the very surface of *The Heat of the Day*. That is, Bowen's novel literalizes the repeated ruminations about "nothing" by Sartre's characters. When Robert returns to Holme Dene, for example, one of his exclamations is transformed into a double negative: in figure 2 below, "Yes, I object to your saying that I don't come across" now reads "No, no one can say I don't come across" (124). Likewise, a clause initially stating that "what he had left

behind him remained solidly here" in figure 3 finds Bowen striking through the final three words to write, "was not to be denied" (125). In his childhood bedroom, which is filled with pictures, Stella exclaims that the room "feels empty!" To this assertion, Robert's reply changes: what he first says in figure 4—"I suppose in a way it actually always has been"—becomes "It could not feel emptier than it is," with the initial "always" becoming the negative "not" (129).

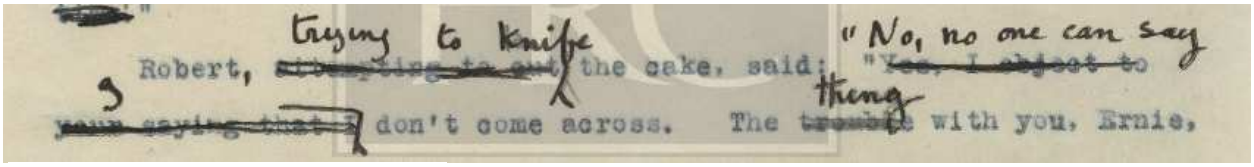


figure 2 (HRC 5.3)

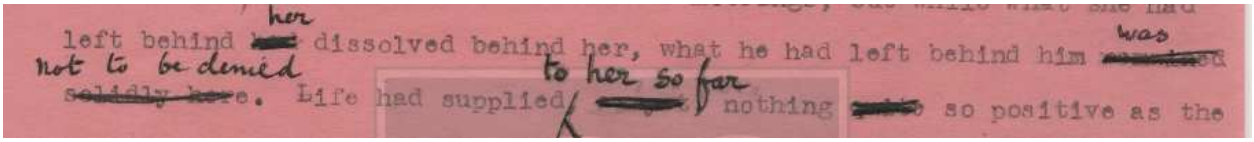


figure 3 (HRC 5.3)

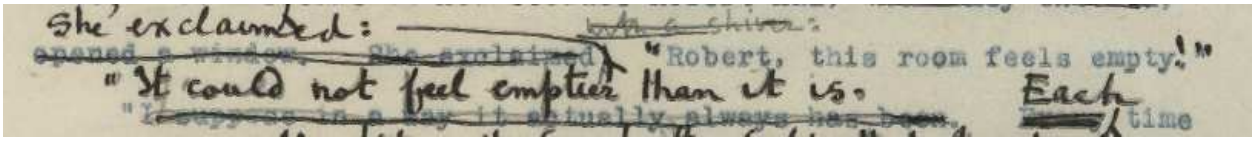


figure 4 (HRC 5.3)

Similar examples can be found across the manuscript. Perhaps the best example we occurs in the history of Bowen's phrase, "Nothing was not possible" (105). The original version reads, "Nothing (appeared) impossible," with "was" substituted in the place of "appeared" (figure 5). The edit shows Bowen changing the very ontology of nothing: nothing doesn't appear; it simply is. Yet neither of these approaches has the eeriness of the published version, "Nothing was not possible," which throws its weight onto the first half of the sentence. "Nothing was not possible" forces the

reader to halt over "nothing." Bowen's revision shows how the sentence comes to emphasize the presence of absence.

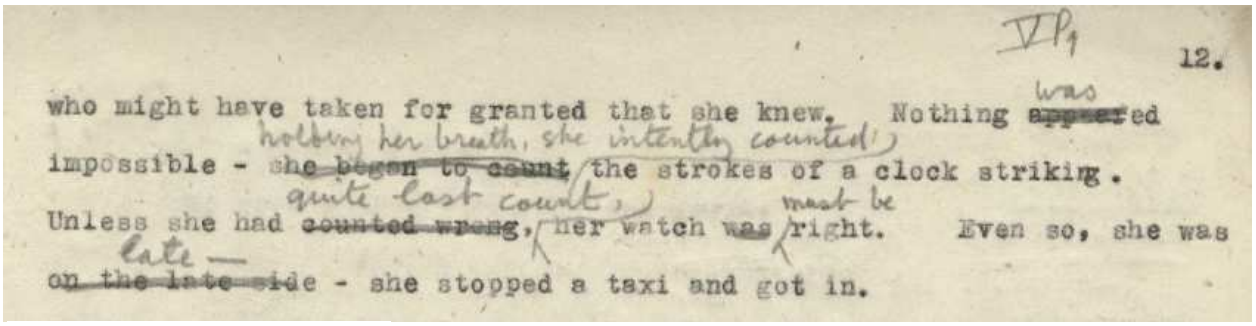


figure 5 (HRC 5.3)

This editorial history finds its precedent in *The Age of Reason*, where characters frequently become aware of an existential "nothing" from which their life springs and to which it is ultimately headed. Although Bowen's fiction has always been characterized by a certain amount of negative description—this accounts for why so many perceive her work as "mannered"—none of the draft manuscripts of her other novels show such a will-to-negation.[58] This alienating effect reaches new extremity in *The Heat of the Day* on account of Sartre's novel. Throughout *The Age of Reason*, characters reflect upon the nature of nothingness and exclaim to themselves or to one another that "nothing" is their motivating force. For Mathieu, such "nothing" is especially poignant in the face of his inability to summon political ardor for the Spanish Civil War. Sartre writes:

> "When you look at yourself, you imagine you aren't what you see, you imagine you are nothing. That is your ideal: you want to be nothing." (14)

[58] See particularly the introduction to Ellmann and Claire Seiler. Whereas Seiler defines the activity of "nothing" in *The Heat of the Day* as part of a larger trope of suspension, I would suggest something like the inverse: Bowen's "nothing" finally finds its philosophical match in Sartre's existentialism.

> "I have cleared myself out, sterilized myself into a being that can do nothing but wait. I am now empty, it is true, but I am waiting for nothing." (64)
>
> "Why am I caught in this loathsome world of noises, surgical instruments, furtive taxi-rides, in this world where Spain does not exist? Why am I not in the thick of it…Why haven't I wanted to go and fight? I could have chosen another world? Am I still free? I can go where I please, I meet with no resistance, but that's worse: I am in an unbarred cage, I am cut off from Spain by—by *nothing*" (146, emphasis original)

Mathieu's inability to act here is the thematic antecedent to *The Heat of the Day*'s unnerving formal "nothing." These examples from *The Age of Reason* suggest the extent to which "nothing" is related to Mathieu's own intervention in history: he "want[s] to be nothing," he is "waiting for nothing," he is "cut off from Spain by—by *nothing*." Bowen's novel sews this "nothing," with all of *The Age of Reason*'s implications (i.e., that internationalist response is a product of individual responsibility), into *The Heat of the Day* at the sentence-level.

As Bowen's afterward to *Bowen's Court* suggests above, the scope of this existential awareness of "nothingness" is vast: it links the individual to broad historical trends, allowing for an intervention within what Arnold Toynbee, in Chapter One, characterized as the seemingly-inevitable "stream" of historical decline. *The Heat of the Day*'s "nothing" is aimed at producing historical self-awareness and placing pressure on the present. It is unlike what Bowen elsewhere characterizes as the comfort of a retrospective glance. In her 1952 preface to the second edition of *The*

Last September, Bowen notes that her earlier novel (originally published in 1929) filters history into cozy permanence. The tone of *The Last September* is one that does not impress upon the reader the social trauma of the Troubles' violence. Instead, Bowen writes:

> The mood and cast of my characters, and their actions, were to reflect the glour of a finished time. 'All this,' I willed the reader to *know*, 'is over.' Yet I wished him to *feel*: 'But see, our story begins!' From the start, the reader must look—and more, must be aware of looking—backward, down a perspective cut through the years. ("Preface" 3)

The time of *The Last September*'s composition is eight years removed from the setting of its events in 1920 so that, by 1928, there is a sense of relief: "peace had come to Ireland; trees were already branching up inside the shells of burned-out homes" (4). By contrast, the environments of *The Heat of the Day*—Holme Dene as well as the restaurant where Stella and Harrison meet Louie—evince no such relief. Their flattening of spatial and characterological depth, explicitly marked as such, analogizes the lack of historical relief that Bowen wishes to press upon her reader. Unlike in *The Last September*, in which readers are encouraged to feel history's remoteness, *The Heat of the Day* stresses the future's unforeseeability. Instead of an assumed juxtaposition between Ireland eight years prior and its current new growth, *The Heat of the Day* states that the present is a "helpless progress towards disaster." Here Bowen sounds like Toynbee; Stella, born in 1899, embodies the pressure associated with the century's fated demise:

> [I]n these last twenty of its [the century's] and her own years she had to watch in it what she felt in her—a clear-sightedly helpless progress towards disaster. The fateful course of her fatalistic century seemed more and more her own: together had she and it arrived at the testing extremities of their noonday. Neither had lived before. (147)

This passage lacks any temporal distance that might foreshadow contemporary growth, as in *The Last September*'s Ireland. Without relief, Stella's situation and the century itself is "helpless," "disaster[ous]," and "fateful." We can see, too, how Bowen revises these sentences to strengthen the intrinsic connection between Stella and time. In the draft, this sentence reads: "Even, her happening to be within a year of the same age as the century made its fate inextricable from hers and made its fateful course her own" (HRC 5.3). In the published version, Stella does not "happen" to have been born simultaneous to the century; instead, the century *is* hers. Likewise, the published version emphasizes not that the two are "inextricable," which implies that they could potentially separate, but rather that they are identical, that "their noonday" is shared completely. To the extent that this "noonday" originates in *The Age of Reason*, Bowen's refusal of historical relief is the heat of the day.

The Heat of the Day explicitly characterizes this refusal of relief as "disaffective," and it does so seemingly in order to link this disaffection with internationalist sympathies. The evening that Stella returns from Holme Dene, the novel notes, "The country seemed to have followed her back into London and to be on her tracks like a disaffecting ghost, undoing the reality of the city; around her the unsubstantial darkness was quickened by a not quite wind" (138). Here the second

sentence's multiple negations compel the reader to feel Stella's disaffection. The reality of the city is undone as one absence ("a not quite wind") passes through another (the darkness's unsubstantiality).[59] Yet the novel connects these misgivings about Holme Dene's authenticity to something like *The Reprieve*'s "cell in a gigantic and invisible coral": Stella's disaffection takes as its object the association of England and Europe. "She began to feel it was not the country but occupied Europe that was occupying London," Bowen writes, "The very tension overhead of the clouds nervously connected London with Paris" (139). Here disaffection is precisely a feeling of unease that begets the inclination to feel for international common ground.

III. *Realpolitik* in *The Heat of the Day*'s conclusion

Disaffection's implicit connection of London and Paris provides a telling contrast to the novel's conclusion. *The Heat of the Day* concludes in September 1944, and its final tableau—Louie standing at the English Channel—harbors obvious overtones for Britain's postwar future (or perhaps more accurately, "future," since Bowen had already lived through four years following the war). Based on her writings in the immediate postwar period—articles about the Paris Peace Conference

[59] As with Holme Dene's description above, we can see in drafts of *The Heat of the Day* how Bowen particularly chooses the participle "disaffecting." Neither "disaffecting" nor "undoing" are her original choices: in the edited typscript, "disaffecting" substitutes for "undermining" and "undoing" stands in for "dispelling" (HRC 5.4). Without wishing to make too much of a simple change between seemingly-similar words, we should note the reversal of the order of words that begin with "un" and "dis." Bowen chooses to have *dis*affection *un*do rather than to have *un*dermining *dis*pel. That is, disaffection marks expectation and the presence of absence. Whereas an "undermining" force that "dispels" seems to eliminate more thoroughly what came before, a "disaffecting" force that "undoes" leaves a trace. In this sense, the "reality of the city" is haunted as by a palimpsest. Hence the appropriateness of the word "ghost," which suggests the complexly layered, dual nature of the city's "reality" in this moment. Bowen's choice of "disaffecting" over "undermining" highlights what is dynamic in "disaffection": the "dis" contains a sense of ghostliness, of the dual nature of being haunted, in addition to the sense of rejection and "undoing."

following World War II for the *Cork Examiner*, correspondence with Charles Ritchie about diplomacy, and the conclusion of *The Heat of the Day* itself—we can see how Bowen's opposition to *realpolitik* figures in the novel's conclusion.

