

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of the Liberal Arts

**ANTI-HUMANIST MODERNISM: THINKING BEYOND THE HUMAN IN EARLY  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE**

A Dissertation in

English

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2009

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the concept of anti-humanism within the historical context of modernism in order to show modernism's complex co-development with specific anti-humanist modes, and to recover a version of modernism that is as invested in representing exteriority and interrelationality as interiority and subjectivity. While literary modernism tends to be thought of in terms of formal experiments that heighten access to the human subject or to "life itself," such as impressionism and the stream-of-consciousness novel, this study considers the various critiques mounted by modernist writers of an autonomous human subject claiming to be the agent of history. In *Anti-Humanist Modernism*, I argue that these critiques of humanism emergent in the modernist period were not limited to writers who were sympathetic to fascism or other authoritarian movements – rather they proliferated among writers interested in considering the potential of life outside the constraints of the strictly human and addressing the possibility that even if we agree that humans are not innately good (as humanism supposes) it does not necessarily follow that they should be controlled by some super-human figure or structure.

This study aims to make anti-humanism legible as an impulse animating much of early twentieth-century writing. The first chapter considers embodiment in specific texts by W.B. Yeats and D.H. Lawrence which complicate agency by dispersing it across or throughout the body rather than locating it in consciousness, in the mind. A second chapter looks at the emphasis on externality and positionality in Henry James's late novels as a shift away from James's earlier use of impressionism to foreground interiority. The study's third chapter examines the tension in Virginia Woolf's high modernist novels – *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* – between the impulse to privilege the self, or subjectivity, and the impulse to favor the group, or interrelationality. And finally, the fourth chapter compares the different experimental realisms deployed by three thirties writers – Henry Green, Elizabeth Bowen, and Christopher Isherwood – who each develop their own response to late modernism's changing demands for the representation of subjectivity as increasingly exteriorized. *Anti-Humanist Modernism* reconsiders the history of anti-humanist thought as a whole, by suggesting through these specific readings that the formation we know as anti-humanism is not simply a branch of French poststructuralism, but a system of thought complete with its own literary traditions and tactics that continued to develop from its beginnings in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche throughout the modernist period. While anti-humanism has long persisted on the edge of modernism and modernist studies, this study argues that anti-humanism is a larger formation that informed modernism much more broadly than has previously been suggested; further, anti-humanism connects modernism – the first half of the twentieth century – to poststructuralism, postmodernism, and our own contemporary moment.

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## **Introduction**

### **Anti-Humanism for Humans**

What is anti-humanism? At the root of this question is another cluster of questions: what is human, what is not human, and what drives us to make the distinction? Because of these roots, anti-humanism is less something that can be overtly defined than simply a set of concerns meant to provoke thought – especially thought about our most taken for granted value systems and modes of identification. Anti-humanism is not a repudiation of the human so much as it is a questioning of our assumptions about what it is to be human and what counts as human. It seeks to raise our awareness of the costs and benefits not just of the human as a category, but of the valuation of the human as a category. Because humanism is not just the protection and the shoring up of the human as a category – it is the valuation of that category as implicitly above other categories, the assertion of the inherent preciousness of human forms of life over other forms of life. But in addition to primarily being a mode of thought, a form more than a content, there are also content-based definitions of anti-humanism: it is the belief that humans are not the agents of history, at least not in any large sense. It is the belief that humans are not inherently good, and that they thus cannot or should not be assumed to be the aim of reality and history. It is the belief that consciousness does not wield unerring control over the self, that is, that the mind doesn't always control the body. Anti-humanism posits that the rationality associated with consciousness in the Enlightenment ideal of historical progress through autonomous individual agents is a myth. Anti-humanism includes the possibility that the irrational trumps the rational, or perhaps that something in between, like the theory of affect, fuses the two, still undermining

the humanist pretensions to pure rationality and thus the justification for human control over our environments, and over all that is non-human. Anti-humanism is the belief that humans are not equal to or coterminous with the Human, that in fact the Human can be damaging to humans. Even humans can be excluded from humanism, and that is a problem with which this project is greatly concerned: how can anti-humanism help us to serve actual humans better – put another way, how can it help us better serve “life,” a fuller, less restrictive term – than humanism itself does? How can we see anti-humanist thought as attempting to make life livable, to foster non-dominative relations between beings and each other, and beings and the outer world? It is not, as I will address in the first chapter, entirely obvious to see anti-humanism as hospitable to life in these terms – Luc Ferry, Alain Renaut, Kate Soper, and Emanuel Levinas in particular find fault with anti-humanism as a life-inhibiting philosophy – but, as I argue in this study, it is necessary to adopt an anti-humanist perspective not just if we want the outer world to flourish, from theoretical perspectives like those of animal studies or eco-criticism or post-humanism, but also – especially – if we care about the real ability of people to continue living, to make good on our potential for non-dominative coexistence. For a real universalism or equality to emerge, we actually must do away with humanism rather than predicating the distribution of rights on its enduring but inherently flawed structure. Perhaps “the human” now includes many groups – women as well as men, diverse ethnic groups, religious groups, socio-economic groups, people of diverse sexual orientations, people with disabilities – but the exclusion of these groups persisted at the origin of the category of the human, such that in order to become a member of “the human,” life in its teeming dynamism must be diminished within these aspiring identity categories. “The human” is a category not only not viable for total life, life in all its dynamic

variation and multiplicity, but it is also not viable for life in society, the life of actual humans, the type of life for which it was ostensibly designed.

In addition to the questions this dissertation raises about anti-humanism in general are the questions it raises about modernist anti-humanism. These are actually still questions about anti-humanism broadly conceived. When does anti-humanism really begin? Generally the term is associated with French philosophy of the 1960s, but in fact the concept has a longer history, beginning with Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. The poststructuralists of the sixties generally touch on one or more of these figures to formulate their anti-humanism: Deleuze and Guattari and Foucault, as well as other poststructuralists, based so much of their anti-humanism on Nietzsche; Foucault also worked from Heidegger; Althusser argued for Marx's anti-humanism. Considering the origins of anti-humanism in Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger allows us to look at modernism's affiliations with anti-humanism not as false, or as an anachronistic reading of modernism more about our own twenty first-century perspective than about modernism itself. Rather, looking at modernist anti-humanism allows us to look more at the emergence of anti-humanism in the early twentieth century. While there are studies of the influence of Nietzsche on modernism – particularly Sanford Schwartz's *The Matrix of Modernism* – and of the implicit anti-humanism of early modernist poetics through T.E. Hulme – Michael Levenson's *The Genealogy of Modernism* – and there are the seemingly anachronistic accounts that find latent poststructuralism in modernism, few recent studies, barring the impressive exception of Paul Sheehan's *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism* to which this study is indebted, have picked up these concerns in a way that refuses the label of anachronism. As Sheehan began to suggest, and as I will continue to show here, the history of anti-humanism in modernism – or the history of anti-humanism as developing through modernism – is a rich one.

It may seem strange and oddly small to start by addressing anti-humanism in its large sense and then moving on to discuss anti-humanism in modernism, but from the perspective of this project anti-humanism and modernism are inextricably linked. It is not a question here of one term constituting the foreground of this project and the other the background – of using one to better understand the other. Rather, these two constellations of thought enrich each other. Not just now, in their juxtaposition in the present study, but at the time of their emergences they enriched each other. Not only did writers like Wyndham Lewis, D.H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats, T.E. Hulme and many others develop their thought along anti-humanist lines formed by Nietzsche, lines that were available as publications in English and in considerations and reviews appearing in the very journals these modernist figures wrote in themselves. These writers also furthered anti-humanism in their own way, developing it beyond its origins, mounting thought experiments in poetry and prose detailing what anti-humanist modes might look like, imagining ways out of the human – in effect compiling a library of anti-humanist possibilities for life. Many of these possibilities may ultimately be as damaging to life as the Human itself, or unworkable in practical terms, or otherwise flawed, but they nonetheless build a tradition we can draw on in the present of trying to imagine life otherwise, as following a different path, as evolving dynamically always into something else, something beyond the human. The contention of this study is that we cannot understand modernism without anti-humanism, and we cannot understand anti-humanism without modernism.

To set the groundwork I offer here a table (Figure 1) suggesting binary definitions of humanism and anti-humanism; while this is a gesture that runs inherently against anti-humanism (especially as configured by Deleuze and Guattari, who favored a complex, variegated monism), I use it here anyway because it helps make the rest of this study intelligible. It contains



distinctions I use throughout, distinctions historically used by modernists, and distinctions which I hope other studies will explore further. The point is to establish a working framework:

Figure 1

<b>Humanism</b>		<b>Anti-Humanism</b>
agency		micro-agency
Subjectivity	←interrelationality→	objectivity
consciousness	←affect→	subconscious/unconscious
mind		body
subject		object
interiority		exteriority
linear history/history as progress		genealogy/history as emergences
reform		transformation
communication		critique of transparency of communication
stream-of-consciousness	←impressionism→	realism
narrative		poetics
identity		alterity
depth		surface
development		stasis
empathy		abstraction
secular stage of history (the Enlightenment)		religious stage of history
characters		settings
autonomy		determinism
individuality		collectivity

Some of these terms are specific to particular authors: empathy as humanist versus abstraction as anti-humanist is from Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*, which divides modes of art into objective (primitive, abstracting) and subjective (modern, but not modernist); humanism as secular and anti-humanism as religious is tied to Worringer but emerges more clearly in T.E. Hulme's thought (to be discussed in chapter 1), and of course this resonates with the epithet "secular humanist" which is bandied about on Fox News as an insult and suggests a totally different range of possibilities for anti-humanism (which won't be discussed here). Some of the terms are tied more closely to modernism, such as the literary distinction between stream-of-consciousness and realism, with impressionism occupying a middle ground (really, impressionism in literary modernism can be seen, as Jesse Matz argues, as being simultaneously exterior and interior – it is more a mediation between the subject and the outer world than anything else). I extrapolate here from the sense of humanism as emphasizing subjectivity, interiority, mind, and consciousness as against an anti-humanist sense of objectivity (complicated because scientific objectivity, the pretension to a transparent unbiased position is also associated with science and the Enlightenment, but in its more radical form approximates an anti-humanism), exteriority, the body, and the unconscious. I see the distinction in the modernist evolution in form from late nineteenth-century realism, to formal experiments such as stream-of-consciousness and impressionism, back to an altered realism in the 1930s and after, as a formation through which we can chart literature's particular ways of grappling with the dictates of humanism and anti-humanism. Stream-of-consciousness often, though not always, was a way to favor the human by privileging interiority, adding value, and emphasizing self over other; realism, though considered less innovative and often classified as necessarily non-modernist, actually afforded opportunities, as I show in chapters 2 and 4, for anti-humanist literary

experiment due to an emphasis on the exterior and thus the synchronic (many people together in time) over the diachronic (development through time that in literature often emerges as the development of a single individual). This also suggests, I hope, the way a lot of these terms can be mapped onto each other.

Other binaries can be traced explicitly to scholars and theorists of anti-humanism. The emphasis on humanism as communication comes from Ferry and Renault's critique of anti-humanism. The pair suggesting that poetics is anti-humanist while narrative is humanist belongs to Paul Sheehan's argument where he claims that "narrative is human shaped" and thus that fiction can only ever approach anti-humanism, it can never be anti-humanist; though I include this binary in my table, I actually argue throughout the study that narrative can facilitate anti-humanism. The discussion of anti-humanism as body opposing a humanism of the mind stems largely from Elizabeth Grosz's consideration of women's struggle for rights in *Volatile Bodies*; although Grosz's work is not primarily anti-humanist here, her account makes it possible to see how Enlightenment rationality, tied historically to humanism, has perniciously worked against non-dominative human coexistence by reducing those considered "others" to body, irrationality, exteriority. The break between consciousness and the unconscious along these lines, like many of the binaries, should not be considered as a hard break, but rather used as a tool for reimagining possibilities of human interaction – this is what we see in D.H. Lawrence's *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, discussed in chapter 1, where he argues for multiple centers of consciousness as a way of bringing people together differently, not using the model of rationality as a form of domination through knowledge with regard to others. Lawrence's theory of different centers of consciousness has affiliations with affect theory, which also relates to anti-humanism. Affect is, as Teresa Brennan argues, between mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious. It forms

a bridge that connects and levels, confusing not only hierarchies within the self but also between the self and the world: “The transmission of affect, whether it is grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or psychological in origin. But the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room’s atmosphere, some longer lasting. In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual” (1). Affect is capable of modeling fluidity and the refusal of hierarchies – the interrogation of impositions of value through hierarchy – that, I argue, anti-humanism at its best can itself constitute.

Interrelationality, in the chart, is another instance of this: it levels hierarchies and suggests a mode of being in the world wherein alterity is the key term – where we are all others, where the focus is moved outward from the self and identity into a broader social framework.

So, the table that I propose is only a tool, but one that begins the work of this study: the work of identifying terms that can register the points of entry for a discussion of modernist anti-humanism and anti-humanist modernism, a discussion that I hope will culminate in a less restrictive worldview, one that allows for infinite variation outside of essential hierarchies. These are terms that we can – and that I will, in the chapters that follow – use to demarcate points of intervention in humanism, to diagnose shifts and emergences taking us away from the human as dominative.

In the first chapter, I discuss the history of anti-humanism and elaborate the idea of an “anti-humanism of life.” I examine modernism from the perspective of its intersections with Nietzsche’s anti-humanist philosophy, in particular *On the Genealogy of Morals*. After setting up anti-humanism in Nietzschean terms, often routed through Deleuze and Guattari and

Elizabeth Grosz (particularly Grosz's *The Nick of Time*), I examine specific encounters with Nietzsche in modernism. The first of these is with the thinker T.E. Hulme. Although Hulme's connections to Nietzsche are not excessive, some of his writings were informed by Nietzsche through Hulme's affiliation with A.R. Orage. Further, it is necessary to juxtapose Nietzsche and Hulme because they both had such an impact on the development of modernist anti-humanism. Next, I address W.B. Yeats as anti-humanist based on his theory of embodied mediumship – an anti-humanism of the irrational and of corporeality, considering in particular how Yeats's anti-humanism aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the Body without Organs. Finally, I close the chapter with a discussion of D.H. Lawrence's anti-humanism, visible in particular in *The Rainbow* and his strange study, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*. These readings of Lawrence show that the anti-humanism of life, through a focus in texts on the relationships between characters, on subjectivity, can indeed be articulated in prose as well as poetry. This first chapter lays the groundwork for a modernist anti-humanism. It is more invested in continuing to set up the terms of the study – unlike the other three chapters which can be seen as charting a historical trajectory through modernism: from naturalism, to high modernism, to 1930s writing. In fact, the first and third chapters constitute a pair: the first chapter looks at high modernism in order to get all of the large connections between anti-humanism and modernism out on the table, but the third chapter looks at high modernism *as* high modernism, as a particular moment in the history of modernist anti-humanism.

The second chapter sets up Henry James's late style in connection with Zola's naturalism in order to show connections between naturalism – itself a kind of pre-modernism, I argue – and anti-humanism. Drawing on Zola's essay "The Experimental Novel," I point out the tendency in naturalism toward an anti-humanism tied to determinism, and specifically an anti-humanism that

takes the depletion of agency perhaps too far in its treatment of characters and perhaps not far enough in its assignment of agency to the author, figured as a genius capable of fixing the experiment's outcomes. I go on to show how naturalism developed in James's works in a way that confounds the nationalist distinctions that predominate in discussions of naturalism, which typically pit American against French, and how it also confounds the narrative of James as developing into the founding father of literary modernism, particularly literary modernism as invested in subjectivity and impressionism. Instead, through a consideration of James's late style – especially in *The Golden Bowl* – I show that James's career ends on an anti-humanist note. He replaces the idea of character with an emphasis on position and thus on surface and interrelationality.

By the third chapter, the study has adopted a historical trajectory, moving from late nineteenth-century naturalism in the second chapter, to high modernism in the third chapter – and then on to thirties writing in the fourth chapter. In the third chapter, I argue that Virginia Woolf's investment in "life" itself makes it difficult to distinguish at times between an impulse that would align her with humanism and biopower on the one hand – invested in the protection of life as human life – and one that would emphasize her role as an anti-humanist taking life beyond the human through an emphasis on radical interrelationality. This chapter also stages the contrasts between a Foucaultian anti-humanism and a Deleuzian anti-humanism. In a Foucaultian version, we might read Woolf through the lens of biopower, as shutting off the human's possibility for transformation, but reading her from a Deleuzian perspective allows the more generative, anti-dialectical, interrelational Virginia Woolf of *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Waves* to emerge. A secondary concern in this chapter is the need for reconciling Foucaultian and Deleuzian versions of anti-humanism because, in addition to both being necessary to a full

understanding of Woolf's anti-humanism, they also must be conjoined to develop a workable theory of historical change in humanism.

The fourth chapter offers a consideration of thirties writing as anti-humanist through readings of particular novels by Henry Green, Christopher Isherwood, and Elizabeth Bowen. While thirties writing has often been considered blandly realistic and thus categorized as non-modernist, the configuration I identify in this study as modernist anti-humanism offers new ways of recognizing realistic or pseudo-realistic writings as complexly affiliated with modernism. The difficult historical moment which exerted pressures on the forms these writers could use also connects to the discussion I progressed in the third chapter about anti-humanism and history. The discussion of Green, Isherwood, and Bowen in this chapter develops a vocabulary of experimental realism which suggests both an objectivity that forces a step back from the interiorities associated with high modernism, and a degree of experimentation which provides room for life to develop beyond itself, a transformative potential which I identify as essential to anti-humanism.

As a conclusion to the study, I offer a brief discussion of Wyndham Lewis and the new modernist studies, through the lens of Fredric Jameson's writings on modernism, which I hope will serve as a jumping off point for further discussions of anti-humanist modernism.

There is much to gain from a consideration of modernism's inherent anti-humanism, and of anti-humanism's inherent modernism. The modernists thought outside the human in so many ways that can and should be of use to us, not just as scholars of modernism, trying to get the period right, but as humans trying to live in the world now. Anti-humanism brings new possibilities for ethics, not just between people but between ourselves and our whole world. In modernism anti-humanism wrought failed experiments as well as the promising ones I consider



here, but it is in the vein of a new plan for life that I read and re-read these writers and that I wrote the present study. It is in this vein, of an anti-humanism of life, that I invite you to approach it.

## Chapter 1

### Toward an Anti-Humanism of Life: Nietzsche, Hulme, Yeats, and Lawrence

In his novel *Tarr*, Wyndham Lewis puts forth criteria for an art that might dispense with the strictly human – the human as figured by the Enlightenment, psychoanalysis, and other institutions of a universalizing modernity. According to Tarr,

“[...] *deadness* is the first condition of art. A hippopotamus’ armoured hide, a turtle’s shell, feathers or machinery [...]. The second is absence of *soul*, in the sentimental human sense. [...] No restless, quick flame-like ego is imagined for the *inside* of [a statue]. It has no inside. This is another condition of art; *to have no inside*, nothing you cannot *see*. Instead, then, of being something impelled like an independent machine by a little egoistic fire inside, it lives soullessly and deadly by its frontal lines and masses.” (299-300)

Here is an art object bereft of interiority or ego – of consciousness – and, in its situation by Tarr within a vocabulary of death and soullessness, it is re-valued in terms unintelligible from within a humanist worldview. For reasons suggested by the content of this passage, Lewis has become, especially since Fredric Jameson’s early study, the pariah of anti-humanist modernism – a master of anti-Cartesian exteriorization, tainted by fascism. The deathliness that Lewis suggests art should strive for is associated, in the hindsight of historical vision, with the absolute devaluation of human life that is now synonymous with fascism. That such deathliness has also, up till now, been a key descriptor of modernist anti-humanism has kept the latter a largely closed area of scholarly inquiry. The terrain of modernist anti-humanism changes radically, I argue, when we move beyond deadness and the idea of anti-humanism as a negation of life. An alternative anti-humanist modernism dethrones ego, consciousness, and interiority with an eye to the furthering of life rather than life’s cancellation; life as a force capable, at its best, of taking the human beyond itself into unthinkable modes of alterity.

Friedrich Nietzsche embodies such an alternative, and provides a radically different point of entry for modernist anti-humanism. Nietzsche's particular brand of anti-humanism, as theorized especially by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Elizabeth Grosz, offers the vocabulary of life as an inadvertent curative for the emphasis in accounts of anti-humanism like Lewis's on refusals of community, sociality, and all of the positive values associated with humanity. In addressing the strain of modernist anti-humanism running from Nietzsche's philosophy to T.E. Hulme's criticism to W.B. Yeats's writings and to D.H. Lawrence's prose, I argue in this chapter that the opposition to all that is allegedly deathly in anti-humanism presents an opportunity for rethinking life, as a force emergent among humans that nonetheless harbors the anti-humanist potential to transform them utterly. The focus in this chapter is on the transformative potential in anti-humanism as a general trend in modernism – this will pave the way for more historically specific accounts of shifts in modernist anti-humanism presented in the second, third, and fourth chapters.

### *On a Genealogy of Anti-Humanism*

Extant histories of anti-humanism have tended to be written by its detractors – anti-humanism is a designation used by its critics more often than its proponents – and for this reason Nietzsche is situated at the early end of a trajectory that culminates, according to many, with the overthrow of positive human promise heralded by the Enlightenment. Chiefly, French neo-humanism of the 1980s, as articulated by Luc Ferry, Alain Renaut, and Kate Soper, has cast anti-humanism as an ethically bankrupt tradition in which Nietzsche holds a special place. Like most accounts connecting French poststructuralism to Nietzsche, Ferry and Renaut pay special attention to Nietzsche as an antecedent to Foucault through genealogical technique. In *French*

*Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism* they write: “it is important to emphasize that the practice of genealogy extended th[e] negation of subjectivity (as finite consciousness) into a formidable destruction of the very idea of humanity as *interrelationality*. From the point of view of this type of reification of consciousness, communication (for example, philosophical discussion) must necessarily appear not as free debate among subjects responsible for what they say but simply as the sublimation of relations of force [...]” (18; italics in original). The problem with genealogy, for Ferry and Renault, is that it “clearly challenges again the idea of the subject as consciousness” and this is a problem because, “using methods that may appear to be intrinsically terroristic [!], [genealogy] is concerned not with what someone said (since there is no signified) but with where he speaks from and with whom he is to say what he said” (16). Genealogy exemplifies all that is destructive about anti-humanism because it scrutinizes positionalities – manifest in the form of subjects – as effects of force that cannot communicate and are incapable of “free debate.” Rationality is clearly removed from the equation here as well; genealogy is what reveals the human subject as having no inherent connection to rationality, which may emerge as a function of certain positions, or it may not.

Outside of this extensive invocation of genealogy as “terroristic,” Nietzsche is less present in the research of Ferry, Renault, and Soper than Heidegger and Marx, although he often appears in the formulation of the “Nietzschean-Heideggerian” tradition, or in the German philosophical lineage of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, to which much of French poststructuralism responded. Although a recuperation of the anti-humanist tradition largely consolidated and then critiqued in these neo-humanist French arguments of the 1980s could arguably be performed through figures other than Nietzsche, Nietzsche is more useful for my purposes here because his ideas inflect literary modernism before contributing thoroughly to the

coherent philosophy of anti-humanism that emerges in French poststructuralism, and also because he emphasizes life and other generative vocabularies that might cast anti-humanism in a different light. For even though Ferry, Renault, and Soper largely developed the vocabulary of anti-humanism for their own critical ends, an inadvertent effect of their projects was to make anti-humanism available as a vocabulary that need not be inflected negatively, and that grouped poststructuralist philosophers together with respect to an attitude toward the human that in fact emerged much earlier, as their research also suggests. Once Nietzsche is rendered legible in this tradition, the temporal boundary that inhibits – on the grounds of anachronism – discussion of modernism and poststructuralism is erased. Anti-humanism is a Nietzschean interest that develops through both literary modernism and, later, poststructuralist philosophy, and it knits the twentieth century together in a suspicion of the Enlightenment that may yet hold promise for, perversely, the forms of interrelationality Ferry and Renault opposed to this formation as humanist.

To return to Nietzsche's particular anti-humanism: while Ferry and Renault largely gloss over the specificities of Nietzsche's philosophy, the most recent research on Nietzsche suggests his anti-humanism has been established but is usually not of primary interest. George Stack, for instance, refers in passing to Nietzsche's interest in "the consequences of the enormous scientific advances since Copernicus that have decentered, demythologized, and diminished the value of the human world" (ix). Karen Brown recapitulates an anti-humanist interrogation of the Enlightenment, without identifying it within those parameters, when she states her interest in "investigating ways human experience may disconfirm or exceed technological reason" and offering "a meditation on the possibility of discerning human experience as dynamically non-dual," all through an examination of Nietzsche's writings (5). Elizabeth Grosz's discussion of

Nietzsche comes closer to the ideal of anti-humanism I want to use here: “[h]e [...] places unpredictable forces, temporal forces bound up with the future, at the center of his philosophy, which [...] he links to the functioning and affirmation of the inventiveness of life, life conceived without man as its culmination or center, life that unfolds through man rather than directs itself to man” (10). Grosz’s consideration of Nietzsche’s anti-humanism emphasizes its quality as life-affirming but also critical of humanity, man, and human institutions, still without actually calling it anti-humanism. This term is reserved, with the founding exception of Althusser<sup>1</sup>, for critics of the formation it describes, like Ferry, Renaut, and Soper. Even Paul Sheehan, author of the only study to treat anti-humanist modernism as such, opts to keep the ethically compromised vocabulary out of his title<sup>2</sup>. However, his attitude toward anti-humanism is generally tempered and sanguine: “Antihumanism is an engagement with the being that has come to masquerade as ‘human’. It aspires to locate the human within the ‘human’, the emergent entity after it is shorn of the metaphysical and axiological assumptions accreting around the name, the *a priori* category, the self-legislating entity that is the ‘human’” (20). With regard to Nietzsche specifically, Sheehan notes “a notorious absence of any specific prescription for social, political or ethical renewal” tied to a philosophical interest in “‘the human without humanism’” (xi).

Grosz’s study, along with several other recent accounts emphasizing Nietzsche’s affirmation of life<sup>3</sup> and counter to Renaut and Ferry or even Sheehan, returns to life as a positive value in Nietzsche’s works while also confirming Nietzsche as an anti-humanist. Such readings

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<sup>1</sup> Althusser’s 1965 essay “Marxism and Humanism” originates the term anti-humanism as an attribute of Marx: “one can and must speak openly of *Marx’s theoretical anti-humanism*, and see in this *theoretical anti-humanism* the absolute (negative) precondition of the (positive) knowledge of the human world itself, and of its practical transformation. It is impossible to *know* anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes” (229; italics in original).

<sup>2</sup> The book is called *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism*; in addition to privileging humanism for the title, Sheehan also develops a vocabulary of counterhumanist strategy for discussing narrative in modernism.

<sup>3</sup> Two notable examples are Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* and Christa and Ralph Acampora, eds., *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*.

are supported by attention in particular to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, one of Nietzsche's texts that influenced poststructuralism and thus philosophical anti-humanism. Responding to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche repudiates values such as "pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice," "on the basis of which [Schopenhauer] *said No* to life and to himself. [...] It was precisely here that I saw the *great* danger to mankind, its sublimest enticement and seduction—but to what? to nothingness?—it was precisely here that I saw the beginning of the end, the dead stop, a retrospective weariness, the will turning *against* life, [...]" (19; italics in original). Mankind, here, is of interest to Nietzsche, but he points out that an altruistic separation out of the self is opposed to life and as such to mankind as well. Life emerges early in the study as a way of speaking about that which cannot be contained and is in fact damaged by human social formations or institutions that rely on abstraction; life is not necessarily human, or not worth talking about only as a function of the human, but we can address that which is of value in the human by speaking about life.

Consciousness as a residue connecting the individual to the social is, for Nietzsche, a key part of the pernicious and thorough abstraction of humanity outward from itself through, conversely, an inward turn. In part, this is what he defines as *ressentiment*: "While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is 'outside', what is 'different', what is 'not itself'; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye—this *need* to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction" (36-37; italics in original). The external world, as Nietzsche argues in the *Genealogy*, causes the man of *ressentiment* to move inward and enfold, and that

enfolding becomes consciousness, rationality, and all that is human in a negative, life-damaging sense. As for many modernists after him, democracy is for Nietzsche bound up with this bad consciousness-making and interiorization: “the diminution and leveling of European man constitutes *our* greatest danger, for the sight of him makes us weary.—We can see nothing today that wants to grow greater, we suspect that things will continue to go down, down, to become thinner, more good-natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian—there is no doubt that man is getting ‘better’ all the time” (44). The putative improvements of civilization wrought by the Enlightenment represent for Nietzsche a curtailment of real human promise, not its fulfillment, and this is tied to his critique of consciousness.

In a passage important for its poststructuralist resonances, Nietzsche writes:

A quantum of force is equivalent to a quantum of drive, will, effect—more, it is nothing other than precisely this very driving, willing, effecting, and only owing to the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) which conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a “subject,” can it appear otherwise. For just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an *action*, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything. (45; italics in original)

The subject and its agency are thus misleading effects of language which produce, together, a false sense of the human as separated out from the economy of life, and mind as separated out from body, acting against life in what Nietzsche refers to as a “spirit of revenge” or *ressentiment*. Science, as a key Enlightenment institution, is complicit in this as well: “our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language and has not disposed of that little changeling, the ‘subject’ (the atom, for example, is such a changeling, as is the Kantian ‘thing-in-itself’)” (45).



For humanity to thrive, the subject and all it entails must be dispensed with. Nietzsche is ultimately quite clear about what he wants to retain from humanity – the capacity for self-overcoming, becoming, and transformation – and what must be expunged – consciousness, interiority, and *ressentiment*.

Let us assume briefly that Ferry and Renault’s repudiation of Nietzsche’s anti-humanism as life-damaging, or destructive of community, might be accurate to the extent that it goes through a Foucaultian route, by which docile bodies as cancelled agents present a fuller condemnation of all human potential<sup>4</sup>. Regarding Foucault’s Nietzscheanism they suggest that “[t]he antihumanism of ’68 philosophy opens onto ‘barbarism’, not because it leads to unleashing all kinds of violence but insofar as all possibility of real dialogue between consciousnesses, which had been open to thinking of their differences on the basis of identity, is destroyed by the accusations brought against subjectivity: When only exaggerated individual differences survive, then everyone’s other becomes ‘wholly other’, the ‘barbarian’” (120). To the extent that dialogue or communication requires something like a fixed subject of consciousness, and that dialogue is for Ferry and Renault the precondition of functional humanity, they are right to identify Foucault, and thus also Nietzsche, as enemies of humanity. However, Deleuze’s poststructuralist account of Nietzsche consolidates the interpretation of Nietzsche glossed above as an anti-humanist proponent of life. Specifically, Deleuze emphasizes a definition of the body in relation to force and as opposed to consciousness: “In Nietzsche consciousness is always the consciousness of an inferior in relation to a superior to which he is subordinated or into which he is ‘incorporated’. Consciousness is never self-consciousness, but the consciousness of an ego in relation to a self which is not itself conscious” (39). That is,

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<sup>4</sup> Troubling this reading is the suggestion, by Ferry, Renault, and others, that Foucault evinces a positive turn to subjectivity later in his works that negates his earlier anti-humanism. For another opinion, see Nealon.

consciousness is purely relational and should be taken only as a “symptom” (39). The body is opposed to consciousness, as its ground of emergence and a field for the play of forces: “What defines a body is this relation between dominant and dominated forces. Every relationship of forces constitutes a body – whether it is chemical, biological, social or political. Any two forces, being unequal, constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relationship. This is why the body is always the fruit of chance, in the Nietzschean sense, and appears as the most ‘astonishing’ thing, much more astonishing, in fact, than consciousness and spirit” (40). This is not a version of the body as essence or plenitude, but more simply presents the body as a positivity, or in Nietzsche’s terms, as active rather than reactive. Deleuze further goes on to link the body to the unconscious in these terms: “What makes the body superior to all reactions, particularly that reaction of the ego that is called consciousness, is the activity of necessarily unconscious forces [...]. The body’s active forces make it a self and define the self as superior and astonishing [...].” (41-42). Like the account Deleuze later developed with Felix Guattari of the “Body without Organs,” the body here is important not because it is a human body, but because it has somehow come into being, it is materially real, and it contains the potential for becoming and transforming.