The final chapter presents an accelerated version of the second half of World War II, from November 1942 to September 1944, and its closing paragraphs hint that Britain's postwar future hangs in the balance. Louie, whose husband, Tom, was killed fighting in Europe, has just given birth to a son (also named Tom) who was conceived in London during her husband's deployment. He is born in June 1944, which the novel is careful to peg as the war's turning point. Louie even uses D-Day as a temporal marker for her son's due date—Tom is as expected as an invasion (367). Intriguingly, however, Louie and Tom return to her coastal hometown (the fictional Seale-on-Sea) to find no one.[60] Not only are both the child's father and Louie's husband out of the picture, but the grandparents have died in a bombing as well. Immediately upon arriving at Seale-on-Sea, Louie tours the wreckage of what used to be Tom's grandparents' house. She gazes across the placid Channel and sees nothing: "Reeds grew out into the still water; ahead, there was distance as far as the eye could see—a thoughtless extension of her now complete life" (372). She and Tom are alone in the world, unfettered by the past, content to make a new life on their own. Unlike Stella in London—disaffected but connected—Louie looks to France and sees nothing ("distance as far as the eye could see"). Tellingly, as an actor who needs only

[60] Seale-on-Sea's appearances here and in *The Death of the Heart* place it at Hythe, where Bowen summered as a child and early adolescent (Corcoran 172, Keown 180). This geography is relevant insofar as it contributes to Tom's overdetermination: Coastal Kent is just across from Calais at the narrowest portion of the English Channel and so was the expected launching point for the Allied invasion of Germany.

look to her own interests, Louie becomes irrational and untrustworthy in the novel's final sentences:

> A minute or two ago our homecoming bombers, invisibly high up, had droned over: the baby had not stirred—every day she saw him growing more like Tom. But now there began another sound—she turned and looked up into the air behind her. She gathered Tom quickly out of the pram and held him up, hoping he too might see, and perhaps remember. Three swans were flying a straight flight. They passed overhead, disappearing in the direction of the West. (372)

We need only note Bowen's jingoistic use of the first person plural ("our homecoming bombers") to insinuate that this passage's purple prose is tongue-in-cheek. Louie lifts Tom from his perambulator in the ridiculous hope that she can persuade him, at three months, to remember the planes and swans overhead. More sinister is the lie that she tells herself: every day Louie sees her child growing more like Tom, a man who is not his biological father. What does it mean that, with the war concluded and her family gone, freed from all solidarities and motivated only by self-interest, an irrational and untrustworthy Louie turns away from France to face the West?

The Heat of the Day's final paragraphs allegorize Bowen's fears for international relations in postwar Britain. In a 1944 manuscript, "The Idea of France," Bowen describes a walk along the cliffs as a seven-year-old visiting relatives in Kent near the fictional Seale-on-Sea. Her view of France is the piece's climax. Bowen's governess, "in a solemn and strained voice," instructs the "giddy" Bowen to focus.

She gazes across the Channel: "I looked. I saw a nothing but the line of the horizon (a "thoughtless extension" of "distance"), Bowen sees France. The nation represents continental sophistication, of course, but the essay notes that it also represents a diplomatic principle: whereas the Irish relate to France out of an anti-English resentment, Bowen writes that her "Protestant, landowning, Unionist" family need not also therefore dislike France (62). Clear lines of affiliation or "interest" do not necessarily signify across all parties; Bowen's family can be both Unionist and Francophile. The enemy of one's enemy is not necessarily one's friend. On the other hand, throughout *The Heat of the Day*, Louie aligns herself with the strongest prevailing attitude or force, whether a newspaper's propaganda or her flatmate's controlling influence. Lying, impressionable, and bereft of independent thought, Louie turns away from the Channel to the West while, in 1944, Bowen's thoughts turn to France. In Louie's flakiness and outright lies, we see what the political realist would likely characterize as the liberal internationalist's typically self-congratulatory moralizing and idealistic superiority. Indeed, Bowen not infrequently refers to the "moral effect" of British liberalism in international relations.[61]

France is particularly important in the late 1940s because it crystalizes the difficulty of the Britain's position. With power shifting from London and Paris to

[61] "I don't think," she writes to Charles Ritchie in 1950, "the moral effect (on the rest of the world) of an outbreak of Scottish-English bad blood would be derisory—do you? It would split—at a moment when any concept is so important—the whole 'British' concept" (*Love's* 168). Here "the whole 'British' concept" is notable for the moral effect its governance has on the rest of the world. Similarly, in a 1948 report coinciding with an invited lecture in Budapest, Bowen concludes that British presence in newly-Communist Hungary exerts an indirect moral influence on the populace: "If the Council in Budapest were to shut up shop, I believe that the moral effect would be more widespread, *and* more unfortunate, than it is possible for people in Britain to compute. The British Council people in Budapest are, personally, not only liked for their friendliness, they are admired for their nerve—and, perhaps most important of all in that atmosphere of universal mistrust, trusted for their discretion" (90).

Washington and Moscow, Britain had to decide quickly whether it could assert itself in world politics or whether it would accept an increasingly minor role. Would Britain have a seat at the table of a new international governing body that would provide a common ground for discourse and the moral principles for relations? Labour's victory in the General Election of 1945 seemed initially to suggest that Britain would be willing to continue its wartime alliance with Soviet Union or at the very least remain neutral, but any such notions were deflated by early 1947, when Britain was forced to appeal to the United States for resources to defend Greece against undue Soviet influence.[62] In general, Attlee and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin were on the right of the Labour Party—an intra-party pamphlet issued by their opposing faction was entitled *Keep Left*—so their agenda favored the continuance of many of the Conservative war coalition policies.[63] These included an anti-Soviet position as well as a reluctance to align more fully with France, an expression of Labour's socialist stance against new European federalism and the corrupting influence of continental capitalism. Coupled with the influx Marshall Plan dollars, an alliance with the United States was quickly cemented. Despite Bowen's soft spot for the United States—in the 1960s, she would embark on a U. S. lecture tour and teach a course at Vassar on the short story—she could not have found this Atlanticist agenda palatable, particularly how it figures Britain as a limb of U. S. foreign policy.

[62] While David Dutton notes that "a socialist foreign policy was common currency in 1945," T. E. B. Howarth suggests that the Greek crisis quickly scuttled any such plans (Dutton 42, Howarth 119-121).
[63] Although "the consistently anti-Soviet stance in Bevin's foreign policy provoked more disquiet on Labour's benches than any other aspect of the government's policies and programme," the rightward leanings of Attlee and Bevin lay the ground for the postwar consensus from a foreign relations perspective (Dutton 43).

While the method for *The Heat of the Day*'s disaffection comes from existentialist fiction, Bowen's moral stand for "principle" in international relations—or, to a political realist, her naivety—increased after WWII on account of her romance with Charles Ritchie, a Canadian diplomat and the dedicatee of *The Heat of the Day*. In a 1946 diary entry, Ritchie writes precisely about how liberalism must desperately safeguard a moral common ground:

> Perhaps the Russians are just more logical than we, more brutally consistent. So often we can see, as in a distorting glass but still recognizable, our motives and actions reflected in theirs. We are more scrupulous, more gentlemanly, but how much does that difference matter? Sometimes, as over the scramble for bases, the difference seems to have narrowed down almost to the vanishing point. Yet that difference only divides us from the jungle world they inhabit. And the difference we must stick to—we must think it a strength, otherwise we shall be too much tempted to throw it over. We must demonstrate its effectiveness or we might as well disencumber ourselves of it and plunge nakedly into the struggle. Every act of hypocrisy in which our governments indulge weakens our own
>
> faith in that difference. (10)

Here the difference between the Soviet and Western governments at the Paris Peace Conference is principle qua principle, the possession of "scruples" without which there is no moral basis for negotiation at all. Scrupulousness stands for a kind of "gentlemanly" reserve which, unlike the "naked" tactics of Soviet *realpolitik*, endeavors to be more than mere "motives and actions." As Ritchie's analogy

suggests, one must see *realpolitik* as the "distorting glass" that it is. Political realism is an epistemological construct rather than methodologically self-evident. For Bowen, too, *realpolitik* is a choice rather than manifest truth. "For the onlooker," she writes in her account of the Peace Conference in 1946, "there is the sinister fascination of watching Russia create, by her own suspicions, a psycho-political situation that, actually, not only has not existed so far but need not, in spite of Russia, ever exist at all" (71). Soviet political realism trades the assurances of a moral common ground for the paranoia of a situation in which each party must continually assess whether the other is acting in good faith. Soviet *realpolitik* is inoperable.

Just as, for Bowen, aesthetic realism harbors inappropriate pretensions to clarity, so too, in the following chapter, does literary impressionism strive for what V. S. Naipaul characterizes as a "curious neutrality of perception." In *The Mimic Men*, "the onlooker" is a problematic position for postcolonial governance as well. How can one communicate an "experience" while also providing a qualitative interpretation of it? For both Bowen and Naipaul, supposed neutrality is never simple.

Chapter 4
Postcolonial Impressionism and V. S. Naipaul's "curious neutrality of perception"

In *The Enigma of Arrival* (1988), V. S. Naipaul diagnoses his friend's struggle to write as a problem of impressionism: wrestling with the need to be both self-conscious and direct, the friend cannot solve the dilemma of the "literary approach to his experience, the self-regard that would have gone with its 'frankness'" (288).[64] Here the difficulty of conveying "literary experience" resides in balancing mimesis ("frankness") and analysis ("self-regard")—how can one give the correct impression? Naipaul borrows the language of Ford Madox Ford's definition of impressionism to characterize his friend's problem. Just as Ford's impressionism requires the "frank expression of personality," so too does Naipaul's friend grapple with the difficulty of balancing self-regard and frankness. Implicit in this definition of impressionism is a notion of belonging or "arrival," for the analytic and the mimetic merge most seamlessly when the reader understands where the author is coming from, when commentary feels definitional. So while Naipaul's friend dies isolated and misunderstood shortly thereafter, *Enigma* testifies to its own impressionistic success, performing the very literary balance of self-regard and frankness. The novel represents an affective turn in Naipaul's *oeuvre* because it performs his sense of belonging; the author belongs because he is neither excessively self-conscious nor a betrayer of hard truths, neither overly self-regarding nor frank.[65] In *Enigma*, Naipaul

[64] This friend, named "Alan" in *The Enigma of Arrival*, is literary critic Julian Jebb (French 418).
[65] Many scholars agree that *Enigma* is a turning point in Naipaul's career. Dooley notes that *Enigma* is the novel in which Naipaul first "makes it clear that his judgments are provisional" (139), and, in general, scholars who find Naipaul's representations of alterity negative or pessimistic also tend to except *Enigma* from this criticism, preferring to see the novel as an affective turn in Naipaul (see

positions himself perfectly between audience and subject matter: he "arrives" because he understands the effect that he creates in his audience, crafting "literary experience" as the appropriate impression.

This chapter casts *Enigma*'s articulation of "arrival" backward in order to characterize Naipaul's earlier impressionist novel, *The Mimic Men* (1967). If impressionism implicitly performs an act of belonging through a conflation mimesis and analysis, *The Mimic Men* might be said to represent the opposite: an expression of unbelonging by an author who prides himself on disavowal and straight talk. In particular, whereas *Enigma* finds Naipaul feeling found, *The Mimic Men* achieves no such resolution; its narrator, Ralph Singh, never belongs. A failed government official in the fictional newly-decolonialized Caribbean nation of Isabella (a thinly-veiled stand-in for Trinidad), Ralph flees for London, where, utterly alienated, he recounts his experience from a suburban hotel. He belongs nowhere, and with nothing left to lose, Ralph retreats into tortuous self-regard under the pretense of frankness.

In *The Mimic Men*, such unbelonging takes the form of what I call disaffective impressionism: by citing and subverting impressionistic technique—specifically, by undermining Ralph's connection to an audience and the world—Naipaul represents his distaste for the individuality available to a postcolonial subject. Showing impressionistic technique as such, *The Mimic Men* refuses the subjectivity-cum-colonial authority that impressionism proffers. Whereas Peter Kalliney argues that midcentury postcolonial authors desired to harness modernist aesthetic autonomy to craft a new form of praeterracial authority, *The Mimic Men*'s disaffective

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especially Mustafa 220 and Nixon 34). At the same time, those who defend Naipaul in general also implicitly reject the premise of a "turn" within Naipaul. Thus, Hayward, King, and Levy all see *Enigma* as a particular achievement along a trajectory that Naipaul has charted from the beginning.

impressionism indexes Naipaul's discomfort with such an aesthetic solution, cutting against this narrative by emphasizing the coercion of impressionism.