The Deleuzian view of Nietzsche, then, emphasizes the latter’s philosophy as generative, active rather than reactive, and somehow embodied, even if Deleuze emphasizes corporeality in a somewhat idiosyncratic way (for what it can do, how it allows us to reconceptualize the human, rather than as an end in itself). Genealogy, which is the linchpin of a despicable anti-humanism for Ferry and Renault, is generative and positive in Deleuze’s account: “Genealogical means differential and genetic” (53). To produce differences is to affirm chance, which in Deleuze’s, and Nietzsche’s, terms is a wholly positive maneuver that will save man from his life-damaging humanity. As Deleuze also goes on to say, “*Ressentiment*, bad conscience and nihilism are not

psychological traits but the foundation of the humanity in man. They are the principles of human being as such. Man, ‘skin disease’ of the Earth, reaction of the Earth...[...]. It is in this sense that Zarathustra speaks of his ‘great contempt’ for man and of his ‘great disgust’. Another sensibility, another becoming – would they still be man’s?” (64-65). The generation and transformation implied by genealogy, then, are necessary for man to become other, to move beyond the human, while Ferry and Renault would posit a static, reduced, and interiorized humanity as a universal, unchanging code necessary for communication. Humanity and reform go together here, as do anti-humanism and transformation.

Elizabeth Grosz picks up on this as well, in tracing a philosophical lineage from Darwin to Nietzsche in terms of transformation (tied in her account to temporality) as an essential affirmation of life. Evolution, for Grosz, emphasizes radical transformation and becoming rather than linear progress, and although according to her Nietzsche misreads Darwin (based on misconstruals among his contemporaries), she places the two philosophers on a continuum in this sense. Grosz claims an interest not in “the well-timed, the well-adapted, the genesis and ‘perfection of design’ of man and beast (what Dennett regards as Darwin’s primary objects of investigation), but rather, the untimely, the dislocated, that which precedes, surpasses, and moves beyond man, that which goes beyond the human and unhinges progress and continuity, displacing the known and the present for a future that does not yet exist” (97-98). The key to reading evolution this way in Nietzsche is a glorification of life and the connection between life and the will to power. As Grosz goes on to say,

Throughout his work, Nietzsche attempts to substitute the will to power for the power of individual variation. In the process, he aims to render the biological being more active and the environment more reactive, a reversal of his view of the Darwinian reduction of the living being to a reaction to the external selective pressures imposed by the environment. Life, existence, is about, and the play of, the will to power, the will to

command or to obey, which is a will to proliferation and profusion rather than an imperative to simply live or to merely reproduce. (103)

This is a view of evolution as outside of progress, as an anti-humanist emergence figuring forward movement through the unintelligibility of each phase to the next, as unassimilable, heterogeneous moments rather than a smooth, linear narrative of human development. The passage of time, in this account, breaks with ideas of flow and human continuity to privilege radical alterity instead. For Grosz, Deleuze, and Nietzsche – and as we will see, for Yeats and Lawrence as well – the radical alterity that characterizes history should be embraced, as signaling “the human who joyously seeks beyond the human, who seeks a kind of happy self-annihilation as human [...]” (Grosz, 102). Nietzschean anti-humanism, as Grosz and Deleuze suggest, relies on the separation of life force and will to power from the individuals or subjects to which the Enlightenment connects them, and this separation has enduring ramifications for human agency in both local and grand historical senses. This anti-humanism values uncertain futures highly and also places the cancellation of subjectivity – which differs importantly from what Ferry and Renault might think of as a *silencing* of subjectivity – at a premium. Life is worth living, but only if you can live it as something other than a subject. Further, bodies are not necessarily subjects – unlike subjects, because disentangled from consciousness as figured by the Enlightenment, bodies are capable of transformation, and this occurred to the modernists long before it emerged in poststructuralism.

### *Nietzschean Modernism, Anti-Humanist Modernism*

Modernist studies has been slow to take these particular Nietzschean insights to heart, although a tradition of reading Anglo-American modernism in connection with Nietzsche began almost as early as the connection itself did. Early accounts of the importation of Nietzsche’s

ideas into modernism emphasize historical and biographical detail,<sup>5</sup> or they emphasize Nietzsche as a thinker of art more relevant to literary studies than philosophy,<sup>6</sup> and both of these possibilities bypass an engagement with Nietzsche's anti-humanism. In the field of modernism, the considerations of Nietzscheanism and anti-humanism thus far have been largely separate enterprises<sup>7</sup>. It is my aim now to provide an account of their separate developments and possible intersections.

We have seen so far how a life-affirming anti-humanism emerges on a certain reading of *On the Genealogy of Morals* that has been influential in poststructuralism (Foucault, Deleuze) and beyond (Grosz). Although this particular reading of Nietzsche has not figured much in accounts of Nietzsche's influence on modernism, such accounts do establish unequivocally the wide reception of Nietzsche's works by significant writers in Anglo-American modernist circles. David Thatcher argues convincingly, under the weight of exhaustive bibliographic research, that Nietzsche's influence on early, pre-1914 modernism largely through the dispersal of his ideas in A.R. Orage's publication *The New Age*, was dramatic. Thatcher glosses Orage's indebtedness to Nietzschean thought as follows:

It is clear from three theosophical lectures Orage gave, later published as *Consciousness: Animal, Human, and Superhuman* (1907), that he was preoccupied with one key problem: "Is it possible for the human to transcend the human? Can man become more than man? May he enter the one ocean of consciousness from which the myriad streams of particular modes of consciousness flow?" Orage was convinced that, by the operation of the Transcendental Self, "the suggestor of human consciousness, the concealed Magician," these things *are* possible. Like Nietzsche, Orage treats man, not as a goal, but as a bridge; not as possessing freedom, but capable of it. (221)

In Thatcher's account, although the supercession of the human is just one Nietzschean concern among many often contradictory others, it nonetheless registers its impact on modernism through

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Thatcher's *Nietzsche in England 1890-1914*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Keith M. May, *Nietzsche and Modern Literature: Themes in Yeats, Rilke, Mann and Lawrence*.

<sup>7</sup> Sheehan's study, considered as it is with the development of anti-humanism as poststructuralism, is an important exception.

Orage. Because of the nature of his project, Thatcher also does not attend to the size or extent of this impact, of the question “Can man become more than man,” on modernism as a literary phenomenon defined in opposition to realism and romanticism. This is outside the scope of his argument. However, the generally neglected connection between Nietzsche and modernist thinker T.E. Hulme through Orage is not.

Hulme’s pseudo-philosophy and writings on art are arguably the epicenter of anti-humanist modernism, rendered so first by Michael Levenson’s account in *A Genealogy of Modernism* and more recently by the collection *T.E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism*. On the question of Nietzsche and Hulme, which the anti-humanism absent from Thatcher’s argument will illuminate, Thatcher writes:

To what extent Hulme was personally acquainted with Nietzsche’s work is hard to establish; his knowledge of the language permitted access to the German original, but he never makes Nietzsche the focal point of any of his philosophizing – all his references to Nietzsche are in the nature of asides. What severely complicates the issue is that several continental writers to whom he is especially indebted in his observations on romanticism and literary theory (for example, Scheler, Sorel, Lasserre, de Gourmant) were themselves deeply influenced by Nietzsche. (255)

Nietzsche’s influence on Hulme, as on others including Lawrence, is never fully traceable because it is at some remove, through other thinkers, or it is denied or protested against – Thatcher shows how Hulme disregarded shifts in Nietzsche’s philosophy in order to cast him as a romantic and thus reject his influence, and Colin Milton suggests that Lawrence pretended not to have read certain works in order to occasionally use Nietzsche as a straw man. However, Hulme and Nietzsche are two thinkers who clearly share what we might productively call an affinity, as opposed to Thatcher’s privileged paradigm of “influence,” and the affinity consists in their independently developed anti-humanist stances.

Hulme's most explicit formulation of anti-humanism comes in his essay on humanism and religion – this essay was published in Herbert Read's edition of *Speculations* as "Humanism and the Religious Attitude," and it now appears, in Karen Csengeri's newer edition of Hulme's writings, as "A Notebook."<sup>8</sup> As Comentale and Gasiorek point out, following Csengeri, "Herbert Read's version of 'A Notebook' gave it a 'polish' that 'obscures the "cindery" aspect of the work' [...]. This cinderiness is perhaps the most important feature of Hulme's writing, which may be declarative in tone but always gives the impression of thought in process, of a vigorous mind worrying at problems even as it announces apparent solutions to them" (8). The idea of the cinder, taken from Hulme's earliest writings, approximates Nietzsche's aphoristic style as well. As Helen Carr suggests, "The most significant influence on his thought at [the "Cinders"] stage appears to be Nietzsche; Herbert Read indeed suggested that the form of 'Cinders' might be modelled on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Hulme saw Nietzsche, unusually for the early twentieth century, as a philosopher rather than as [a] prophet [...]. Hulme, for his part, read Nietzsche much as he is read today, when he has come to be seen as the father of modern deconstruction" (95-96). However, this placement of Hulme and Nietzsche in the legacy of deconstruction and poststructuralism is not generally aligned with anti-humanism.

In addition to the "cindery" form of "A Notebook," this piece also, as suggested above, marks the culmination of anti-humanism in Hulme's thought. In the less cindery, more directly argumentative moments of the piece, Hulme focuses on the differences between what he identifies as humanism, on the one hand, and the religious attitude, on the other. This distinction both draws on and exceeds Hulme's earlier opposition of classicism and romanticism, resulting

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<sup>8</sup> The recent resurgence of Hulme scholarship attends, as did Levenson, to the cryptic arrangement of essays in Read's edition. The arrangement of that edition places Hulme's essays without regard to the order in which they appeared, which has been especially confusing given the agreement now that Hulme's thought underwent a series of evolutions during his lifetime. The collection *T.E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism* develops a new scholarly landscape that Csengeri's edition has made possible.

in a critique of the romantic: “Romanticism for example confuses both human and divine things, by not clearly separating them. The main thing with which it can be reproached is that it blurs the clear outlines of human relations—whether in political thought or in the literary treatment of sex, by introducing in them the *Perfection* that properly belongs to the non-human” (427; italics in original). This last conceit, regarding the invocation of perfection, characterizes the hubris of humanism for Hulme. According to the religious attitude, as against humanism,

man himself is judged to be essentially limited and imperfect. He is endowed with Original Sin. While he can occasionally accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself be perfect. Certain secondary results in regard to ordinary human action in society follow from this. As man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary. (444)

The obsession with order as a way of containing and directing the otherwise squandered potential of humanity which led many modernists to champion fascism is evident here, but for now I would like to emphasize the debate over human potential outside of this loaded context<sup>9</sup>. To continue the opposition, Hulme also classifies the humanist attitude:

When a sense of the reality of [...] absolute values is lacking, you get a refusal to believe any longer in the radical imperfection of either Man or Nature. This develops logically into the belief that life is the source and measure of all values, and that man is fundamentally good. [...] This leads to a complete change in all values. The problem of evil disappears, the conception of sin loses all meaning. Man may be that bastard thing, a ‘harmonious character’. (444)

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<sup>9</sup> The relationship between fascism and anti-humanism, or fascism and humanism for that matter, is highly vexed. While the Holocaust is often identified as the culmination of humanism, the modernist writers who strove to make fascism, either as political content or aesthetic style and sometimes both, publicly acceptable – including Wyndham Lewis, the later Yeats, and to an extent even T.S. Eliot – are often also those affiliated with anti-humanism. Regarding a famous picture of soldiers from the Third Reich at the Parthenon, Tony Davies writes: “From one point of view, at least, that sunny morning in 1941 witnessed not a tragic confrontation between Hellenic culture and barbaric anarchy, but the historic affirmation of an ancient continuity, in which the invading Germans appear not as the destroyers of Greek civilisation but as its liberators, the heirs and custodians of its sacred flame” (9). This is the argument, too, of Adorno and Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Yet, as Davies writes of modernist anti-humanism, “The search for a lost profundity and intensity led Hulme, as it was to lead Eliot, to an admiration for the Catholic and royalist authoritarianism of Charles Maurras’ proto-fascist *Action Francaise*. The same impulse turned Ezra Pound into an eccentric but energetically committed apologist for full-blown fascism” (49). A larger discussion of this problem is outside the scope of the current analysis, but it does represent another direction studies of modernist anti-humanism should take. Nietzsche’s putative fascism, facilitated by his sister Elizabeth Forster-Nietzsche’s aggressive and often inventive control over his literary estate, is part of this narrative as well.



Two Nietzschean things happen here: “life” is invoked, as is the project of a transvaluation of values, and through a method resembling genealogy. But where Nietzsche associates life with transformation beyond the human, life is equated to character and what will develop into the modernist vocabulary of personality.

The difficulty of theorizing an anti-humanist modernism lies in part with the seeming amenability of Hulme’s anti-humanist vocabulary to fascism, where an as yet unexplored Nietzschean anti-humanist modernism would emphasize life as the alternative to fascism. Still, the disparity between humanism and the religious attitude for Hulme underscores the human’s arrogation of perfection to itself as an achievable state. A Nietzschean take on Hulme’s analysis would say that life can thrive only when the dream of possible human perfection is recognized as a nightmare. Hulme persists in seeing this possible future negatively, outside of an affirmation of life. Here, transformation is a sought-after outcome, but as the overall analysis in “A Notebook” has been more negating than affirming, it will necessarily be more tempered than what we have found in Nietzsche. Even the structure of the piece as alternating between humanism and the religious attitude promotes a depressing stasis, negating the positive potential for something like human overcoming. Against this grain, though, Todd Avery does find a generative ethics in Hulme’s anti-humanism: “The remedy for [...] failure, the foundations for a rejuvenated ethics and indeed for a wholesale reevaluation of the grounds of ethical valuation, he thought, lay in the embrace of a ‘religious’ anti-humanism that would also bolster profound social and political transformation in a century whose grimacing first decade and a-half seemed to demand a sweeping new theory of ethics [...]” (185). The end of “A Notebook” supports this more positive reading. Hulme speaks, ultimately, of the religious attitude as “a real attitude,

perfectly possible for us to-day. To see this is a kind of conversion. It radically alters our physical perception almost; so that the world takes on an entirely different aspect” (456).

The wording with which Hulme concludes “A Notebook” leads us to another anti-humanist flashpoint: the body. As discussed above, Nietzsche’s anti-humanism foregrounds embodiment in productive opposition to humanist ideas of subjectivity, which privilege consciousness and thus mind over body. In humanism, agency and subjectivity are intertwined and function to move humanity forward through the “free debate” privileged by Ferry and Renault, whereas embodiment is in keeping with anti-humanist theories of transformation as mysteriously removed from human control. Can Hulme’s anti-humanism align with this favoring of the body? The wording of the conclusion is at first dubious, with its emphasis on sight as tied to knowledge; it presents an approximation of scales falling from the eyes that might release us from our fatal humanism, but only through a consciousness that, from a Nietzschean perspective figuring transformation as possible only outside of consciousness, mires us firmly in the humanism it aspires to escape. But what is meant by “physical perception?” Can anti-humanism not only question the dominance of consciousness, but also restore a sense of the continuity between mind and body, in relation to perception and otherwise? Hulme presents compelling possibilities in this area.

Edward Comentale’s recent essay, “Hulme’s Feelings,” treats affect and thus embodiment in Hulme’s philosophy in a way that is congenial to this reading of Hulme’s anti-humanism as aligned with Nietzsche’s. Compellingly, Comentale begins the essay with an account of sadness about Hulme: “this sadness pours forward, silting the appraisable, pushing itself beyond its original cause and towards a different future. This sadness is a productive force, one of the most transportive aspects of modernist writing. It is what at first drives and then routs

the modernist polemic, what pushes modern thought and vision beyond the glacial impasse of modernity” (209). Sadness is an affect detached from an “I” or otherwise coherent subject here, and it is endowed with a transformative potential that promises “a different future.” It is, in a word, anti-humanist; it is not, as we often think of sadness, sentimental and implicitly humanist, or conventional. Rather, opposed to the stasis associated with conventions, it is productive. As the essay continues, Comentale elaborates this point. Through Hulme, we find that “the modernist demise of the subject does not necessarily presuppose a demise of modernist feeling” (211). That is,

the taylorized workplace remains a scene of hostility or pride, the city occasions both intense fear and intense hope; feeling persists throughout these structures, if even in a dehumanized, impersonal form. Ultimately, despite our desubjectivized smugness, feeling remains to condition and contain the cultural networks that supposedly signaled its demise. In fact, one might even argue that desubjectivization itself allows feeling, which is always somewhat more than subjective, to enter the socius in a more active way [sic]. Ironically, modernity killed off the subject only to free up feeling and its critical potential. We may no longer be subjects, but our emotions still haunt the landscape, at once shaming and shaping its future. (211)

What does it mean to speak of feeling as something that has “critical potential” and something detached from subjectivity? Comentale’s argument about feeling, through Hulme, compounds the stakes of anti-humanism in modernism. It takes affect beyond its interpretation as a mere subjective response and moves it into the anti-humanist realm of transformative force outside of or possibly between subjects; this is Teresa Brennan’s argument about affect as well. The death of the subject can be tied to anti-humanism in modernism as it is to poststructuralism in philosophy, and its consequences are far from reducible to the arid version of anti-humanism that suffocates community and the social in Ferry and Renault’s account. The death of the subject produces, instead, “Hulme’s feelings” or the idiosyncratically generative Body without Organs theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. It produces interactions that take us outside ourselves, that

demand empathy, encounters with alterity through mediums other than consciousness. People must reduce themselves to their common humanity, negating alterity, for something like “free debate” to occur; this promotes stasis rather than transformation. This is the diminishment of life’s radical potential to a common, translatable, merely human denominator that Nietzsche abhors. The insistence on consciousness as the only common language through which humanity can be expressed cancels life and its potential for overcoming. Hulme, like Nietzsche, exemplifies anti-humanism as both a negative critique of humanism and the living, affirmative promise of its transformation into something other, through encounters with the other. Anti-humanism as it has been explored thus far, both in itself and in terms of its relation to modernism, has often been neglected on this second count. In what follows, I will consider this second form of anti-humanism – embodied, affective, transformative, anti-subjective – as it relates to modernist poetics, through W.B. Yeats, and to modernist prose, through D.H. Lawrence.

### *The Anti-Humanism of Modernist Poetics: Yeats Beyond the Human*

The tradition of scholarship connecting Yeats to Nietzsche is an enduring one, ranging from accounts in Thatcher and May to the recent essay by Michael Valdez Moses<sup>10</sup>, but there has been little discussion of Yeats as an anti-humanist figure. Interestingly, modernist poetics as a whole has not been neglected in terms of anti-humanism, and in fact anti-humanism is often considered to be its dominant mode<sup>11</sup>. This is largely a result of Micheal Levenson’s A

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<sup>10</sup> “The Rebirth of Tragedy: Yeats, Nietzsche, the Irish National Theatre, and the Anti-Modern Cult of Cuchulain” in a 2004 issue of *Modernism/Modernity*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rochelle Rives, “‘Things that Lie on the Surface’: Modernism, Impersonality, and Emotional Inexpressibility.” Rives argument actually suggests that anti-humanism (which is not the main focus of her argument) constitutes a dominant strain of modernist thought, and seemingly not just in poetics, although the distinction between narrative and poetics seems somewhat beside the point in her account. She discusses “the modernist critique of humanism, a concept that, according to Fredric Jameson, equates individualism with

*Genealogy of Modernism*, which privileges Hulme as a significant force transforming modernism from a formation hospitable to narrative and individualism and tied to the human, to a formation favoring more anti-individualistic, impersonal, and therefore anti-human aesthetic – and political – modes. The key in Levenson’s account to what we will ultimately recognize as the anti-humanism of modernist poetics is Imagism:

The insistence on the primacy of the image is the specific literary point that has been Hulme’s most influential. [...] for Hulme the image was not a matter of merely formal poetic concern. It was part of the attempt, indeed a considerable part, to find a satisfactory definition for modern poetry. In this regard Hulme makes three points which are central to his literary position: that poetry is to avoid pursuit of the epic, the absolute and the permanent; that it is likewise to avoid the prosaic and conventional; that a poetry of images is therefore the appropriate literary method. There is a fourth point, which has so far been submerged but which will come into increasing prominence: namely that the poetic strategy is to be founded on a radical literary individualism. (46)

And Levenson goes on in the terms of feeling that Comentale evokes later: “And Hulme’s particular formal enthusiasms – for free verse and the image – are consistently defended in terms of the drive toward the ‘maximum of individual and personal expression’. Free verse makes it possible to communicate ‘some vague mood’; the arrangement of images allows the poet ‘to suggest and to evoke the state he feels’”(47). Although Levenson sets this up as largely a starting position that will develop, in later evolutions of Hulme’s thought as well as in the Imagist “manifesto,”<sup>12</sup> into a definition of Imagism that eschews subjectivity and the attendant premium on communication, the invocation of feeling is instructive.

With regard to Yeats, the foregrounding of subjectivity as something that is first essential then expunged as modernist poetics overcomes itself, as it were, is especially telling. Like the

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‘consciousness as such’, particularly as it ‘purports to characterize the inner climate of the liberated individual and his relation to his own being’. This self-consciousness, a product of modernity, contributes to the habit of forming ‘anthropological association[s]’ that centralize subjects in terms of egos, psychologies, and subjectivities” (61).

<sup>12</sup> Pound’s list of the criteria for Imagisme, as ventriloquized through F.S. Flint, “1. Direct treatment of the ‘thing’, whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation. 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome” (qtd. in Kenner, 178).

history of modernist poetics, and through his engagement with Nietzsche, Yeats moves from an early subjective, romantic sensibility in his poetry to a later interest in embodiment and radical moments of transformation, from moment to moment and between modes of being, in his mature poetry, plays, and essays. He develops a compelling theory of embodiment and attends to radical historical transformation in a way that approximates Nietzschean anti-humanism. It is with this later, anti-humanist Yeats that we are concerned here.

In Thatcher's account, Yeats was sympathetic to Nietzsche's theory of the overman "as he understood it, both as the need for a superior race of human beings and as the worship – if that is not too strong a word – of individual men of genius" (155). And Thatcher's reading of Nietzsche, as of Yeats, misses the potential of the Nietzschean vocabulary for meaning what it says: a real overcoming of man, outside of either an evolution toward more "human beings" however superior, or an affirmation of men recognizable for their individuality. Yeats, I will argue, did take Nietzsche literally, as we have already seen that Deleuze, Grosz, and even Hulme do. I will suggest that in Yeats's poetics, intensity, or intensification, as linked to a concept of embodiment, serves as a Nietzschean anti-humanist strategy and allows us to suggestively locate Yeats in the paradigm of modernist anti-humanism.

In Yeats's poetry and plays, intensity manifests as repetition, incantation, transformation. It records a utopian impulse without reverting to escapism, and it does this through an insistence on materiality and corporeality; it eschews transcendence in favor of immanence. Intensity – in the poststructuralist thought of Deleuze and Guattari, borrowing the vocabulary from physics – is a way of describing a resonance across the surface of the body that leads to change, and specifically change effected through the body without recourse to consciousness. Intensity, figured as a corporeal phenomenon, supplies a vocabulary of the pre-rational or extra-rational

that accords nicely with Yeats's occultism, as with the Nietzschean figuration of the body as distinct from consciousness and rationality. Intensification through repetition coincides with the occult as well, when Yeats produces incantatory refrains in his poems and plays<sup>13</sup> in order to enact phase changes or transformations – becomings – and perform ontological disruptions. In such moments of intensification through repetition, form homologizes the body: it constitutes a mediating membrane across which the repetition – of a word or phrase, of a sensation – can resonate in a controlled and positively disruptive way. Poetic form, conceived as an entity molded into stability over time, is a space unfolding in Yeats's poetry to facilitate transformation and mobility. The concern with transformation would seem to evoke romantic ideals of transcendence, but as figured here it instead recapitulates the concerns of modernist anti-humanist poetics with placement, history, and alterity – becoming elsewhere, becoming future (or past; becoming future through the past), and becoming other. A significant modernist question is this: how to respond to a world of dislocation and fractured temporality in which identity has become fragmented beyond recognition? Yeats's compelling answer – developed through an encounter with Nietzschean anti-humanism – is intensity, and he formulates this answer in his discussion of spirit embodiment, in the essay “Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places.”

In this 1914 essay (not published until 1920), Yeats provides a generative and involved theory of corporeal spiritualism, or spectral embodiment. Though the essay was originally intended as an introduction to a set of folk tales collected by Lady Gregory, it only tangentially links up to that exigency – through a significant emphasis on ethnography – and offers instead a genealogy of mediumistic practice focused through the figure of the eighteenth-century mystic,

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<sup>13</sup> Consider, for instance, the refrain “And Niamh calling *Away, come away*” in “The Hosting of the Sidhe,” or the witches' spell, binding Cuchulain to Conchubar in *On Baile's Strand*.

Emanuel Swedenborg. Through Swedenborg and two of his disciples – the American Jackson Davies and the Frenchman Allen Cardec – Yeats traces the properties of the medium, even to the point of offering potential ground rules for mediumship, and always with a special attention to the embodiment of the medium, spirits, and the spiritualist subject. In an early disclaimer, Yeats describes the appropriate mode of embodiment for aspiring spiritualists: “we must excite the whole being into activity if we would offer to God what is, it may be, the one thing germane to the matter, a consenting of all our faculties” (31). Here is his theory of the body, or of the spiritualist subject: the “whole being” must be excited “into activity,” and spiritualist receptivity depends on “a consenting of all our faculties.” This consenting of faculties composes a makeshift self, approximating what Elizabeth Grosz specifies in *Volatile Bodies* as the “body image,”<sup>14</sup> and this self is stretched out to incorporate both mind and body into a seamless whole uniquely receptive to messages from beyond, or from what Yeats himself acknowledged were probably nearer, if alienated, parts of the self<sup>15</sup>.

The distinctive embodiments of mediums and spirits, the latter having to forge their own corporealities (or other less robust visible forms), are also given special attention in the essay. The quintessential figure of the medium to which Yeats returns throughout the piece is a “fat old medium” in “Soho or Holloway,” and this is from his own experience attending séances (30). The counterpart, seemingly culled from Swedenborg and routed into spiritualist practice by Davies, is a more generalizable schematization of mediumship: the ghosts “create temporary bodies, commonly like to those they wore when living, through some unconscious constraint of memory, or deliberately, that they may be recognised” (52). These bodies, according to Davies,

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<sup>14</sup> The body image is also the “lived body,” or “the ways in which the body must be psychically constituted in order for the subject to acquire a sense of its place in the world and in connection with others” (Grosz xii). The body image provides a way of thinking interrelationality, and thus brings identity to the surface of the body.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, of a dictated letter from the communicator Leo Africanus, he said: “I am not convinced that in this letter there is one sentence that has come from beyond my own imagination” (qtd. in Sword 112).



are “images,” “made of a substance drawn from the medium, who loses weight, and in a less degree from all present [...]. The image will begin outside the medium’s body as a luminous cloud, or in a sort of luminous mud forced from the body, out of the mouth it may be, from the side or from the lower parts of the body” (52). The medium grows outward physically to accommodate visitants, in effect repositioning subjectivity across the surfaces of her body, rather than relegating it to the depths, or to the mind – subjectivity as distinct from consciousness.

What is interesting about this theory of the mediumistic body is that it disrupts the Enlightenment schema of the body as (coherently, directly) expressive of and manipulable by interiority. That is, the séance creates a space in which identity dissolves and the body becomes incapable of being controlled by the mind, thus effectively undermining a humanist sense of agency.

Interestingly, too, the forms of embodiment or self-representation contrived by the spirits are often disjointed and discontinuous: “There will be few complete forms, for the dead are economical, and a head, or just enough of the body for recognition, may show itself above hanging folds of drapery that do not seem to cover solid limbs, or a hand or foot is lacking, or it may be that some *revenant* has seized the half-made image of another, and a young girl’s arm will be thrust from the withered body of an old man” (53). Yeats describes these forms with impressive neutrality, though they register as indelibly modernist and, as such, categorically disruptive; his tone instead borders on the taxonomic:

Nor is every form a breathing and pulsing thing, for some may have a distribution of light and shade not that of the séance-room, flat pictures whose eyes gleam and move; and sometimes material objects are thrown together (drifted in from some neighbour’s wardrobe, it may be, and drifted thither again) and an appearance kneaded up out of these, and that luminous mud or vapour almost as vivid as are those pictures of Antonio Mancini which have fragments of his paint-tubes embedded for the high lights into the heavy masses of the paint. (53-54)

We are confronted here with a description of spirit subjectivity as three-dimensional modernist collage, cobbled together with material objects and borrowed elements from other selves.

However, coupled with the emphasis on materiality is Yeats's subtle recapitulation of flatness and surface: these are "images" and "flat pictures" as much as they are at the same time, in some sense, embodied. So too, the forms taken by the spirits are not strictly manipulable or self-authored; spirit embodiment emerges or, in Yeats's phrase, is "kneaded up," rather than self-consciously produced or controlled. This aligns the Yeatsian body with poststructuralist theories of embodiment derived from Nietzsche, theories that dispense with the vocabulary of agency as derived from consciousness and rationality.

Yeats's theory of embodiment in the Swedenborg essay is as follows: the spirits must (or can) produce their own bodies, but the mind does not then control the body in the way that such a production would suggest; the interrelational relationship between the spirit forms and the medium's body condition a flattening of subjectivity. In fact, Yeats goes on to suggest that the spirits are often disoriented and do not know who they are (or were), that the forms "kneaded up" from disparate materials may be more an effect of the group assembled for a séance than a reflection of a spirit's will, and that the mode of spirit embodiment is contingent and radically theatrical. He even goes so far as to imply that thought itself may be inextricably situated in or on the body, an image mirrored by a brief discussion in the Swedenborg essay of the Irish peasantry as possessing an "imaginative tongue" (46). Here, the natural or appropriate form of embodiment is dispersed and flattened, approximating the entire surface of the body, but nonetheless emphatically corporeal. The centrality of the body in Yeats' poetry is not news: the appreciation of corporeality in the Crazy Jane poems has often been remarked, and Vicki Mahaffey writes about the corporeality of the heart as a recurring image throughout Yeats'

oeuvre, but Yeats's position within a tradition of modernist anti-humanism has not been connected with this interest in embodiment.

In Yeats's late (1931) play *The Resurrection*, this view of corporeality is connected to questions of how the human becomes something other; this engagement is performed through a complexly layered invocation of Christian mythos, a strategy often used by Nietzsche and Lawrence as well. The play takes Christ's resurrection seriously as a moment where the human becomes something other. Imagery of the heart, here as elsewhere, provides a way into this problem for Yeats; it both opens and closes the play. At the outset, we are given the image of a virgin ripping out the heart of Dionysus, and the play closes with the lines: "Whatever flames upon the night | Man's own resinous heart has fed" (492). In the actual plot of the play, the heart signifies the irreducible corporeality of Christ, even in his ghostly form, which had been so disputed by the characters called the Hebrew and the Greek. When the Greek touches the specter of Christ to prove that, as he had argued, Christ (as a god) could never take corporeal form, he is shocked by what his hand encounters: "The heart of a phantom is beating! The heart of a phantom is beating!" (491). The heart itself signifies as the impossibility that becomes dually legible through intense phase change (that which did happen, that which could not have happened): at the moment of resurrection, Christ's still-beating human heart incorporates the residual moment in human history, the unthinkable moment of a god incarnated as human on earth. This is interesting for Yeats in terms of the system of history he delineates in *A Vision*, but also because it figures the heart as itself spectral, as transitioning between the human world and other worlds. As such, it is both there and not there; syntactically, Yeats makes it the wound: "Thomas has put his hand into the wound. He has put his hand where the heart is" (492). Christ

becomes a possible example of the overman; he instantiates an embodied alterity that bridges the human and the something else that comes after.

In Yeats's reimagining of corporeality, the sense of what constitutes anti-humanism within modernist aesthetics evolves past a narrow aversion to the insipidly subjective imprint of humanity toward a positive avowal of the horizontal mobility – rather than vertical transcendence – of the human into other possible forms. Transformation as horizontal mobility is favored, too, in the Byzantium poems. The last stanza of “Sailing to Byzantium” approximates a commendation of Byzantine art as geometric, as averse to the human:

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come. (194)

The expurgation of nature, and of man as part of nature, figures positively in the Byzantine landscapes fantasized by Yeats and suggests, more than anything else, a sense of longing which catalyzes a conversion of the sensuously human into pure artifice. The above stanza is directly preceded by a series of exquisite lines in the third stanza that dramatize the intensity of a longing for that which is beyond the human: “Consume my heart away; sick with desire | And fastened to a dying animal | It knows not what it is; and gather me | Into the artifice of eternity” (193). The rigid form of the golden bird to which Yeats's speaker accedes in the poem approximates the anti-humanist “geometrical” art form called for by Wilhelm Worringer in *Abstraction and Empathy* and theorized further by Hulme – the transformation is finely and laboriously wrought rather than escaped through. To read this moment as sentimental or romantic in its desire for something like escape is to miss the point: intensity, which, as we have seen, is tied in the

Yeatsian aesthetic to spiritualism and incantation, buys us out of the rhetoric of transcendence, trading this instead for a sense of escape converted to horizontal mobility. This is what Grosz points to in Nietzsche as the radical disruption of evolution out of the human, and outside of linear progression, toward the alterity of the overman.