At the same time, Naipaul is unwilling to give up on authority altogether: he wants to retain an individuality uncircumscribed by the colonial metropole. Although modernist aesthetic autonomy is fraught, equally unpalatable is a materialist solution that would "engineer" society, trampling the individual in turn. *The Mimic Men* thus crystalizes a moment when Naipaul is caught between anti-colonial sentiment and a dispositional conservatism, and the novel's disaffection participates in this bind of unbelonging, in which Naipaul is unwilling to accept either reactionary colonialism or progressive materialism. It shows how the origin of what many critics characterize as pessimistic orientalism is in fact a complex idealism by which Naipaul wants to hold out for the impossible—namely, an organic solution to colonialism, an answer for, in Ralph's words, "the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfillment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors" (38). In the final section of this chapter, I trace the legacy of this counterfactual non-colonialism from *The Mimic Men* through Naipaul's immediately subsequent work to his Nobel lecture in 2001.

The Mimic Men's disaffection from impressionism ultimately attempts to escape impressionism's politics by retreating into a formal paradox—namely, a representation of why representation is problematic. Despite the fact that *The Mimic Men* represents Ralph's own experience with representation, the former (that is, the novel's "second-order" representation) is still troubling, since it does not escape the colonial authority inherent to impressionism's voice. Were *The Mimic Men* a

straightforward impressionist novel, one would be able to criticize Naipaul for finding authority within and reinforcing colonial relations. And we might still levy this criticism against *The Mimic Men* in the sense that its disaffection from impressionism remains thoroughly impressionist. Nevertheless, I think, we also should be attuned to *The Mimic Men*'s sally against the politics of modernist form. While it does not escape modernism's coercive colonialism, *The Mimic Men* is unique in Naipaul's *oeuvre* for how it does attempt to resist this coercion. Moreover, in its disaffection, Naipaul's novel is doing something rather different from other postcolonial novels of the decade prior, particularly from Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), with which *The Mimic Men* is often lumped, and George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954). For example, *The Mimic Men* exhibits none of the impressionist brio with which Selvon's narrator immerses himself *Dalloway*-esque in the life of the city: "This is London, this is life oh lord," he exclaims, "everybody hustling that is life that is London" (87, 109). Rather, as we shall see, Ralph's experience of London explicitly foregrounds his awareness of modernism as an inescapable interpretive lens.

I. The Postcolonial Impression

The impression stands in for a connection to the world; it mediates an entire moment. Ideally, its mimetic capacity is for representing a moment by also transmitting the experience of that moment. That is, literary impressionism is not just the translation of visual style but is instead a philosophical question of the self's interaction with the world. How should one take into account point of view? Is the

impression subjective or objective? Does the perceiver apprehend objects through impressions or do objects impress themselves upon him or her? This question, in various forms, is the one with which Ralph Singh grapples and the one that drives the novel's disaffective impressionism.

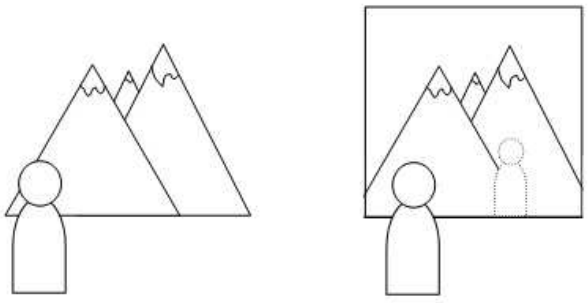
The Mimic Men's disaffection challenges impressionist convention in two ways. First, it cites and subverts the pragmatic function of impressionism, unsettling the relationship between author and reader by presenting a proliferation of hierarchical differences in Isabella, none of which Ralph identifies with. By contrast, if *Enigma* puts the reader through the paces of belonging by empathizing with (but also condescending to) the townspeople in the narrator's adopted village, then *The Mimic Men* provides no such proxy as compensation for the novel's own relationship to its reader. The second impressionist convention that the novel highlights is a mimetic relationship to the world. As with the relation to its audience, *The Mimic Men* teases how impressionism might represent sensation before undermining this possibility. It thus suspends Ralph in a "neutrality" of unfeeling. Taken together, these strands of the novel's disaffection highlight how impressionism reinforces colonialist belonging by assuming that its mediation of an entire moment proceeds naturally or transparently.

In his 1914 essay, "On Impressionism," Ford Madox Ford distinguishes impressionism from realism: while realism is a vile "chronicle," the "rounded, annotated record of a set of circumstances," impressionism aspires to "attain to the sort of odd vibration that scenes in real life really have" (263-264). This vibration

occurs because our mind is never completely focused on one moment but is always distracted and drawn in multiple ways to recall other places and times. So, Ford says:

> Impressionism exists to render those queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass—through glass so bright that whilst you perceive through it a landscape or a backyard, you are aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you. For the whole of life is really like that; we are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite other. (263)

Ford appears to suggest that, unlike realism, whose success depends upon the unobtrusiveness of its literary techniques, impressionism calls into focus the medium itself. Whereas realism is an unmediated cluster of facts, impressionism addresses itself to the feeling of a moment through artifice. In the spirit of Ford's inspiration by Hogarth's drawing (259), we might visualize Ford's representation as figure 6:



These images suggest how an impression is sensation plus processing. It contains a lag by which the experience becomes layered, a movement between the object perceived and a face in the glass (or the memory of a face). Impressionism's layering or movement adds temporal depth, "ten years or ten minutes," to quote Ford. However, this mediation does not imply that impressionism is labored. Instead, with a

choice detail or two, it captures the entirety of a moment. The act of processing, the lag in impressionism, allows Ford to define it famously as "a frank expression of personality." This means that the indirectness of seeing a reflection in the glass *is* the impression's "frankness." Impressionism expresses a totality because it represents an experience or sensation processed through memory. In this sense, literary impressionism brings the world closer, conferring how a scene feels. Ford summarizes the paradox of representing a sensation and its processing in a pair of contradictory sentences in the second version of "On Impressionism." He writes: "[T]he Impressionist author is sedulous to avoid letting his personality appear in the course of his book. On the other hand, his whole book, his whole poem is merely an expression of his personality" (265). By "avoid[ing]" the appearance of his personality, the author can represent the thing itself. At the same time, by suffusing his personality throughout the "whole book," the author can express the feeling of a moment entire. The author is both *after* and *within* the moment.

According to Michael Levenson, impressionism originally registered the challenge of belonging to a community. It arose out of the passing of the Victorian era's moral and political authority: impressionism's new understanding of subjectivity, its "aggressive individualism," follows from the dismissal of traditional values and societal norms (78). This individualism posits that the self's perceptions are the world, which might appear to deny society because the aggression of its fidelity to individual perception seems anarchic. At the same time, since this new individualism *is* contemporaneity, representing individual perception is in itself a representation of the world. Subjectivity thus becomes a kind of objective reportage

or catalog of sensations. In other words, impressionism recenters the world around the individual even as qualitatively this individual experience seems decentered or impersonal. As a response to social upheaval and to a generalized experience historically of feeling decentered, then, impressionism might seem a particularly apt literary technique for the postcolonial author.

However, understanding subjectivity as impersonal reportage also requires implicit agreement with impressionism's civic agenda. When one individuality represents collective experience, readers agree upon whose experience stands in for the whole. Conversely, an author must possess an understanding of and superiority to society in order to craft an impression "such that it has an exaggerative impact on the public" (Matz 162). This superiority is problematic because, far from representing society to itself, it assumes that individuals are of a certain receptive type. For example, Ford characterizes the relationship between author and audience as classed: the audience is the peasant cabman "hierarchically available to instruction" (Matz 163). The expression of a totality is problematic because impressionism's effect uses hierarchical difference to register ineffability, since those of a different class, gender, or orientation are—impressionism assumes—obviously more in touch with the world. Impressionism becomes reactionary when its civic goal shifts from an aesthetic balm for alienation under capitalism to an aesthetic whose effects require replication within a circumscribed subject. This is the familiar modernist autonomy-as-fascism argument: the aesthetic is not open to contingency but instead requires an audience to be available in a particular way. It assumes that the masses cannot themselves find instruction. Thus, Jesse Matz argues, while impressionism's representation of

difference makes alterity visible, its transmission also reinscribes those conditions of difference. Similarly, Adam Parkes suggests that impressionism opens the self to unforeseeability and "shock" while simultaneously managing these shocks as historical events. It registers sensation while also providing an interpretation of it. This play between experience and interpretation, between sensation and processing, gives impressionism its ethical complexity: it fancies itself both witness and judge. For the postcolonial author, impressionism's compensation for societal disorder also reaffirms colonial order, remaining closed to new civic modes.

The Mimic Men casts itself in these very terms; Ralph characterizes his story as both unique to his own experience and generalizable to many others like him. Upon first glance, *The Mimic Men* appears to be the consummate impressionist novel. Frequently, Ralph notes, his story is the representation of chaos or "disorder" (22, 97, 141, 214, 248), and his description of his experience as a "prolonged sensation of shock" recalls Parkes's theorization of impressionism (34). Ralph also describes his ideal memoir (had he not lost his governmental position) in terms that are theoretically impressionistic. This memoir would have been "the exposition of the malaise of our times pointed and illuminated by personal experience and that knowledge of the possible which can come only from closeness to power" (10). In other words, Ralph's work would have found its authority in the applicability of his experience; as a seasoned politician who represented so many, he would have been able to speak genuinely for a collective. And although Ralph differentiates *The Mimic Men* from his ideal memoir—he is not sitting peacefully on a veranda in his twilight years—he nevertheless insists that his actual experience is also generalizable to

"twenty places, twenty countries" (230). Claiming the authority to speak for places in similar circumstances, Ralph asserts the superiority and durability of his empathetic skills: "The newspapers even today spell out situations which, changing faces and landscapes, I can think myself into" (230). Here his ability to think himself into situations feels like an assertion of belonging. Finally, his evenhandedness seems to suggest that *The Mimic Men* achieves the dispassionate representation of disorder that Ralph projects onto his ideal memoir. He frequently considers various facets of an argument or represents multiple viewpoints. With regard to a moral accounting of his actions as a politician (the novel's *raison d'etre*), Ralph arrives at contradictory verdicts. On the one hand, colonial order was useful, and he should have worked harder to preserve it; on the other hand, it was utterly unrepresentative of Isabella's populace. That is, while imperial rule kept the proverbial trains running on time, it also "did not represent us; it could not have lasted" (227-228). "I write, I know, from both sides," he admits, "I cannot do otherwise" (228).

Although his tone appears aloof from society in the manner that Matz defines for impressionism, Ralph also signals the impossibility of fixed perspective. An implicit question running throughout *The Mimic Men* is whether the impersonal reportage of impressionist subjectivity is possible at all. In other words, the fact that Ralph "know[s]" that he writes from both sides does not ultimately excuse or validate the fact that his beliefs remain obscure. The novel suggests that Ralph's culpability in his country's governance depends upon whether his motivation is internal or external, and here impressionism's subjective-objective quibble comes into focus. Most often, this question of agency arises with Ralph's frequent reference to "character."

Colloquially, of course, "character" is both a kind of social credit or cache (to have character) and an expression of idiosyncrasy (to be a character); that is, "character" both projects a world and marks one's individuality. For Ralph, "character" signifies the extent to which one's identity is externally constructed, and the assertion of "character" would in turn lend Ralph causal distance from his actions. Indeed, "character" appears to be something that many people have. Ralph's father embraces being a "radical," which on Isabella, he says, denotes "an unconventional person or someone who was a 'character'" (143). Later, Ralph's political partner adopts a similarly radical "character…of a special type," one of the "poets, renegades, interesting failures" in which Isabella delights (221). His wife, Sandra, exhibits a "character more pronounced" among the couple's expat friends, and Ralph's cousin, Cecil, is aware of character at a young age—he is "the only person I knew who even as a child tried to be a 'character'" (65, 104). As we can see from these examples, "character" is achieved in relation to community; how others (Isabellan natives, expat friends, one's own family) perceive one determines his or her character. Just so, Ralph's character appears "on the public platform" (234). He is "the character of the rich colonial" or the "dandy" (24-25, 231), an identity that he claims was initially created by a London housemate, Lieni, and later resuscitated for political purposes by his partner, Browne. As with his associates and relatives, Ralph remains ambiguous about whether his self is held in abeyance from "character" or whether he disappears within it. Ralph contradicts himself, as is his wont. He states: "We become what we see of ourselves in the eyes of others" (25). Here others' vision constructs a person, he claims, yet the verb "become" is troublesome. Is "becom[ing]" motivated

internally or externally? Is it active or passive? On this matter, Ralph himself is uncertain. He writes about the motivating force of "character" in a circular fashion. "I felt that I had changed," he notes upon leaving London, "I recognized that the change was involuntary, so that at last my 'character' became not what others took it to be but something personal and ordained" (68). Here again Ralph fails to clarify the nature of "becoming." The friction between "personal" and "ordained" goes unrecognized, and the sentence overheats: Ralph's character is "not what others take it be" but is "personal," yet this shift to the personal is not intentional but "involuntary," suggesting that it is derived externally ("ordained"). In other words, the provenance of Ralph's character is tautological. It both is and is not "what others take it to be." This, he notes, is how he "lived neutrally"—a state in which impressionism's impersonal reportage may or may not be possible (68).