Yeats's aesthetic, as informed by his "romantic" spiritualism and his more "classicist" investment in form, is anti-humanist, and anti-humanist in such a way that it suggestively revises the ways we are currently able to think about anti-humanism in the context of modernism. Namely, Yeats's particular anti-humanism constructs a productive opposition between embodiment and the strictly human. Reading Yeats in the tradition of anti-humanist modernist that includes Nietzsche and Hulme, we discover a dual investment in corporeality and intensity that allows us to imagine alterity – other spaces, other times, and Others – outside the constraints of a humanism which would construct a smooth narrative necessarily incapable of producing transformation. That is, transformations wrought through intensity – approximating Yeats's "passionate syntax" – disrupt narrative through radical stasis, through staccato-like moments of repetition, and provide a new way of articulating the modernist with that which moves beyond the human. Yeats's poetics provides a way of considering anti-humanism not just as negation, but as positive affirmation, through suggestions of embodiment, of possibilities for life not reducible to the merely human. The theory of the beyond-human propounded in the Swedenborg essay, *The Resurrection*, the Byzantium poems, and other poems dealing with historical change in terms of radical alterity – such as "The Magi," "The Second Coming," "Leda and the Swan," and many others – places anti-humanism squarely within rather than at the periphery of the tradition of literary modernism. That is, Yeats is at his most modernist, aligned with Levenson's definition of poetic modernism, when he rejects the subjective. As Levenson writes, "After its

Impressionist, Imagist and Vorticist avatars, modernism returns to classicism,” through T.S. Eliot, and this classicism is characterized by “the suspicion of progress, the hostility towards individualism and modern democracy, the insistence on hierarchy and order” (210). It is Hulme’s classicism, the precursor to his anti-humanism in its opposition to romanticism, that Eliot follows to its conclusion in this account; Yeats belongs in this tradition too, but he shows instead how classicism and anti-humanism can facilitate life without rounding back to romanticism and the subjective. We will now consider this version of anti-humanism with regard to D.H. Lawrence.

*Lawrence’s Animals, Lawrence’s People: Life and Anti-Humanist Narrative*

Whereas in studies of modernist poetics the conjunction with Hulme facilitates an invocation of anti-humanism, there is no similar possibility for modernist prose. In moving as it does from Impressionist fiction to classicist or anti-humanist poetry, Levenson’s account excludes the possibility of anti-humanism in prose. For Levenson, the subjectivity of impressionism is a result of “the disintegration of stable balanced relations between subject and object,” which produces an “enshrining of consciousness as the repository of meaning and value” (22). This implicit affiliation of the subjective with prose and the objective and classical with poetry has in general been further cemented as modernist studies has continued to grow as a field, although Jesse Matz’s study of impressionism is an interesting case; he asks us to consider whether literary impression, as the dominant prose technique in literary modernism, might better be recognized as a bridge connecting the objective and the subjective. He explains the sense of impressionism developed by the modernists as follows:

Impressionism meant rendering life as it really seemed to individual subjective experience. It meant making fiction “plunge into consciousness” and fuse “the

transcendent subjectivity of romanticism and the omniscient objectivity of realism” toward a kind of utopian compensation for modern alienation. Impressionism seeks generally to suggest atmosphere and mood; it subordinates plot, fixes moments, fragments form, and intensifies affective response; it fuses subject and object, finds truth in appearances, and evokes the dynamic feeling – the “flow, energy, vibrancy” – of life itself. (13-14)

Although impressionism does provide a potential for affect to take the human beyond itself, this is not typically the way the technique is thought of – the idea of a “plunge into consciousness” as that which has depth and constitutes, even, the potential for *ressentiment*, is closer to the mark and provides a suggestive jumping off point for discussion of D.H. Lawrence. Let us temporarily bracket the argument that impressionism might be coterminous with the subjective and consider that Lawrence, although he is famous primarily for his modernist novels, is not often considered within the paradigm of impressionism. Indeed, his repudiation of consciousness in favor of the unconscious and the corresponding construction of perceptive centers and active forces in the body outside the mind define his literary texts as well as his criticism, psychology, and pseudo-philosophy. Paul Sheehan, writing of Lawrence’s anti-humanism, claims that “[f]or Lawrence, [...] surrendering consciousness was a necessary prerequisite for the full inhabitation of life” (92). This surrender and its anti-humanist consequences are our immediate concern. In what follows I will consider specifically the relationship between this disavowal of consciousness and the recirculation of alterity it orchestrates, from human, into beasts, into the revered Lawrentian unit of the couple.

But first: the connection between Lawrence and Nietzsche. As of Yeats, so has it been suggested of Lawrence that he inherited from Nietzsche an apocalyptic cast of mind which manifests in the use of religious imagery and symbolism, as well as in an attention to the temporality of apocalypse. Nietzschean, also, is the sense of apocalyptic rupture in Lawrence as life-affirming rather than pessimistic – as Colin Milton points out, this constitutes Lawrence’s

affinity with Nietzsche against their shared, earlier philosophical mentor, Schopenhauer.

Whereas the latter valorizes intellect in its potential for overcoming, as Milton writes, “[b]oth Nietzsche and Lawrence agree that consciousness and intellect can develop to the point where they undermine the ‘needs and purposes of life’ but both see this as a threat to the continuing vigour and even survival of man rather than as something to be admired. Both argue that reason and consciousness should remain in their subsidiary roles as instruments of the unconscious, and that instinct rather than intellect should guide our lives” (9). That is, in terms of apocalypse, as long as an anti-humanist perspective is retained – and it necessarily should be in any Nietzschean tradition – the wiping out of the human, or in other words of rationality, consciousness, and the will to domination borne of *ressentiment*, is legible not tragically but affirmatively in a trajectory of evolution and development, expurgated of value as such because disarticulated from engines of human motivation.

As I suggested early in this chapter, the connections between Nietzsche and modernism are not new, and that holds especially true in the case of Lawrence, to such an extent in fact that Milton must begin his 1987 study with an avowal that “[t]he intellectual kinship between D H Lawrence and the nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has been widely recognized” (1). So, what I will consider is not primarily the affiliation itself, but rather the ways in which the refusal of consciousness in particular and other recognizably anti-humanist stances and strategies common to both might be deployed in a reconfiguration of the terrain of modernist prose. Where, as I argued above, Yeats’s Nietzscheanism belongs in a tradition of anti-humanism in modernist poetics, there is no similar tradition of anti-humanism in modernist prose to which Lawrence’s Nietzscheanism guarantees membership. This is partly because of the dominance of impressionism, noted above, in discussions of modernist prose, but partly because



of the nature of anti-humanism. This chapter, and my study as a whole, are responding in part to Paul Sheehan's contention that prose forms can only ever approximate anti-humanism. He suggests that anti-humanism and narrative are, in fact, largely antithetical:

narrative has traditionally been regarded as human-shaped – made by and for human beings, to consolidate their humanness. But in masking contingency and totalising event-series, narrative logic – encoded in the terms raised earlier, of seriality, causal connection, mutual implication, immanent structuration – cannot be entirely human-shaped. It has the potential to exceed the limits of anthropological mastery, just as language has this potential. Indeed, literary narrative is composed from the impersonal, indifferent, recalcitrant archive that is language, a labyrinthine network that, without ever being entirely present to consciousness, offers and structures the materials for all our thoughts and statements [...]. Yet narrative still bears a human countenance, as it is language organised, aestheticised, arranged into patterns of meaningful development. (10)

Sheehan's study cannot ultimately resolve this problem of the inherent humanism in narrative, and for that matter in language; he develops a tempered vocabulary of counter-humanism rather than anti-humanism to suggest the possibility of approaching, through narrative, something outside the human, rather than actually achieving transformation. I cannot resolve the problem here either, but by placing the emphasis on life, embodiment, and affirmative transformation in Lawrence's prose I will suggest that anti-humanist modes can emerge, and in fact must emerge, out of existing forms, including narrative.

Considerations of anti-humanism in Lawrence's works tend to privilege *Women in Love*. The anti-humanism in that novel is explicit and even polemical. Joyce Carol Oates suggests, based on this novel, that the individual in Lawrence eclipses community, even as it is not presented as a viable alternative: "The human instinct for something larger than an intense, intimate bond, the instinct for community, is entirely absent" (xv). Development in the novel is toward "a universal nothing, a new cycle in which humanity will play no role. The prospect is a chilling one and yet—*does* it really matter? Humanity in the aggregate is contemptible, and

many people [...] are better off dead since their living has somehow gone wrong (xiv). These are the familiar terms of a depressing anti-humanism that either actively repudiates community – as in Ferry and Renault’s account – or else merely critiques the impossibility of community wrought by the arrogance of humanity. Anti-humanism might be, on this reading, only humanism’s own becoming conscious of itself. Michael Levenson, in *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, offers an anti-humanist reading of the novel as well, and somewhat more positively than Oates he registers Lawrence’s attempt to develop a sustainable anti-humanism. The focal point is Birkin: “The individual in *Women in Love* – whose only name is Birkin – is compounded of the inhuman world that precedes it and the interpersonal world that it dreams into being” (164). Although each option is laboriously considered, the novel suggests through its progression that neither the individual, nor the heterosexual couple, nor the homosexual couple is the answer to sustainable life. Levenson continues: “This man who loathes himself ‘as a human being’ lives with a metaphysical restlessness, refusing to be what he is, who he is, where he is” (164). Life here, in the form of Birkin, is cramped and cannot become or transform, but is stuck in self-negating tensions and the refusal of situated identity; this is an anti-humanist mode, but it falls short of the affirmative, Nietzschean anti-humanism we have been discussing. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* is legible affirmatively where *Women in Love* is not.

In some sense it is disingenuous to counterpose *The Rainbow* to *Women in Love* in this way; both novels are a part of the Brangwen family saga, and chronologically *The Rainbow* precedes *Women in Love*. *The Rainbow* mounts a history of England through depicting successive generations of the Brangwen family, and with each generation consciousness increases and the potential of the human for becoming something other is depleted; the human becomes more human as time passes. The books stand together as Lawrence’s critique of

modernity as a continuation of the Enlightenment and, along Nietzschean lines, as the diminishment of humanity's potential for life. That is, *The Rainbow* develops a critique, by beginning in an edenic plenitude that cedes through each new generation to increased consciousness and separation or alienation, which becomes full-fledged and resoundingly sour in *Women in Love*. If the anti-humanism of the latter novel is the culmination of Lawrence's aesthetic, is it wrong to hark back to the earlier, more life-affirming anti-humanism of the earlier novel? Although the trajectory is ultimately toward the dark, life-denying anti-humanism that dominates *Women in Love*, I will argue that moments of affirmation in *The Rainbow* are plangent enough that they exceed an overarching narrative of Lawrence's development that would deny them; their singularity, too, opposes the contention that narrative is "human-shaped" in its imposition of continuity – the moment is the odd, unchangeable currency of anti-humanist transformation.

While *Women in Love* picks up immediately where *The Rainbow* left off, which is to say with dialogue between characters separated from each other and defined as individuals, specifically Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, the opening of *The Rainbow* bypasses character and thus also the imperatives of modernist literature as dictated in, for example, Woolf's "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Lawrence ignores the dictates of both Victorian realism and modern fiction which are united on the point of treating the social world through characters and opens the novel with a depersonalized humanity, undifferentiated except in terms of gender, that is nonetheless hospitable:

The Brangwens had lived for generations on the Marsh Farm, in the meadows where the Erewash twisted sluggishly through alder trees, separating Derbyshire from Nottinghamshire. Two miles away, a church-tower stood on a hill, the houses of the little country town climbing assiduously up to it. Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkeston in the empty sky. So

that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance. (9)

Setting trumps character here, already presenting an opposition to the dominant impressionistic mode in modernist prose. The Brangwens are presented less as humans endowed with a spark – consciousness – than as a species, which has undifferentiated male members – “one of the Brangwens,” “he” – and, as the narrative continues, undifferentiated female members. The lack of differentiation is not something the narrative depicts unfavorably. Here are the women:

The women were different. On them too was the drowse of blood-intimacy, calves sucking and hens running together in droves, and young geese palpitating in the hand whilst food was pushed down their throttle. But the women looked out from the heated, blind intercourse of farm-life, to the spoken world beyond. They were aware of the lips and the mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance, and they strained to listen. (10)

From here, Lawrence begins to move in the direction of a critique, as the women are associated with proto-consciousness that will be, according to Lawrence in these two novels and in keeping with the Biblical framework he depends on, the undoing of anything good in humanity.

Lawrence’s narration is remarkable here. At first glance, it approximates realism and offers a third person perspective. Periodically the narration latches onto characters and shares their perspective with the reader, but often such perspectives are expressed in some way other than through consciousness – the mode is, rather, pre-conscious or unconscious – and the non-conscious mode of the expression is emphasized through Lawrence’s odd grammar, whereby the sentences circle around in half-turns marked by commas, in order to convey a sense of something less definite and more undulating than consciousness. The anti-conscious modality favored by Lawrence in style is thematized as content in the novel when, in the first generation of the Brangwen family that is presented to us, Tom’s biology itself seems to shift as his body and pseudo-consciousness re-orient themselves to the woman he loves, Lydia: “A daze had come

over his mind, he had another centre of consciousness. In his breast, or in his bowels, somewhere in his body, there had started another activity. It was as if a strong light were burning there, and he was blind within it, unable to know anything, except that this transfiguration burned between him and her, connecting them, like a secret power” (38). Love, a development that could happen narratively, more or less consciously, is here figured as a radical bodily transformation, something Tom feels rather than knows. This is aligned with the argument about centers of consciousness as multiple and separately developing that Lawrence also makes in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*:

In asserting that the seat of consciousness in a young infant is the abdomen, we do not pretend to suggest that all the other conscious-centres are utterly dormant. Once a child is born, the whole nervous and cerebral system comes awake, even the brain’s memories begin to glimmer, recognition and cognition soon begin to take place. But the spontaneous control and all the prime developing activity derive from the great affective centres of the abdomen. In the solar plexus is the first great fountain and issue of infantile consciousness. There, beneath the naval, lies the active human first-mind, the prime unconscious. From the moment of conception, when the first nucleus is formed, to the moment of death, when this same nucleus breaks again, the first great active centre of human consciousness lies in the solar plexus. (26)

Lawrence, both here and in *The Rainbow*, is very clear about his attention to the unconscious as embodied, as a mode of perception more affirming than the kind of knowledge we recognize as consciousness, as tied only to the mind. As he also writes, “The brain is the seat of the ideal consciousness. And the ideal consciousness is only the dead end of consciousness, the spun silk. The vast bulk of consciousness is non-cerebral. It is the sap of our life, of all life” (18). This is a direct affront to the subject of the Enlightenment, stirred by an even consciousness that homogenizes all humanity into direct action.

As Lawrence struggles toward anti-humanist modes through representations of animals in his poetry, so he uses animals in *The Rainbow* to suggest the possibility of human transformation. In encounters within couples, which the novel particularly relishes, the

characters become in the narration different kinds of animals. For instance, the second generation of Brangwen couples chronicled by the narrative, Anna and Will, often merge violently in Lawrence's dehumanizing prose; Will's eyes were "like a hawk's, naïve and inhuman as a hawk's. So she loved him and caressed him and roused him like a hawk, till he was keen and instant, but without tenderness. He came to her fierce and hard, like a hawk striking and taking her" (151). And Anna too: "She too was a hawk. If she imitated the pathetic plover running plaintive to him, that was part of the game. When he, satisfied, moved with a proud, insolent slouch of the body and a half-contemptuous drop of the head, unaware of her, ignoring her very existence after taking his fill of her and getting his satisfaction of her, her soul roused, its pinions became like steel, and she struck at him" (151). In *The Rainbow*, sexuality is not expressed as a revelation of the most private part of subjectivity, rather it is valued for its transformation of the human into something other. Will and Anna already represent the depletion of human potential for overcoming and the triumph of *ressentiment*; their sexual encounters are the last remaining possibility to recover this potential and disavow, through animality, the inward turning that will make them unfit for life.

These encounters, where the characters are rendered inhuman and their alterity to each other, even in a moment of supposed union, is heightened (as a deadly conflict between hawks!), register a utopian potential which persists in the novel's adherence to couples. First we have Tom and Lydia, then Anna and Will, and the couple structure finally breaks down with Ursula, who couples with Anton Skrebensky, her teacher Miss Inger, Skrebensky again, and then the moon (!), but finally ends up alone. This is part of the novel's critique of modernity as well: consciousness develops through increasing alienation and breeds an individualism that prevents Ursula from finding happiness in the dyads that, in addition to being privileged in the novel,

Lawrence poses elsewhere as necessary to life. Through a strange discussion of the solar plexus and lumbar ganglion of each individual linking with those of another, Lawrence emphasizes in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* the ways in which the unconscious, rather than consciousness, can unite us in social bonds with other beings. He explains that the unconscious is “that active spontaneity which rouses in each individual organism at the moment of fusion of the parent nuclei, and which, in polarized connection with the external universe, gradually evolves or elaborates its own individual psyche and corpus, bringing both mind and body forth from itself. Thus it would seem that the term *unconscious* is only another word for life” (42). The unconscious is not an entity buried deep inside a subject, but rather an active force pushing outward to engage with other beings. As defined here, the unconscious is the exact opposite of *ressentiment*, which makes interiority; it is the Body without Organs theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, who drew on ideas of consciousness from Nietzsche, and also Lawrence. A constant in discussions of the Body without Organs is the preposition “on”: the subject or self is always “on” the Body without Organs. If you want to make yourself a BwO – and one of the plateaus in *A Thousand Plateaus* is a how-to guide for accomplishing this goal – you must realize “it is not ‘my’ body without organs, instead the ‘me’ (*moi*) is on it, or what remains of me, unalterable and changing in form, crossing thresholds” (161). If we take the subject to be an entity with interiority that uses the break between conscious and unconscious to formulate a kind of agency that allows for the version of progress we currently understand, then the Body without Organs disrupts all this. If the subject is on the body experiencing and thinking at the same time rather than contained neatly in the body conceiving actions and seeing them through, then a sense of immanence is restored to an understanding of subjectivity. As with the theory of the body in

Yeats, the *Body without Organs* describes a mode of being devised by Lawrence as an antidote to the humanist subject, as a passage outside the self.

But how does the dyad, the couple, figure into this embodied, anti-subjective subjectivity? Lawrence is amazing on this, hopeful and despairing at once in the most plaintive tones:

Love is a thing to be *learned*, through centuries of patient effort. It is a difficult, complex maintenance of individual integrity throughout the incalculable process of interhuman-polarity. Even on the first great plane of consciousness, four prime poles in each individual, four powerful circuits possible between two individuals, and each of the four circuits to be established to perfection and yet maintained in pure equilibrium with all the others. Who can do it? Nobody. Yet we have all got to do it, or else suffer ascetic tortures of starvation and privation or of distortion and overstrain and slow collapse into corruption. The whole of life is one long, blind effort at an established polarity with the outer universe, human and non-human; and the whole of modern life is a shrieking failure. It is our own fault. (45-46)

In the dyad, each individual makes their *Body without Organs* and emerges at the surface of their subjectivity to attempt an encounter – to attempt love. Love is a dyad, and dyads constitute the social. Whereas in *Women In Love* the dyad is not the final unit, and the despair is more complete even than in this passage, *The Rainbow* locates the dyad, in its more triumphant moments, as the source of utopian anti-humanism. It uses polarities that are implicit (or so Lawrence argues) in human biology to stanch the formation of subjectivity and interiority through resentment. It protects alterity during such encounters through a vestigial individualism, even as Lawrence recognizes this tension is impossible to maintain; this is why “modern life is a shrieking failure.” In spite of the sporadic utopian moments in *The Rainbow*, this is the conclusion we arrive at in *Women in Love*: there can be no social and humanity is doomed. Anti-humanism may advocate a becoming other, but it presents the problem, as well, of the stasis of humanity. “Interhuman-polarity” is offered as a goal, but its ultimate achievement, in Lawrence’s works at least, is dubious.



## *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have used the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche to cast the anti-humanism of modernists like T.E. Hulme, W.B. Yeats and D.H. Lawrence in a more positive, life-affirming light. I have shown how Yeats and Lawrence, like Nietzsche, opposed the inward turning of *ressentiment* by countering trends in modernist form – in Yeats’s case, romantic poetry; in Lawrence’s, impressionism – with reconfigurations, or even repudiations, of consciousness as we know it. Instead of favoring the human in themselves, becoming more human through adherence to Enlightenment values, Yeats and Lawrence overturned those values by intervening in dominant aesthetic forms. They produced new possibilities for outward expansion and transformation of consciousness instead of turning inward, as in narrative modernism the protocol often demands. This has been, in some senses, an alternative history of literary modernism told through key figures.

In addition to suggesting a general consideration of anti-humanist modernism, the beginning of the chapter intimated that through a Nietzschean reading of modernism we might begin to see the contours of an anti-humanism that could be hospitable to humans, to the social, to interrelationality. A version of anti-humanism that privileges life and affirmation takes us part way to this point, as Sheehan’s contention that “narrative is human-shaped” is opposed to a negative, life-denying anti-humanism; an anti-humanism of life, as the title to this chapter suggests, opens greater formal horizons as well as philosophical ones. The poetic forms reconciled with anti-humanism already in accounts of Hulmean modernism can still, as we saw through Yeats, accommodate this ethical, affective, transformative anti-humanism as well – but

narrative forms? The reading of Lawrence as an affirming anti-humanist gleaned through *The Rainbow* suggests that narrative is indeed capable of favoring life beyond humanity, and its success in this measure has something to do with the dyad. The dyad, as a unit capable of love or “interhuman-polarity,” constitutes an anti-humanist mode in its privileging of the unconscious and embodiment as opposed to the consciousness entrained to Enlightenment theories of the human subject; going beyond Yeats’s theory of embodiment, the dyad accomplishes this by moving away from a singular individuality and outward toward a theory of anti-humanist interrelationality. Ferry and Renaut are wrong: anti-humanism does not preclude community or social exchange. Rather, through Lawrence’s theory of dyadic encounters with alterity, we see that anti-humanism can positively suffuse the social through an alterity that leads to transformation. An interrelationality outside this paradigm seems ethically bankrupt: there can be, as an engagement with Nietzsche shows, an anti-humanist ethics, and it promises to reshape literary modernism as it does modes of being in the world. Through discussions of anti-humanist interrelationality in modernist forms, whether treated more critically or with an eye to generative potentials, this concern will continue to shape the ensuing chapters. Life, taken from Nietzsche and followed through Hulme and Yeats, is at odds with consciousness and promises to remake modernism as beyond the subjective, but beyond the negation of the subjective into hollow empty form as well. Contra Tarr – whose privileging of deathliness I invoked at the beginning of this chapter – anti-humanism during modernism, and even today, is very much alive.

## Chapter 2

### **From Emile Zola's Theory to Henry James's Practice: Between Anti-Humanist Naturalism and Anti-Humanist Modernism**

In this chapter, I will address the anti-humanism of literary naturalism through Emile Zola in order to connect this earlier form of anti-humanism to the emergent anti-humanist modernism of Henry James. In Zola's essay "The Experimental Novel," I will show connections to both modernism and anti-humanism, and then, by dwelling on James's encounter with late nineteenth-century literary France and with Zola's naturalism in particular, I will offer a new explanation of Henry James's late style. While considering James's evolution away from the impressionism he pioneered in *The Portrait of a Lady* and recognized in his New York Edition prefaces and "The Art of Fiction," I will ultimately read *The Golden Bowl* as James's contribution to a modernism that subscribes not to a humanism of the impression, but to anti-humanism. The engagement with Zola's naturalism leads to a reconsideration of *The Golden Bowl* as a story of people positioned, not a story of characters with interiorities. A secondary aim of this chapter is to model a possibility for registering the interplay between modernism and naturalism that is too often left out of accounts of both literary modes.

If Nietzsche offers one point of entry for a discussion of modernist anti-humanism, the naturalist novel undoubtedly offers another. Where Nietzschean modernism aligns the human with the productivity of life, naturalism assumes a certain level of determinism. The difference is essentially that while Nietzscheanism can function to dismantle forms of agency that place

rationality or consciousness at the helm of human life, leaving a space open for activity and force, naturalist determinism seems to suggest the ineffectuality of agency at any level – except, perhaps, that of the author. Characters in examples of the form, like *L'Assommoir*, *Sister Carrie*, or *The House of Mirth*, are hemmed in by some combination of social forces, social conventions, and biology. For women like Gervaise Macquart, Carrie Meeber, and Lily Bart, there is no escape from the forces of the world that impinge upon them, curtailing their agency. In addition to this determinism or fatalism, naturalism's ties to the discourse of evolution foreground, as Donald Pizer argues, the corporeal: "realism and naturalism imply, through their association with the concrete immediacies of experience, a literature unmediated by the intellect or spirit, and therefore lacking in those qualities necessary to sustain the mind or soul of man. Naturalism [...] is thus held morally culpable because it appears to concentrate on the physical in man's nature and experience" (3).<sup>16</sup> Agency is discounted additionally, then, by virtue of the treatment of human characters as things, by the society depicted and by the author. The effect of, for instance, Zola's vulgar corporealization was dehumanization.<sup>17</sup> If humanism is coterminous with subjectivity, then the non-agentive materialism of naturalism aligns with anti-humanism. Bill Brown's argument about the anti-subjectivity of "things" is instructive here; things, he argues "might offer us dry ground above those swirling accounts of the subject" (1). Things disrupt the

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<sup>16</sup> Determinism tends to be the accepted terminology for European naturalism, whereas sensational fatalism is more appropriate in the American context. I should mention here that in this chapter I am not especially concerned to police the distinctions between realism and naturalism, and that by drawing on Pizer's compilation of essays I to an extent adopt his American perspective, which muddles the terms. I do this partly because of the difficulty of looking at James as a naturalist: I am trying to connect him to the specific tradition of French naturalism, when he is an American, and the American scholarly tradition is to address naturalism and realism as a set and as outside of the heavy philosophical context – determinism, positivism – that naturalism involves in France. A better account of the French context is David Baguley's *Naturalist Fiction*.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Lethbridge speaks of "the filth and stench of the milieu Gervaise inhabits. This is a world of open sewers and overflowing drains, its streets turned to mud by the rain, its workshops filled with choking dust, its bars thick with rancid smoke" (xxvii). The gross materiality of *L'Assommoir* is, as Lethridge goes on to point out, very much of human bodies; the novel is "pervaded by fetid odours: of unwashed bodies, vomit, bad breath, alcohol, the discharges of slaughterhouse and corpses" (xxvii).

relationship between subject and object, and they discredit processes like introspection and projection that allow us to relate to an object (not a thing) in ways that allow us to know or assimilate it. Further, he draws on Adorno to point out that “accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such” (12). To think of humans as naturalism has the potential to do, as “things” treated objectively rather than subjectively, and especially as entities in the world stripped of value, is to move toward an anti-humanism of alterity.<sup>18</sup> In this chapter, I examine the development of naturalism from Emile Zola to Henry James, toward modernism through the concept of experiment. The infusion of radical objectivity in the novel transforms, I argue, the stereotype of a monstrous death-seeking anti-humanism associated with naturalism, while also emphasizing, through cosmopolitanism and objectivity, the relation between alterity and the decentering of consciousness.

### *Naturalism and Anti-Humanism*

In this chapter, my interest is in addressing naturalism primarily as theorized by Emile Zola in his 1880 essay, “The Experimental Novel,” an enterprise I will come to shortly. However, as I will ultimately apply Zola’s model to Henry James’s novels, it is necessary to address naturalism more generally. Although Zola’s essay provides one of the best accounts of literary naturalism (from one of its most famed practitioners), the field is factionalized along national lines, making a discussion of James’s relation to Zola’s naturalism suspect. As Donald Pizer’s broad account of the field of naturalism suggests, the options are to consider naturalism locally, in specific national (usually American) and even regional contexts, or to look at it

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<sup>18</sup> This raises the question of whether a better term than “objectively” is needed; does looking at something objectively necessitate turning that thing into an object? The way I intend the terms “objective,” “objectively,” and “objectivity” in this chapter is in opposition to this kind of projection; I use these terms to suggest a way of perceiving the outer world that does its best to sever ties with subjectivity and a perceiving consciousness ready to impose its human values on the matter being perceived.

globally, as a transnational literary phenomenon, more like the modernism that eventually supplanted it. In his Introduction, Pizer presents this conflict as follows:

A [...] major problem in the use of *realism* and *naturalism* as key terms in American literary historiography arises from several significant differences in the way the terms have been used in European literary history. It has often been remarked that realism and naturalism occurred earlier in Europe than in America (from the late 1850s to the late 1880s in France); that they contained – in the pronouncements of Flaubert and Zola, for example – self-conscious and full-scale ideologies; and that they functioned within a coherent network of personal relationships for much of their existence. In America, on the other hand, it is noted that the boundaries of the period are the Civil War and World War I, which suggests a substitution of historical event for ideology as the significant basis for understanding literary production; that critical discussion, as characterized by Howells's definition of realism as "the truthful treatment of material," lacks depth; and that the movements also lacked a social base or center. For some critics, the inescapable conclusion to be drawn from these differences is that it is inappropriate and poor criticism to attempt to apply terms with a body of specific meaning derived from the specific characteristics of their European origin to a very different set of circumstances in American literary history. (4)

This passage nicely adumbrates the logic of separating the two literary contexts indefinitely, largely by showing that the continuity of American naturalist texts is typically accidental or attributable to history, whereas continuity among European naturalist texts was deliberately engineered by French authors, in intentional statements of position and definitions of form like that provided by Zola in "The Experimental Novel." However, Pizer's account passes over the question of why a term as specific as naturalism, which ends up sharing significant connotations in both contexts, should still be usable for these two sets of texts which apparently have so little in common. At some point, the term "naturalism" landed in the American context because what it denoted in the European context seemed apt. For Pizer, the lack of commitment to the philosophical core of European naturalism – namely, determinism – in American naturalist writers seems sufficient evidence to sever the two traditions: "Naturalism, to [Frank] Norris, is a method and a product, but it does not prescribe a specific philosophical base. Norris was thus identifying, in his criticism, the attraction of naturalism in its character as a sensationalistic novel

of ideas flexible enough in ideology to absorb the specific ideas of individual writers” (8). In the American context, naturalism is individualistic and changeable, whereas in the European context it is fixed and dogmatic, prescribed by authorities.

A counterpoint to Pizer’s breakdown of American versus French naturalism is Richard Lehan’s claim for naturalism as a formal movement like modernism, which was disseminated across national boundaries. He explains that as “a narrative mode, literary naturalism has a beginning and an end, a European origin and a multinational history. [...] It depends upon a biological model, relying heavily on theories of evolution and devolution, seeing man as a product of his immediate environment. It is essentially mechanistic in its view of matter and deterministic in its attitude toward human will”(65). On this reading, French and American naturalists are part of a continuum, and they share a role in the transition from realism to international literary modernism. To consider Zola and James as sharing investments in a tradition of naturalism, however divergent those particular investments may be, contributes to an interpretation of naturalism open to the emergent formation of modernism as well as cosmopolitanism.<sup>19</sup>

The image of Zola as a sort of naturalist stereotype has endured, in French and American literary history, and it lends credence to a transnational consideration of naturalism. Michael Davitt Bell, in describing James’s botched attempt to write like Zola in *The Princess Cassamassima*, mentions that Zola “was famous for taking notes on the subjects of his novels,” a

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<sup>19</sup> In their recent article on the state of modernist studies, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz emphasize the “transnational turn” the field is taking. They suggest that “it is not new to associate modernism with the milieu of ‘exiles and émigrés,’” but the new scholarship disavows what they call “old international modernism” – “their work often aims to make modernism less Eurocentric by including or focusing on literary production outside Western Europe and the United States” (739). Their essay misses an opportunity, I think, to speak of cosmopolitanism outside of identity politics, as a way of engaging with the other. While there is nothing postcolonial about the juxtaposition of Zola and James, the opportunity afforded by James’s French interlude, and by the inherent qualities of naturalism itself, is a special one. It allows us to examine the productive capacity of alterity to disarrange human value systems.

portrayal meant to suggest Zola's mania for empiricism (92). In a discussion of *L'Assommoir*, Lethbridge explains that the novel "becomes an unremitting catalogue of misery, starvation, and pain, recounted in the most distressingly minute detail" (xxxvi). And this, for better or worse, is pretty much what we think of when we think about naturalism: a depiction of the worst circumstances that a specific civilization can deal out to its constituents, offered so objectively and descriptively as to transcend the more comfortable category of melodrama, which deals more often in types than such intricate specificities. Such a view is expanded and revised on reading Zola's "The Experimental Novel."