Contemporary critics frequently noted this neutrality's opacity, and although they recognized its contradiction as in-line with impressionistic subjectivity, they also describe the novel very differently across their reviews. There is critical consensus around *The Mimic Men*'s literary effects, but specific descriptions of the novel's techniques vary significantly. This suggests that Naipaul is somehow pulling the wool over the critics' eyes. Most find *The Mimic Men* praiseworthy—it won the WH Smith prize, and it was lauded as "one of the four or five best novels in English since the war" (Jebb)—but they also do not agree on the reasons for its laudability and at times appear to be describing different works altogether. For some, Ralph is a relatively simple narrator and character: "Foibles are rehearsed by the author with the knowledge of standing gratefully outside them…the laugh is built into the point of

view, it creates the writer's glamour by its distance" (Pryce-Jones 82). This "distance" seems relatively routine, and given that *The Mimic Men* itself cites *Lord Jim*, it follows that reviewers would see this distance as a "Conradian irony" that "suffuses all the events, speeches and the thoughts of this book" (Wilson). Such irony is "Naipaul's usual indirect manner" (Beloff 90). At the same time, this distance or indirection is so thoroughly suffused that "the final viewpoint remains obscure" (Wilson). Graham Greene notes that it is uncertain whether this irony is typical or clear-cut at all. "I wonder whether I am alone in finding a new obscurity, a style which falls more and more like a net curtain between author and reader," Green writes: "He can see us when he looks out, but we can see nothing from our side of the curtain except a portentous ill-defined Thing.…Certainly there is some meaning there, but I cannot see what exactly it is through the concealing muslin net." That is, the "obscurity" of *The Mimic Men*'s ironic distance clouds one's ability to discern the novel's object. Just as Ralph struggles to find the proper perspective on his experience, so too do readers lack a clear sense of what, exactly, is under consideration—Ralph's experience, the experience of writing his experience, or the very "obscurity" between these? What these reviewers couch as the obscurity of Conradian irony is actually an aggressive resistance to the fact of an audience and to belonging in general. If Matz posits that impressionism's work is compromised because the transmission of sensation requires an assertion of authority, then contemporary reviews suggest that it is unclear how *The Mimic Men* works at all. Obvious achievement though it may be, Naipaul's impressionism appears to lack a

point of view or an object or both. Portentous and ill-defined, serious but in barest outline, the embarrassed postcolonial impressionist appears to retreat into neutrality.

II. Lack of an Audience

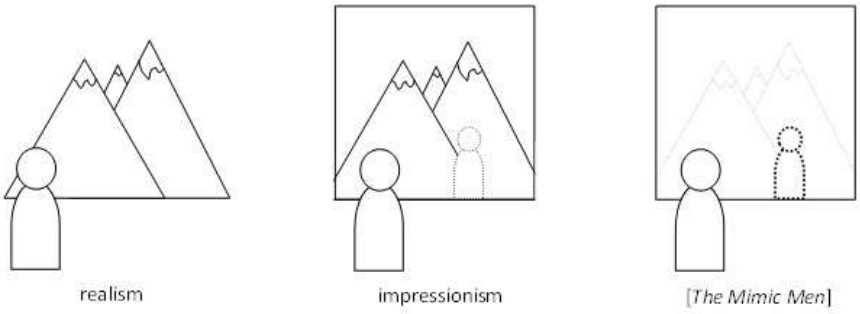
The obscurity that contemporary reviews refer to is *The Mimic Men*'s disaffection. Rather than rely upon existing hierarchical relationships to provide the associative power that (the ideal of) aesthetic autonomy cannot, the novel foregrounds the conventions by which an impressionist text would relate to audience and, as a result, belong.

The clearest expressions of such unbelonging occur with the novel's references throughout to "parenthesis." These arise when Ralph ponders a classic question of literary impressionism—how does the past relate to the present?—and their appearance marks Ralph's inability to make such an assessment. That is, if impressionism is sensation plus processing, Ralph is waylaid by the latter—the parentheses exhibit his experience of continual "processing." That Ralph cannot assess where the past ends and the present begins suggests that he cannot assume authority. Willing only to lean on his past self as affective laborer, Ralph in effect exempts himself from society. He desires to corral his own experience, to set it apart in order to render it transmittable—and the parentheses acknowledge the convention of doing so—yet still he waffles. His lack of a present context for the past fundamentally undermines any possibility for "frankness," for the expression of a totality or an entire moment, that the impressionist novel is designed to achieve. From

the beginning, *The Mimic Men* explicitly questions the distance of "processing" upon which the belonging of impressionistic "frankness" is predicated:

> [M]y present mood leaps the years and all the intervening visits to this city—leaps the Humbers, the hotels, the helpful officials, the portrait of George the III in Marlborough House; leaps my marriage and my business activities—leaps all of this to link with that first mood which came to me in Mr Shylock's attic; so that all that came in between seems to have occurred in parenthesis. Which is the reality? The mood, or the action in between, resulting from that mood and leading up to it again? (13)

Arriving at the beginning of the novel, the items in this list constitute what is nominally the novel's plot: a tale of minor disgrace and exodus for a once-powerful man in a newly-postcolonial nation. Yet uncertainties about the tenets of impressionism overtake these plot points. Which is more real, a contemporary feeling that recalls a prior one or "the action in between," that is, the life that spans these feelings? How can Ralph know what constitutes a fully "processed" moment? And how might he then transmit this to an audience? Ralph's obsession with his perceptual abilities is problematic for the work of literary impressionism. Within continual "processing," Ralph draws Graham Greene's "muslin curtain" around himself, which we might imagine differs from both realism and impressionism (figure 7):



In the third image, we see how Ralph emphasizes the medium, looking upon his own perceptual abilities. His fascination with and inability to parenthesize his own experience disallows him from conveying an entire impressionist moment. And while the device of parentheses remains intact for Singh throughout the novel, their object shifts. Ralph's past begins as parenthetical, but then, as with his contradictory statements regarding "character," he doubts whether such bracketing is possible—"I question now whether the personality is manufactured by the vision of others. The personality hangs together. It is one and indivisible" (217)—before ultimately placing this part of his life back in parentheses: "But now I find I have gone back to something closer to my original view. I once again see my marriage as an episode in parenthesis" (301). Without the ability to assert his authority, Ralph cannot transmit his sensations. He remains a solipsistic outsider, disconnected from an audience, utterly within himself.

To be clear, Ralph's solipsism does not mean that hierarchical social relationships do not exist in Isabella. *The Mimic Men* entertains many relationships informed complexly by age, class, gender, or race—relationships that might hypothetically solidify Ralph's authority—yet Ralph recuses himself from these and remains withdrawn. Nearly every other character condescends to someone—his

cousin Cecil to those with less money, his political partner Browne to the very voters who elected him, his wife Sandra to the various races comprising her group of ex-pat friends (101-109, 230-232, 77-81)—but Ralph does no such thing. In fact, the opposite is true. Although one might argue that Ralph condescends to women, particularly in light of his frequenting of prostitutes and his fascination with breasts, Ralph infantilizes himself and behaves masochistically, remaining vulnerable rather than condescending. The best examples are his final interactions with women at the novel's conclusion: the first, a fling with a British woman, finds Ralph yearning for (rather than asserting) authority, and the second emphasizes even further Ralph's inferiority. During the first he desires but fails to embody the woman's "limpid, direct vision of the world…a way of looking at the city and being in it" (275). In their relations, Ralph tries to adopt the woman's authority, her direct way of looking that confers a mode of belonging. In the second relation, during a layover between London and Isabella, Ralph visits a prostitute and experiences a strange "disembodied probing." He "never touche[s]"; he becomes "all painful sensation" (282). In these two relations, Ralph experiences abnegation. For Ralph, neither women nor the elderly nor the poor nor any other race occupy a fixedly inferior social position that would ensure *The Mimic Men*'s pragmatic relevance.

Ralph's lack of authority finds its clearest articulation in his explicit explanation of his own attitude toward an audience. Remember, just as "character" and the narrative device of parentheses above suggest, the notion of an "audience" always also implies the question of whether an external perceiver constructs one's identity—that is, the problem of the "personal" versus the "ordained." No surprise,

then, that Ralph's relation to an audience is also self-contradictory. He claims that he learned a lesson about audience when playing cricket as a child. Specifically, an audience is not worth deigning to acknowledge:

> An audience is never important. An audience is made up of individuals most of whom are likely to be your inferiors. A disagreeable confession; but I have never believed the actor who says he 'loves' his audience. He loves his audience in the way he might love his dogs. The successful public performer in whatever field operates, not perhaps from contempt, but from a profound lack of regard for his audience. (136)

Ralph claims that he need not be aware of his reception; it hardly matters whether he belongs at all. On the one hand, Ralph's assertion that an audience is "inferior" aligns with Matz's theorization of impressionism. Impressionism's bad politics arise when an author places an audience in a particular "inferior" social position, since impressionistic images can only be reproduced if an aesthetic effect is guaranteed. However, in his performance as a cricketer and—more disturbingly—as a politician, Ralph claims that he acts with profound disregard for audience. He tries to move them in no way whatsoever. Thus, an audience's inferiority here refers to its alterity; it is inferior only the sense that it is unrelatable or of an entirely different type. Unlike the relationships of other characters to perceived inferiors, Ralph does not condescend to condescend.

As with Ralph, Naipaul's catholic disdain for an "inferior" audience suggests a failure of authority and belonging. This lack of affiliation originates in his personal experience; Patrick French's biography shows how what Naipaul wishes to posit as

"neutrality" is in fact a series of negative identifications. Like Ralph, he shuttles back and forth between the Caribbean and Britain. In 1950, Naipaul leaves Trinidad and heads to Oxford under a scholarship. However, after experiencing a sort of mental breakdown (and failing to receive a First), Naipaul rejects Oxford; instead, after 1953, he begins to fashion himself less as British and more as a citizen of the Commonwealth. During this time—between 1954 and 1958—Naipaul first finds an audience through the *Caribbean Voices* radio program on the BBC World Service, but he later disavows this identification. Although his first broadcast stories borrow from his Trinidadian upbringing (published later in 1959 as *Miguel Street*, but which Naipaul completed in 1955), his disillusionment with the racial politics of the 1956 Trinidadian election cause him to begin to mask his West Indian provenance and emphasize instead his Indian heritage, culminating in a trip to India in 1962. By this time, as Diana Athill notes, Naipaul was selling himself primarily (but effectively) to a smallish audience of London liberal intelligentsia (103). By 1963, the *Caribbean Voices* contributors have scattered, departing England for North America or for home, and this coincides with an anti-British stance on Naipaul's part. At the same time, Naipaul is adopted by the British upper-crust, "a new group of privately educated, well-connected British people who were willing to accept him as a curiosity" (French 241). Thus, French claims, when Naipaul composes *The Mimic Men*, he has become willfully stateless (273).

This calculated unbelonging matters because it shows a prehistory of Naipaul's orientalism as a series of negative assertions that also understand self-identification as conventional. If impressionism performs political and social

belonging—representing the chaotic modern world and crafting this representation to resound in the reader—then Naipaul's disaffective impressionism shows how he dismisses such identification as politically fraught. Homi Bhabha argues that Naipaul's pessimistic representations originate in his adoption of a colonial vision of culture as natural or transparent. That is, because Naipaul believes in "the unmediated nature of the Western book," he fails to see how the supposed autonomy of art is coercive. Thus, Bhabha argues, Naipaul reproduces as "natural" or "original" what was always contextual or contingent (152). Edward Said similarly chastens Naipaul for allowing the invisibility of authority to masquerade as a virtue—namely, as Naipaul's "ruthlessly honest" character (21). However, *The Mimic Men* specifically foregrounds the conditions of its enunciation. Contrary to the criticism that Naipaul adopts the convention of exile in order that his conservatism—particularly his racial or cultural essentialisms about the "primitive"—might pass as non-traditional (Nixon), *The Mimic Men*'s disaffection, by foregrounding impressionistic conventions, shows belonging itself as conventional. Its disaffective impressionism feels exiled, yes, but as a way of highlighting how the politics of belonging are troubled (rather than as, say, yet another example of Naipaul taking unearned license). While this response is not much of a solution, it is also not mere quietism.