In this essay, in addition to explaining the objective stance we now associate with naturalism, Zola anticipates the modernist verve for formal experimentation with a much more specific sense of experiment. Published in 1880 partly as a defense of novels like *L'Assommoir*, whose depiction of reality was so filthily extreme as to seem political, "The Experimental Novel" draws on Claude Bernard's work defending experiment as a wider practice in order to confer the values associated narrowly with science on medicine (a discipline considered at the time too involved with humans, or their feelings, to be properly scientific).<sup>20</sup> Consequently, experiment becomes an appropriate practice for novelists as well.<sup>21</sup> As Zola suggests, the same

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<sup>20</sup> On the reasons for writing "The Experimental Novel," Lethbridge writes: "it was to accusations of the gross exaggerations of *L'Assommoir* that Zola mounted a defence based on the argument that the veracity of his descriptions was supported by published sources and his own empirical observations of the social worlds represented in his novels. Polemical pressures so vitiated Zola's accounts of his own achievement (with the strategic analogy of the novelist and natural scientist hardening into a militant Naturalism) that by 1880, in his best-known theoretical work, *Le Roman expérimental*, he was going so far as to claim that the documents assembled by Naturalist writers like himself were entirely responsible for the structure and content of their work: they both preceded the elaboration of character and plot, and were transposed so directly that the creative imagination was virtually redundant. Scholars with access to the preparatory notes for his novels have since shown the more dogmatic statements to be highly misleading, and intelligible only in a climate in which Zola was violently attacked for his depiction of unaesthetic physical appetites and social conditions" (xii-xiii). That the political circumstances of the French Second Republic demanded an apolitical explanation from Zola about his aesthetic does not discredit the intertwining of naturalism with objectivity and empiricism suggested by "The Experimental Novel."

<sup>21</sup> While Baguley points out that many of Zola's contemporaries saw the likening of literature to medicine as ridiculous, he also explains that Zola may not have intended the comparison literally. He says that "the excesses" of



principle that allows the extension of experiment into medicine also allows it into literature: “if the experimental method leads to the knowledge of physical life, it should also lead to the knowledge of the passionate and intellectual life. It is but a question of degree in the same path which runs from chemistry to physiology, then from physiology to anthropology and sociology. The experimental novel is the goal”(2). The body and the mind should thus be treated as equally accessible to this mode of enquiry – experiment – which is defined by Bernard and confirmed by Zola as “provoked observation,” where observation is entirely objective: “the experimentalist should have no preconceived idea, in the face of nature, and should always retain his liberty of thought. He simply accepts the phenomena which are produced, when they are proved”(3). Thus Zola redefines, through the application of experiment to all levels of humanity as treatable in prose, both the novel and the author. The experimental novel charts the determination of phenomena according to unchanging rules and properties, and the experimental novelist is the one who “provokes” the observations. Both of these changes inhere in the belief that the human is determined by external forces; experiment as an idea depends on the diminishment of agency to a minuscule fraction. However, there is a peculiarity in thinking of the author as a provoking or precipitating force – the human cannot be wholly bereft of agency if the author is exempt from the determinism he or she prescribes.

According to Zola’s model, then, experiment is the new component that naturalism adds to the realism which constitutes its base:

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the essay “are to be explained as polemical and rhetorical strategies” (60). In a way, then, Zola was like many modernists (or they were like him); Baguley continues: “This text needs therefore to be considered in the context of that continuous battle of prefaces, manifestos and journal articles [...] which was the reality of literary life (and survival) in Zola’s time. [...] Privately he was far less doctrinaire. If we were to approach his essay from the familiar Russian Formalist standpoint with regard to literary evolution, his overstatements and emphatic formulas would appear perfectly normal as part of the process of challenge, conflict, and renewal whereby new styles, new genres, new forms and devices have to be forcefully imposed to discredit the canonized forms and to reinvigorate the literary system with new elements” (60).

the novelist is equally an observer and an experimentalist. The observer in him gives the facts as he has observed them, suggests the point of departure, displays the solid earth on which his characters are to tread and the phenomena to develop. Then the experimentalist appears and introduces an experiment, that is to say, sets his characters going in a certain story so as to show that the succession of facts will be such as the requirements of the determinism of the phenomena under examination call for. (8)

This dual approach to the novel moves from stasis to dynamism, using realism, or disinterested observation, to present objective data first – which in its stasis may favor a depth model of consciousness and character as much as details of setting or non-human context – and then relying on the experiment to add plot, action, and force. Zola sees this second part, the setting into motion, as necessary for revealing the “determinism,” the expected course and outcome.

Experiment in Zola’s sense may owe a debt to the Enlightenment and thus to a certain kind of humanism: the Enlightenment belief in a universal subject – which dictates that humans are more or less the same – vouchsafes the human reproducibility on which experiment relies while also implying a humanist verve for improvement and reform, which is what T.E. Hulme mocks as the perfectibility of the human. Further, the belief in the observer or novelist’s control and mastery is a humanist, Enlightenment tenet to which Zola also adheres: “the naturalistic novelists observe and experiment, [...] all their work is the offspring of the doubt which seizes them in the presence of truths little known and phenomena unexplained, until an experimental idea rudely awakens their genius some day, and urges them to make an experiment, to analyze facts, *and to master them*” (13; italics mine). The assertion that humanity becomes more completely knowable through experiment, which adds components of movement and development, beyond even its ability to be understood through observation, and that this is unquestionably a good thing in literature as it has been in science, is well within Enlightenment parameters. But what can we make of the tension between the potentially anti-humanist

dynamism that experiment introduces into the novel, and the intention of bringing that dynamism in only to yield more complete knowledge of humanity in all its manifestations?

Foucault's essay "What Is Enlightenment?" wherein the thinker responds to Kant's essay of the same name, offers a productive exploration of the potential non-identity of humanism and Enlightenment. Foucault writes: "I am inclined to see Enlightenment and humanism in a state of tension rather than identity" (52). Further, he considers it "dangerous to confuse them; and [...] it seems historically inaccurate. If the question of man, of the human species, of the humanist, was important throughout the eighteenth century, this is very rarely, I believe, because the Enlightenment considered itself a humanism" (53). Humanism is, for Foucault, a muddled terrain, but its indeterminacy does not preclude its being written off as irrelevant to discussions about the Enlightenment. The eagerness to disarticulate humanism from Enlightenment owes something to the provocative definition of Enlightenment that Foucault is advancing here. Emphasizing the "audacity to know" derived from Kant's imperative "dare to know," Foucault insists on Enlightenment as a continuing enterprise. Critique, he argues, is the lasting and perennial project of the Enlightenment:

This philosophical ethos may be characterized as a *limit-attitude*. [...] We have to be at the frontiers. Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. But if the Kantian question was that of knowing [*savoir*] what limits consciousness [*connaissance*] must renounce exceeding, it seems to me that the critical question today must be turned back into a positive one: In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over [*franchissement*]. (53)

Enlightenment, recast here as ongoing critique and transformation, as "crossing-over," is far from over. Further, the question is switched from knowledge to transformation. The Nietzschean influence even appears here in the positing of transformation through generative

variation rather than transcendence, when Foucault asks us to trace out from the universal the singular and contingent – namely, those aspects which can lead us away from our current mode of being. This is how critique functions.

As Jeffrey Nealon argues, “What Is Enlightenment?” is taken as a linchpin in the argument for Foucault’s subjective turn. He writes, “Much of the critical consensus concerning the late Foucault takes its inspiration directly from [this 1984 essay...] where it seems that Foucault definitively softens his stance toward the Enlightenment imperatives of autonomy, rationality, liberty, and subjective self-determination” (13). The essay seems to invite a reading of Foucault as changing his model of power, such that its functioning becomes more easily intervened in by subjects through something like resistance. If the Enlightenment is back, so are rationality and agency – and so is humanism. The popular reading of late Foucault culled largely from this essay, as Nealon points out, is that “he shifts his emphasis from the subject’s sociopolitical docility (thumbs down on the Enlightenment) to its creative, norm-busting individual agency (two thumbs way up)” (14). Following Nealon, I see this reading as an unconvincing one, but my interest is in the particular question of humanism. To return to the discussion of humanism in the essay, Foucault alleges that the Enlightenment has nothing to do with humanism. However, this is partly because the project of the essay is one of redefinition. Enlightenment (very specifically not “the Enlightenment”) is not a finite historical period – although its emergence can be pinpointed, and genealogically confirmed – but a practice or ongoing project, a critique moving into transformation. He redefines it as anti-subjective, which is to say anti-humanist. That Foucault dismisses humanism as useless – because it confers irrelevant values in a way that is damaging to the genealogical project of Enlightenment which he advocates – gives credence to Nealon’s refutation of a subjective late Foucault, but it does not

tell us anything explicit about anti-humanism. However, this new sense of Enlightenment as transformative critique cut off from the subjective values of humanism offers much to connect Enlightenment with anti-humanism. Opposed to the strict redefinition of Enlightenment as “the mode of reflective relation to the present,” Foucault says, “Humanism is something entirely different. It is a theme or, rather, a set of themes that have reappeared on several occasions, over time, in European societies; these themes, always tied to value judgments, have obviously varied greatly in their content as well as in the values they have preserved” (52). That the only enduring feature shared by all humanisms is value judgments – implicitly human value judgments, and this is also aligned with Nietzsche’s project of the transvaluation of values – confirms the definition of anti-humanism as that which cannot posit value judgments, the anti-subjective. Zola’s anti-subjective idea of experiment belongs to both *the* Enlightenment and Enlightenment. However, the “audacity to know” to which experiment adheres as a tool of Enlightenment drives a wedge between two versions of anti-humanism that coexist uneasily in Zola’s essay, one of which favors determinism and one of which favors transformation.

As explored earlier, the definition of naturalism put forth by Zola is anti-subjective, even if, typically, in the American iterations of naturalism, this is not necessarily the case. In the idiom of scholarship on naturalism, Zola offers determinism as a curtailment of the characters’ agency: agency is curtailed at one level by social forces which take precedence, and at another unstated level by the novelist who conducts the experiment and holds an unflagging belief that the experiment will lead to knowledge.<sup>22</sup> American naturalism eschews the emphasis on determinism for, according to Pizer, the pure sensationalism of tragedy. Attending to the connections drawn from Foucault, above, between Enlightenment and the anti-subjective,

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<sup>22</sup> The fixation on knowability is, after all, simply another kind of determinism; knowledge is revered because of the presumption that having it will determine outcomes.

between humanism and subjective valuation, and thus between Enlightenment and anti-humanism – the unresolved contradictions of Zola’s naturalism emerge. Determinism places Zola within Foucault’s sense of the anti-subjective, and implicitly with anti-humanism, while Zola’s specific sense of experiment locates him with the Enlightenment historically, but also philosophically with the non-evaluative Enlightenment Foucault reconstitutes as ongoing.

Transformation, and the dynamism of experiment remain the compelling, unaccountable variable in Zola’s version of naturalism, although this aspect runs unquestionably counter to the insistence on determinism. Even as transformation is introduced into the protocol of the experimental novelist in the aspect of setting plot into motion, it is introduced only to more fully confirm generalizable outcomes and to gain complete knowledge. The Enlightenment’s project of human mastery is fully endorsed here. As Zola writes, “In our role as experimental moralists we show the mechanism of the useful and useless, we disengage the determinism of the human and social phenomena so that, in their turn, the legislators can one day dominate and control these phenomena. In a word, we are working with the whole country toward that great object, the conquest of nature and the increase of man’s power a hundredfold” (31). The emphasis on plot over character is used, then, to exaggerate humanity’s pliability first to the social forces that the experimental novelist puts into play, and second to whatever forces are devised by “legislators” after the novel to counter these social forces. Humans are indeed capable of being reformed, of being perfected, and this reform is the goal Zola sets for naturalism. That is, the dynamism of the plot is not, in Zola’s formulation, emphasized; it is rather denied its potential for transformation by keeping the focus on those deprived of agency by plot, instead of moving the focus to where the agency is. Put another way, in the context of reform, transformation and dynamism are not completely denied, but rather tightly contained and controlled. This

determinism is still anti-humanist, but not along the lines I discussed in the first chapter; life and productivity are demolished by the experimental novel – according to Zola, so that the protocol for life can better be calculated, implemented, and controlled. Naturalism seems to constitute, again, an anti-humanism of the deathly, of constraint and a paucity of choice and strategy. There is no way out of or even through the drama of power for the characters in the experimental novel, except through the agency of the novelist, who passes that agency on to society, which in turn implements what seems to be only a more benign determinism. It is on this point that Zola's naturalism of experiment and Foucault's anti-humanist Enlightenment fail to match up: even as Foucault refuses subjectivity and value judgment, favoring instead "crossing-over" into something other, a movement to unknowable futures through critique, he does not posit crossing-over as a path to social reform through human mastery.

Zola's figuration of consciousness in the essay, counter to the ultimate disavowal of plot-as-transformation, introduces another level of complexity to naturalism's anti-humanism. Notably, naturalism treats consciousness not as knowable depth, but as controllable surface. This is clear in Zola's pronouncement: "in the experimental novel it is best for us to hold to the strictly scientific point of view if we wish to base our studies on solid ground; not to go out from the 'how', not to attach ourselves to the 'why'" (46). The "why," the deep development of subjectivity that explains, in more humanistic accounts, why people react the way they do, is sloughed off as philosophical waste here. Instead, the "how" is the proper focus of naturalism: how do bodies react under given circumstances, and develop in predictable ways from these circumstances? Consciousness is subordinated when exteriority trumps interiority, as it does here, in one of Zola's quotes from Claude Bernard: "experiment, that is to say, the study of natural phenomena, taught man that the truths of the exterior world were to be found formulated,

in the first place, neither in reason nor in feeling. These last are, indeed, our indispensable guides, but to obtain the truth it is necessary to descend into the objective reality of things, where they lie concealed under their phenomenal form” (34). The anti-humanism I outlined in the first chapter followed Elizabeth Grosz’s anti-humanist theory of evolution and temporality. This developed from a refutation of consciousness in her earlier work, suggesting the body as a unit of transformation which nonetheless denies the humanist implications of agency as tied to consciousness:

Not being self-identical, the body must be seen as a series of processes of becoming, rather than as a fixed state of being. The body is both active and productive, although not ordinary: its specificity is a function of its degrees and modes of organization, which are in turn the results or consequences of its ability to be affected by other bodies. In opposition to the Cartesian model, then, subjectivity or the psyche is no more certain and incapable of doubt than the body: there is no single founding principle, such as the immediacy of self-consciousness, to guarantee knowledge or to construct knowledge in the form of a science. (*Volatile Bodies* 12)

I juxtapose Grosz to Zola/Bernard here to show again the tension and slippage between these two anti-humanist modes.

As we see in the end of the passage from Grosz, science and consciousness are linked and in opposition to a corporeal anti-humanism rooted in transformation and becoming. The exteriority of Zola and Bernard, in contrast, is wedded to a scientific fervor for knowledge. The scientific method is the solution to a literature that is “rotten with lyricism” due to its subjectivity (Zola 48). The contradiction we must ultimately contend with in Zola’s essay, and at the heart of naturalism itself, is thus that it counters a rampant humanism with an anti-humanism too much its opposite, such that it displaces the human agency it extracts from romanticized subjectivity onto the author, the “genius,” who helms the experiment. This returns us, too, to the conflation of modernist anti-humanism with fascism: the use of knowledge for complete human mastery is precisely what corrupt human systems take to excess. The vocabulary of agency is accepted, but



the anti-humanism inheres in the negation of that agency. Henry James, I will show, has a productive encounter with Zola's naturalism, and French literary culture more broadly, that leads him to a partial resolution of the contradictions of naturalism, while simultaneously evolving naturalism into modernism.

*Henry James: Between Impression and Perspective*

In his study *Henry James Goes to Paris*, Peter Brooks refocuses James's entire career through the year the writer spent in Paris, from 1875-76. During this year, James met the greatest writers in Paris, including Zola and Flaubert, and encountered provocative modern art. At the time, he renounced naturalism as too vulgar and impressionism as too vague, and he championed the more tempered novels of George Eliot at the salons to which he was invited. The scene Brooks describes is one that arguably transforms the whole course of James's literary career – particularly in terms of the accepted account of James as master of psychology and consciousness, as reluctant impressionist. Brooks explains that “James in Paris in 1875 and 1876 – aged thirty-two and thirty-three – encounters the very crucible of the modernism that he will come to represent, even embody,” and he refers to impressionist modernism (4). The continental influence, rebuffed at the time, produced James's later affinity for the impression as the currency of modernist literary form. But Brooks has little to say of James's possible connection to naturalism. In this section, I consider the encounter Brooks describes, not as one which confirms impressionism as the emergent modernism marking the culmination of James's career – rather, I argue that James's French encounter with impressionist painting and naturalist writing results in an emphasis on perspective, transforming the subjectivity of impressionism into positionality

while retaining the objectivity of Zola's naturalism. The perspectivism James explores and perfects in his late novels constitutes a different kind of modernism altogether.

Although Brooks traces James's impressionism to this French encounter, the argument for James's impressionism came much earlier with F.O. Matthiessen's path-breaking account. Prior to Matthiessen's work, James tended to be rejected when he was cast as the international modernist who favors consciousness, and celebrated when he could be seen instead as the stalwart American who favors realism, and places objectivity over consciousness, or subjectivity. This is what is at stake in Matthiessen's 1963 study, which responded to the dominant claim against James that he was tainted by "deracination and cosmopolitanism" (x). Matthiessen counters this intended insult, which was usually accompanied by a grudging acceptance of James's earlier novels as acceptably regional (read: parochial), with the coining of the term "major phase" to describe James's late novels – and Matthiessen sees these as revealing consciousness as a secular religion for James. As he points out, "The consciousness which James dwells on 'as the highest good I can conceive of', though interpenetrated with ethical values, is more of the mind than of the soul" (148). Further, Matthiessen shows how this valuation of consciousness is tied to the sense of spectatorship in James, who "felt it his obligation to examine what the mind of Henry James was in relation to every stimulus, no matter how accidental or trivial. He never lost his boyhood curiosity about the otherness of the outside world. He was, to the end, the absorbed spectator" (149). This image of James as invested in a kind of perceptual narcissism, wondering how his own mind would react and reveling in the reactions, is certainly evinced in the New York Edition prefaces, and the preface to *The Golden Bowl* in particular. James talks here not about the novel, but about the oddness of re-vision, always in relation to his own individual consciousness; his marvel is at having trod the text

before and yet experiencing it so differently: “The ‘old’ matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted, exquisitely re-assimilated and re-enjoyed—believed in, to be brief, with the same ‘old’ grateful faith” (liii). The specificity of consciousness as changing over time, reproducing itself into further mutations, is what James notes here – this is the reason for the invasive hyphens which disrupt the smoothness of repetition that the “re-” in each of these words implies. The kind of story James is interested in is, often enough, a story of a developing consciousness, whether his own or, say, Isabel Archer’s, and this supports Matthiesson and Brooks in their claim that we should read James as aligned with an international modernist paradigm – impressionism – that the writer contracted in France.

Further evidence of James’s impressionism emerges in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*. Here, he discusses criteria for the value of art in terms of the accurate rendering of subjectivity: “is it valid, in a word, is it genuine, is it sincere, the result of some direct impression or perception of life?” (45). James’s impressionism is also recognizable, in this preface, in his attention to the prominence of subjective positioning as a determining factor in the story that emerges:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. (45-46)

In spite of the indeterminacy suggested by the discussion of the windows as untransformed by human viewers – I will return to this shortly – James arrives here at a version of human subjectivity wonderfully unique, and thus arguably worthy of examination in its own right, with

little attention to what it is observing. Regard to what the subjectivity in question is looking at is reserved for what it presents by way of a reflection back on the uniqueness of that subjectivity. The story of interest, at least at this point in James's career, is the story of subjectivity itself, not of the outer world and the relationship between subjects – not, in other words, a story of alterity. What Matthiessen refers to as “curiosity about the otherness of the outside world” ends up foregrounding the play of curiosity, the perception of the subject, rather than the otherness whose role it finally is only to stimulate the subject.

The claims made for James's inclusion in the modernist canon, even as one of its originators, often stem from this emphasis on subjectivity through impressionism. Drawing on an encounter focused through modernism's humanist tradition – a discussion James had in 1912 with Roger Fry and recounted by Virginia Woolf, two of Bloomsbury's liberal humanist reformers – Brooks comments on James's continuing self-identification outside of modernism, even as his novelistic technique seems to position him otherwise:

James in 1912 was a modernist master, but one who clung to a notion of representation of the real that he saw as indispensable to the very project of the novel—a project that leads him over and over again to set against Flaubert's practice the more nourishing example of Balzac. [...] Yet Roger Fry was certainly right in his comparisons. Starting in the mid-1890s, James does produce work that parallels Seurat's *pointillisme* and anticipates Picasso's cubism. It is work that eschews the direct presentation of the story—its characters and its actions—in favor of the play of interpretive consciousness on the action. (2)

The placement of James in a tradition of impressionism – modernism's humanist form – is argued further by Jesse Matz, who claims that “Between Stevenson's romance and Besant's realism, James founded the Impressionist theory of fiction. Like Pater between Arnold and Wilde, James made the impression the basis of an aesthetic vision that discovers truest realism in the most fertile imagination” (86). The specific reference here is to James's 1884 essay, “The

Art of Fiction,” which responds to Walter Besant’s theory of fiction and in which James straightforwardly defines fiction as an art, partly through recourse, again, to impressionism.

Although we might compare James’s “The Art of Fiction” with Zola’s “The Experimental Novel” on the grounds that each is its author’s most coherent statement of his aesthetic, and both constitute significant contributions to theories of the modernist novel, the two pieces readily conflict. In “The Art of Fiction,” James refutes the value of observation by valorizing the role of the writer; this contributes to the redefinition of fiction as an “art” rather than a vocation. The means James uses to further this end of redefinition is an appreciation of impressionism, and according to Michael Davitt Bell, James’s argument specifically if not explicitly serves to denigrate the realism of Howells and the naturalism of Zola. In the essay, James writes:

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about. The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact: then the author’s choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances. Then in a word we can enjoy one of the most charming of pleasures, we can estimate quality, we can apply the test of execution. *The execution belongs to the author alone*; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that. (14; italics mine)

Subjectivity is favored here to the exclusion of literary convention: the “freedom to feel and say,” attributed singularly to the author here although the reader is invited to extrapolate the importance of this freedom across humanity, puts the individual liberty of the subject at a premium.

At stake in the essay’s adding of value to the author over the conventions of the story is a shift going on at the emergence of modernism, which allowed for a consideration of fiction as

art, as culturally valuable rather than pandering to the masses or, put more generously, in some larger or smaller sense determined by market concerns. James responds implicitly in the essay to some idea of fiction derived from the omnibus novels produced by the Victorians, and this stance leads him to a critique of conventions, which might otherwise be said to determine the outcome of a given novel as much as the novelist in question. He draws on Flaubert and Turgenev to tease this out:

The novel and the romance, the novel of incident and that of character—these clumsy separations appear to me to have been made by critics and readers for their own convenience, and to help them out of some of their occasional queer predicaments, but to have little reality or interest for the producer, from whose point of view it is of course that we are attempting to consider the art of fiction. . . . If we pretend to respect the artist at all, we must allow him his freedom of choice, in the face, in particular cases, of innumerable presumptions that the choice will not fructify. Art derives a considerable part of its beneficial exercise from flying in the face of presumptions, and some of the most interesting *experiments* of which it is capable are hidden in the bosom of common things. Gustave Flaubert has written a story about the devotion of a servant-girl to a parrot, and the production, highly finished as it is, cannot on the whole be called a success. We are perfectly free to find it flat, but I think it might have been interesting; and I, for my part, am extremely glad he should have written it; it is a contribution to our knowledge of what can be done—or what cannot. (18-19; italics mine)

In these terms he sees Turgenev as succeeding where Flaubert fails: “Ivan Turgenev has written a tale about a deaf and dumb serf and a lap-dog and the thing is touching, loving, a little masterpiece. He struck the note of life where Gustave Flaubert missed it—he flew in the face of a presumption and achieved a victory” (19). While James is wary of burgeoning modernists like Flaubert, he alights on this sense of “experiment” as a refusal of “presumptions,” his way of identifying literary conventions that were originally devised to appease the vulgar public, described here as people who need literature and insist on its adherence to conventions in order to solve their “queer predicaments.” Although James does not explicate further, this address suggests that it is not the responsibility of art, or of the novel as art, to either apprise the public of

morality in some Arnoldian sense or, by falling back on conventions to prevent them from having to think, to maintain the status quo.

In juxtaposing James's formulation for what fiction must become in "The Art of Fiction" to Zola's in "The Experimental Novel," connections do emerge, sometimes through significant dissonances and, specifically, in relation to the seeming celebration of subjectivity in the former and the disdain for it in the latter. In actuality, both pieces prioritize the novelist in new ways, James in the clearest of terms and Zola more incidentally, because for Zola scientific objectivity is all, eclipsing personality and thus partially relegating the author to the background. Although Zola takes issue with Claude Bernard's allegation that "In art and letters personality dominates everything," the role of the writer as a kind of "genius" who must helm the project of naturalism is repeatedly emphasized (49). The experimental novelist is of value, and his or her work does constitute an art form: "Those who make use of experiment might well be called experimental artists; but then people will tell us that they are no longer artists, since such people regard art as the burden of personal error which the artist has put into his study of nature" (51). Where Zola lays out, as I discussed above, a convoluted argument with regard to the author's agency versus that of the characters, James makes the priority of the author's subjectivity absolutely clear. That in Zola's account the authorial control is mediated by the experimental method does not dull the comparison to James: both claim authority and value for the novelist even as one uses more humanist terms coupled with aesthetics while the other links the credentials of the new novel to those of science, resulting in a borderline anti-humanist stance. Experiment, too, is a vocabulary shared by the two essays, although for James, the associations of the word are more connotative than denotative; in one of the above quotes, he glosses experiment as a "flying in the face of presumptions," and this suggests a departure from the familiar into futurity. Experiment

approximates transformation. In “The Experimental Novel” it cannot, because there it is tied to a very specific and controlled apparatus with its own exacting conventions. James’s usage indexes the transplantation into literature of the term, which still in Zola’s usage maintained all of its original meaning. Experiment can only become the watchword for modernism when it has shed these meanings, but in the more successful transplantation, the radicalism of Zola’s project is lost. The necessity now is to rediscover that radicalism.

James’s literal encounter with Zola during his year in France is briefly glossed by Brooks. While James was there, he met Zola, whom Brooks points out was “James’s nearly exact contemporary,” while in attendance at Flaubert’s “at-home” (22). James’s attention more to Zola’s texts while in Paris is well, and his reaction is unfavorable. For him, Zola is “the most thoroughgoing of the little band of the out-and-out realists. Unfortunately the real, for him, means exclusively the unclean, and he utters his crudities with an air of bravado which makes them doubly intolerable” (qtd. in Brooks 31; 36). James seems to see in Zola the culmination of the logic of a certain kind of realism, even an objectivity taken to excess. As Brooks also explains, “James ultimately sees Zola as a powerful but limited novelist, restricted to the gross, the crowd, the physiological, incapable of exploring complexity of human motive and character” (37). This attention to “complexity,” the absence of which James laments in Zola and the perfection of which James works up in his own novels, is traditionally filed with interiority and attention to complex psychology – this seems, to me, a critical jump not corroborated by James’s final novels, which move toward exteriority.

Beyond direct encounters with Zola, there has been some scholarly attention given to the engagement James makes with Zola’s naturalism in his own fiction. As Michael Davitt Bell suggests, James’s attempt to deal with what he saw as the conventions of naturalism, *The*



*Princess Cassamassima* which appeared in 1886, is a failure; in spite of a “sincere investment in the rendering of social and political reality” that is typical of naturalist writers but often, Bell argues, anathema to James, “the book sets in motion such different kinds and conceptions of realism—social comedy, heavily descriptive and deterministic naturalism, the impression of the sensitive protagonist—that they hardly seem to belong to the same novel”(105). It is true enough that *Princess* superficially incorporates and ultimately botches the conventions of naturalism, but in a consideration of naturalism along the lines of experiment, more of James’s late novels and *The Golden Bowl* in particular become legible within the naturalist thought experiment. This claim develops further from an observation Brooks makes, that James’s time in Paris initially soured James on French moderns like Zola and Flaubert, but that some reconciliation with the French tradition and with Paris itself is what conditions the shift from Christopher Newman’s disillusionment with Europe in *The American* in 1877 to Lambert Strether’s more sanguine and perspectival cosmopolitanism in *The Ambassadors* in 1903. What Brooks’s argument brings to light is that James, an outsider to the naturalist tradition in France is also an outsider to the realist/naturalist tradition in America, and this puts him in a unique position to reinvent the conventions – not in the awkward pastiche of *The Princess Cassamassima*, but in the more perspectival, modern style of his late novels, where aesthetics finally do not close the universe to transformation, where we recall that transformation is invoked in Zola’s essay – as it is in Foucault’s account of Enlightenment as anti-humanist – but then shut down through what Zola sees as the neatly closed circuit of scientific experiment.

James’s more developed understanding of naturalism can be seen in his use of Zola’s sense of experiment to structure his later novels, at least at the outset. If experiment begins from a set of givens and then moves to “provoked observation,” which involves the insertion of at

least one volatile variable, then James and Zola are thoroughly aligned. For instance, in *The Wings of the Dove*, the given circumstances include the mutual affection between Kate Croy and Merton Densher, as well as the impossibility of that relationship ending in marriage due to financial constraints tied to familial obligations – these are tied at a higher level to the social conventions James sees throughout his novels as arbitrating the appropriate conditions for marriage. The variable James introduces in the novel is Milly Theale – the question driving his experiment is, what will happen when the problem between two (basically decent) people in love is a lack of money, and they encounter a woman who is kind, rich, dying, and ready to fall in love? The answer the novel finds is one that, at least in part, condemns human nature; unfavorable circumstances (much less unfavorable, of course, than those Zola depicts) cause humans to behave inhumanly.

*The Golden Bowl* also begins very clearly from an experiment. As Virginia Llewellyn Smith reminds us, the impetus for the story came from a member of James's social circle: "he heard that a middle-aged American and his only daughter had simultaneously become engaged to be married. This suggested to James a curious situation wherein the father and child, devotedly attached, should remain so, 'with the husband of the one and the wife of the other entangled in a mutual passion, an intrigue'"(vii). The experiment thus emerges: what will happen when the social convention that marriage is natural is imposed on a father and daughter – Adam and Maggie Verver – who are probably happier alone together? What will happen to the two outside parties – Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant – brought in to meet the socially determined needs of the daughter and her father?

As it happens, this is not quite the kind of experiment Zola envisioned, if his own novels rather than his essay can be taken as the chief indication. While the aspect of experiment which

brings tragedy in James's novels is the conventions of polite society, wherein the goal is to make an agreeable marriage in terms of financial and historical family background, the aspect of experiment which brings tragedy in Zola's novels derives from the contradiction between modern civilization's imperative for self-betterment and the evolutionary resistance to that trajectory, coupled with the rot that civilization only superficially transcends. Richard Lehan explains, "as civilization became more and more pronounced, society became more and more corrupt. Zola believed that beneath all the trappings society was a festering mass of infected sores. At the center of this situation was Louis Napoleon and the Second Empire" (59). And further, as regards evolution, "Literary naturalism gave far more attention to [...] evolutionary throwbacks than to [evolution's] forward progress"(56). These commonplaces of French naturalism produce the kind of famously bleak experiment we get in Zola's *L'Assommoir*: what happens if a woman, Gervaise Macquart, hoping to climb economically – she dreams of opening her own laundry, and enjoys a brief success – from the circumstances determined by the illegitimacy of her family, marries a man with a predilection for alcohol kept in check by his steady manual labor as a roofer? And then what happens when that roofer falls from a roof? Obviously, a tragedy ensues that confirms the impossibility of upward class mobility; this is generally what James's novels confirm as well, although they do so with characters who begin from a higher position, and, relatedly, with less gruesome outcomes, while they also, unlike Zola's, do not rely on evolutionarily predicated decay.

Although James and Zola both interpret the imperatives of naturalism differently, they each conform to the criteria of experiment Zola eventually delineates in "The Experimental Novel," a piece whose appearance in 1880 does not precede his most famous naturalist novels and is almost contemporary with James's own reconsideration of modern French literature. The

experiment in *L'Assommoir* and those in James's late novels begin under tight control by the author, who in each case gives us cues early on as to what will happen. With Zola it is heredity, with James it tends to be the early revelation to the reader of a truth that characters conceal from each other, the later revelation of which rends social bonds. The novels of Zola and James have in common, too, a possible critique of the existing social institutions, conventions, or behaviors that will clamp down, sealing the characters' fates in the end. That Zola saw reform as an end of naturalist critique – that channels such as legislation exist for the purpose of social transformation – is clear enough in his essay, but James's sense of critique and transformation are unclear. If "The Art of Fiction" is any indication, social transformation is eclipsed by aesthetics, and this is one reason why James is not considered a naturalist.

After attempting to work with the congealed conventions of naturalism in *The Princess Cassamassima* – resulting in a naturalist stereotype – and then more subtly implementing the logic of experiment in the late novels, James takes the last modification of his style from his intersection with naturalism: perspective. The shift in James's career from impression to perspective is subtle; in fact, Brooks sees the two forms as interchangeable. I would argue, however, that there is a difference between the two. Impressionism points inward as much as outward, relying upon a variable degree of reflection and interpretation, whereas perspectivism, which is specifically Nietzschean, takes perspective as a kind of tube – or an aperture, like the windows from James's preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* – through which information travels from the outside world into the mind of a particular human being, emphasizing pure situatedness, where the position of the person rather than his or her interiority is what matters. A tension between impression and perspective is evident in Matthiessen's account, quoted above, where

James's interest in the "otherness of the outside world" and his status as spectator suggest perspective, yet his fascination with the registering of stimuli on his mind comes closer to the glory of interpretation more proper to the sense of impressionism. In Jesse Matz's excellent account of modernist impressionism, he explains the inbetweenness of the impression: "Lumping together empirical psychology and aestheticism, confusing the difference between thoughts and feelings, erasing the line between superficial appearances and deep knowledge, the impression brings art richer connections. It promises *mediation*, and thereby to release art into places it could not otherwise go" (17). That this is the potential of the impression is both compelling and undeniable, but the entrée it provides into psyches through its capacity for mediation has made it more amenable to certain kinds of projects – namely, those which favor a fluidity of communication between inner and outer, often in the interest of reform. Although impressionist texts seem radically different from realist novels focused through a perspective from nowhere and intent on objectivity, they share an interest in communication, even if the mediation of the impression makes a hitch, a brief obstacle to be scaled, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly, during the interpretation. Impressionism and perspectivism map onto humanism versus anti-humanism: perspectivism has an interest in objectivity and the "otherness" of the world, seeming to align it with a humanist universalism, but its investment in revealing the situatedness of knowledge while disavowing interiority (thus leveling self to the status of other, removing the value) makes it anti-humanist. The refusal of interpretation is a denial of humanist agency – and this is not a refusal we get in impressionism, even if impressionism sometimes revels in the subjectivity of interpretation to such an extent as to discredit it. Even if James fluctuates throughout his novels – and his writings about his novels – between impressionism and

perspectivism, in *The Golden Bowl*, he arrives at a perspectivism the more easily distinguished from impressionism by dint of its confluence with naturalist experiment.

### *Surfaces, Positions, and Movement in The Golden Bowl*

Nothing suggests the shift in James's career toward perspective better than the ideological distance between the preface to *Portrait* and the preface to *The Golden Bowl*. While the unified impressionism of the former inheres in the centrality and general availability to the reader of Isabel Archer's consciousness, the perspectivism of the latter emerges in the breakdown of impressionist language as James attempts to account for his last novel. He does begin the preface by addressing the form of the novel in something like impressionistic terms, emphasizing the subjective aspect of knowledge which he believes the book's chosen form foregrounds. Explaining his division of the novel into two books, one called "The Prince" and the other called "The Princess," he writes, "the whole thing remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness of but two of the characters" (xlii). The manner of presenting information to the reader is, as James sees it, thus mediated: "The Prince, in the first half of the book, virtually sees and knows and makes out, virtually represents to himself everything that concerns us—very nearly (though he doesn't speak in the first person) after the fashion of other reporters and critics of other situations" (xlii). The parenthetical is important here, as the choice to emphasize subjective consciousness through the stated focus on the situation as experienced through just two characters seems at odds with the narrative mode, which is specifically not first person. Further, in practice the novel does not filter its information through two characters in this way – there are scenes of Fanny Assingham conversing with her husband during which neither Prince Amerigo nor Maggie, the Princess, are present. The

combination of third person narration with intense psychologism has always constituted a tension in James's novels: the careful attention he gives to the thought processes and perceptions of the characters conflicts with the clinical, sometimes even cruelly detached third person narration.<sup>23</sup> However, the ultimate moral relativism of *The Golden Bowl*, wherein our identification of any one character as "good" is thoroughly undermined, greatly intensifies this conflict.

What James struggles to do in his preface is contain the novel within the trajectory toward impressionism. After suggesting his interest in the registration of consciousness, the account takes a strange turn. Instead of defending the argument for the novel's impressionism, James makes a digression on the topic of book illustrations. Moving away from the particular and toward a macroscopic view of his prefaces, James writes: "I have so thoroughly 'gone into' things, in an expository way, on the ground covered by this collection of my writings, that I should still judge it superficial to have spoken no word for so salient a feature of our Edition as the couple of dozen decorative 'illustrations'" (xlv). Initially, the importance James attaches to these illustrations has just to do with the immediacy of imagery – a necessary requirement, he suggests, for mimetic representation. What is most interesting about the digression is the turn it ultimately takes back to the particular, to the late novel at hand. For one thing, the pictures "were to remain at the most small pictures of our 'set' stage with the actors left out" (xlvii). In working with the artist, Alvin Langdon Coburn, James explains that, regarding "the proper preliminary compliment to the first volume of *The Golden Bowl* we easily felt that nothing would so serve as a view of the small shop in which the Bowl is first encountered" (xlvii-xlviii). The other image James describes is one of Portland Place, where Maggie lives with her father, Adam Verver, prior to her marriage, and where Adam continues to live with Charlotte, the

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<sup>23</sup> The cruel treatment of Catherine Sloper in *Washington Square* is a particular example of this.

woman he marries after Maggie becomes Amerigo's wife. The insistence that the images must be of places devoid of human "actors" takes on special significance in the context of the priority afforded to character – that is, consciousness – over all else in the novel which James asserts earlier in the preface, without reference to any part of the novel besides its formal two-part structure (perhaps because the novel itself doesn't support this claim). The appearance of conflict between character and setting suggests a reading of James as a transitional figure for modernism, one whose resolution of the contradictions of emergent modernist forms is of interest here, as the contradiction is between one strain that will become dominant, humanist modernism – the modernism Brooks emphasizes when he aligns James with impressionism and the Bloomsbury group – and one that will become anti-humanist modernism.

One explanation for the contradiction is a reexamination of James's career through the question of genre. The language of the stage and acting that James relies on to make his point about what illustrations should do – they should represent an "aspect of things or the combination of objects that might, by a latent virtue in it, speak for its connection with something in the book, and yet at the same time speak enough for its odd and interesting self" – harks back to a moment of formal difficulty for James, which arguably led to the late style of the "major phase" novels. The accepted account suggests that James's marked failure as a dramatist with *Guy Domville* in 1895 is what motivated the writer's return to, and perhaps improvement of, the genre of the novel. David Kurnick addresses the claim which attends this narrative of James's writerly development, that in the return to the novel James "perfects the narrative technologies that have earned his critical stature as the father of the psychological novel. 'The master' is born from the death of the playwright" (109). However, Kurnick goes on to argue compellingly, and in line with the retention of stage vocabulary in the preface discussed above,



that this narrative overlooks crucial continuities between the attempt at theater and James's late novels. By pointing out "James's continued obsession with the theater in the last years of the century" Kurnick creates a more anti-humanist context for reading the 1899 novel *The Awkward Age*, and then the novels that follow it. Regarding this transitional novel, Kurnick writes:

We underestimate the complexity of James's work when we survey it from the standpoint of the generic victor. *The Awkward Age* creates imaginative difficulties for its reader that are only resolvable through the often extraordinarily difficult visualization of a hypothetical scene of enactment. Despite its self-announcement as a novel, *The Awkward Age* is designed to read as if it were written in the "wrong" form; the novel is perhaps best understood as a blueprint for an impossible or withheld performance. [...] In making its readers hunger for an escape from the practice of novel reading, the book also insists on the formal and ideological inadequacies of the novel form; *The Awkward Age* demands to be read not as a way-station on James's pilgrimage back to the novel but as a sustained exploration of the possibilities of resisting that form—particularly the novel of psychological depth that now seems tautologically connected with the epithet "Jamesian." (110)

Dialogue, which Kurnick also notes is key to the seeming peculiarity of *The Awkward Age*, in which dialogue is rampant and psychology minimal, functions to remove attention from inner psychology to outer behavior and positioning, aligning it with an anti-humanist attention to the social and the difficulties of alterity.

Positioning and staging are indeed central to James's late aesthetic and even inflect his account of impressionism in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, where he comments on the primacy of character over plot. Oddly, the quote from a conversation with Ivan Turgenev that James uses to support his claim that character trumps plot in the best of novels greatly complicates the relation:

'To arrive at [a vision of people] is to arrive at my "story",' he said, 'and that's the way I look for it. The result is that I'm often accused of not having story enough. I seem to myself to have as much as I need – to show my people, to exhibit their relations with each other; for that is all my measure. If I watch them long enough I see them come together, I see them *placed*, I see them engaged in this or that act and in this or that difficulty. How they look and move and speak and behave, always in the setting I have found for them, is my account of them [...].' (43; emphasis in original)

The italicization of the word “placed” here does peculiar work: the characters may be responsible for the germination of a story, but only insofar as their positions are determined by exterior forces, in part belonging to the real world that the novel represents and in part devised by the author. This approximates the naturalist orthodoxy of Zola’s essay. The response of characters to the situation is granted high significance in James’s novels as in Turgenev’s account, as their attempts to “look and move and speak and behave” in the given setting are very much of interest. But the determinism of placement takes clear precedence here. James strives in *The Portrait of a Lady* to impress the special qualities of Isabel Archer on the reader, through her careful and wonderful reactions to the stimuli presented to her through plot, but this striving is at odds with the experimental or deterministic form that James appreciates in Turgenev’s subtle formulation and rejects in Zola’s more vulgar demonstrations. Isabel is meant to be a human triumph, but the tragedy of her marriage to Osmond mitigates this; the lack of a proper ending to the novel confirms the contradiction further.

Positioning and placement also serve a key role in *The Ambassadors*, but their impact registers differently than in *Portrait*: specifically, position is important in relation to knowledge, in relation to knowing other people. The concern for Lambert Strether, the main character who goes to Paris to retrieve an American (Chad Newsome) from the decadence of Europe, is to be positioned in such a way that he doesn’t have to know so much, that he can be at such a distance from people (specifically at such a distance from knowing them) so that he can respect their alterity. Strether likes to keep his distance. We see this in one of his charged encounters with a woman in the novel: “The occupant of the balcony was after all quite another person, a person presented, on a second look, by a charming back and a slight shift of her position, as beautiful brilliant unconscious Mamie [...]. With her arms on the balustrade and her attention dropped to

the street she allowed Strether to watch her, to consider several things, without her turning round. But the oddity was that when he *had* so watched and considered he simply stepped back into the room without following up his advantage” (247). Strether hesitates in the face of encounters where he would have to impose meaning on people, to know them better. This attitude culminates in the sad climax of the novel, where Strether, who had assumed all along that the connection between Chad and Mme de Vionnet was chaste, discovers them together at an inn. Even here his disappointment is almost not so much at the moral wrongness of their relationship, but of the discomfort at being forced to behave in a certain way about it:

He was rather glad, [...] that he hadn't been reduced to giving them his blessing for an idyllic retreat down the river. He had had in the actual case to make-believe more than he liked, [...]. It was the quantity of make-believe involved and so vividly exemplified that most disagreed with his spiritual stomach. He moved, however, from the consideration of that quantity—to say nothing of the consciousness of that organ—back to the other feature of the show, the deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed. That was what, in his vain vigil, he oftenest reverted to: intimacy, at such a point, was like that—and what in the world else would one have wished it to be like? It was all very well for him to feel the pity of its being so much like lying; he almost blushed, in the dark, for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll. He had made them—and by no fault of their own—momentarily pull it off for him, the possibility, out of this vagueness; and must he not therefore take it now as they had had simply, with whatever thin attenuations, to give it to him? The very question, it may be added, made him feel lonely and cold. There was the element of the awkward all round, but Chad and Madame de Vionnet had at least the comfort that they could talk it over together. With whom could he talk of such things?—unless indeed always, at almost any stage, with Maria? He foresaw that Miss Gostrey would come again into requisition on the morrow; though it wasn't to be denied that he was already a little afraid of her “What on earth—that's what I want to know now—had you then supposed?” He recognised at last that he had really been trying all along to suppose nothing. (313)

Much is going on in this passage, as Strether grapples with his recognition of what had been transpiring between the two lovers. While in the old James we might jump first to the moral core, where it would be clear that Strether's horror, his spiritual sickness, was at the broken moral code which doomed one character or another. But Strether's conflict readily differs from that of characters like Isabel Archer or Catherine Sloper – he is a man in the bloom of mid-life,

visiting Paris, outside the watchful eye of propriety. Further, James chooses here to begin from the possibility that Strether's disgust comes from a moral breach, only so that he may move away from that version. Several things are going on: Strether is disgusted at having to lie, at having to act or "make-believe" that nothing happened; this doesn't suggest his repulsion from their indiscretion, only his dislike of having to act a certain way. Notably, the passage makes it undecidable whether he is forced to make-believe for Chad and Mme de Vionnet or for the society which would recognize this as a breach. Further, Strether moves on in his thinking to a larger disgust at intimacy itself, at the knowledge of people being brought so close together, to know each other so fully. He resists this intimacy, too, in his refusal of Maria Gostrey's tacit proposal at the end, and the implication from Strether's behavior throughout is that the possibility of an intimacy so close repels him. We see this specifically at the end of the above passage, too, where he notes that he was trying not to "suppose" anything – *The Ambassadors* moves towards anti-humanism in Strether's insistence on keeping up a barrier between himself and others. This constitutes a kind of non-dominative attitude that is respectful of alterity.

The mania for placement, with its roots in naturalistic determinism and theatrical exteriority, achieves a new level of intensification in *The Golden Bowl*, in part because the perspective, still third person, does hover above different characters, and more characters than just Amerigo and Maggie, as James strangely claims. In *Portrait* and even as late as *The Ambassadors*, the focus on a central character – Isabel, or Lambert Strether – occasions the emergence of morality. The reader's proximity to Isabel and access to her obvious intelligent goodness makes it easy to pass judgment on the other characters. Proximity to Strether would function in the same way but for Strether's greater receptivity to difference, to the cosmopolitan values of Paris as possibly modern and progressive rather than decayed and corrupt. Strether is

perhaps more defined by his mobility and circulation than by his placement. There is a formal catch in *The Golden Bowl* which sets it apart from these other two novels: although James claims to have divided the book into two separate sections, one for each main character's consciousness and impressions, each section develops to a vastness that encompasses additional perspectives, not strictly valued or devalued, from the other interested parties. In addition to Prince Amerigo and Maggie, we have Charlotte and Adam, and then we have Fanny and Bob Assingham. In spite of the formal pretence, Amerigo and Maggie do not have traction in the story as voices of authority, at least not any more than Charlotte, and later Adam, who are equally concerned. This is in stark contrast with Isabel Archer, whom James positioned to corner the market on the reader's feelings. This again is James's perspectivism: to be placed is always to be placed in one way, which affords a particular view and, in *The Golden Bowl*, which makes some strategies available for deployment and others unavailable.

In its obsession with placement, *The Golden Bowl* is the perfect culmination of the shift toward surface that Kurnick describes: the novel as story of consciousness finally gives way to the novel as story of positions. Character is translated to pure positionality, and the ramifications of this for anti-humanism are important. In the novel, James makes character a function of position. Unlike Isabel Archer, who has a central core that we might refer to as character, the characters in *The Golden Bowl*, Charlotte especially, cohere only in their desires, which as directional forces cause shifts in position through the novel that consequently change character. The two strategies James uses to emphasize this new sense of character are an insistence on placement and location, and the evacuation of essential character through repetition of stock details (usually by Fanny Assingham). The text first and most thorough strategy can be seen in the way characters alter their relations to one another through discussion that falls back on spatial

language. Initially, Fanny and the Prince discuss how he will have to relate to the immediate presence of Charlotte, his old lover, on the eve of his wedding: “‘Has she come with designs upon me?’ And then in a moment, as if even this were almost too grave, he sounded the note that had least to do with himself. ‘Est-elle toujours aussi belle?’ That was the furthest point, somehow, to which Charlotte Stant could be relegated” (31). Fanny’s line, which signals the resolution of the spatial maneuver Amerigo makes in this passage, suggesting his intention to keep distance between himself and Charlotte and honor his impending marriage to Maggie, recurs throughout the novel: “Then there you are!” (31). At the close of the fraught first reunion with Charlotte to which this discussion with Fanny is a prologue, the upshot revealed to the reader is a confirmation of the Prince’s position, not anything about his subjectivity, his feelings: “he took his departure with the absolutely confirmed impression of knowing, as he put it to himself, where he was. Which was what he had prolonged his visit for. He was where he could stay” (47). Though the word “impression” surfaces here, what is important is awareness of place, rather than knowledge of self. Instead of searching his soul – the microcosm of a moral universe – for evidence of future betrayal, the Prince is assured by the value-free language of “there” and “where”: placement.

Although the line of “there you are” is generally removed in the novel from a language of value, it does suggest a somewhat positive line – as though to mark the achievement of a successful campaign – in comparison with the novel’s variations on this language of position, which have the naturalist whiff of determinism. Fanny feels deprived of agency by Charlotte’s arrival, which puts her in a complex position with regard to the marriage she has arranged between Maggie and the Prince; speaking of her role as matchmaker, she says, “[...] There was no question for me of anybody else when I brought the two others together. More than that, there

was no question for *them*. So you see,’ she concluded, ‘where that puts me’” (57). The emphasis here is on the last, severed clause, “where that puts me”: characters arrive at places naturally, through their own desire, or through arrangements of the social terrain performed by other agents, from other positions.

Charlotte sees herself positionally as well – for the first part of the novel largely as positioned by others, and then her desire takes control and she orchestrates the drama of placement for herself and the people around her. After taking the situation from the Prince and Fanny, she reflects during the walk that leads them to the golden bowl, the object that ultimately reveals the truth to Maggie,

The application in fact presently required that they should sit down a little, really to see where they were; [...]. They had taken, for their walk, to the cropped, rain-freshened grass, after finding it already dry; and the chairs, turned away from the broad alley, the main drive and the aspect of Park Lane, looked across the wide reaches of green which seemed in a manner to refine upon their freedom. They helped Charlotte thus to make her position—her temporary position—still more clear [...]. (72)

The genius of Charlotte, too, is described as a genius of position. For instance, when she is brought in to force out the harpy-ish suitor-women who settle around Adam Verver following Maggie’s marriage to Amerigo: “’She saw, of course, as soon as she came, with her quickness, where we all were. She didn’t need each of us to go, by appointment, to her room at night, or take her out into the fields, for our palpitating tale [...].’” (144). Read with an eye to Charlotte, the novel suggests that understanding of a situation through position is linked to action, and importantly disconnected from interiority. Position can be read off of the surface of people, read from an arrangement of interrelationality; depth is of no interest here.

The deterministic circumstances of experiment familiar from naturalism and other James novels emerge here too, as central to the issue of placement. After Charlotte’s marriage to Adam has been arranged to assuage Maggie’s fears for her father’s loneliness, we again see a language

of morality displaced by a language of position. Virginia Llewellyn Smith puts it nicely, speaking of the reader's "having been increasingly led to see the conflict in terms not of conventional morality but of a game" (xxiii). "It's not that any character has done anything wrong, or breached any moral code – they have just performed a maneuver that placed people differently, favorably or not. Charlotte's position at this point in the novel is more or less unfavorable. Speaking to Fanny, she says, "Nobody could [upset me], for it belongs to my situation that I'm, by no merit of my own, just fixed—fixed as fast as a pin stuck, up to its head, in a cushion. I'm placed—I can't imagine anyone *more* placed. There I *am!*" (187). Charlotte's brief outcry suggests discomfort at her position more than the moral wrongness of some responsible party, and the development and extension of this sense of moral devaluation throughout the novel set it apart, both from James's impressionism and from the humanist language of reform in Zola's naturalism. James makes, here, a radical break with the language of value that Foucault associates chiefly with humanism: Enlightenment (and its tools, like experiment) cannot perform its true function of critique – "crossing over" – while wedded to a human language of value. If that language is maintained, and the values are recognized as the same, then transformation cannot have occurred. Thus what James does in *The Golden Bowl*, by essentially stripping adultery and betrayal of their place in human value systems, is thoroughly radical: he opens, albeit without exploring, the potential for remaking sociality, interrelationality, and alterity, with reference to the position rather than the value of things – people – occupying and moving through social space. This is something quite different than reform.

In addition to the pervasive use of position as the key descriptor for both plot and identity in the novel, Fanny's role indexes the transformation from both the naturalist tradition and James's earlier career into anti-humanist modernism. Previously, as we saw in Zola's essay, the



experimental novel depends as much on the observing and masterful author as it does on the experimental method in order to achieve its goal of revealing the predictability and perfectibility of human subjects. We see, too, in James's overwhelming use of third person narration and the experimental method of storytelling that the role of the experimental novelist can be sadistic – the integrity of the experiment a novel performs is revealed in the abjection of the characters by the conclusion, characters such as Catherine Sloper, Isabel Archer, Kate Croy and Merton Densher, and even, by a narrow margin, Lambert Strether. The author makes the moral thrust of the story clear even as he refuses to intervene, in order to prove an implied point about a social problem – this is true of both James and Zola. *The Golden Bowl* reverses this tradition, and Fanny is part of the reversal. That is, James takes the agency and mastery that accrues to the experimental novelist and disperses it into the novel through Fanny, who is both the book's stand-in for the novelist and a parody of that figure. Like the experimental novelist, she spins out plots – the marriage between Amerigo and Maggie, followed by that between Charlotte and Adam – and although she ostensibly does so because she cares for her friends rather than to prove a point about society, her long drawn out conversations with her husband suggest the high stakes she ascribes to these plots. We know she is meant to be taken parodically because of her narcissistic self-importance, specifically her worry at being blamed when the relation between the Prince and Charlotte outs, and also because, as many critics point out, her name is Fanny Assingham.

To diffuse into the novel the interpretive agency that usually functions to coat a story with moral implications while also discrediting that agency through parody is to cross over...into a form unintelligible from the perspective of James's earlier career. Devaluation through a language of perspective approximates a crossing over as well, into a modernist anti-humanism

that imagines alterity through perspective, in a way inhospitable to the imposition of value. Like Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* but more so, *The Golden Bowl* shows the potential for the social to be divested of its humanism. The rules of conventional, moral interpretation do not apply to *The Golden Bowl*, where Maggie's ultimate victory over Charlotte in gaining back her husband does not confirm Maggie's goodness, just as Charlotte's adultery does not confirm Charlotte's badness. Rather, navigation, ground gained or lost, is the thing, and to speak of these maneuvers outside the shackles of human value moves modernism in the direction it takes from Nietzsche as well: toward a rebuttal of biopower, as the dominant form of power in the twentieth century, identified by Foucault. Biopower was beginning to congeal during James's moment, and it found expression not in the anti-evaluative mode descended from naturalism and the experimental novel, but in stream-of-consciousness, and the most liberal incarnations of impressionism. It is to "life itself" as the contested territory between biopower and anti-humanism that I now turn.

### Chapter 3

#### **High Modernism and Anti-Humanism: Virginia Woolf and “Life Itself,” Between the One and the Many**

##### *Introduction*

Like the first chapter in this study, this chapter will address high modernist anti-humanism; however, unlike the first chapter, it will address those manifestations of anti-humanism specifically *as* high modernist. Where the first chapter offered a general consideration of modernism and anti-humanism, specifically offering Nietzsche as a point of connection, in this chapter I chart, as I did in the second chapter, a moment of anti-humanist emergence along the timeline of modernism. Given the recoil of anti-humanist thought from the belief in linear progress in history, it is necessary for me to offer some explanation for the choice to organize this study chronologically, with the exception of the first chapter. There was an efflorescence of anti-humanism that emerged with naturalism and developed further in Henry James’s late style, and, as I show in the fourth chapter, anti-humanism again spurs prominent literary modes in the 1930s and 1940s, with a complex interwar fatigue regarding formal innovation. High modernist texts – although the figures I address in the first chapter, Yeats and D.H. Lawrence, are essentially high modernist writers – present some complications, but hopefully productive ones. Lawrence, while a high modernist, did not have a mainstream style, or mainstream theories of consciousness and subjectivity, as his *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* attests. And Yeats, though clearly canonical, belongs to a tradition of high modernist poetics that, through T.E. Hulme and Imagism, has more visible links to anti-humanism than its narrative/novelistic counterpart. Even Wyndham Lewis, probably the most

recognizably anti-humanist modernist, can be classified as a high modernist but is not discussed as a pinnacle of the high modernist tradition.

And then there's Virginia Woolf.

Unlike Lawrence and Lewis, Woolf was a highly influential – and today a thoroughly celebrated – high modernist writer. Because she and Leonard Woolf had their own press, their ideas could circulate more widely, but beyond that material reality of circulation Woolf's style struck then – and continues to strike now – a significant chord with her readers and with fellow-writers. Her impressionism built on that of the James of *The Portrait of a Lady*, and her stream-of-consciousness mode developed in a way at first similar to but then divergent from Joyce's mid-career technique (Joyce ultimately emphasized form and language to such an extent that a notably interiorizing technique, juxtaposed with so many other forms, became just another formal surface, became externalizing, quite aligning his type of modernist anti-humanism with poststructuralism in its specific linguistic sense). The attention paid to consciousness and subjectivity in her high modernist works – chiefly *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Waves* – is one of the most easily recognized, one of the most agreed upon traits of high modernism. The access Woolf granted to interiors, as well as the pleasure she took in granting it and the value she by extension conferred on what was exposed, became a dominant representational mode, one that persists, as I will argue with reference to Jeffrey Nealon's account of biopower in Foucault, in literary culture today. Seemingly, Woolf's investment in subjectivity and interiority, through this connection, positions her as a high modernist at odds with anti-humanism. Where anti-humanism favors the exterior, the counter-subjective, the anti-reformist, and the counter-agentive, Woolf is a master of interiority, of the subjective, and shares

at many points (if not necessarily at the level of literary form) the Bloomsbury group's investments in reform and liberalism.

However, Woolf is more complicated than this dichotomy at first suggests. At times she delves deeply into subjectivities, yet she also moves between subjectivities, moving her away from the singular, agentive consciousness I identify with humanism and toward the dispersed human existence that strives to resist the valuation of the one over the many, the dominance of the singular human individual over an outer world that sometimes is a non-human environment and that sometimes classifies other humans themselves as mere setting. Sometimes Woolf reduces the many to the one, canceling the anti-humanist, transformative potential of multiplicity suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, but sometimes the many she depicts is in excess of the one. This flickering, between the one and the many, is at the heart of my consideration of Woolf's anti-humanism; as a flickering, it means that she is not fully an anti-humanist, but it also means that she is not fully humanist. It means that we may find in her more of a challenge to the dominance of biopower than we might expect, given her famed emphasis on interiority and self-exposure. My argument about Woolf is this: in her writings, Virginia Woolf's mediation between the one and the many – while it does not ultimately eclipse singularities in her novels and is sometimes in the last instance diminished by them – offers an instance of high modernist anti-humanism which challenges the dominance of consciousness in high modernist narrative modes. Even if the disruption of consciousness and of singular agency in Woolf is more a germ of a disturbance than a full-fledged disruption, than it is at least significant because, what if part of what makes Woolf so canonical is the fact that she can be read as a humanist? Her humanism, however partial, aligns her with biopower and makes her more accessible, makes her high modernist not just in the temporal sense – “high” as in the 1920s – but in terms of defining the

modernist canon – “high” modernist in the sense of the culmination of modernist form. In what follows, I argue not that Woolf’s high modernism epitomizes high modernist anti-humanism; that would be more true of Yeats or Lawrence, or even Lewis. Instead, I argue that recognizing the anti-humanist germ within Woolf’s complex high modernism threatens to unravel modernism’s bonds to humanism, which have so far in many ways constituted the terms by which modernist studies (especially the “new modernist studies”) has overcome the stigma which prevented modernism from being studied in anything but negative terms for so long. Woolf has become as canonical as she is partly because biopower still triumphs and, relatedly, because she seems so identity politics-friendly. To expose her ties to anti-humanism productively complicates the narrative of modernist studies that still privileges identity, that builds on currently dominant value systems mired in biopower – that, even when modernism is “bad,” finds a way not to question the value systems underwriting designations of bad and good. If even Virginia Woolf can be read along lines of alterity rather than identity, interrelationality rather than subjectivity, micro-agency rather than agency (perhaps I should say Agency), then it is possible to read modernism as anti-humanist, but not just in the deathly way associated with Wyndham Lewis or with modernists who flirted with fascism: in the productive way I detailed in the first chapter, in the way of life. No modernist writer has been more concerned than Virginia Woolf with “life.” In this chapter I will consider how this concept of life allows Woolf to move so interestingly between humanism and anti-humanism.

I should say, too, that Woolf is not the only focus of this chapter. Through Woolf I advance the argument about modernism, but at another level, again as in the first chapter, an argument about anti-humanism itself is being advanced. In the first chapter I argued that anti-

humanism didn't need to be an anti-humanism of the deathly, it could be an anti-humanism of life, that is, an anti-humanism that could be hospitable to life forms up to and including people rather than a narrative of progress imagining a reality fully beyond the human that could dispense with the human, or a narrative envisioning a future of robots. In this chapter, I would like to advance a compatible but distinct argument about anti-humanism; namely, that anti-humanism, as a theory of an evolution to accommodate life further in all its different forms (sometimes human and sometimes other than human, sometimes considering humans as others), needs a historical component. Change in anti-humanism as I theorize it in this study inevitably occurs, though it is not propagated by agents (least of all by Agents), and so anti-humanism has to have a theory of history that diverges from the idea of history as linear progress. I formulate this argument perhaps more elliptically than otherwise, but it is part of the engagement with Woolf in what follows. It appears most in the intersection between Deleuze and Foucault here. Where Deleuzian anti-humanism dominated in the first chapter, here Foucault is evoked as a reminder of the compatibility of anti-humanism with a theory of history – namely, genealogy. This is a complex point given the more ready association of Foucault with a nay-saying, agency-refusing anti-humanism, and given the seeming difficulty with history in Deleuze and Guattari because of their loathing for dialectics. In spite of these difficulties, I fuse Foucaultian and Deleuzian anti-humanisms here to explain why Woolf's groping anti-humanism can only ever be partial (because it does not recognize its own position within the history of humanism, as an affiliate of biopower), and, perhaps more obscurely, their fusing serves as a justification for my own choice to organize this study chronologically. We need to think of anti-humanism historically rather than transhistorically because of the potential for change, transformation, evolution. The modernists were concerned with this just as 1960s philosophical anti-humanism

was, just as anti-humanism is today, but instead of this recognition of similar interests eliding history and promoting anachronism, I want to suggest that all these moments offer different potentials for recognizing how change can happen, but how it is not “change” as figured in linear history. History is not homogeneous, but nor is it a straight line of progress. My framing of modernist anti-humanism as peculiarly historical is a small nod to the need for theories of development and change – even as it is also a nod to the status of change and development as moving forward oddly, misshapenly, non-linearly. In this vein, here is Virginia Woolf.