This is not the ground on which scholars typically defend Naipaul. Indeed, Said's "ruthlessly honest" best summarizes the primary critical attempts to do so. Either he is a bad man and a good writer—that is, his personal views are irrelevant to his fiction—or his depictions are misunderstood, sometimes willfully so. Bruce King champions the latter camp. According to King, the objectionable Naipaul is a product

of the expectations for a postcolonial writer imposed by leftist critics. "Naipaul is the only writer to have taken on a broad perspective of the contemporary world and its discontents," King writes: "[T]he literature of cultural assertion sometimes selectively ignores the actual horrors of slavery and imperialism" (22, 195). In other words, Naipaul has the right to depict his subject matter as he finds it rather than adhere to an ideal of what might interest proponents of "cultural assertion." He can write about the world as he sees it rather than as others want him to see it; he is just "ruthlessly honest." Others defend Naipaul on similar grounds of personal expression for specific texts: his aesthetic captures the experience of the Indian diaspora where "the artistic documentation of the effects of indenture history is part of their internal history" (Mishra 215), or his references to Conrad are evolved rather than indebted, "a reciprocal communication with the past" rather than a "reversion" to it (Nakai 16), or his works represent exoticism come full circle, freeing "exotic" to become a representation of pure difference, one that is "used 'from without,' applied 'elsewhere'" (Célestin 182). Most recently, Sanjay Krishnan makes the compelling case that Naipaul's later, postmodernist work generates a variety of effects that begin to catalog the importation of and forced induction into modernity for the non-West, thus bypassing a reductivism in progressive-minded scholarship that would otherwise force a delineation between works as either in solidarity with or firmly against the oppressed. However, I am not arguing that *The Mimic Men* is an appropriate representation of disorder or that it is merely symptomatic of epistemic fracture. Rather, the novel's disaffection is specifically and especially crafted as a response to modernist aesthetic tradition.

III. The Material World

While *The Mimic Men*'s lack of audience implies the novel's response to impressionistic technique, more convincing are the moments when the novel highlights sensation itself as conventional. It takes the reader through the sense impression in order to show Ralph's unbelonging as detachment from the material world, and it rejects the immediacy of sensation and the representation of a shared social world that is impressionism's very purpose. So many of high modernism's impressionistic novels consolidate a perceptible society. For example, *Heart of Darkness* and *Mrs. Dalloway* share a "this-ness": Marlow's famous intonation—"And this also has been one of the dark places of the earth"—shares a world that is given and immediately sensible, a "this," with Clarissa's excited exclamation—"[I]n the triumph and jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June." Whatever you might wish to claim about the politics of each novel, no one would accuse either of a failure of earnestness or of a desire not to represent society. This remains true even if the "this" of *Heart of Darkness* is inherently racist and constituted against a monolithic Africa of undifferentiable blackness. That is, Chinua Achebe's famous critique of *Heart of Darkness*—that the irony of Conrad's narrative scheme does not sufficiently mitigate the novel's racism—indicts Conrad for failing to give a fuller account of the cultures that Marlow encounters. Achebe notes that the Africans do not speak but persist only as strange, frenzied bodies; Africa is rendered "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity" (1790). However devoid of humanity Conrad's Africa

may be, it is not also therefore only metaphysical. The obscurity of the novel's "black and incomprehensible frenzy" *is* Conrad's transmission of the impression, and while the racism of this ineffability may be inexcusable, the world that Conrad sensed and desired to transmit was nevertheless ineffable.

Unlike Conrad, Naipaul inspires less than full confidence in Ralph's mimetic capabilities. Does *The Mimic Men* actually desire to represent a coherent "this"? Ralph is unclear. He both remembers the impossible as actual and cannot recall events that, he insists, occurred. For example, his first memory of school is bringing his teacher an apple. "This puzzles me," he writes, "We had no apples on Isabella. It must have been an orange; yet my memory insists on the apple. The editing is clearly at fault, but the edited version is all I have" (109-110). An easy explanation suggests itself: Ralph here is experiencing the power of colonial subjectification. At the same time, the memory nevertheless calls into question Ralph's control over his impressionability. Similarly, before his final return to Isabella (the one before his subsequent and final departure from Isabella to England, from where he writes *The Mimic Men*), Ralph experiences the placeholder for an experience that he believes has been "edited" out. When he changes planes in an unnamed European city and is forced to layover, Ralph feels his own unreliability:

> And a few hours later I was walking, as in a dream, through the streets of a city, I thought I didn't know, which yet now revealed little points of familiarity, abrupt half-remembered areas: so that reality was disturbed, sounds curiously muted, and for stretches I had the sensation of witnessing and performing actions for the second, third, fourth time. (279)

Perhaps Ralph has never walked these streets before; perhaps he has done so at least three times prior. This is reinforced by the sentence's misleading syntax. Coupled with the failure to highlight "I thought I didn't know" as a subordinated clause, the comma after "city" in the first line lends the sentence the feel of a run-on and, as a result, the "I" of "I thought" feels like a second subject. Returning to the sentence's beginning, the reader, like Ralph, sees double. Unlike Conrad's experience of the ineffable—finding within the world something impossible to articulate—Ralph is literally uncertain as to whether he experiences the world in the first place. In this sense, *The Mimic Men* harbors a kind of anti-mimeticism.

In fact, Naipaul constructs this anti-mimeticism in opposition to impressionist technique; Ralph appears specifically to cite and subvert the conventions of impressionism. The question is less of fidelity to a chaotic world and more whether the social world actually exists as representable at all. Although Ralph acknowledges the expectation to represent the disorder of his time, he also registers a sense of resistance to such mimetic representation, calling into question the convention that "this" is expected. Notice how, in the following passage, Ralph begins to describe London in a stereotypically impressionist way before concluding, in the second paragraph, that society has actually become unavailable.

> So quickly had London gone sour on me. The great city, centre of the world, in which, fleeing disorder, I had hoped to find the beginning of order. So much had been promised by the physical aspect. That marvel of light, soft, shadowless, always protective. They talk of the light of the tropics and Southern Spain. But there is no light like that of the temperate zone. It was a

light which gave solidity to everything and drew colour out from the heart of objects. To me, from the tropics, where night succeeded day abruptly, dusk was new and enchanting. I would sit in Leini's basement room, in the clutter, and study the light, not willing to risk losing any gradation in that change. Light was slowly withdrawn; a blueness remained, which deepened, so that before the electric lights began to make their effect the world seemed wholly aqueous, and we might have been at the bottom of the ocean. Then at night the sky was low; you walked as though under a canopy; and all the city's artificial lights, their glow seemingly trapped, burned intensely; and sometimes the wet streets threw up their own glitter.

Here was the city, the world. I waited for the flowering to come to me. The trams on the Embankment sparked blue. The river was edged and pierced with reflections of light, blue and red and yellow. Excitement! Its heart must have lain somewhere. But the god of the city was elusive. The tram was filled with individuals, each man returning to his own cell. The factories and warehouses, whose exterior lights decorated the river, were empty and fraudulent. I would play with famous names as I walked empty streets and stood on bridges. But the magic of names soon faded. Here was the river, here the bridge, there that famous building. But the god was veiled. My incantation of names remained unanswered. In the great city, so solid in its light, which gave colour even to unrendered concrete—to me as colourless as rotting wooden fences and new corrugated-iron roofs—in this solid city life was two-dimensional. (22-23)

Despite Ralph's initial impressionistic account of London, he yearns for what he earlier calls an "extension of ourselves," the solidity of a space shared with others. He wishes for the "enchanting" light to "dr[a]w colour out of the heart of objects, and he desires for London to reveal its depths, to open its traps, to throw up its glitter. But Ralph finds it shallow. The tram is filled with workers who, as "individuals, each man returning to his own cell," fail to engage him. Likewise, the factory buildings are mere exteriors, "empty and fraudulent," and the human names given to streets or bridges have "faded." By the conclusion of the second paragraph, it is as if any human element in what we might commonly define as a city has been evacuated; here the "three dimensionality" of London refers to a strange "solid[ity]" of light. Ralph knows what he thinks he ought to appreciate in the city—the impressions of a river rippling with reflections, "blue and red and yellow. Excitement!"—yet he cannot connect with this London, this life, this moment. Paradoxically, the only concrete aspect of London is its light. The rest of it, flat and pale, lacks depth and color. It is as if Ralph acknowledges how impressionism ought to represent a shared social world but cannot actually perform this mimetic act. His description of London is almost inevitably framed by impressionism's colonialist perception: "So quickly had London gone sour on me," he begins.

The conclusion of *The Mimic Men* provides some theoretical insight into this representation of the absence of solidity. Just as, above, Ralph "lived neutrally" in Isabella, so too does he here name his seemingly-contradictory representational mode "a curious neutrality of perception." That is, if "liv[ing] neutrally" refers to an ambiguity of culpability within "character"—is it derived from within or constructed

from without?—then "a curious neutrality of perception" similarly questions how the world impresses itself upon a perceiver in the first place. Indeed, the friction of "neutrality" and "curious" begins to suggest how this state of being is oxymoronic: perception is valueless ("neutral") but nevertheless tinted by interest or perspective ("curious"). In the novel's conclusion, Ralph experiences this curious neutrality when he decides to leave the Home Counties and return to London. As he waits at a country rail station:

> The tall trains went by and did not stop for me. They were long trains, and packed; people stood in the corridors. Tomato sauce and gravy and coffee stained the tablecloths in the restaurant car. I knew. I was waiting for another to take me away. Early impatience had given way to despair, despair to indifference, indifference to a curious neutrality of perception. The concrete platforms were white in the sun, the diagonal, lengthening shadows sharp and black. Heatwaves quivered up from the rails and their level bed of dry, oiled gravel. In the bushy field beyond, pale green blurred with yellow, white and brown, junked rusting metal was hot to look at. (299)

This passage moves from particular to abstract; what begins as a "sharp" distinction between light and dark—the hard "white" concrete covered linearly ("diagonal") by "black" shadow—becomes less precise, "quivering" and "bushy." Objects lose specificity as they develop color—"pale green blurred with yellow, white and brown"—and even this palate, with the addition of brown, becomes murky. The scene loses its Manichean quality, dissolving the boundaries of objects before synesthesia sets in ("hot to look at"). It is as if this progression of physical description aligns with

Ralph's perceptual phases as he waits for the train: beginning in seemingly impossible authority (about the interior details of moving trains—"I knew"), Ralph feels impatient, then indifferent, then neutral. What, we wonder, distinguishes indifference from neutrality? Because his perceptual progression moves from an indifferent shrug to a neutral curiosity, it is not unreasonable to suggest that, somehow, this neutrality contains a negative feeling. His articulation of *not* caring itself implies too strong of a stance. Instead, rejection is folded into curiosity. About the empty quality of this experience, Ralph thinks: "The moment linked to nothing…To attempt to explain my presence in this station to myself…was to be truly lost, to see myself at the end of the world" (299). Here Ralph cannot position himself toward the world; even the contrarian position of detached "indifference" is unavailable to him. This is because, he explains, "aloofness implied an audience" (300). Instead, Ralph experiences "a moment of total helplessness"; he is "a man sitting at the limit of desolation with sixty-six pounds of luggage in two Antler suitcases, concentrating on the moment, which he mustn't relate to anything else" (300). The curious neutrality of perception, then, is beyond the negative or contrarian because there is nothing to experience or receive him as an audience, nothing to sound himself against. Ralph feels a neutrality of unbelonging. Here we find Naipaul's disaffection. The narrator of *The Mimic Men* cites the terms of impressionism only to subvert them by moving through sensation, through detachment, through indifference to the disconnected impression.