*Virginia Woolf, Humanist, Proponent of Biopower*

A curious aspect of the few studies of anti-humanism in modernism is that they focus almost exclusively on “high” modernists, either in the temporal or canonical sense and often both. The writers Paul Sheehan considers in his study *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism* are Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf, and Beckett (Beckett is the exception, although his anti-humanism has never been much in question), while Beatrice Monaco, in her recent Deleuzian study *Machinic Modernism*, treats Woolf, Lawrence, and Joyce. Monaco’s Deleuzian readings of Woolf are often compelling. Of *The Waves*, the novel set up as the culmination of her study, Monaco writes,

*The Waves* is a form of narrative “water” in which everything is born of, and folds into everything else; it is a mathematical literary equation for duration; an event of what might be called “bio-art” or “geomorphic” art, as Deleuze and Guattari say of the cosmic work of art. In creating it, Woolf does not allow the narrative surface to multiply into unbounded, inorganic material extension (as in Joyce), but the work remains organically vital by retaining its depth and its positive difference – its positive passive, as well as its positive active. In this way, the work “breathes” like an organism: it is both surface and depth. (187)



Woolf is depicted here as resisting hierarchy and affirming life while continuing to “machine” existence. For Monaco, this means that she balances the non-human aspects of anti-humanism with the more living and human parts:

where Lawrence and Joyce negatively stagnate somewhat, the first veering towards over-defensive protection of vital organic life from modernity, and the second towards an over-schematised mechanism of modernity, the achievement of *The Waves*, in contrast, is that it sustains contact with the fragile balance between representation and life to a greater extent, to the margin of activity that contains clues to evolutionary processes and development. It is in this sense that Woolf does not really fall out of balance with the human or with vital forces, even as she becomes highly technical. (188)

Woolf, then, appears to be precisely the kind of anti-humanist my study has sought to reclaim: an anti-humanist not opposed to the human but perhaps officiating at the conjunction of diverse life forms and forces. As Sheehan puts it, “the human no longer possesses an *a priori* connection to humanism” (x). That is, anti-humanist does not have to mean inhuman. It can mean, as the classification of Woolf as anti-humanist often suggests, a favoring of the vital as unrestricted by the human, an interest in “life.”

Sheehan’s own treatment of Woolf as anti-humanist is more particularized, and focuses on her redefinition of narrative, pushing the novel form past its humanistic limits. He suggests that in Woolf’s high modernist novels, *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*,

the conventional boundaries between the human and the natural are very liberally policed. The narrative poetics they deploy – that is, the particularities of their *telling* – suggest that it is stories that maintain those boundaries in the first place. If narrative is human, for Woolf, it is also a restriction of an individual’s humanity, a singleminded severing of ties with the nonhuman world. The difficulty to be assayed is how the novel form, of all things, can be exploited to keep faith with these precepts. The philosophical attitude that emerges denotes a signal reworking of humanist tenets, and their reinscription as a mutable, variegated form of ahumanism. (127)

Overall Sheehan’s study, in contrast to Monaco’s, is more grounded in a conjunction of various philosophies of anti-humanism and theories of narrative, and so, as indicated here, Woolf makes sense as a theorist of narrative; further Sheehan opts for vocabularies of counterhumanism and

ahumanism rather than anti-humanism. The claim in his study for Woolf's anti-humanism is thus doubly mediated. Still, I am interested in interrogating Sheehan's and Monaco's claims for Woolf's anti-humanism, however qualified, from another anti-humanist perspective: Foucault's perspective.

I approach Foucault by reiterating the suggestion I made above, that it is curious that the high modernists, especially Woolf, should be in such a privileged position in the recent studies of modernist anti-humanism. Prior to studies like Sheehan's, Monaco's, and Tyrus Miller's (to be discussed in the fourth chapter), anti-humanism was predominantly associated with fascist-leaning modernists and particularly with Wyndham Lewis – thus it was largely reviled as party to the heinous genocidal practices we now think of when we hear the word “fascism.” Michael Levenson's and Sanford Schwartz's studies of modernism published in the 1980s, in some ways inaugural texts of modernist studies as we know it today, approached modernist anti-humanism without calling it that. They offered excellent genealogies of the period without plumbing the value systems, or relations to ethics, on which modernist iterations of anti-humanism might rely; because of the associations with fascism, there could be no question of thinking in terms of value. Anti-humanism emerges objectively from Schwartz's study, the project of which he describes as simply “to explore the affiliations between Modernist poetics and contemporaneous developments in philosophy” (3). His goal was to “construct a matrix that brings together a significant number of philosophers and poets, and articulates the relationships among them. This matrix will also provide a new perspective on Modernism itself. It will reveal that the stylistic features of Modernist verse—abrupt juxtaposition, irony, paradox, and the like—were not merely accidents of the history of taste; nor were the critical emphases on impersonality, the unified sensibility, and the autonomy of the literary text merely isolated or arbitrary phenomena” (3). A

view of modernism as anti-humanist – constituted by the “stylistic features” and impersonality Schwartz describes – is a byproduct of historical accuracy here. Signally, Schwartz points out that Nietzsche

celebrates the ceaseless flux of “life,” but he strives to eradicate all traces of metaphysical thinking from his vision of cosmic Becoming. For him “life” manifests itself in the perpetual expressions of “will to power” that bring forth new forms of organizing, interpreting, and mastering reality. At first the expression “will to power” seems no different from any other metaphysical notion: it reduces all of reality to a single governing principle. But soon we realize that Nietzsche is using this notion to undermine metaphysics itself. Will to power is the production of forms that express no underlying unity, the perpetual creation of new modes of life that manifest no universal principle, the ceaseless play of differences without ultimate identity. And in response to this undirected cosmic flux with no first cause and no final goal, Nietzsche calls for the bold affirmation of life, the proud assertion of our power to lay down new values, new interpretations, new forms that create a self-authenticating existence. (38)

This is not the first appearance of this perspective on Nietzsche – emphasizing “life” outside of metaphysics – in the present study, but the significance of invoking it again here is to show the development of modernist studies as a field: the consideration of Nietzsche’s influence on modernism without reference to the value of that influence is part of a particular moment in modernist studies in the eighties.

As Marjorie Perloff writes in her essay on the history of the field, admittedly published in 1992, before the “new modernist studies” happened in 1999,

no literary term has raised more controversy and misunderstanding than [...] *modernism*. [...] Once the site of all that was radical, exciting, and above all new [...], by the early 1970s modernism found itself under attack as a retrograde, elitist movement—at best, the final phase of the great Romantic revolution and, at worst, the aestheticist reaction formation to an alienated social life that had close links to fascism. Thus Fredric Jameson called his 1979 study of Wyndham Lewis *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*. By 1990, the pendulum had swung again: today modernism has become less a derogatory term than a neutral one, referring to the earlier twentieth century. (154)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Though Jameson’s title suggests an acquiescence to the designation of modernism as “bad” that Perloff glosses here, the study itself actually takes a more complex view and paves the way for a reconsideration of modernist anti-humanism. Jameson’s account of Lewis, and Lewis himself, will be considered in greater detail in the present study’s conclusion.

Schwartz and Levenson provide a framework, in its own way implicitly anti-humanist, that sidesteps the problem of modernism's devaluation addressed here by Perloff: they attempt to use historical approaches that divest the content of value. In Levenson's case the approach is "genealogy," with its ties, as criticized by Renaut and Ferry, to Nietzsche's genealogical method.

Foucault effectively captures the anti-humanist resonance of the genealogical method in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." He claims that Nietzsche the genealogist was opposed to any version of history that was "an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to 'that which was already there', the 'very same' of an image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity" (353). This non-genealogical method is posited as faulty implicitly because of metaphysical, humanist underpinnings. Genealogy is something different. Foucault writes,

if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret but the secret that they have no essence, or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. Examining the history of reason, he learns that it was born in an altogether "reasonable" fashion—from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition—the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason. Further, genealogical analysis shows that the concept of liberty is an "invention of the ruling classes" and not fundamental to man's nature or at the root of his attachment to being and truth. What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity. (353)

This definition of genealogy in Foucault, as that which revels in fissures and non-identity, as a model of history outside the schematics of human progress, belongs to the model of evolution

and life discussed by Elizabeth Grosz, in which life regenerates itself through difference – emergence, not progress<sup>25</sup>. This sense of genealogy is also obliquely tied to Foucault’s claim that we have to flee who we are. In the essay “The Subject and Power,” he writes, “Maybe the target nowadays is not to *discover* what we are but to *refuse* what we are” (134, emphasis added). In emphasizing the difference within the subject which can lead to such refusal, Foucault returns to the roots of genealogy, which recognizes the fission implicit in origins, opposed to the very concept of identity. Further, he explains that “the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries” (134). What Foucault suggests here is the development of a power that seems at some remove from the state – though the “individualization” in question here was originally linked to the state, it may now confront us on its own terms, and this evolution is part of the emergence of biopower. Here, we begin to approach the historical valence Foucault adds to anti-humanism through the genealogical method – a valence that complicates a reading of Virginia Woolf as anti-humanist.

As Jeffrey Nealon compellingly argues in *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, Foucault’s works might be read not, as structuralist and poststructuralist works often are, as transhistorical, but rather as charting the history of power relations. Nealon explains, “there’s at least one aspect of Foucault’s work on power that’s not so extensively commented upon: the question of power’s

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<sup>25</sup> In *The Nick of Time*, she writes: “Life is a form of self-overcoming, a form of affirmation, an excess or superabundance of opposing forces, whose internal will, what Nietzsche describes as the will to power, interprets and thereby transforms itself and its world. [...] Nietzsche renders Darwin’s work truly philosophical. He returns Darwinism to the history of philosophy, which has resolutely repressed temporal flow, forcing it to confront physics and cosmology in ways Darwin himself resisted, and he draws out and makes explicit the moral and physical implications of a world without divine plan, a world of emergent order” (10).

historical mutations or the genealogical account of emergent, ‘new’ modes of power. In short, how do dominant modes of power change over time, mutate from one form to another? Or, more specifically, how does Foucault account for those diachronic changes outside the historicism of ‘progress’, or without the teleological metaphors of historical ‘developments’?” (25). With Foucault, this attention to emergence also offers a different account of what scholars tend to recognize as the late Foucault’s embrace of subjectivity (Nealon 14). What Nealon’s account allows for is the possibility that the late Foucault was interested in biopower as one of the more recent intensifications of power – perhaps because biopower is our contemporary mode of power, and one that we often do not recognize as a form of power, it is more difficult to recognize that Foucault is describing it rather than embracing it. Famously discussed in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, biopower is defined there as a conjunction of “concrete arrangements” such as “the deployment of sexuality” and “the emergence of demography, the evaluation of the relationship between resources and inhabitants, the constructing of tables analyzing wealth and its circulation” which together “would go to make up the great technology of power in the nineteenth century,” namely, biopower (140). Biopower is exerted – by us, through us – to create greater access to humanity – again, by humanity, for humanity, etc, not in relation to some external, controlling entity. As Nealon explains, biopower targets simply “life.”

He writes,

For Foucault, biopower is the ascendant type of power at work in modern societies—a very efficient mode of power that infuses each individual at a nearly ubiquitous number of actual and virtual sites, rather than working primarily on specific bodies at particular sites of training (hospital, school, army, factory, store). It’s a form of power “centered not upon the body,” Foucault writes, “but upon life.” Another way of putting this might be that biopower forges an *enabling* link between the seemingly “universal” categories of population or demography and the “individual” idiosyncrasies of everyday life. And the proper name for that link is the “norm.” (46)

Through the norm, biopower improves upon (or rather, makes more efficient – improves from the perspective of power) the power relationship between individual and society posited in earlier modes such as sovereign power and discipline – it makes access to humans, to “life” or “life itself,” much easier by multiplying the available sites, switching from public institutions to private life<sup>26</sup>.

So what of biopower’s relation to modernism? While the groundwork for biopower was perhaps laid more than a century ago, and Foucault seems to argue that the form ripened with the Victorian “repression” of sexuality, Foucault did not theorize a form of power that comes after biopower. Nealon argues persuasively that the current mode is still biopower, citing the prevalence of the memoir, the popularity of body and affect studies in academia, and the reinvestment of the space of the home as evidence of the valorization of the private associated with biopower (85-86). He points out that “personal voice and experience have triumphed at the high cultural end of the literary spectrum,” and that these characteristics are “even more ubiquitously on display in the more popular segments of the book market” (86). Citing the success of Ken Burns and the style of the Vietnam War Memorial, Nealon also explains that “history isn’t real to ‘the public’ in the contemporary United States until and unless it’s run through the ringer of individual subjects and their interior, private experiences” (87). If this shift begins with the prominence of the confessional and similar social forms, as Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality*, and continues today with apparatuses like facebook and twitter, then what particular intensifications of this mode of power were wrought during literary modernism?

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<sup>26</sup> As Nealon also points out, “a genealogy of contemporary biopower would suggest that what we (whoever ‘we’ might turn out to be) have in common is not so much our public lives (our fragmented disciplinary roles as citizen, teacher, activist, worker), but our private lives (our immanent and continuous construction of a lifestyle, a sexuality, an identity). If there is something that we might call the realm of the contemporary ‘common’, that vector of power that directly connects the cultural to the economic, for better or worse Foucaultian biopower will show us that this common takes up residence in the *private* realm, not the *public* sphere” (85)

And what interventions in the mode of power – or redirections of force – did modernists attempt? To suggest the participation of certain instantiations of literary modernism in the propagation of biopower is, as I will show in this chapter, a way of arguing for the continuous history of modernist anti-humanism and philosophical anti-humanism – wherein anti-humanism is a kind of challenge to biopower – at the same time as it gives a better sense of the landscape of literary modernism, considered as much as possible outside of imposed value systems – considering “high” modernism as canonical precisely because it is humanist – and in the context instead of a genealogically excavated history.

On this Foucaultian reading of modernism, Virginia Woolf’s relation to biopower emerges more readily than that of many other modernist writers. We might take as a jumping off point the development Michael Levenson charts in early modernism: “the disintegration of stable balanced relations between subject and object and the consequent enshrining of consciousness as the repository of meaning and value” (*Genealogy* 23). This shift, emergent as Levenson argues in Pater, Conrad, and James, might be seen to culminate in the novels and theory of fiction of Virginia Woolf. Woolf’s reception, perhaps even more than her works themselves, conforms to the current model of biopower Nealon expounds. Woolf is a woman riven by depression, a prolific letter- and diary-writer, recognized (often criticized) for the political quietism – what Rebecca Walkowitz refers to as “evasion” – evident in her novels: Woolf’s valorization of the personal, perhaps chiefly of the human, but explicitly of “life itself,” seems to be the characteristic that most endears her to students of literature. In teaching undergraduate courses on modernism, Woolf’s novels are often the most loved by the students. Consider, too, the popularity of Michael Cunningham’s novel *The Hours* and the subsequent film adaptation, both of which imaginatively mingle Woolf’s own life with her fiction. As subjects of biopower,



enamored of our individuality and private selves, we relate to who Woolf is, and who she is seems to be made more available not just by the academic industry devoted to unearthing her personal documents, but also by her novels and her theoretical writings on literature. Our contemporary belief in the preciousness of the personal is mirrored by what seems to be Woolf's own valuation of interiorities, of subjectivities, of life.

The role of sex in particular in the reception of Woolf's subjectivity is noteworthy in this context. In biopower's deployment of apparatuses like confession, which Foucault discusses at the beginning of *The History of Sexuality* in connection to the repressive hypothesis, this modern form of power invites subjects to expose themselves in discourse. Sex is Foucault's prime example:

One had to speak of sex; one had to speak publicly and in a manner that was not determined by the division between licit and illicit, even if the speaker maintained the distinction for himself (which is what these solemn and preliminary declarations were intended to show): one had to speak of it as a thing to be not simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of a public potential; it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses. [...] A policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses. (24-25)

Foucault's compelling argument here is that sex has not been repressed in culture during and since the Victorian period; rather, sex has been controlled more insidiously, by being brought out into the open rather than being forced to remain hidden. This is more insidious and in keeping with biopower precisely because it allows people to believe that speaking of sexuality and other secrets makes them free, means they are resisting, when in fact self-exposure simply fuels a different kind of control. Speaking the truth to power does not inhibit power, but it does produce the illusion of dissolving the relationship between you and power, making you more comfortable with your existing relation to power rather than altering that relation. The prominence of sexual

permissiveness and in particular talk about sex in Virginia Woolf's social circle of Bloomsbury is instructive in this context.

Interestingly, the published writing of most of the Bloomsbury writers – like Woolf, Forster, or even Keynes – tends to be staid in comparison to that of other modernist writers. Lawrence and Joyce are far more known for the obscenity of their prose, as a result of high-profile censorship trials. However, the private lasciviousness of the Bloomsbury circle is very well known. As Peter Stansky explains in his cultural history of the group, “What was unusual about their conversation, unusual even now, but certainly so in England before the First World War, was their willingness to chat openly about their own and others’ sexual lives” (9). To bear this claim out, Stansky then offers a lengthy quote from Woolf’s essay “Old Bloomsbury”:

It was a spring evening. Vanessa and I were sitting in the drawing room. The drawing room had greatly changed its character since 1904. The Sargent-Furse age was over. The age of Augustus John was dawning.... The door opened and the long and sinister figure of Mr Lytton Strachey stood on the threshold. He pointed his finger at a stain on Vanessa’s white dress.

“Semen?” he said.

Can one really say it? I thought and we burst out laughing. With that one word all barriers of reticence and reserve went down. A flood of the sacred fluid seemed to overwhelm us. Sex permeated our conversation. The word bugger was never far from our lips. We discussed copulation with the same excitement and openness that we had discussed the nature of good. (Qtd. in Stansky 10)

The sense of “barriers” being removed, a palpable feeling of relief at the influx of the private into the public, and in particular the seepage of the values associated with “the nature of good” into the very experience of disclosure, present the markers of biopower at work, bringing sexual transgressions out into the open so they might be better controlled and policed – offering a surfacey freedom to distract from, perhaps not a deeper but definitely a more widespread economic thrall. Although, as I pointed out at the beginning of this paragraph, there is an ostensible tension between the sexual openness Woolf describes here and the seeming absence of

it in her more famous writings, is it possible that these two modes simply present different faces of biopower? That biopower is not about what is revealed, as much as it is about the act and apparatus of revelation?

While sexuality is rarely privileged, certainly not pruriently displayed, in Woolf's novels their chief focus, "life," is also the chief focus of biopower. The preciousness of life is paramount in Woolf's novels and the tension specifically between life and death readily animates much of her writing. The juxtaposition of life, as exemplified by the social intercourse staged during Clarissa Dalloway's party in *Mrs Dalloway*, and death, in Septimus's suicide, indeed forms the structure of that novel, serves to knit the characters together. The sole purpose of Woolf's novels often seems to be the tenuous and generally fleeting unification of a group of people contemplating and valuing life in the face of death: the death of Septimus, the death of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, the death of Percival in *The Waves*.<sup>27</sup> Human community emerges, born of the need to affirm the value of life. In itself, this insight about Woolf is trite, but in the context of biopower, it suggests that Woolf was particularly aligned with the aims of this most recent mode of power, valuing human life, seeking not to impose a universalism outside the universal value of individual, subjective particularity. Beyond the concern with life and death in Woolf's content, her form also, or perhaps especially, capitulates the mode of biopower. Like the current forms of literary culture Nealon describes – no doubt paving the way for such forms – Woolf's use of impressionism and interior monologue provides unprecedented access to the minds of characters and human subjectivity. In a discussion of connections between impressionism and feminism (standpoint theory specifically) Jesse Matz offers some

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<sup>27</sup> Biographical and historical accounts – such as Christine Froula and Peter Stansky – tend to point out the terrible prominence of death in Woolf's own life: her mother's death in 1895 (when Virginia was 13), her half-sister Stella's death in 1897, her father's death in 1904, and her brother Thoby's death in 1906. The influence of Thoby's death in particular on Woolf's writing – especially *The Waves* – can be traced in her diaries.

insight into the relation between Woolf and biopower, also between biopower and high modernism in general: “As a host of critics have noted, what were formerly liabilities became strengths when Modernism revamped the terms of literary genius; liabilities such as emotionality, irrationality, and proximity to private experience made women seem more likely to produce or at least to inspire the immediate, inchoate, and interior modes of writing that modernists came to value” (197). The very literary practices that align Woolf with high modernism and confer value on her as a canonical writer are also those that reveal her affinity with a mode of power that is, according to Nealon, “increasingly [...] invested in the minute details of our lives” (108). While Nealon also suggests that this shift in focus which characterizes biopower invites “modes of resistance” which are “increasingly subtle and intense,” the general sense of Woolf that emerges here is that she is more aligned with biopower than not – that she seems to be, by extension, more humanist than anti-humanist. (108)

Biopower is a humanism because it sanctions the preciousness of the human by privileging and valuing an everyday personalism and individuality – the human as constituted in its most quotidian forms. If humanism is, as I have been defining it in this study, the belief that humans are the agents of history, actors in the drama of historical progress, and the belief that reality is and should be directed toward and seen as the extension of the human, then biopower is a logical intensification of humanism. It extrapolates humanism further into the territory of subjectivity than earlier Cartesianism and metaphysics could bring it. If, as Tony Davies has argued, “the sovereignty of rational consciousness, and the authenticity of individual speech” serve as “the twin pillars of humanism,” then biopower ratchets up the second of these, coercing the conferral of value on that speech and subordinating a larger public world to the private world that hinges on subjectivity (60). Biopower continues the legacy of humanism while further

evolving it by recalibrating agency to the newly dominant realm of private subjectivity. Humanist agency begins to consist in the various modes pioneered through biopower of saying and revealing who we are – the convergence of humanism and biopower is marked by the shift from the grand historical agency associated with Enlightenment ideas of progress to the micro-agencies of everyday private life. Arguably, Virginia Woolf’s modernist innovations in form were instrumental in this shift. Her assertion in her seminal essay, “Character in Fiction,” is that character trumps all. The charge she levels against the “Edwardian writers” including Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett concerning the person of Mrs. Brown, an imagined figure exemplary only in her ordinariness, is that the writers have “looked powerfully, searchingly, and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature” (430)<sup>28</sup>. Woolf goes on to advocate the closest attention to who Mrs. Brown is: “the things she says and the things she does and her eyes and her nose and her speech and her silence have an overwhelming fascination, for she is, of course, the spirit we live by, life itself” (436). Woolf’s theory of modernism quite approximates the terms of biopower: to reveal being in its particular ordinariness, humanity as a value in itself, because it has private thoughts and feelings. Even in its form the previous sentence suggests, through missing commas, the intense immediacy of access to human life that, depending on your perspective, is tied to biopower or to a generative anti-humanism. So, the (or a) Foucaultian reading of Woolf is that she is a dynamic humanist, evolving the humanist belief in agency into an updated, twentieth century form. More even than other high modernists like Lawrence, whose emphasis on sexuality eschews humanist subjectivity, or Joyce, whose concern

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<sup>28</sup> I quote here from “Character in Fiction,” the 1924 essay that appeared in the *Criterion*, but which developed from the earlier short version of “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” (1923) and which Andrew McNeillie explains only underwent minimal revisions before the Hogarth Press issued it as the pamphlet “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown” and before it was simultaneously published in the New York *Herald Tribune* in 1925. (*The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Volume Three, 1919-1924*, fn1, 436-437)

with language avows an early poststructuralist anti-humanism, Woolf arguably offers a humanist template for biopower's access to subjectivity in the literary realm. However, there are complications in reading Woolf entirely as a pro-biopower humanist because of the terminology of "life" and "life itself," which can suggest both humanist and anti-humanist principles. Is Woolf's use of these terms such that it invokes the possibility of the human evolving past itself, beyond humanism, or does it force, as biopower does, the eclipse of all of life by the human (and the human only as defined by humanism)? I turn back now to readings of Woolf as anti-humanist, while I lay the groundwork for my own reading, that her humanism or anti-humanism is undecidable, and that this undecidability – especially the lack of congruence with anti-humanism – is part of what makes her the quintessential high modernist.

In her essay "Virginia Woolf Meets Michel Foucault," Michèle Barrett offers a decidedly different Foucaultian analysis of Woolf. Interested initially in a connection between discussions of Woolf's actual madness and Foucault's theories of madness, Barrett continues from there to find a sympathy between the two writers with regard to a depth model of psychoanalysis: "Both Woolf and Foucault, in being pre-eminently interested in words, in language, in what is said and can be said, sidestep the central thrust of psychoanalysis, which is to go underneath and behind words" (187). Barrett goes on to connect this affinity to Woolf's interest in what I have been calling life itself, and what Barrett calls "internal truth." She finds a connection between Woolf and Foucault here, too. She writes that

Septimus Warren Smith's ability to see "insane truth" stands in for Woolf's more general perception of the importance of an internal truth that goes unrecognized in the rationalist world built by insiders to the system. Only social outsiders can be true to themselves. Her work is peppered with references to vision, truth, integrity and the attempt to render things whole. Foucault says: "Madness deals not so much with truth and the world, as with man and whatever truth about himself he is able to perceive." (189-190)

Instead of emphasizing Foucault's long, historical view of shifts in emergent and residual modes of power, Barrett assumes a transhistorical truth about madness which she finds in Woolf as well. Thus, the significance of "internal truth" in Woolf, which is "particular and momentary: it is a form of what we might call (to use a Weberian category) 'inner-worldly mysticism'," is that by shirking the rational – as Barrett also says, in internal truth there is "no clear dividing line between the sane and the insane truth" – it aligns Woolf with a version of Foucault, and a version of anti-humanism, one that attempts to think being outside of the rational human agent (190). This all contributes to what Barrett prefers to call Woolf's "more agnostic kind of not-humanism," which consists in a "general interrogation of what we would now call 'the human subject'," and which was evident when "Woolf attempted, at times, to represent consciousness from an eerily not-human perspective" (196). Instead of using Foucault to diagnose biopower in Woolf, Barrett finds instead that Foucault's seeming valuation of insanity affords an opportunity to read Woolf's interest in insanity, or "insane truth" in particular, as a repudiation of the constraints humanism forces on humans.

Like Barrett's, Toril Moi's attempt to claim Woolf for anti-humanism comes not from within the context of modernist studies, but rather from the essential femininity debates within feminist poststructuralism. Moi begins by renouncing Elaine Showalter's critique of Woolf's formal modernism as politically irresponsible – Moi identifies Showalter's argument with "a strong, unquestioned belief in the values, [...] of traditional bourgeois humanism of a liberal-individualist kind" (6). Further, she argues that Woolf "radically undermine[s] the notion of the unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism and one crucial to Showalter's feminism" (7). Moi's point here seems to be that we should revere Woolf as anti-humanist because her emphasis on subjectivity undermines a "unitary self" and thus offers a model of a

radical anti-humanist feminism that is more promising than the feminism Showalter espouses. Moi repudiates Showalter's model because, "In this humanist ideology the self is the *sole author* of history and of the literary text: the humanist creator is potent, phallic and male – God in relation to his world, the author in relation to his text. History or the text become nothing but the 'expression' of this unique individual: all art becomes autobiography, a mere window on to the self and the world, with no reality of its own. The text is reduced to a passive, 'feminine' reflection of an unproblematically 'given', 'masculine' world or self" (8). While I take issue with Moi's claim that Woolf's modernist emphasis on subjectivity necessarily disrupts the unitary self of humanism rather than sometimes shoring it up instead, Moi does remind us that there was a time when anti-humanism was, at least in the context of feminism, a positive value that could "rescue" Woolf from the obscurity of seeming political quietism. Moi calls into question the necessary identity politics of feminism when she celebrates a broad anti-humanism in Woolf. Drawing on Derrida's "textual and linguistic theory," Moi argues that "we can read Woolf's playful shifts and changes of perspective, in both her fiction and in *Room*, as something rather more than a wilful desire to irritate the serious-minded feminist critic. Through her conscious exploitation of the sportive, sensual nature of language, Woolf rejects the metaphysical essentialism underlying patriarchal ideology, which hails God, the Father or the phallus as its transcendental signified" (9). Further, "Woolf does more than practice a non-essentialist form of writing. She also reveals a deeply sceptical attitude to the male-humanist concept of an essential human identity" (9). The definition of anti-humanism in feminism of the 1980s – as with Moi – or the 1990s – as with Barrett – establishes a precedent for considering Woolf as anti-humanist, but the anti-humanism of anti-essentialist, poststructuralist feminism is strikingly different from the Nietzsche-influenced concept of anti-humanism that developed in the context of modernism



itself and which emerged in Levenson and Schwartz, and more recently as an outcropping of the new modernist studies.<sup>29</sup>

*Toward Virginia Woolf, Anti-Humanist*

I have identified four theoretical configurations here that are relevant to a discussion of Woolf's anti-humanism: modernist scholarship in the 1980s (Schwartz; Levenson), which revealed the anti-humanist roots of canonical (then, largely male) modernism through a historical, often specifically genealogical approach; Foucault's theory of biopower as a mode of power that emerged at a particular point in history, but that remains dominant today; feminist poststructuralism (Moi; Barrett), which explicitly took up Woolf as emblematic of a less reductive, not strictly identitarian feminism; and the recent accounts of modernist anti-humanism (Sheehan; Monaco), which overlap at some points with the values of the "new modernist studies" – including what Rebecca Walkowitz and Douglas Mao refer to as "expansion" in all directions (*PMLA* 737) – but which are more notable for considering modernist anti-humanism largely transhistorically, and in connection to the most current version of the modernist canon, of which Woolf herself may be the most recognizable head. I bring these configurations together to suggest a gap, a formation I view as needing a corrective. On one side we have the two historically based formations, Foucault and 1980s modernist criticism, neither of which considers Woolf, while on the other side we have two comparatively transhistorical formations – poststructuralist feminism and recent studies of modernist anti-humanism – which emphasize Woolf, not, as I would argue, primarily because she is a modernist anti-humanist (although she may be), but because she is canonical. Although there may have been a time when Woolf was

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting here that Elizabeth Grosz's critique of humanism also emerged out of a feminist engagement. That there are stakes to be gained by minoritized groups through appeals to anti-humanism rather than a universalist humanism is another – and a hugely important – part of the debate about anti-humanism's potential for change.

reviled for being apolitical, for being too bourgeois, for being too weakly feminist (in the case of Showalter's argument) or simply (perhaps indirectly) for being a woman, today she occupies a special place in modernist studies. It is now valuable to find connections between Woolf and whatever area you are working to "expand" modernist studies to include. If on some readings Woolf was apolitical, guilty of "evasion," then she at least spoke out unmistakably against fascism in *Three Guineas*, and regrettably there are few major modernists who match her in this instance. In the context of anti-humanist modernism especially, it would help to discover affiliations with Woolf, who has none (or at least few – except for class prejudices, we'll get to that) of the political drawbacks of Wyndham Lewis, or Pound, or even Yeats. My aim in juxtaposing these related accounts is to suggest that an account of Woolf and anti-humanism is necessary which would weigh her connections to biopower through innovative representations of subjectivity against her treatment of alterity through interrelationality, an additional anti-humanist mode that remains to be explored here. Even if Woolf's exploration of subjective experience can be linked to the expansion of biopower, it is less clear how her multiplication and juxtaposition of different subjective experiences affected biopower and thus also the modernist conflict between humanism and anti-humanism.

As I have suggested at various points during this study, interrelationality may be the key to reconciling anti-humanism to the human; it may even allow for something approximating anti-humanist ethics to emerge. If anti-humanism has an ethics, it is in the approaches to alterity, to encounters with the other, that it espouses. On a certain reading, alterity is the foremost concern of anti-humanism. If the rhetorics of humanism have served to explain how the human is to be defined, and aligned with universalism to distribute rights to those designated "human"

accordingly, then the “other,” as that which falls outside these definitions of the human, is the proper concern of anti-humanism. Anti-humanism, and perhaps to an even greater extent post-humanism, considers entities not traditionally classified as human and weighs the relationship between these beings – between all beings – and the human. The question asked by anti-humanism or post-humanism about the other – as opposed to the questions of identity politics – is not about the righteousness of these beings’ claims to the rights of the human; rather it uses these beings’ perceived distance from the human to interrogate the value of the human itself.

Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy of an ethics founded on the other serves as a useful jumping off point for this discussion. Levinas is concerned with the problem of alterity, of mankind’s responsibility to the other and of the need for that responsibility to not take the form of converting the other into the same, but he ultimately argues that respect for alterity is a humanism. The conflict here, between respect for the other necessitating anti-humanism or relying on humanism, is complicated by Levinas’s terms. In *Humanism of the Other*, Levinas characterizes – and repudiates – the critique of humanism as “a rejection of responsibility” (69). Yet, he also defines his new humanist pursuit in terms that, aside from the humanist overtones of “responsibility,” resonate with the definition of anti-humanism I have been offering here:

But that responsibility endured beyond all passivity from which no one can unleash me in raising me up from my incapacity to close myself in, that responsibility from which the Ego cannot escape—the ego for which the other cannot substitute himself—designates the uniqueness of the irreplaceable. Uniqueness without interiority, ego without repose in self, hostage of everyone, diverted from self in every movement of its return to self—man without identity. Man understood as an individual of a genus or as a *being* situated in an ontological region, persevering in being like all substances, has no privilege that would establish him as the aim of reality. But man must also be thought from the responsibility more ancient than the *conatus* of substance or interior identification, thought from the responsibility that, always calling on the outside, precisely disturbs that interiority; man must be thought from self putting himself despite himself in the place of everyone, substituted for everyone because of his very non-interchangeability; man must be thought from the condition or incondition of hostage, hostage of all the others who, precisely others, do not belong to the same genre as me, because I am responsible for them without

reposing in their responsibility to me which would allow them to substitute themselves for me, because even for their responsibility I am, in the last analysis and from the beginning, responsible. (68)

Levinas recognizes the alignment of his project with the anti-humanist view that man is not “the aim of reality,” and he also imagines the human as an exteriorized, outward-directed entity that is “without identity.” The chief conflict with anti-humanism is, again, responsibility which, even as it prevents a conversion of the other into the same – which would constitute a disrespect for the particularity and autonomy of the other – nonetheless implies a hierarchy between the other and the self, with the self taking responsibility for the other, caring for it under its own auspices. Further, it implies a relation between the other and the self that is universally reproducible – the formation imagines a context in which the beings involved define responsibility in exactly the same way. As the end of this quotation suggests, the self’s responsibility to the other must be prior to the other’s otherwise symmetrical responsibility to the self, to you. While this does put Levinas’s formula somewhat at odds with anti-humanism, it provides a helpful way of reading Virginia Woolf, and showing her betweenness, her inability to be fully reconciled with either humanism or anti-humanism. That is, her emphasis on interrelationality, her concern with how humans interact with each other and how they find ways to be accountable to one another (or not) is more rightly explained by a modified Levinasian ethics of alterity than either a Deleuzian or Foucaultian anti-humanism used on its own: Foucault adds a necessary component of historicity to the Deleuzian anti-humanism I established in the first chapter, and Levinas highlights the potential for interrelational anti-humanism also hinted at in Deleuze and Nietzsche. Anti-humanism need not be a disinterest in the conditions of the other, throwing up its hands because there is no human agency; it might instead offer a respect for the other more

radical than Levinas's, searching for ways to observe alterity and enact micro-engagements with the other which do not close around the other in the manner suggested by responsibility.

In her article on *The Waves*, Tamlyn Monson begins to consider the interrelational, Levinasian potential of Woolf's modernism; she reads the novel through a combined Levinasian/Kristevan lens. In a discussion of Bernard, arguably the novel's most prominent character, Monson writes:

The gestures of the social fabric thus constitute the subject's defenses against the idea of the limits of subjectivity, especially its ultimate limit: death. Life is associated here with singular, reduced identity, that is, the same, while death is associated with multiplicitous, unbounded identity. The point of view indicated by these associations is that of a necessarily symbolic subjectivity, which cannot exist without its protective horizons. [...] Although Bernard wishes to reach the Other, to confront it in its infinity, thereby returning to a semiotic heterogeneity, this attraction cannot be consummated without embracing a dissolution of boundaries and a paralysis that would signal subjective death. The alterity beyond the limits of the subject thus threatens the very possibility of being; [...]. (181)

Monson ultimately finds *The Waves* to be critical of an absolute ethics of the other, wherein the other is so radical it is figured as death itself, but elsewhere – for instance, with the parallel between Clarissa, who embraces life, and Septimus, who embraces death, in *Mrs Dalloway* – Woolf displays a more sanguine attitude toward death-as-other: death is an alterity that remains other, but that need not be fully recoiled from, as Monson suggests. Also, however ultimately damning for its view of the impossibility of human (or counter-human) evolution as emerging from the encounter between self and other, Monson's account paves the way for anti-humanist modifications of Levinas in interpreting Woolf.

Perhaps the most productive path so far for reading Woolf on interrelationality has come not from specifically anti-humanist work, but from Jessica Berman's study of modernist cosmopolitanism. As she argues, "Woolf develops an expanded notion of personal identity, one that constitutes subjectivity as coming into being always in fluctuating relation to a small group

of affiliated yet singular others” (121). Berman suggests the importance of communities of loosely conjoined subjectivities – groups of others interacting – not only as an alternative to national and other more authoritarian group formations (this is part of what makes it cosmopolitan), but also as an alternative to identity. Berman speaks of communities that would be “more cooperative than collective, predicated on the continuing diversity of beings who nonetheless exist together” (122). This formation allows for alterity without insisting on responsibility as a contingency plan, for when humans in general go wrong (of course Woolf was before the Holocaust and Levinas was after – their historical positions no doubt shape their approaches); it is anti-humanist to the extent that its idea of cooperation rejects the priority of any party within the social relation over any other party.

Berman develops the point that Woolf’s cosmopolitanism fosters non-authoritative relations with the other further, advocating an almost Deleuzian reading of Woolf as following this formation to its logical conclusion, finding the multiplicity within the self. Regarding *Orlando* and *The Waves* in particular, Berman writes:

these characters become socially and historically significant within a domain of affiliation. Woolf creates them in a sphere in which being implies being-with-others, and yet without reference to specific external social structures or shared political agendas. Further, as Bette London makes clear, the narrative voices that Woolf develops in the twenties “deauthorize the speakers, transgress the boundaries of individual utterance, and call into question the figures that mark the voice as a whole,” thus expanding the realm in which character and community coexist. (131).

The boundaries of the self are dissolved here in a way that recalls a particular Deleuzian anti-humanism, of the Body without Organs, of machinic assemblages, of multiplicities that are simultaneously the many and the one. This is at stake in a passage from *A Thousand Plateaus* where Deleuze and Guattari address a specific moment in another high modernist text, Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. Regarding the emergence of the narrator, Marcel’s, great love,

Albertine, they write: “We each go through so many bodies in each other. Albertine is slowly extracted from a group of girls with its own number, organization, code, and hierarchy; and not only is this group or restricted mass suffused by an unconscious, but Albertine has her own until the end of their love returns her to the indiscernible” (36). Whereas in Deleuze and Guattari this slip between the one and the many facilitates a peculiar monism that rejects any ultimate reduction of the multiplicity down to one – a monism of the multiplicity, many/one instead of a binary pair – in Woolf’s novels the one threatens, at times, to engulf the many.

To bear out this point about Deleuze and Guattari, I turn to a passage in the “1914: One or Several Wolves?” plateau (or chapter) wherein psychoanalysis stands in for modes of interpretation more generally as a pernicious instigator of the reduction to the one, either one being or, in the case of interpretation, one meaning. Deleuze and Guattari write: “The Wolf-Man keeps howling: Six wolves! Seven wolves! Freud says, How’s that? Goats, you say? How interesting. Take away the goats and all you have left is a wolf, so it’s your father... That is why the Wolf-Man feels so fatigued: he’s left lying there with all his wolves in his throat, all those little holes on his nose, and all those libidinal values on his body without organs. The war will come, the wolves will become Bolsheviks, and the Wolf-Man will remain suffocated by all he had to say” (38). It is in the theory of multiplicity that Deleuze and Guattari’s anti-humanism most disrupts the assumption that anti-humanism quells agency; rather, the agency is of the assemblage. Similarly, evolution – another way of saying “change” – happens at the micro-level, where the one is recognized as itself a multiplicity, in which the parts develop in productive friction with one another, creating new “assemblages,” instigating change. Whereas the analyst/analysand relationship Deleuze and Guattari dramatize here (Freud/Wolf-Man) constitutes a duality that results in a stifling stagnation, Deleuze and Guattari counter that the

subject is a multiplicity, not to be determined by a singular interpretation. The theory of the multiplicity also disrupts the self-other dichotomy I have been examining: the self and the other coexist in the multiplicity, neither taking responsibility for the other, nor does either impose its will on the other. Multiplicity offers a model of the social wherein an ethics of alterity can flourish: the multiplicity is the other, and the other, and the other, to infinity – there is no self to overarchingly take responsibility, only others coexisting and producing together, or put differently, only selves coexisting and producing. What matters is simply that there is not a hard dichotomy or binary, so there can be no fixed hierarchy and no imposed value or definitive agency. While Woolf is concerned with the “co-operative” as Berman suggests, the relation she posits does have some tensions with the anti-humanist alteriphilic – other-loving – multiplicity emphasized by Deleuze and Guattari.

In discussing *Orlando*, Berman points out the “community of selves that people Orlando” – she speaks of the character Orlando containing many characters (131). Berman thus argues that *Orlando* counters a coherent theory of identity, ostensibly locating the novel as an anti-humanist text, undermining the pretensions to wholeness, autonomy, and agency that coherent identity implies. She writes,

*Orlando* seems to substitute a supple and expanded notion of character for communal history, while at the same time resisting the consolidation of identity that underlies the mythic hero. Orlando’s extraordinary series of connected identities makes it nearly impossible to read the novel without in some way conceiving of Orlando as a *multiple* figure with very different socio-historical roles. Orlando’s essential quality seems to be that he/she knows, and is, all of her identities at once and cannot therefore be restricted to the progress of a hero/heroine – even one seen as extremely supple. We must resist the temptation to point out the “core” of identity that stays the same in Orlando – for there can be no core in so contingent a figure, no singularity when the character changes form (sex), dress (gender), language (poetic diction), state (marriage), and if not very often, age. (133)



Berman argues compellingly for Woolf's rethinking of character in this novel as a function that could thwart identity in most traditional ways, but in another sense Orlando's multiplicity seems to grant the character more autonomy and agency – even in traditional terms – rather than radically disrupting our understanding of agency. Orlando, as Berman points out, “knows” and “is” all of his/her identities at once – to be all of the identities at once retains multiplicity, but to know them suggests an overarching autonomy that contains and controls – a larger agency or consciousness capable of wrangling the identities in favor of some coherence that persists, at least on the surface we know by the name of “Orlando” in the novel. Berman's argument here is convincing, particularly in the context she chooses, wherein Woolf negotiates in her novels the tension between “splinter” and “mosaic,” as Berman puts it, in order to respond to the particular situation of emergent fascisms in England and abroad. Berman aligns *Orlando* with the kind of communal filiation that, in line with the coalitions imagined in *Three Guineas*, might be able to combat fascism. Spread outward in Berman's account so that self truly is radically dissolved, “Orlando-as-community comes to represent the potential past of women that cannot exist as a common experience to be remembered or drawn upon. It is this version of a potential common past that becomes ‘thinking back through [one's] mothers’ in *A Room of One's Own*” (138). Further, according to Berman, *Orlando* goes so far as to reveal “the expansion of subjectivity beyond the determination of the body” (138). How can this be so when that subjectivity, however compounded and expanded, can still be named as “Orlando”? Or can it be so when Woolf herself famously made character the cornerstone of her template for modern writing as an art form?<sup>30</sup> In the rest of the chapter, I will read *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The*

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<sup>30</sup> Referring to “great novels,” i.e. not Georgian novels, in “Character in Fiction,” Woolf writes, “if you think of these books, you do at once think of some character who has seemed to you so real (I do not by that mean so lifelike) that it has the power to make you think not merely of itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes – of religion, of love, of war, of peace, of family life, of balls in county towns, of sunsets, moonrises, the immortality of

*Waves* with an eye to this tension between the one and the many, the implications of this tension for alterity, and the significance of Woolf's iterations of this tension for a theory of anti-humanist modernism.

Mrs. Dalloway: *The Democracy of Consciousness*

The first of Woolf's high modernist novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) navigates the tension between the one and the many deftly, suggesting an interrelationality legitimately irreducible to the chiefly individual human, the indivisible unit of agency and progress under humanism.

While the fact that the novel is called *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests a unity of perspective calibrated through or around an individual character, the relation between Clarissa and Septimus routs the focus implied by the title and the symmetrical ending, when Peter Walsh, seeing Clarissa across the room at her party, seemingly allows Clarissa Dalloway to eclipse the radical plurality of subjectivity otherwise fostered by the novel. Getting ready to leave with Lady Rosseter, who had in youth been Sally Seton, Peter closes out the scene:

“I will come,” said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement?  
It is Clarissa, he said.  
For there she was. (194)

Although the text closes in in this way around an individual – a tendency that emerges in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, as well – the disruption of the one/many relationship throughout the rest of the novel not only confirms Jessica Berman's argument that Woolf's anti-fascist interest in cooperation led to a cosmopolitan ethics. In addition, the complexity and plurality Woolf

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the soul. [...] And in all these novels all these great novelists have brought us to see whatever they wish us to see through some character. Otherwise, they would not be novelists; but poets, historians, or pamphleteers” (426). Perhaps asserting the significance of character for good novels, as Woolf does here, does not preclude her from intervening in definitions of character, as Berman suggests she does. However, Woolf's favoring of single characters, like Mrs. Brown in the above quoted essay, or Orlando, or Clarissa Dalloway, sometimes does get in the way of a radical expansion of character into multiplicity.

brings to the concept of character in this novel shows how interrelationality, as tied to an anti-humanist dethroning of singular subjectivity associated with rationality and agency, offers an anti-humanist mode for which ethics itself is not anathema. The subjectivities that people *Mrs. Dalloway* modify the circuitry of communication between humans such that sympathy between people dominates over coherent selfhood. Even as the novel is named for one person and closes with the focus back on her, the proliferation of other subjectivities is in excess of this implied coherence of character – and productively, wonderfully in excess.

In her discussion of the tension between “I” and “We” that often productively informed Virginia Woolf’s writings, Gillian Beer pays special attention to *Mrs. Dalloway*, calling it “the first of her works which moves about within a community poised in a historical moment, and explores the mass behind the single voice” (52). Further,

The reader becomes the medium of connection, partly through our assumed familiarity with these same places and history, partly through the lateral entwining of the narrative and its easy recourse to the personal pasts of memory, the communal past of an imagined prehistory. Woolf uses several means of representing those impersonal intimacies of juxtaposition and association which usually go unrecorded. The closed car and the aeroplane are seen by the various figures in the book. More subtle and more mysterious are the two old women, of whom one, singing beside Regent’s Park tube station, takes us back past language to a semiological cradle-land surviving into the present. (53)

Indeed, Woolf finds innovative ways, using the conceit of a contained space – London – and a contained time – a single day – to bring characters’ thoughts up against one another, showing through the famous scenes with the car and the skywriting that all consciousnesses are, in some sense, equal. All equally worthy of representation, with equal access to truth, all outside of a hierarchy of human value which, for at least these moments in the text, allows the reader some distance from the centrality of a single subjectivity implied in the novel’s framing.

Consider, in the passage about the car, the equal weighting of perspectives of “main” or “round” characters like Clarissa and Septimus – the Mrs. Browns of the novel – alongside the

perspectives of characters we will never hear from again. We have Edgar J. Watkiss who, “with his roll of lead piping round his arm, said audibly, humorously of course: ‘The Proime Minister’s kyar’” (14). Then Septimus Warren Smith, whom we encounter for the first time here:

And there the motor car stood, with drawn blinds, and upon them a curious pattern like a tree, Septimus thought, and this gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes, as if some horror had come almost to the surface and was about to burst into flames, terrified him. The world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames. It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? But for what purpose? (15)

Septimus’s notably particular perspective – his pattern of thought obviously distinctive, as off-kilter as that of Judge Schreber in *Anti-Oedipus*, a body without organs who “has sunbeams in his ass” (2) – is followed by Lucrezia, who “could not help looking at the motor car and the tree pattern on the blinds. Was it the Queen in there—the Queen going shopping?” (15). Then Clarissa: “It is probably the Queen, thought Mrs. Dalloway, coming out of Mulberry’s with her flowers; the Queen. And for a second she wore a look of extreme dignity standing by the flower shop in the sunlight while the car passed at a foot’s pace, with its blinds drawn. The Queen going to some hospital; the Queen opening some bazaar, thought Clarissa” (16-17). And there are still more, still weighted evenly. “Shawled Moll Pratt” – of whom we do not hear again – “with her flowers on the pavement wished the dear boy well (it was the Prince of Wales for certain) and would have tossed the price of a pot of beer—a bunch of roses—into St. James’s Street out of sheer light-heartedness and contempt of poverty had she not seen the constable’s eye upon her, discouraging an old Irishwoman’s loyalty” (18-19). I have not offered all the perspectives that Woolf does here – and she does the same with the section, right after the treatment of the car, where people are again united in observing the skywriting airplane. There are myriad significances to be found in these scenes – not least the shift from a culture based on class distinction (royalty in the car) to one based on the market (the plane is writing an advertisement

for toffee) – but in the context of anti-humanism the devaluation of a central consciousness is notable. To break perception down laterally, as Beer suggests, and spread it out among a group, is implicitly to decenter the rational agentive subject of the Enlightenment. When perception and thus agency are distributed among the many, as they are here, human interaction becomes legible outside paradigms of domination, hierarchy, or even dialectics, in which one term is continually superseding another. Interrelationality in these passages, which intercalate individual units in a way that refuses hard self/other breaks and which thus re-form alterity (especially as juxtaposed with Levinas’s theory), emerges as in line with the Deleuze and Guattarian emphasis on the productivity of multiplicity. Agency, or other valued modes of being human, comes from micro-interactions among relatively equal, non-binarized units. Perception and knowledge among the people in these scenes amounts to a joint composition, by which different units see from different positions and all bring something different to the reader’s understanding of the whole scene.

In scenes like these, Woolf privileges what might be referred to as a democracy of consciousness. Through synchronic horizontality, these carefully orchestrated group moments show an articulated interaction, wherein all the participants are granted interiority and thus significance, and we see them all responding to a stimulus. In keeping with Woolf’s anti-fascism, these scenes break a “mass” down into thinking, perceiving individual units, responding rather than being manipulated. “Democracy” suggests the equality these named individuals gain by being relatively rational, relatively autonomous subjects in a loose group – and consciousness, rather than seeming to have added value in these passages, serves to separate the observers from each other in order to remove the need for something as extreme as Levinasian responsibility in the face of alterity. In these passages, the characters are all others, there is no dominant self. Perhaps Septimus is more other, as we see when we are granted access to his consciousness, but

the trajectory of the novel seems specifically to want to repudiate the imposition of responsibility on Septimus, the recognition of his alterity as particularly other in order to take care of it more effectively.

These group scenes are not, of course, the only presentation of inter-human interactions in the novel; two others warrant treatment here. While the observing groups move in the direction of an anti-humanism that devalues agency while valuing the social (even as they still retain a sense of decorum and rationality that we associate with the human), the novel also evinces the more humanist, more subjective mode which connects Clarissa, Peter, Richard, Hugh, Sally – the people who had shared experiences at Bourton – through memory. In scenes connecting these characters, the relations of dominance and submission return, though they are not always stable and fixed. The diachrony of memory trumps the synchrony that disrupts singular subjectivities when many people are arranged in one space, and these more subjective interludes restore humanist hierarchies wherein characters are invested with value, subordinated, positioned at a lower or higher point on a ladder of human being which doles out rights according to proximity or distance from the fully human. In Woolf's defense, this is simply how narrative and character tend to function, but it is interesting that within the same novel she experiments with different, more anti-humanist modes. To speak of one of these more subjective scenes, there is the exchange where Peter Walsh visits Clarissa at home – seeing inside their thoughts reveals the struggle each of them is having in order to be the self in the encounter and to reduce their counterpart to the other. In Peter's thoughts: "Stop! Stop! he wanted to cry. For he was not old; his life was not over; not by any means. He was only just past fifty. Shall I tell her, he thought, or not? He would just like to make a clean breast of it all. But she is too cold, he thought; sewing, with her scissors; Daisy would look ordinary beside Clarissa. And she would

think me a failure, which I am in their sense, he thought; in the Dalloways' sense" (43). Clarissa feels, internally the same vulnerability, reflecting on Peter's fidgety habits and how they affect her:

Always making one feel, too, frivolous; empty-minded; a mere silly chatterbox, as he used. But I too, she thought, and, taking up her needle, summoned, like a Queen whose guards have fallen sleep and left her unprotected (she had been quite taken aback by this visit—it had upset her) so that any one can stroll in and have a look at her where she lies with the brambles curving over her, summoned to her help the things she did; the things she liked; her husband; Elizabeth; her self, in short, which Peter hardly knew now, all to come about her and beat off the enemy. (44)

In these passages, Clarissa's in particular, the emphasis is not so much on a productive encounter with an other outside the self, but on the reaction formation of identity – these are the facets Clarissa “summoned to her help” – which such encounters sometimes produce. The memories Clarissa and Peter share from Bourton make the encounter humanistically restrictive, causing the two to shore up their interior selves instead of interacting, instead of breaking down their congealed human selves and experiencing the dynamic flux of life. And another interesting part of the encounter, one which problematically recurs in Woolf, is the other person who shares it with them: Lucy, the maid. Between Peter's thoughts and Clarissa's, we have this aside, breaking Peter's protective focus on his identity: “(Here Lucy came into the room, carrying silver, more silver, but charming, slender, graceful she looked, he thought, as she stooped to put it down.)” (43). The servants are relegated unchangingly to alterity (in a negative way, in a way that suggests inequality) in Woolf's novels, transformed into the background in the face of the subjectively human foreground, here constituted by the fluttering and privileged consciousnesses of Peter and Clarissa. Even as the scene depicts the marshalling of identity between Peter and Clarissa as simultaneously humanist (because identity implies a rational, autonomous self) and restrictive of life, the unexamined reduction of Lucy as not, herself, having a consciousness,

unlike the characters in the earlier group scene, inadvertently reverts to a humanistic hierarchy of modes of being.

The third mode of human interaction in the novel consists of more respectful, distanced, dyadic relations. The novel depicts this in the sympathy between Clarissa and Septimus, drawn out structurally throughout the novel, and culminating in her meditation: “She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun” (186). This relation, like the relation Clarissa also imagines herself in with the woman she watches through her window, relies on a non-dominative connection, one not based on knowledge of the other, and one not constructive of identity in the face of the other. Both parties mingle in a non-hierarchized respect which implies an anti-humanist mutuality of alterity. Clarissa hates, too, the doctor, Sir William Bradshaw, when he comes to her party because she sees how he could reduce and dominate a patient – a patient that could have been herself, but that was Septimus. She thinks, on his arrival, “Why did the sight of him, talking to Richard, curl her up? He looked what he was, a great doctor. A man absolutely at the head of his profession, very powerful, rather worn. [...] He had to decide cases of appalling difficulty. Yet—what she felt was, one wouldn’t like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; not that man” (182). The sympathy between Clarissa’s thought and Septimus’s is somehow more poignant by not fully being realized by either of them – the text positions them in sympathy, she more knowingly so than he, without the two ever meeting, and this makes it a better rendering of sympathy within alterity.

The closeness between Clarissa’s sense about Dr. Bradshaw and Septimus’s own much more urgent expression against the medical establishment earlier is notable: “Human nature, in



short, was on him—the repulsive brute, with the blood-red nostrils. Holmes was on him. Dr. Holmes came quite regularly every day. Once you stumble, Septimus wrote on the back of a postcard, human nature is on you. Holmes is on you. Their only chance was to escape, without letting Holmes know; to Italy—anywhere, anywhere, away from Dr. Holmes” (92). This – the unrelenting war of human nature against Septimus, which he sees because he could not feel (because it was clear that in not feeling he wasn’t like the others) –leads ultimately to Septimus’s certitude that he must die. When he sees that Rezia sees Dr. Holmes as good, as a help, he has this revelation:

So he was deserted. The whole world was clamouring: Kill yourself, kill yourself, for our sakes. But why should he kill himself for their sakes? Food was pleasant; the sun hot; and this killing oneself, how does one set about it, with a table knife, uglily, with floods of blood,—by sucking a gaspipe? He was too weak; he could scarcely raise his hand. Besides, now that he was quite alone, condemned, deserted, as those who are about to die are alone, there was a luxury in it, an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know. Holmes had won of course; the brute with the red nostrils had won. But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay, like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world. (92-93)

Here, Woolf depicts Septimus as in a conflict with the forces of biopower: he loves life in a basic, physical way – food, the sun – but not in ways that would require him to join forces with “human nature,” which values life according to one’s ability to experience life normally, to feel normally. The recourse Septimus has to biopower, to human nature, is to kill himself – as a body without organs, reacting against the macro-organization of life, the hierarchization and humanization of life, Septimus’s mode of being is not sustainable. Perhaps if human nature were not “upon him,” in the policing form of Dr. Holmes and then Dr. Bradshaw, his different mode of life could be sustainable. This, Woolf seems to suggest, is the difference between Septimus and Clarissa: human nature is not upon her yet, and so she can simply appreciate the difficulty of preferring to live that way, as Septimus does but without the verdict of society which Septimus

sees he can't escape. She can love a form of life that is not humanized life, which the novel suggests is macro-organized, built in consciousness internally but through external pressures in order to value the edifice of the human. Because of his anti-humanist sacrifice, she can experience life unfettered by the crushing weight of humanism. She can embrace her refrain: "*Fear no more the heat o' the sun*" (9).

The question which mitigates the triumph at the end of the novel – we might call it Clarissa's triumph in Septimus's name – though, is, what kind of structure ultimately connects Clarissa and Septimus? In the terms of metaphor, is the relation a definitionally failed but poststructurally viable one, where no term in the pair trumps the other, or is Clarissa, as the opening and closing focus on her may suggest, the dominant term, the tenor, reducing Septimus to the vehicle? It is in this way that Woolf's forms often complexly refuse to decide between humanist and anti-humanist modes.

To the Lighthouse: *Humans ≈ Characters?*

Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) evinces much the same concern as *Mrs. Dalloway* with more and less hospitable-to-life relations between characters, although it focuses slightly more than the earlier novel on the identity-forcing, damaging, and humanistic relationships of which paired-gender interactions constitute a truly pernicious form. But in the novel Woolf also, as has been noted in anti-humanist accounts of her work, tackles anti-humanism more directly through the "Time Passes" section of the novel, in which she claimed to represent the world as we might imagine it outside of human consciousness.<sup>31</sup> As she writes in

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<sup>31</sup> Here is Beatrice Monaco's account of the section's anti-humanism: "What 'Time Passes' is ultimately showing is that it becomes immaterial to semantically differentiate between time, or nature or even space because in reality – that is, in practice – they are metaphysically commensurate with one another, and are inextricably mixed in duration. In duration, time and nature are the same, a qualitative force. But in organic representation and thought, time, space

the much-cited quote from her *Diary* about “Time Passes”: “I have to give an empty house, no people’s characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to” (qtd. in Froula 152). As anti-humanist as “Time Passes” undeniably is, it makes up only one part of the novel, and a problematic part at that. In the first section, “The Window,” Woolf seems more concerned with critiquing the dyadic, flawed relationships between pairs like Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey, and Lily Briscoe and Charles Tansley, wherein one member seeks to subordinate the other, although the first section also includes the group dinner scene which might be said to accommodate anti-humanist interrelationality (Mrs. Ramsay does somewhat dominate the encounter, however, subtly orchestrating). Then, in the third section, “The Lighthouse,” Lily emerges as the mature artist, finally ready to register her earlier experiences, finally able to put Mrs. Ramsay and, in some sense, life itself into a complex, painted representation. The third section, wherein Lily triumphs however quietly (the choice to hide the painting away at the end smacks of the desire for non-domination), may suggest the reduction of the novel’s multiplicity back down to the one, the singularity of the artist figure. So in this larger context of the novel, how can we read the anti-humanism of “Time Passes,” especially when it is an interlude that claims to have “no people’s characters” and to be outside the human, yet which in fact *does* depict humans, or people, or characters, in the form of Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, and Mrs. Bast’s son, George – the workers charged with the upkeep of the Ramseys’ house? Given this contradiction, it is unclear whether it is ultimately possible for the novel to offer a coherent

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and nature come to delineate negatively quantifying and qualitative modes of measurement, and are forced to exist separately, in artificial separation, just as in organic forms of human organisation, like marriage, problems arrive because of strict categories. Hence the issue is finally one of the limits of representational convention: insofar as for us humans the very term ‘time’ connotes homogeneous repetition (insofar as it is quantified in space), and the term ‘nature’ implies a qualitative disjunction between ourselves and it. Such terms, which belong to the (pre-Deleuzian) organic values of the first stage of modernism, are in fact outmoded, and must be replaced by other models of thought and perception. It is these new perceptual models that Woolf’s narrative is starting to configure” (46-47).

And Sheehan also recognizes the section’s importance for an anti-humanist account of Woolf, pointing out that “the instrumental relationship to the object world that is the basis of humanist understanding is reversed” (144). Further, “It is nonhuman time that passes here, time expunged of mind” (144).

viewpoint as to the validation of being a character, of being human, or of simply being alive.

Are being a character and being human the same thing – and whether they are or not, does Woolf suggest that it might be desirable to be either one?

Mrs. McNab, the character who is not a character in “Time Passes” is at the center of the difficulty in the novel. In a critical reading of the novel in a slightly different context, Edward Comentale takes issue with Woolf’s treatment of the servant woman. He writes, “Opposed to Mrs. Ramsay’s intuitive art of the everyday and Lily’s visionary struggle at her easel, Mrs. McNab lurches into the novel as ‘a force working; something not highly conscious’. She clearly lacks the grace of an ‘imaginative life’, but she serves well enough to ‘stay the corruption and the rot’. McNab, in fact, can appear in the novel only when her more fully human counterparts are absent” (61). Comentale sees Mrs. McNab as a figure that Woolf makes grotesque because of her working-class status, and his argument gains traction with a reference to Woolf’s essay, “Middlebrow.” Citing the essay, Comentale explains that “The low brow [...] is ‘a man or woman of thoroughbred vitality who rides his body in pursuit of a living at a gallop across life’. He may be blind to beauty and the ‘imaginative life’, yet he helps run the world, ceaselessly toiling, like McNab. In this, Woolf belies the fears that shape her dialectical art. High brows need low brows, but they need them to be different; social order rests upon the division of labor” (61). This reading persuasively argues that Woolf patronizingly loves the working class and Mrs. McNab; the implication is that the working classes are valued (obviously more than the middle class, which Woolf despises) for being, when taken with Woolf’s quote about writing “Time Passes,” less than characters, and less than human. This becomes complicated when reading Woolf as an anti-humanist because, as the relation between Septimus and Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* suggests, to live as other than human, to have an anti-humanist appreciation for life, is

the best way to live – however, the essentialization of the difference between Mrs. McNab – non-character – and the Ramsays, Lily, Charles Tansley, etc. – characters, between high brows and low brows, cancels the potential for anti-humanism by coating it in the deeply humanist logic of class distinction.

Woolf may be making a complex point here about the virtue of *not* being a character, the virtue of being distanced from the human by a labor that insists on seemingly greater embodiment. Speaking of that embodiment, here is Mrs. McNab's entrance into the text:

As she lurched (for she rolled like a ship at sea) and leered (for her eyes fell on nothing directly, but with a sidelong glance that deprecated the scorn and anger of the world—she was witless, she knew it), as she clutched the banisters and hauled herself upstairs and rolled from room to room, she sang. Rubbing the glass of the long looking-glass and leering sideways at her swinging figure a sound issued from her lips—something that had been gay twenty years before on the stage perhaps, had been hummed and danced to, but now, coming from the toothless, bonneted, care-taking woman, was robbed of meaning, was like the voice of witlessness, humour, persistency itself, trodden down but springing up again, so that as she lurched, dusting, wiping, she seemed to say how it was one long sorrow and trouble, [...]. (130)

The grotesque display that constitutes Mrs. McNab's labor here indeed specifically does not resemble the human. Her modes of ambulation are inhuman – rolling, forced to haul herself by hanging on to the banisters – she is witless, and toothless, and she makes an inhuman sound, making noises bereft of meaning. This is not the productive counterhuman we get in Lawrence or Yeats, or even in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where Septimus's counterhuman alterity enriches life, even in death making it more possible for Clarissa to separate life from “human nature.” Rather, the text makes Mrs. McNab a monster – a necessary monster, but a monster just the same. Whereas the format of “Time Passes” does stage a compelling anti-humanist experiment – what if, the experiment asks, consciousness weren't everything? – this treatment of Mrs. McNab undoes the criticism of humanism by reverting to the humanist essentialism of class distinction, which insists on hierarchizing beings as more or less human than each other in order to determine

which groups get which sets of rights, or perhaps in Woolf's worldview, which groups perform which labors. The novel thus leaves us with a difficult choice: to be a character and be human – like the Ramsays – or to not be a character, to be alive but inhuman – like Mrs. McNab. Lily Briscoe is the middle ground, but her artistic supposition, transforming the multitude of life through her consciousness into the singularity of art, makes her vulnerable to the same reading of reduction that complicates Clarissa Dalloway's status.