Finally, Naipaul emphasizes the novel's formal relationship to the impression by explicitly reworking Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The moment of total

helplessness above recalls an earlier scene in *The Mimic Men*: Ralph's encounter with a prostitute during his fugue-state layover in the unnamed city between London and Isabella. As he readies himself for bed, he also gorges on the hotel's amenities. The staff whirls around him in a hyphenated, adjectival, impressionistic blur: "On the cream-coloured plastic bell-push a flat-footed maid stared placidly and a slender steward raced, tray aloft, coat tails flying. Promise of delight! I rang for snacks I didn't want and drinks I couldn't finish" (279). Like the "Excitement!" that Ralph knows he ought to expect from the city above, his "delight!" here is only the expectation or "promise" of fulfilment. Of course, then, after bathing and settling into bed, Ralph remains restless. Sense-soaked though his expectations may be, Ralph dresses and ventures out to a bar where, meeting the prostitute, he experiences complete detachment from the world. During his masochistic submission, he becomes "all painful sensation" as he undergoes a "disembodied probing." Most interestingly, however, he describes the encounter with vocabulary similar to Marlow's own description of meeting Kurtz:

> The self dropped away, layer by layer; what remained dwindled to a cell of perception, indifferent to pleasure or pain; neutral perception, finer and finer, having validity, existing only because of that probing which, growing fainter, yet had to be apprehended, because it was the only proof of life: fine perception reacting minutely only to time, which was also the universe. It was a moment that extended and extended and extended. There could be no issue: it was a moment which, when release without fruition came and perception widened again, defined itself as an extended moment of horror. (282-283)

Here “neutral perception” whittles experience to the finest point possible. Like a two-dimensional plane retreating to the single dimensionality of a line then ebbing further to the non-dimensionality of a point, Ralph experiences the perception of non-perspective, becoming “finer” but also “extended,” a retreat that opens the self to “the universe” entire. While this retreat might appear to be a description of impressionism’s impersonal subjectivity or objective reportage, Ralph’s selflessness here in fact leads him away from sensation of the world. Moreover, unlike Kurtz, who takes a position on the world, Ralph is both literally and figuratively position-less. Whereas Kurtz’s horror is an “expression of some sort of belief” containing “a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper” (132), Ralph’s horror is toneless, a neutral but nevertheless pressured non-ejaculation. Whereas Kurtz “had summed up—he had judged,” Ralph plainly states that his “[j]udgement disappeared” (Conrad 132, *The Mimic Men* 282). Whereas Kurtz’s glare is “wide enough to embrace the whole universe,” Ralph’s “universe” overwhelms his perception. And whereas Marlow appreciates Kurtz’s perspective in the face of death, Ralph cannot embody even this position of “revolt.” Detached from the world, he belongs nowhere.

By foregrounding the conventions by which it might address itself to an audience or represent the world, *The Mimic Men* offers an anticolonialist critique that is as subtle as it is feeble. If literary impressionism is the coincidence of analysis and mimesis—that is, the effective presentation of the subjective as impersonal or of the cultural as unmediated—then the novel’s disaffective impressionism makes visible these techniques. Indeed, in a 1954 letter to Pat, his wife, Naipaul is uncharacteristically eager to connect postcolonial individuality to historical

circumstances of oppression. Naipaul writes that his "position has been caused by several complex historical factors: the slave trade, its abolition; British imperialism, and the subjection of Indian peoples; the need for cheap labor on the Caribbean sugar plantations; Indian indentured immigration" (quoted in French 135). This is an unusual sentiment from Naipaul. To the present day, Naipaul has remained generally intractable about the individual's agency and ability to overcome circumstance. Yet in this letter, written just before he knew he would have an opportunity with the *Caribbean Voices* program, he engages in slight self-pity. "You see, it is all right to get worked up about the (admittedly frequent) acts of physical repression," he writes, "but the more insidious form of oppression is the spiritual one. I am an example of that, whatever you may say" (135). The letter is almost singular in its tone: that Naipaul claims spiritual oppression on account of historical material circumstance is highly irregular. The letter represents a man who wants none of colonial individuality, and it articulates unbelonging in a way similar to *The Mimic Men*, albeit in terms far less circumspect than the novel.

At the same time, the world is what it is—colonial individuality is the one that has been handed down to him, and it presents an intractable problem. Just so, in *The Mimic Men*, what Ralph seems to desire is a counterfactual scenario: an individuality that is neither colonial nor born of the circumstances of colonialism. *The Mimic Men* presents as equally unappealing the socialist alternative to impressionist individuality. When Ralph pictures the ideal situation in which he would write his memoirs, he describes a troubling vision of early capitalism. In his fantasy, Isabella returns to an agrarian economy, and Ralph is the benevolent landowner who exchanges

pleasantries with harvesters while on his morning ride. The fantasy of these workers is that they are not alienated from their labor—or rather the lack thereof, since they work "undemanding tasks" and are "sitting in the shade" (40). And the upshot of this fantasy is that the workers are still individuals: "Words would have been exchanged, about their jobs, their families, the progress of their sons at school. Labourers of the olden time! Not yet 'the people'!" (40). Here, objecting to the abstraction "the people," Ralph desires a whimsically ahistorical individuality—if only everyone know their place! Elsewhere, too, "the people" refers to individuals under socialism: the people are "on the march" (74). As a group, the people are easily swayed; once they become the "concept of the people," they respond to politicians and are "manipula[ble]" (236). While Naipaul rejects impressionism's individual, he also rejects a concept of the individual proffered by historical materialism. In its place lies an impossible fantasy of pre-neo-capitalism. What Ralph wants is an organic individuality, people originating in "landscapes hymned by their ancestors" (36). Yet he cannot embody this identity; he views himself "not as an individual but as a performer, in that child's game where every action of the victim is deemed to have been done at the command of the tormentor, and where even refusal is useless, for that too can be deemed to have been commanded" (97). As with Naipaul's critique of Kurtz's horror, "refusal" is out of the picture. Naipaul's "horror" is not a Conradian judgment but rather the impasse of non-judgment. Here Naipaul presents disaffection as toneless but pressured—Ralph's failure to ejaculate is literally non-arrival. All of which suggests that neither Ralph nor Naipaul are the pusillanimous mimic men that Bhabha makes them out to be (126-127). Instead, *The Mimic Men* feels fully aware of

mimicry's power to unsettle through the metonymic reapplication of authority to other times and places. This is not to say that Naipaul positions disaffection as a mode of salvific hybridity; rather, to borrow Bhabha's terms, he acknowledges that representation requires repetition. *The Mimic Men*'s disaffective impressionism shows and shows up colonial authority.

IV. Unique Existence

The Mimic Men is the height of Naipaul's unbelonging as political practice: he does not want to embrace colonial authority, but he also does not want to give up on the individual as individual. Subsequently, however, we can see Naipaul drift toward the authority of impressionism by way of his burgeoning antisocialist stance. The clearest articulation of this is his essay "What's Wrong with Being a Snob?" (1967), in which he argues on behalf of snobbery as an individual recourse of the enlightened citizen against the encroachments of socialism. What begins as antisocialism becomes Hayekian individualism as a result of questionable critical thinking, particularly his tendency to position the self in relationship to socialism's totalizing impulses as an all-or-nothing proposition. Moreover, we can see the advance of this impressionist-Individualist alliance on other works, from Naipaul's depiction of Sir Walter Raleigh in *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969) to an essay immediately subsequent to *The Mimic Men*'s publication ("Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble"), extending even to his Nobel lecture in 2001.

In "What's Wrong with Bring a Snob?" Naipaul defines snobbery as "the simple voice of dissent," one that curates peculiarities under the dictum, "I do not

want to be like them" (12). Snobbery operates against what he portrays as a slippery slope of moral relativism: in striving toward equality, Naipaul argues, a welfare state eliminates the hope of aspiring toward something greater. One needs the differences and inequalities of class in order to avoid the bleakness of "subsidized apartment houses…with their official lawns and regulated amenities" (12). Although equality is a noble goal, in practice, Naipaul claims, equality gives way to a "doctrinaire romanticism" that dilutes the overall social good because one "begins by sympathizing with the oppressed and ends by exalting their values" (18). In other words, Naipaul is against what he sees as a leftist erasure of difference; he wants to suss out difference and judge it accordingly. "Humanely," he says, we should "recognize the primitive and try to eradicate it" (18). Without snobbery's recognition, we are left with the regular lawns of the utopian, totalizing impulse. However, with the minor articulations of individual revolt, we can avoid a slide into socialism. "[W]hen man has been reduced to a unit and Big Brother rules all," Naipaul says, our hero is the advocate for the particular and precious, preferring "period flavor" to council flats (12). In distinction to *The Mimic Men*'s disaffection, in which Naipaul distinguishes Ralph's unbelonging from Kurtz's revolt or judgment, here antisocialism leads Naipaul to the certainty of individualistic snobbery.

Naipaul's views correspond roughly to those of contemporaneous conservative economist F. A. Hayek, who inveighs against a socialism that was supposed to yield "economic freedom" as a form of political freedom, but which instead winds up homogenizing society by changing the human spirit's relationship to and definition of freedom. Whereas prior to the introduction of socialism, "freedom"

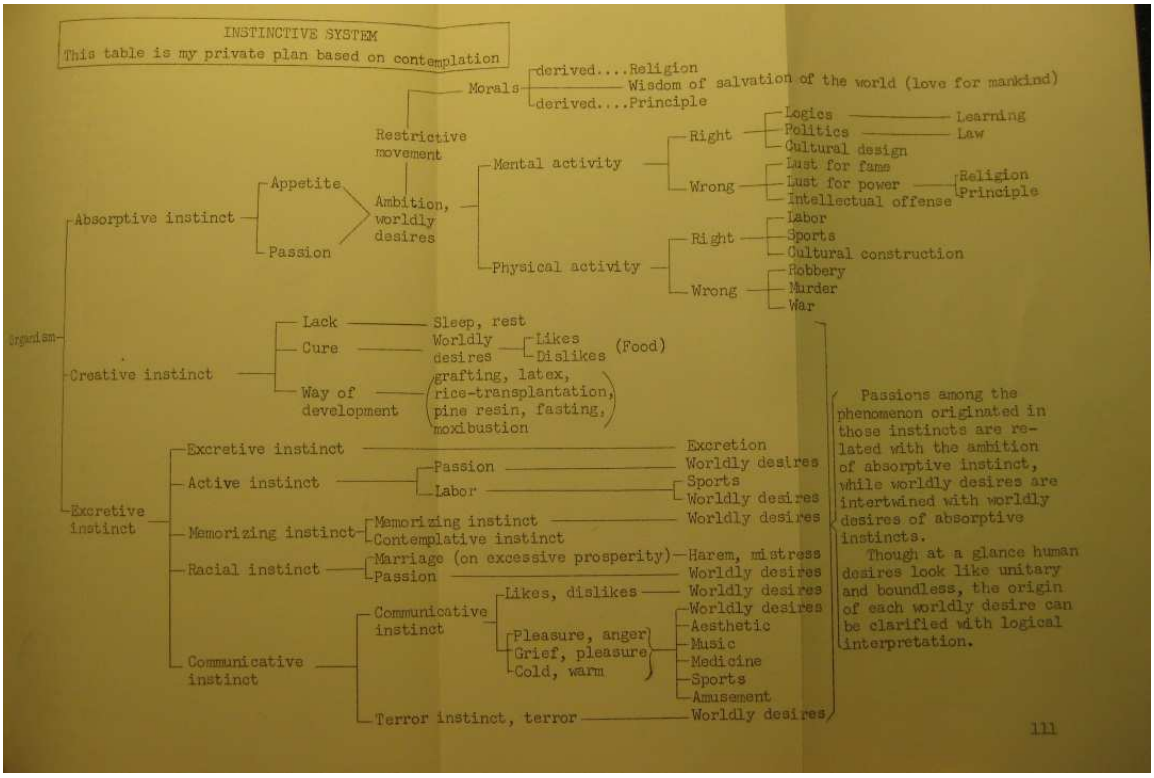
meant "freedom from coercion, freedom from the arbitrary power of other men," freedom now means "freedom from necessity, release from the compulsion of the circumstances which inevitably limit the range of choice of all of us" (77). Similarly, Naipaul argues, the welfare state has come to define humans solely by their material needs, a trajectory straight from 19th century naturalism through Hemingway to contemporary pornography and totalitarianism, all of which emphasize "the flesh alone." Both Naipaul and Hayek claim to want to allow for contingency; they inhabit a world that is difficult to comprehend and whose future is unforeseeable. "A complex civilization like ours," Hayek writes, "is necessarily based on the individual's adjusting himself to changes whose cause and nature he cannot understand…a multitude of circumstances that no single mind will be able to grasp them" (212). Similarly, Naipaul wonders, what values fit the world as it exists—not as idealists would like to see it but as right-thinking individuals know it is?

Taken to extremity, snobbery entails a redefinition of the world that eliminates the "primitive." We witness the most extreme form of snobbery in Naipaul's portrayal of Sir Walter Raleigh in *The Loss of El Dorado*. While nominally a history of Trinidad, *The Loss of El Dorado* sometimes feels like a love letter to empire, and Naipaul's admiration for Raleigh particularly stands out. Although Naipaul deplores the history of violence in the Caribbean, he also admires the extent to which Raleigh successfully exerts his will. Trinidad was initially settled by the Spanish, and Naipaul traces the history of El Dorado back to Antonio de Berrio's dream of a Third Marquisate. But whereas Berrio's vision was the claim of one man for the glory of his God and his nation, Raleigh's genius (and the genius of the British model more

broadly) is the introduction of social integration. Raleigh introduces a longer con, in which the initial idealistic claim of planting one's flag is less important than keeping territory peacefully subdued. Naipaul describes this revision of the individual as "a lucid three-dimensional view of the world and its possibilities" (27). Here three-dimensional means that each person occupies a place in the world that is informed by (rather than blind to) context; three-dimensional means diplomacy; it means engaging with the conditions of native people rather than ignoring these through a simple expression of will or might; it means seeing actions as having reverberations, planning for and incorporating response on a larger scale, and comprehending one's audience and world. In other words, it means a union of impressionism and Individualism.

Naipaul further employs impressionism to this effect in his largely unexamined essay, "Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble." Here Naipaul chooses impressionism to discredit his subject. In its condescension, such impressionism involves a tacit expression of belonging. Just after *The Mimic Men*'s publication, Naipaul travels to Tokyo to interview a Japanese businessman named Morihiro Matsuda, from whom he had earlier received a cryptic pamphlet entitled *The Bible of Wisdom*. *The Bible of Wisdom* lists its publication date as 1963; however, because it was self-published and distributed by Matsuda himself, and because no English-language copies were ever sold, it is unclear when between 1963 and 1967 Naipaul would have received it. The text is, in essence, a manual for classifying and organizing human beings, and one might be forgiven for thinking that Matsuda's organization could appeal to Naipaul's conservatism. "Those who can not make their

own lives better for themselves is [sic] likely to insist on the superiority of the . . . . ism," *The Bible of Wisdom* proclaims: "[Y]ou must recognize that to proceed step by step towards a better way of life is the only scared obligative mission and rights [sic] given to our lives" (36). Both Matsuda and Naipaul seem to share a belief in the individual as a means to collective good, insofar as the ". . . . ism" is to be shunned by one desirous of progress ("a better way of life"). And this is not merely a political assertion. With regard to religion, too, Matsuda suggests that the individual would do well to bootstrap himself: "Believing is compared to human beings who can not walk for himself [sic] and do with an assistance of a stick" (32). In a contradictory impulse, Matsuda provides his own taxonomy for outlets of human expression. Unlike Ralph, who desires an organic solution, Matsuda takes it upon himself to remake culture based on his diagnosis of humans. For example, he distinguishes between outlets for "mental activity": Logics, Politics, and Cultural design are appropriate, while Lust for fame, Lust for power, and Intellectual offense are wrong. He states: "Though at a glance human desires look like unitary and boundless, the origin of each worldly desire can be clarified with logical interpretation" (111). He interprets them with an "instinctive system" (figure 8):



Although this taxonomic project comprises a majority of *The Bible of Wisdom*'s content and is by far its most notable aspect, Naipaul tends to avoid mentioning the specifics of Matsuda's plan.

From Naipaul's perusal of *The Bible of Wisdom* and from his subsequent interview with Matsuda come "Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble," originally published in the *Daily Telegraph Magazine* in 1967 and later reprinted in *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (1973), a collection of Naipaul's essays. "Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble" combines Naipaul's textual and personal experiences of Matsuda, and it ultimately leads the reader to conclude that Matsuda is delusional, a wannabe savant and prophet. Avid readers of the *New York Times* and *The Times of London* would have known Matsuda from full-page advertisements that ran in May and June of 1966, respectively. These were titled "Idea for Peace in Vietnam," and they cost most of his personal funds (approximately $11,000 each). The ideas for

peace are wildly impractical: they involve the establishment of utopian communes and, in essence, deny the possibility that humans acting rationally would ever choose their own self-interest. According to Matsuda, it is self-evident that rational humans would choose what he calls "the neutral way of life," a kind of utilitarianism without difficult decisions. "People everywhere in the world seem to have come to the hasty conclusion that there cannot be a neutral view," Matusda writes: "They also tend to brand neutral opinions as opportunism, pro-Communism, unrealistic idealism, anarchism, Utopian daydreams, etc" (1st page, 3rd column). And those people are correct, as far as it goes: Matsuda's "neutral view" is all of the criticisms that he lists, particularly the socialism to which Naipaul is allergic in "What's Wrong with Being a Snob?"

However foolish, Matsuda is also a slight sensation in Japan. "Most Japanese periodicals have written about him," Naipaul writes, embodying Matsuda's energetic faux-modesty (142). *Life* magazine profiles him as well. Yet the impressionism of "Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble" hardly gives Matsuda a fair shake, particularly when juxtaposed to the *New York Times*' contemporaneous coverage. On the same day that the *Times* runs Matsuda's advertisement, they also publish an article about both the advertisement and the paper's choice to run it. This piece opines on Matsuda and the "Idea for Peace in Vietnam," but it also affords his ideas a fair accounting. It describes Matsuda as "an unsophisticated man of rough appearance"; it describes his ideas as "unconventional" and "simple to the point of naivete"; and it implies a certain imbalance of focus, given the vast difference in size of his dual missions "to terminate the war in Vietnam and to reduce traffic accidents" (Chapin).

Nevertheless, the *Times* write-up also provides a significant elaboration of Matsuda's ideas before editorializing on them. It mentions Matsuda's idea for dividing Vietnam, noting Matsuda's proposal for a utopian community in the south for "bereaved families and war victims"; it highlights Matsuda's proposed committee for the cessation of war, including "10 Americans, 10 Chinese and 10 Japanese, as neutral representatives"; and it summarizes Matsuda's general idea with relative objectivity: "The 'paradises' are portrayed as idyllic communities in which work would be pleasant and rational, residents would produce many books and other creative works, no money would be needed and 'unnecessary kinship relations' would be abolished." While readers are obviously free to draw their own conclusion about these propositions, the *Times* does at least present an elaboration of Matsuda's ideas with minimal irony.

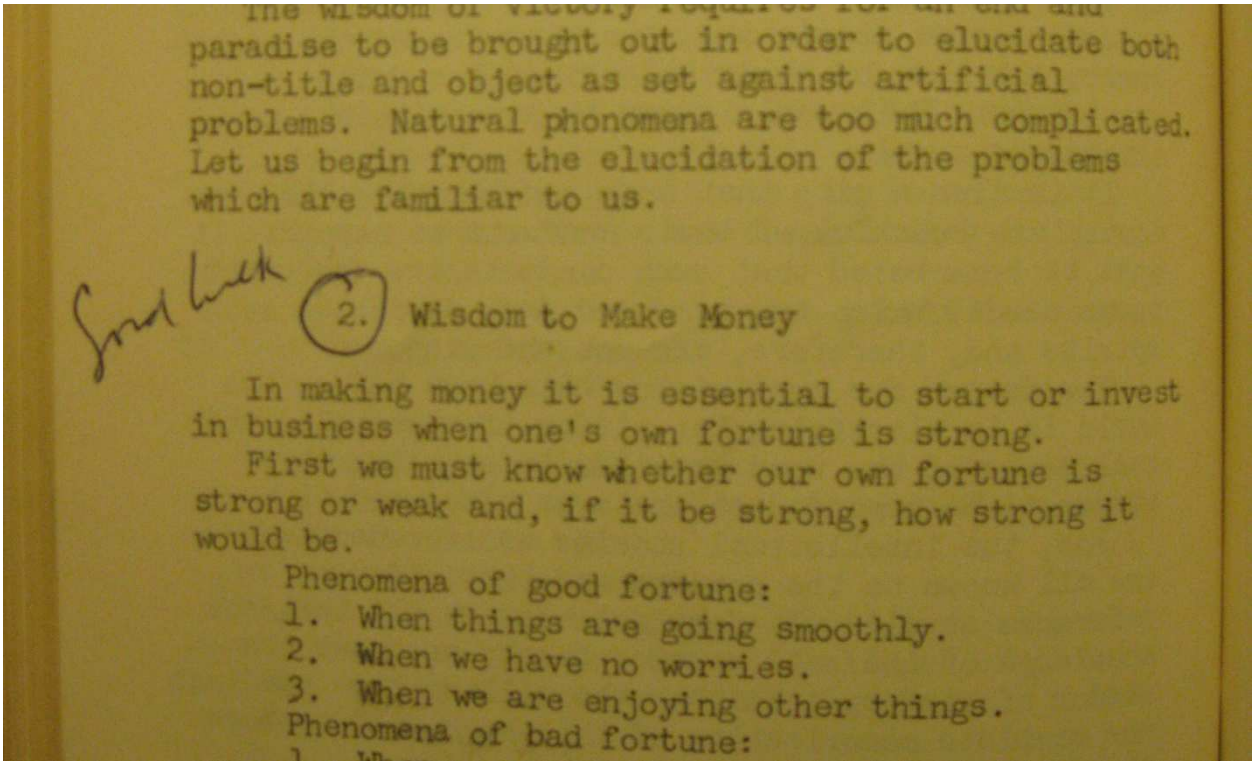
However, for his piece, Naipaul chooses not to differentiate between object and commentary: he chooses to present Matsuda impressionistically. The first half of the essay is devoted to describing Matsuda's mental state and physical characteristics. Naipaul begins to embody the frenzy of Matsuda's train of thought: staccato sentences, leaping from this idea to that, emulate Matsuda's excitement, hopping about a hotel room, about letters that he received in response to his advertisements. Naipaul uses proper nouns—what are obviously concepts esoteric to Matsuda—without explanation, just as Matsuda might conversationally. For example, the following sentences begin a paragraph that explains how Matsuda intends to raise capital to effect his plan:

> This is how he will do it. He will go to Chicago, to deal with the newspapers that have invited him. Then he will give lectures to the university about happiness and the seven degrees of beauty. He might also make a model of his indestructible motor car—no more deaths in road accidents—and sell the development rights. (144)

None of these concepts have been explained previously. Readers do not know Matsuda's thoughts about happiness—only that he is interested in it, since "As a sage, his subject is happiness" (143)—or his theory about the degrees of beauty. Moreover, Naipaul has yet to mention the motor car, and the adjective "indestructible" is unfair. While "indestructible" raises questions about the physics of these cars—how are they indestructible? What happens if two of them collide?—Matsuda's vision for his car is actually more interesting and noble. While equally unbuildable, Matusda's car is a multi-purpose vehicle that serves his utopia: "First, it is designed to be equipped with a top and chairs for passenger car and then, when they are removed, it changes into a truck. When equipped with parts of a combine, it changes into a combine, while furnished with parts of a plowing-machine, it can well serves [sic] as a plowing-car" (*Bible of Wisdom* 49). Naipaul's misrepresentation speaks to his interest in his own piece's effect rather than its accuracy.[66] The effect is one of disorientation. And while disorientation might very well be the experience of interviewing Matsuda, it does not do justice to the origin or scope of his plan. Indeed, judging from Naipaul's marginalia in *The Bible of Wisdom*, Naipaul has already made up his mind about

[66] Eastley similarly concludes that Naipaul plays fast and loose with fact for effect. While *The Middle Passage* claims that political parties did not exist during the 1946 Trinidadian elections, Eastley shows that this suggestion is both objectively false and contradicted by Naipaul himself in his earlier novel, *The Mystic Masseur* (7).

Matsuda. Next to the subheading "Wisdom to Make Money," Naipaul sneers: "Good luck" (figure 9).



paradise to be brought out in order to elucidate both non-title and object as set against artificial problems. Natural phonomena are too much complicated. Let us begin from the elucidation of the problems which are familiar to us.

Good luck (2.) Wisdom to Make Money

In making money it is essential to start or invest in business when one's own fortune is strong.

First we must know whether our own fortune is strong or weak and, if it be strong, how strong it would be.

Phenomena of good fortune:
1. When things are going smoothly.
2. When we have no worries.
3. When we are enjoying other things.

Phenomena of bad fortune:

What is the purpose of traveling to Japan to perform an interview with a man against whom the well is already poisoned? Why write a takedown of a man who is already down? In fact, "Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble" is inaptly titled. The essay is not about Matsuda's plan but instead about the notion of the "unique existence" or the individual "marked" by destiny. The impressionism of "Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble" testifies to Naipaul's desire to prop up an individualistic ideal. Readers sense this from the outset, when the essay's tone generates an expectation on which it does not deliver. It begins with an italicized inscription that performs the factual work of describing both newspaper advertisements, and then Naipaul immediately ups the ante, mentioning that these

advertisements "were not Mr. Morihiro Matsuda's first extended writings" (142). He states that *The Bible of Wisdom* contains ideas implying that "Mr. Matsuda was aiming at more than the cessation of a single war" (142). In opposition to the *Times*' write-up, Naipaul first elevates Matsuda. Rather than juxtapose disparate aspects of Matsuda's plan in order to suggest their levity, he presents Matsuda as a figure of potential wisdom whom he has discovered, "a sage or aspirant-sage who is as yet without disciples or an amanuensis," a man whose larger ideas "crowded out the Vietnam issue" (141, 142). In other words, the exigence for Naipaul's piece is neither the sensationalism of Matsuda spending tens of thousands of dollars for advertisements nor the ideas for peace in Vietnam but rather the larger vision of a man with a plan for the world.

Yet Naipaul summarily dismisses this exigence by ignoring it. "Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble" concludes by portraying Matsuda as of a type. At the conclusion of the essay, Naipaul asks a Japanese "man of culture" what he thinks will happen to Matsuda. "Our businessmen of the Matsuda type and at the Matsuda stage," he says, "just feel they are bound to win. But if they fail and fail and fail again, they can take the hint. They will know when good fortune has left them. Then they usually become ordinary again" (154). In other words, Matsuda is knowable as a category. He is of a "type" and at a particular "stage." Here Naipaul ignores what was nominally the piece's thrust—that Matsuda's ideas set him apart as more than of a particular "type." Toward the conclusion of the piece, Naipaul recalls a moment in the interview when Matsuda calls himself a "unique existence." He writes:

> He had used the words in his first advertisement, and they interested me. They held less and more than simple arrogance; they were a description of the man of destiny, the man who felt himself marked. I wanted Mr. Matsuda to go back to his first apprehension of this fact about himself, back to his childhood, the boy in straw shoes in the Korean winter when the river froze over.
>
> I had spoken too quickly. I was misinterpreted.
>
> "Yes," Mr. Matsuda said. "I was born without the sense of smell." (151).

This passage is typical of the essay as a whole. Naipaul begins from the premise that Matsuda is unusual, but this is a feint: readers are treated only an explanation of the absence of an explanation. That is, Naipaul does not state that Matsuda is either a misinterpretation or a fraud. Instead, he stages the moment when he *might* come to draw such a conclusion before drawing no conclusion at all. The reader is left with an impression of Matsuda—a series of moments when presentation and analysis coalesce—rather than an overt interpretation. What lingers is the "unique existence," an afterimage of Naipaul's unanswered question in the interview. Moreover, "unique existence" recalls the language that Ralph uses in *The Mimic Men* to describe himself as a child. Ralph, too, believed that he was secretly "marked" (36, 114, 117). For Ralph, this describes a feeling of destiny or of living in a scripted film; he claims that "a celestial camera recorded my every movement, impartially, without judgement or pity. I was marked; I was of interest; I would survive" (114). Like Matsuda, Ralph felt that he was a unique existence or man of destiny. Unlike Matsuda, Ralph transcends this notion of cosmic belonging.

The concept of a "unique existence" carries through Naipaul's work to even his Nobel lecture. Entitled "Two Worlds," the lecture seems designed for the audience to ask "What two worlds?" and its title implies that Naipaul might finally address the relationship between his work and his background. That is, the title "Two Worlds" goads the audience to recall that Naipaul is Indian by way of the West Indies. Moreover, the lecture finds Naipaul only happy to speculate about a variety of possible worlds. Early on, he explains how the geography of Trinidad, at the mouth of Venezuela's Orinoco River, identifies it as neither South American nor Caribbean. "Are these the two worlds?" we wonder. But Naipaul continues; he relates how he discovered the history behind the name of his birthplace, Chaguanas, in the British Museum.[67] But these are not the two worlds either, for Naipaul then describes his grandmother's house, the front of which is architecturally Indian while the rear is French Caribbean. "The entrance gate," Naipaul teases, "was at the side, between the two houses." Surely these are the two worlds, this combination of two non-indigenous continental styles. "So," he transitions to the next paragraph, "as a child I had this sense of two worlds, the world outside that tall corrugated-iron gate, and the world at home." Here the split "between" the houses has disappeared. His grandmother's house is whole. Instead, the two worlds are what is outside and what is within, the world and "a fierce kind of privacy." In a brilliant sleight of hand, Naipaul shifts his focus from the influence of material circumstances—the destiny of geography, the lack of cultural institutions, the shape of a house—to the problem of individual perception. The title "Two Worlds," then, turns out to be an exercise in historicist

[67] For Krishnan, this is the prime example of "historical derangement": Naipaul must travel to the Old World to discover a history of the New, one that might, without the imposition of modernity, have remained organic.

baiting. While Naipaul does acknowledge that one's individual perception of the world is culturally and materially reinforced—he speaks by counterexample of a French child whose experience matches her knowledge of the world gained from conversations with elders, radio broadcasts, and schooling—he nevertheless retains the right to write about his chosen object in whatever manner he desires. The individual emerges from confusion and looks upon disorder. In such a world, there are no sufficient—let alone necessary—allegiances. South America and the Caribbean, the Western hemisphere and Europe, India and the French Caribbean…the self and the world? While it seems overly generous to include this final item in the list, Naipaul does so. He retains a radical self-sufficiency of the individual beside his or her material circumstances. The self is a world. As with "Mr. Matsuda's Million-Dollar Gamble," Naipaul's Nobel lecture reinforces a concept of the individual. If Matsuda is of a "type," then Naipaul is a "unique existence," exempted from how historical circumstances might determine his individuality.

Aesthetically, for Naipaul, this is an assertion of his own neutrality. "[A]ll literary forms are equally valuable," he states, "I have no system, literary or political." This lack of a system he describes as his "way of looking." Naipaul is merely a mirror. Form suggests itself spontaneously; the author imposes nothing; that any text comes to be at all is a mystery and a miracle. Yet what separates this assertion from Ralph's own desire for a counterfactual organic culture? Similarly, Naipaul claims in *A Writer's People* (2007), his recent collection of essays, "*All my life I have had to think about ways of looking and how they alter the configuration of the world*" (4). According to Naipaul, although ways of looking might alter the

configuration of the world, his own mode of *thinking* about these ways of looking does not. Epistemologies can change the world, but Naipaul exempts his own thought from being categorized as one such epistemology.

The Mimic Men stands as a testament to the contrary. Its disaffective impressionism shows the artificiality and conventionality of Naipaul's supposedly-neutral "way of looking," and the novel represents an awareness of the fantasy that such *thinking* generates. *The Mimic Men*'s disaffective impressionism characterizes Naipaul's difficulty with belonging and his early refusal to do so. Moreover, it shows how his claims to realism—those by which he is historically criticized—masquerade for a caustic perceptual and ideological idealism. While he may have forgotten by 2001, Naipaul's reception of modernism in 1967 shows his knowledge of how knowledge operates. *The Mimic Men*'s simultaneous desire for and despair of belonging is something that Naipaul will nominally resolve twenty years later. While unsatisfying, Naipaul's resolution is static. He writes in *The Enigma of Arrival* about how he came to terms with his first years in London:

> In five years I was to see very clearly that the family farewell [in 1950] and my cousin's advice were "material." But it was to be many years after that before the alterations in my personality, or the slight intimations I was beginning to have about those alterations, intimations that were minute fractions of that first day's adventure, were to acquire their proper proportions. (108)

Consider *The Mimic Men*'s disaffective impressionism part of this process of acquiring the proper proportions, where "proper" denotes Naipaul's complete (and,

for many, completely upsetting) embrace of the supposedly apolitical "writerly" persona. *The Enigma of Arrival* performs Naipaul's comfort with his own Englishness and does so, as we see in the passage above, with a full-throated impressionism. *The Mimic Men*, on the other hand, represents a thread that ultimately goes unpulled: Naipaul's discomfort with the fantasy of belonging.

Like the other works of disaffection in this study, *The Mimic Men*'s disaffection from impressionism is the elaboration of an aesthetics of negativity that nevertheless holds out hope for a solution that it cannot foresee. The novel discloses belonging's problematic relationship to colonialism even as its impressionism works to create the very cooption of experience that it rejects. Ultimately, *The Mimic Men* shows us how the political situation of 1960s London was, for a relatively recent emigrant, as uncertain as that of the 1930s for Henry Green or of the late 1940s for Elizabeth Bowen. As we will see in the brief coda that follows, *Enigma*'s "comfort" is perhaps symptomatic of disaffection's demise in postmodernist fiction. If the literature of disaffection wants to hold for and engender in its reader an awareness of form's vibrancy, then postmodernism's "exhaustion" of form—in the guise of pastiche, for example—puts an end to the motivating force that spawned disaffection in the first place.

Coda
Disaffection and Postmodernist Beginnings

This coda gestures very briefly to some of the questions that disaffection raises about the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. I suggest that disaffection can help us rethink postmodernist literature's modernist lineage; indeed, perhaps disaffection is where modernist formalism hibernates in the midcentury before reawakening in postmodernity. A glance at a seminal instance of postmodernist fiction, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), is instructive in this regard, since Fowles's novel appears to represent disaffection's subsumption into postmodernism.

Fredric Jameson argues, in simplest terms, that postmodernism is the expression of late capitalism. The cultural logic of late capitalism is the apparent commodification of all spheres of life, and this logic finds literary expression in postmodernist literature's "relativity" of values and concomitant insistence that everything is a text. For Jameson, postmodernist literature expresses one's disconnection from history. All that remains is a poetics of presentism, most famously in the form of pastiche. That is, postmodernism flattens history by turning it into mere style.

As we have seen, this "exhaustion" of style is something against which the literature of disaffection fights. Disaffection's political project is the attempt to retain the meaningfulness of form without simplistically repeating the failures of a philosophical imperative to "make it new." In this sense, disaffection appears to reject postmodernism's waning of affect or exhausted pastiche. The literature of

disaffection endeavors to create in its reader an awareness of how form retains its vibrancy. Of course, for the literature of disaffection, this circulation of form in the world is problematic. Nevertheless, if postmodernism's pastiche is directed toward the mass consumption of style, then disaffection looks something like the last gasp of a modernist spirit of earnestness. It also looks like one of the last vestiges of elitism, as the previous chapters have at times implied.

The French Lieutenant's Woman is often cited as a touchstone of postmodernist literature (by Jameson and Linda Hutcheon, among others). Most famously, the novel's self-reflexive narrator offers his reader multiple possible conclusions to a story of forbidden love set in the mid-19th century. A gentleman, Charles, struggles with his attraction to a disgraced servant, Sarah, even as he is already betrothed to the wealthy Ernestina. Throughout the novel, the narrator telescopes his own present-day perspective, explaining Victorian culture to a contemporary reader while acknowledging the latter's contemporaneity. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* uses anachronistic idioms or concepts. For example, the narrator compares Victorian and contemporary slang—how "gooseberry" is equivalent today with the adjectives "square" or unfashionable (105)—and provides multiple justifications of Charles's behavior with reference to existentialist philosophy (60, 252). Beyond this, the novel contains numerous outright acknowledgments of the reading situation—ruminations on what readers today tend to forget about the middle class, a lengthy disquisition about Victorian sexuality (including a theory about Thomas Hardy and incest), and even a simple reference to the year 1969 itself (201, 215-216, 233).

Most important, however, are the novel's multiple conclusions, which whimsically foreground an author's power to make or break narrative. It is here that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* stages disaffection's demise. Indeed, the novel does so at the height of its postmodernist metatextuality: the moment when the novel first acknowledges that it will contain multiple possible endings is also the moment when the narrator depressurizes disaffection. Charles waits for a letter from Sarah that he expects will reply either affirmatively or in the negative. Instead, upon receiving Sarah's letter, he finds himself questioning its interpretation. Sarah has replied only with the new address of her current lodging. Is this an invitation? Is it, in its brevity, a rejection? To Charles, Sarah's letter is one of disaffection—how she actually feels is unknown. The language that *The French Lieutenant's Woman* uses to describe Sarah's letter reflects the interpretive bind in which the literature of disaffection places its reader. The narrator reconsiders the first ending—a happily-ever-after with Ernestina—that the reader has just encountered:

> Where I have cheated [in the first ending] was in analyzing the effect of that three-word letter on him. It tormented him, it obsessed him, it confused him. The more he thought about it the more Sarah-like that sending of the address—and nothing more—appeared. It was scribed only by oxy-moron; luring-receding, subtle-simple, proud-begging, defending-accusing. The Victorian was a prolix age; and unaccustomed to the Delphic. (267)

Here Sarah's letter generates meaning that it subsequently subverts in order to muddle the clarity its author's intentions. According to this description, Sarah's letter is a picture of disaffection: its multiple possible meanings create an awareness of the

strictures of one's own situation. If this is the case, then the multiple possible conclusions of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* would be the death of disaffection. The reader needn't choose an ending. The pressure of disaffection is lost when one can have it both ways. This is postmodernism's poetics of presentism. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* deploys the past as a flat field of mere style from which one can sample what one prefers.

Such playfulness is generally absent from the literature of disaffection. While difficult and self-reflexive, the works of disaffection in this dissertation are nevertheless earnest in how they are rooted to their historical moment. Indeed, as I have argued, disaffection is a strategy for authors uncertain of how to negotiate the relationship between form and history. Disaffection shows us a form of late modernism that neither continues nor overtly rebels against modernism. As *The French Lieutenant's Woman* suggests, it provides a kind of prehistory for postmodernist literature's characteristic comfort with pastiche.

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