### The Waves: *Bernard and Plurality*

Woolf's later novel, *The Waves* (1931), is often considered the culmination of her late style as well as of her anti-humanism. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Beatrice Monaco argues for *The Waves* not just as Woolf's anti-humanist masterpiece, but as the epitome of all of anti-humanist, Deleuzian modernism. Through her engagement with Deleuze, Monaco speaks of the novel not only as anti-humanist, but as anti-humanist in a life-engaging, life-fulfilling way; she explains that in the novel, "life reverberates vigorously with pulsed time, and the metaphysical dynamic of the text has, correspondingly, become more dense, complex, and 'corporealised'. In this sense the narrative is just as much a corporeal organism as the life it denotes" (167-168). She identifies the novel as a Deleuzian "desiring machine" (168). This designation implies much about *The Waves* as belonging to a logic of production rather than diminishment (desire as lack). The whole form of the novel is often seen as anti-humanist in this way, as moving beyond Woolf's concerns with gender (in *To the Lighthouse* especially) and instead breaking down identity entirely. The perspective overall is undulating throughout: on the one hand, the perspective shifts from the temporal microcosm of a single day (these are the sections in italics preceding the non-italicized sections on the characters' lives) which seems, like

“Time Passes,” largely outside human consciousness, from the perspective of nature rather than the human (Monaco identifies this as Deleuzian “cosmic time”); and on the other hand, it shifts more and less fluidly (more in earlier stages of development, less in early adulthood, and arguably more again in their/Bernard’s dotage) between the human characters within the non-italicized sections. The curious thing about *The Waves* is that, in spite of its clearly more radical formal experimentation and in spite of its pointed fluctuation between the earth and the human, and between the different characters as positions (not quite in the abstracting manner of *The Golden Bowl*, but more so than in Woolf’s other novels) rather than valuable subjectivities, the human ends up permeating the italicized sections shaped to “cosmic time,” and by the end of the novel the singularity of Bernard, who had been just one among the six characters throughout, eclipses their countering perspectives with a strange monologue.

The beginning of the novel strives to remain outside the human:

*The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky and the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually.*

*As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously. Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire. (3)*

While there really are no humans here, and the passage begins with a compellingly vast version of the outer world, with the sun, the sea, and the sky coexisting and shifting all the time, the grammar is peculiar: it is the grammar of subjectivity and human agency, transposed to the

natural world away from humans. By the second paragraph, the prose begins metaphORIZING aspects of the natural world in human terms, anthropomorphizing them and granting them the humanistic agency already being cultivated in the sentence structures; even before we know the wave has become a breathing sleeper, it is the sentence's agent: "The wave paused." Later, light, instead of coming from the sun, or from the juxtaposition of non-human elements of the natural world, emerges as if the great arm of a woman had "raised a lamp." Beyond the passage's explicit anthropomorphism, there is also the emphasis on a human scale. When elements of the scene do not gain their meaning by being cast as specifically human agents, they are compared instead to smaller, human objects, built for us and buy us clarifying our status as the makers of reality – this hierarchy between man and nature seems to be confirmed with the passage's references to cloth, "an old wine-bottle," the lamp, a fan, and even the bonfire, all human-made, all human-sized.

If these interceding character-less passages were not designed to call into question the largeness of the human, the human's ability to overshadow other, human-adjacent modes of life, then why are they included? Like "Time Passes," these interludes emphasize a different mode of temporality than the rest of the novel; by charting the time of one day in the italicized sections (the last long italic section begins, "*Now the sun had sunk*" and it ends with darkness fully falling (197-198)) and juxtaposing this with complete human lifetimes in the non-italicized sections, Woolf would seem to be making the point that human life is infinitesimal in comparison to the temporality of the universe. However, this sense is thoroughly undermined by the humanization of the world in the italicized sections.

So too, the sections charting the lives of the characters start out dismantling any hierarchy of character, retaining the six figures of the story in a kind of anti-humanist multiplicity. The



language is sparse and refuses to add value to any character over any other, and the portrayal is innovatively even. At the beginning:

‘I see a ring,’ said Bernard, ‘hanging above me. It quivers and hangs in a loop of light.’

‘I see a slab of pale yellow,’ said Susan, ‘spreading away until it meets a purple stripe.’

‘I hear a sound,’ said Rhoda, ‘cheep, chirp; cheep chirp; going up and down.’

‘I see a globe,’ said Neville, ‘hanging down in a drop against the enormous flanks of some hill.’

‘I see a crimson tassel,’ said Jinny, ‘twisted with gold threads.’

‘I hear something stamping,’ said Louis. ‘A great beast’s foot is chained. It stamps, and stamps, and stamps, and stamps.’

‘Look at the spider’s web on the corner of the balcony,’ said Bernard. ‘It had beads of water on it, drops of white light.’ (5).

There are no descriptors here outside of the consciousness of these beings – children, specifically, at this point in the novel – and, although Woolf gradually does make it clear that these observations are indeed consciousness, interiority, she chooses to present them as though they were exterior: each character “said.” Even though these insights are thought, the text pretends that they are spoken aloud, exteriorized. At first it is as though the part of the novel which focuses on the natural world is humanized, while the part focusing on actual people is rendered through not a subjective mode, but rather an objective, anti-humanist idiom. The evenness between the characters does alter throughout the novel. Specifically, they become differentiated individuals, with particular abilities, particular desires, particular memories separated from the group memory we receive as readers through the addition of meaning and value through trauma and other perspectival irregularities – a part of the novel Woolf renders ingeniously. But even as the characters become distinctive, there is no extraneous narrative description adding meaning to the characters for us – such that *The Waves* adheres, in the non-italicized sections, to an anti-humanist dehierarchization of humanity.

At least, there is no hierarchy until the end, when the whole narrative cedes to the voice of Bernard, no longer breaking each section up into distinct, equally valued perspectives but having the one overtake the many instead. Gradually, as the last section grows longer it becomes clear that, although it began the same way that the others did, we will only be receiving Bernard's perspective. The answer to the reader's experience of this shift as strange comes near the end:

I begin now to forget; I begin to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of apparently solid objects and say, "Are you hard?" I have seen so many different things, have made so many different sentences. I have lost in the process of eating and drinking and rubbing my eyes along surfaces that thin, hard shell which cases the soul, which, in youth, shuts one in—hence the fierceness, and the tap, tap, tap of the remorseless beaks of the young. And now I ask, "Who am I?" I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt, "I am you". This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome. Yes, ever since old Mrs Constable lifted her sponge and pouring warm water over me covered me with flesh I have been sensitive, percipient. Here on my brow is the blow I got when Percival fell. Here on the nape of my neck is the kiss Jinny gave Louis. My eyes fill with Susan's tears. I see far away, quivering like a gold thread, the pillar Rhoda saw, and feel the rush of the wind of her flight when she leapt. (240-241)

The challenge to identity here is explicit, and very much in keeping with Berman's argument: the way Woolf succeeds in disrupting identity is to find the many in the one, as in the person of Orlando. The disruption of Bernard's body here is arguably anti-humanist: it irrupts into numerous sites teeming with previously distinct subjectivities. This passage refers to and reinterprets moments already depicted in the novel, but transforms them from moments dispersed across subjectivities to moments consolidated, moments belonging now chiefly to Bernard, who is them all.

While the explosion of Bernard's subjectivity suggested in the lines above, to the point where "Bernard" is as much constituted by Susan's tears, Louis's kiss, and the experiences of

Percival's and Rhoda's deaths as he is by anything belonging essentially to Bernard (like the moment with Mrs. Constable), this shift is nonetheless jarring. Are the others, whose subjectivities we have up until this point in the novel received from their own perspectives, being reduced into Bernard? Should we focus instead on the development outward of Bernard as he incorporates the others – and should we see this as a productive anti-humanist demolition of restrictive concepts of identity? Does the novel make of the combination of his subjectivity and theirs something other, something less human, than the very idea of subjectivity? We can read this moment either as an anti-humanist or simply anti-identitarian expansion, or we can read it as a reduction from what had literally in the novel been many voices down to one voice. Again, I see Woolf's treatment here as, from the perspective of either humanism or anti-humanism, contradictory. While the rebuttal of identity is clear enough – in the line, “This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome” – the prose assigned to Bernard as his perspective overtakes the narrative does little, structurally, to dismantle the concept of identity. It persists at the sentence level, where it is still “I,” “I,” “I,” not the “we” that “I” supposedly cedes to in Bernard's epiphany. As if to confirm, the novel closes with Bernard more fully closed in this “I”:

And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!' (247-248)

In the face of death, perhaps because he faces death, Bernard is again the one, the singularity, the unequivocal “I.” The boundary between himself and the others is not permeable – his hair is “like” Percival's, he no longer has access to Percival's being. The potential to move beyond the

human, hinted at beautifully with the transformation Bernard feels in the earlier passage, seems to have been foreclosed here.

### *Conclusion*

As I have shown regarding Woolf's novels, her strongest anti-humanist mode is the mode in which she challenges a binaristic system of interrelationality – and thus a binarist theory of historical change. Instead, she shows through the multiple subjectivities in *Mrs. Dalloway* and in the larger community encircling the Ramsays in *To the Lighthouse* that development or change – really, these things are “life itself” in Woolf's universe – comes not through an intense dialectic, as in the relationship Mr. Ramsay tries to force with his wife, or the one Charles Tansley foists on Lily, but in non-hierarchical, non-dialectical, non-progressive subjective interplay. We saw this interplay again in the radical early chapters of *The Waves*, wherein the anti-humanism of life emerges in the unspoken but nonetheless intense coexistence and codevelopment of the novel's six characters in childhood. No hierarchy is imposed and the interplay of the one and the many is, as in Deleuze and Guattari, balanced, yet microorganized: mutual alterity does not have to mean the homogenization of alterity, rather beings within a multiplicity (or parts of an assemblage) can perform different roles without the roles assuming higher or lower values. Although the dynamic of interrelationality is altered by the end of *The Waves*, we still glimpse, in Bernard's late epiphany the potential for transformation into something else – again, transformation not based on a dialectical, binaristic relation. Rather, Bernard's transformation is emergent. Alterity – other beings – surfaces on his own body. Regarding the depleted ending of *The Waves*, we might consider a slightly more productive reading. If, as far as Virginia Woolf is

concerned, life is the way into anti-humanism, a way to get out from under the constraints on humanity – the “human nature” of Dr. Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw, the damaging binaristic imposition of roles among men and women associated with human conventions – then it makes sense that death would be, as it is for Bernard, the force in the face of which life diminishes, recedes, slipping back into the merely human.

## Chapter 4

### Experimental Realism: Anti-Humanism in the Thirties

As I have been arguing, anti-humanism is an impulse that runs all the way through the different developments and formal emergences tied to modernism, from Nietzsche's modern philosophy, through naturalism, through high modernist poetics and even strains of high modernist narrative. In its emphasis on exterior over interior, movement and process over stasis, body over consciousness, space over time, objectivity over subjectivity, and finally alterity over selfhood, anti-humanism disorients the scholarly narratives we tell about modernism. Moreover, anti-humanism displaces the valuation and hierarchy that define the terrain of modernist studies, riven as it is with anxieties about what can constitute the truly modernist, what rebels by being effectively outside the tyranny of the formally normative modernist styles, what is protected from the dangerous politics of the modernist period by seemingly anachronistic bouts of realism. Anti-humanism, in its insistent attempts to detach thought from human perspectives and the systems of value those perspectives imply, asks for detachment from the conferral of literary value by questioning the right of the human to ascribe value, by equalizing all human perspectives according to what T.E. Hulme considered their shared baseness, but which writers of the thirties would begin to see in more sanguine, value-neutral terms.

Nowhere is anti-humanism's potential for modernist revision more evident than in the context of thirties British literature. A key surge of studies on thirties literature in the 1970s – notably those by Samuel Hynes and Bernard Bergonzi – coincided with the implicitly humanist, mid- to late-twentieth century distaste for modernist writers on account of their more or less opaque fascist allegiances coupled with a softening of the anti-Stalinist backlash to communist

writers (a significant component of the larger population of thirties writers) that prevailed around mid-century. Hynes chose the literary genius-inflected terminology of “the Auden generation” for his study, whereas Bergonzi preferred “the thirties generation.” Many later studies have stuck with the label of “the thirties,” and appended “the forties” where applicable, or opted against totalizing terminologies by varying almost interchangeably between these and “interwar” or “postwar,” and in a recent edited collection, Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge identify and expand the terrain to “mid-century writing.” A few recent studies addressing the period in terms of “late modernism,” the “antimodern,” and “intermodernism” are the exceptions, attempting to clarify the complex and robust relationships between modernism, the apparent outlier narrative forms of the thirties, and, in the case of at least Tyrus Miller’s study, postmodernism. These studies grapple with the complexities of the thirties in ways that resist total separation from while still posing challenges to the more established literary contexts and groupings of the twentieth century.

Kristin Bluemel, who advocates “intermodernism” in her study *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics*, claims the need for an inclusive and productively vague category:

Intermodernism, like modernism and postmodernism, is best thought of as a kind of writing, discourse, or orientation rather than a period that competes with others for particular years or texts or personalities. I offer intermodernism as a literary-critical compass, an analytical tool or useful guidepost, an attractive neologism that can help scholars design new maps for the uncharted spaces between and within modernisms. Encouraging critics to think in terms of threes—“inter” always forging a connection or bridge between at least two other territories—intermodernism permits a more complex, sensitive understanding of many writers’ relations to literary London and mid-twentieth-century English history. (6)

The emphasis in this definition is on a remapping that would allow the model of a loose network or collectivity of “radical” and “eccentric” writers to replace what Bluemel sees as an Orwell-centric view of the period. Her book works to displace Orwell, and by implication other more

canonical thirties writers, like Auden, to the periphery along with all the other British writers of the thirties and forties. The study privileges eccentricity and the peripheries of English writing in a way that is obliquely indebted to recent postcolonial modernist scholarship (cf. Jed Esty and Jane Garrity) that has focused on the contraction of the British empire and the ramifications of this contraction for English writing, particularly an emergent emphasis on home as locality, and as newly worthy of postcolonial theorization. Interestingly, given that Bluemel's definition of intermodernism cited above initially suggests the intermodern as a term similar to "modern" and "postmodern," the peripherality or eccentricity of intermodernism has a strangely evacuating potential – the intermodern functions to privilege the particular and the local, to emphasize a kind of regionally-informed writing, even when it comes from the metropolitan center of London or an "Indo-Anglian" writer like Mulk Raj Anand. Whereas modern and postmodern both suggest a kind of positive content – even if it took much widespread circulation to transform the postmodern into an autotelic, non-hyphenated entity – the intermodern seems to point away from itself, presenting the texts and writers it contains as on the periphery in a way that still makes them the background to the alternately looming foregrounds of the modern and the postmodern.

Bluemel's term is highly suggestive in the context of radical eccentricity which her study develops, but it does little to intervene in the hierarchy that privileges modernism as a monolithic formation covering the interesting micro-innovations of the thirties with its shadow. The intermodern advocates a detachment from traditional systems of literary value within its own parameters, transforming Orwell's privilege into parity within his context, but the term inadvertently validates the priority of the categories of modernism and postmodernism over what falls in between, specifically, over the thirties. In contrast, Tyrus Miller's *Late Modernism* functions to legitimize the thirties as more than the bridge-like, connective formation that



Bluemel's discussion suggests; Miller presents the thirties as a period with its own literary and aesthetic culture on a par with other periods within the twentieth century. Admittedly, Miller accomplishes this parity partly by offering more canonical writers with avowed modernist pedigrees as models for late modernism – Wyndham Lewis, Djuna Barnes, Samuel Beckett, and Mina Loy, as compared with Bluemel's examples of Stevie Smith, Mulk Raj Anand, Inez Holden, and George Orwell. Miller breaks here with the pattern established by Hynes of separating older writers producing works in the thirties from a separate and unified "thirties generation."<sup>32</sup> But more importantly, Miller's model offers a way to consider the realism or political commitment of thirties novels, which often disqualifies them from modernist discussion, as implicated in yet still importantly distinct from the modernist tradition.

Privileging as late modernist those writers who would not choose between the political and the aesthetic (instead of favoring writers like Orwell with explicit social and political commitments), Miller writes,

Late modernist writers in no way ignored their social context; in fact, they were deeply troubled by their inability to keep it at a manageable distance. Their literary structures tottered uneasily between vexed acknowledgement and anxious disavowal of social facts, [...] for late modernism we would have to speak of a *failure* to repress, a failure of the forms to contain the turbulent historical energies that sweep through late modernist works. These works are perforated and torn by their relation to history, which is here occulted beneath a dense textual tangle and there exposed in transparent allusion and bald polemic. (32)

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<sup>32</sup> Hynes specifies that he is "concerned with one generation of writers, the men and women born in England between 1900 and the First World War, who came of age in the 'twenties and lived through their early maturity during the Depression. They are above all the generation *entre deux guerres*, and their relation to both wars is an important part of this book. [...] I do not take the generation beyond the beginning of the Second World War; the decade of the 'forties has a different history. Nor do I consider, except tangentially, important works written during the 'thirties by older writers. Of course those other works are part of the circumstances of the time: one could not be a young poet in the 'thirties and be unaffected by *Ash Wednesday* and *The Winding Stair*, or be a young novelist and unaware of *Work in Progress*. But these are relevant to this study only insofar as they influenced younger writers" (9). Valentine Cunningham breaks or at least offers commentary on this pattern by exposing a tension in the thirties between Eugene Jolas – or the experimental writing associated with *transition* and spoken of in the context of modernism – and Marx – or the realistic writing of the thirties interesting in exposing inequalities between economic classes.

Here is an account of thirties writing that, in spite of distinguishing certain kinds of thirties writing or mid-century writing as outside the favored category of late modernism, does positive, transformative work in terms of moving the century along from modernism to postmodernism. Miller creates a space for the difficult-to-situate writers he discusses that resists relegating them to an intermediate existence in between two more significant points, like a bridge, while thus also asking us to suspend our ideas about how literary history progresses. Just as MacKay and Stonebridge point out that “a literary history of breakthroughs and ruptures is never going to work particularly well for this period,” Miller invites us to recognize, through reading but not hierarchizing the connections between the thirties or late modernism and historically contiguous formations, that an emphasis on breakthroughs and ruptures does a similar disservice to modernism itself.

In this chapter, I sympathize with Miller’s effective opposition to existing theories of historical rupture while also aligning my argument with his characterization of the period as implicitly anti-humanist. Although Miller does not address anti-humanism as such, the picture of late modernism which emerges in his study, partly because of the special significance it gives to Wyndham Lewis, places that period squarely within the tradition of modernist anti-humanism that I have been mapping. In particular, Miller argues that laughter is a significant technique in late modernism in a way that resonates with the characteristics of anti-humanism described above. He writes:

Laughter has an intimate relationship with the situation of the embodied subject in external space, a fact that should give pause considering Lewis’s insistence [...] on spatiality over time and physical exteriority over psychological interiority. [...] I want to take up Lewis’s expressed preference for the “ossature” and “shell” of the living organism (his “favorite part” being the dead one) over its soft, fluxive innards. [...] This imagery, hinging on the distinction of inside and outside, unconscious and conscious, and surface and depth, is reminiscent of Freud’s depiction in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*

of consciousness as a rigidified, deadened shield against excess stimuli from without.  
(49)

As I have described anti-humanist modernism thus far, it privileges the exterior over the interior in a way that removes or severely tempers human (and humanist) agency, thwarting the belief whose unraveling much of literary modernism witnessed, responded to, or enacted, that mankind is the agent of history and of progress. The shift which anti-humanism favors away from a validation of the subjective and toward a questioning of all values emanating from the subjective is evident here, although Miller's assessment of how late modernism values that shift is not yet clear in this passage. Lewis's choice, described by Miller, to in effect favor death and externality over subjectivity and interiority while moving consciousness from supposed depth to the very boundary of the subject, making it the first line of defense against the outer world instead of, as Levenson has suggested, "the repository of meaning and value," not only suggests a late modernist view exhausted by the alleged high modernist depth imperative, but, on the contrary, a continuation of the anti-humanist modernism which I argue coexists, often even in the same texts, with the high modernist forms which even in Miller's account are somewhat opposed to late modernism.

Miller goes on to explain further the function of laughter in his model. Drawing again on Lewis, he argues that "laughter may, like mimicry, fulfill a defensive function against a threatening 'outside'. Laughter may turn back self-reflexively on the subject, 'stiffening' the self against danger, marking that minimal 'spatial' difference between conscious life and the pure extensivity of dead nature: a difference that preserves the subject, however diminished, in situations of adversity" (51). Finally, the view of the subject here is not entirely anti-humanist: the aim of late modernism is a tenuous preservation of the subject in the face of dire historical forces. As MacKay and Stonebridge likewise suggest, the writers of the period dealt with a

peculiarly nightmarish historical moment: “Only now, perhaps, after the end of the Cold War which shaped the imaginations of so many writing at mid-century, do the continuities of twentieth-century British fiction really become apparent. For many, the climate of fear that dominated the post-war period was in fact their third experience of war anxiety. [...They feared that] the twentieth century would be a time in which there would never be a peace” (7). Even Lewis, in his radical embrace of dead things and outer shells, can be seen on this reading as frantically attempting to preserve some semblance of a self rather than acquiescing to some new anti-humanist mode of life. Miller confirms a view of late modernism that attempts to recuperate the human as a response, basically, to the ravaging inhumanity of history:

Late modernism, finally, presents an image of subjectivity “at play” in the face of its own extinction. It prepares the literary ground for the anthropological “endgame” Beckett would betray to the world in the 1950s—the theatricalized gestures of the Western subject, rehearsing its final abdication. Yet unlike, perhaps, the late writings of Beckett and other canonical instances of postmodernism, late modernism maintains a tenuous hold in the borderland of “mirthless laughter”: a mortifying jolt that may yet work to stiffen and preserve. (64)

Thus is the conjunction postmodernism/poststructuralism/anti-humanism opposed to the conjunction modernism/humanism, with late modernism producing harsh and frenetic techniques that comfortably inhabit neither of these conjunctions even as they begin to approach the official and sometimes unrepentantly post-subjective moment of postmodernism. In what follows I argue that this view of late modernism, while arguably true in the cases of Lewis and Beckett, cannot accommodate writers like Henry Green, Christopher Isherwood, and Elizabeth Bowen – the writers I will focus on in this chapter – who revert to anomalous forms, neither fully realistic nor fully experimental (although often a compelling combination of these), that are strangely less hostile to the extinction of humanism as we know it.

As suggested above, Miller does not consider thirties writing in general to be a part of late modernism, and it is not clear that he would accept an argument for the inclusion of Green, Isherwood, and Bowen as late modernists. These three are outliers from most relevant categories, as they are slightly more formally experimental than thirties writers (like Orwell or the other writers Bluemel discusses), yet still too minor to be considered in the comparatively commanding terms used by Miller. These writers are too interested in form, or put differently, too apolitical, to make their inclusion in the thirties uncomplicated, but they are too reserved, not ecstatic or aggressive enough, for Miller to position them on the cusp of the unstable historical moment between modernism and postmodernism. Oddly, they do fit the relation to history that Miller demands: like Lewis, Barnes, and Beckett, Green and Bowen wrote texts marked by a failure to repress, but the display of that failed repression is much less fervent. It often approaches the realist form of the novel of manners instead of radical satire. At stake in these various considerations of the thirties – Miller’s, Bluemel’s, and many others – is the debate about realism: the thirties are partly seen as an anomaly because the texts of the period so often seem to revert to realism, to be outside of the temporality of the literary progress so emphatically ignited by modernism’s imperative to “make it new.” The thirties must be talked about in isolation – or, as Miller argues, we can find ways to talk about at least some thirties texts as carrying on a model of literary progress, where the connection between point A (modernism) and point B (postmodernism) follows a familiar logic of forward historical motion.

However, both of these approaches to the thirties overlook the fact that the period’s break with historical progress is by no means an accident. Rather, the formal shift which seems to result in retrograde realism is a logical product of the pervasive mentality of ongoing war – if war never ends, and if, as Hitler’s rise to power suggests, the values of the Enlightenment have

turned against themselves to reach their gruesome terminus, then any sense of historical progress – or the sense of human agency as facilitating that progress – is effectively canceled. What I argue is that anti-humanism, as an explanation of the disintegration of agency and the faltering of historical progress, is better suited to explain thirties writers like Green, Isherwood, and Bowen than either late modernism, which recuperates the period into a narrative that privileges a sense of historical development, or a theory which would isolate the thirties as a period which must be treated as radically particular and disconnected from other historically contiguous periods. Anti-humanism, as I have been arguing, runs all the way through modernism and manifests in a variety of different ways – this continuity, monism, or homogeneity approximates the strange non-differentiation that comes to characterize the whole twentieth century. The proliferation of “posts” and “moderns,” the continual insistence on “the new” carried from modernism, through advertising culture, through postmodernism and beyond, even through the “new modernist studies” – these phenomena thwart an explanation of development and futurity that conforms to available models. Even Fredric Jameson, famous for his theorization of the postmodern, is rethinking the twentieth century – and perhaps the twenty-first – in terms of a continuing modernity, incapable of ending until some form other than capitalism is imagined and enacted.<sup>33</sup> Anti-humanism attempts to take into account the inability of twentieth-century literary formations to fissure into periods in quite the way they did before modernism; the thirties, as an unaccountable period, is fertile territory for this rethinking.

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<sup>33</sup> In Jameson’s study, wherein he formulates an “ontology of the present,” he writes that “A true ontology would not only wish to register the forces of past and future within that present; but would also be intent on diagnosing, as I am, the enfeeblement and virtual eclipse of those forces within our current present” (214). I will discuss this in more detail in this study’s conclusion, but it seems that Jameson is arguing here for a kind of complex historical stagnation, connected to capitalism’s failure to be superseded (which he goes on to say means that we are in a perpetual modernity); this account is informed by a kind of Deleuzian monism.

Although perhaps the key characteristic shared by Green, Isherwood, and Bowen is a tendency toward forms that foreground an anti-historicity or non-differentiation – forms that seem retrograde in their realism – the context of the thirties did produce particular anti-humanist styles. In keeping with the flattening of history, the texts I discuss in this chapter exhibit a flattening of narrative progress: Green’s focus on many characters in the novels *Living*, *Party-Going*, and *Loving* prevents a sense of individual – and thus also collective or overall – human development from emerging; in *Goodbye to Berlin*, Isherwood includes the different sections outside their chronological order, disrupting any sense of normal causality or progress; and *The Death of the Heart*, by Elizabeth Bowen, fuses the novel of manners with the female bildungsroman to pit social forces against a developing subjectivity that should serve as the microcosm for larger scale social development. These writers also share the emphasis on exteriority over interiority described by Miller, although it is manifested very differently in their texts: Green uses dialogue to emphasize the surface of social interaction over its depths, as does Bowen occasionally, and both sometimes sterilize the diary form – that is, purge it of subjectivity – to undermine the imposition of meaning onto internal thoughts and feelings, while Isherwood offers a mode of chiefly external documentation when he famously declares, “I am a camera.” Finally, these writers share what I will call a crypto- or experimental realism, which twists the tradition of equating thirties writing with realism. I argue that it would be a mistake to lump together the realism of Green, Isherwood, and Bowen with thirties iterations of social realism and autobiography when, in fact, the objectivity of certain kinds of thirties realism functions to cancel the absolute truth attributed to the confessional subjectivity typically associated with autobiography. The writers I discuss here cancel a “speak truth to power” model of resistance associated with writers like Orwell and taking its ethos from personal observation in favor of a

more dynamic realism that experiments with radical objectivity in order to show people in their complex interrelational relations with one another. The aim of this chapter is to suggest, through consideration of Green, Isherwood, and Bowen, that the thirties as a period not only benefits from anti-humanist consideration, but also demonstrates the potential of anti-humanism for inclusively rethinking twentieth century literature.

### *Henry Green*

While Henry Green ultimately developed a highly distinctive style that functions in the context of anti-humanism, his first novel, *Blindness*, is a cross between a modernist *kunsterroman* and an Evelyn Waugh-esque comedy. Although most critics agree that *Blindness* is an outlier in Green's career, unrelated to the stylistic contributions he is known for and not particularly good, there are a surprising number of studies which treat it in some depth. Pascale Aebischer, for instance, considers *Blindness* in isolation from Green's other works but in connection to the familiar modernist trope equating creativity with disability, citing Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* as well as the figure of Tiresius while also connecting the novel with Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* due to their shared reliance on the form of the *kunsterroman*. Similarly, Rod Mengham begins his treatment of *Blindness* with a mild denigration – “largely the work of a schoolboy” the novel “lacks the peculiar savour of his later work” – yet Mengham ultimately provides a compelling reading of the novel (1). It is, oddly, the badness of *Blindness* as a novel which so effectively invites interpretation. Although this is not often the case with literature, Green's novels, other than the all-too-easily interpreted *Blindness*, evince the compelling trend in anti-humanist modernism against interpretation: leading up to the thirties and continuing through mid-century writing, interpretation comes to be seen by some



writers as an authoritarian means of control. The social investment of writers like Green, Isherwood, and Bowen reveals itself most effectively not in direct social engagement but in this verve against interpretive control and meaning.

In *Blindness*, Green sets up a fraudulent narrative of development. The novel's three headings – "Caterpillar," "Chrysalis," and "Butterfly" – suggest a progress and growth that is belied by the actual story the book tells of a young man, John Haye, who is beginning to become a writer during the initial section of the book composed of his banal diary entries, but who is then blinded when a child throws a stone, breaking the glass of a train window John was looking through. The blinding (as Aebischer in particular argues) ostensibly works to dispose John more toward a career as a writer, so this too fuels a narrative of development. The "Chrysalis" section witnesses a fitting period of incubation in which John lives with his stepmother in the country adjusting to his blindness, making use of family, servants, and an impoverished young woman named Joan (John calls her "June") to do so. His arrogance about his writing grows in this phase – suggesting a cocoon puffed up to bursting – even though we never see him write anything. He tells Joan/June: "But now, do you know what I am going to do now? After all, one must have something to put against one's name. For I am going to write, yes, to write. Such books, June, such amazing tales, rich with intricate plot. Life will be clotted and I will dissect it, choosing little bits to analyse. I shall be a great writer. I am sure of it" (463). Joan/June's failure to appreciate John's incipient greatness seems in part to fuel John's need to transcend his circumstances and the perceived stagnation of his family home and village life.

The shift from "Chrysalis" to "Butterfly" is marked by John's choice to leave the country for the city, where the proliferation of stimuli will presumably help him to write, but the final arrival at identity implied by "Butterfly" is entirely deferred in the novel. Once John and his

stepmother arrive in the city everything makes him irritable and more incapable of writing: the stifling temperature in the apartment, the noise of the city outside, his stepmother's sociability. The book ends too tidily after a scene that seems almost a parody of Joyce's bird girl in *Portrait*, where Haye's sexuality is awakened by a nurse, and this translates to the stirrings of creativity which, again, are deferred to a time and place outside the narrative. The encounter with the nurse, like Stephen's with the bird girl in *Portrait*, is crucially frustrated, while Green appropriately makes the nurse engage John's other senses whereas the bird girl chiefly engaged the visual. Green describes John's attempt to help the nurse close the window in his room as follows:

But he was on his feet and groping about when he met her hand again, calm and a trifle moist, which took his and guided it. His other hand meeting her shoulder slid down the dress (through which her arm glowed) till his finger caught her on the elbow. How small it was, but it wriggled, and seized with a sudden despair he loosed it. Then, as he was groping forward again, the lily poked gently into his face, trying to tickle him, and shuddering, he pushed the thing away. He leant forward to where he felt her presence and the stand. Her breath burned in his face for a moment and bathing in her nearness he leant further forward still, in the hopes of finding her, but she dropped his hand and it fell on the slick edges of the pot in which the lily grew. Despair was coming over him again, it was too awkward, this pursuit of her under a lily, when all at once her arm mysteriously came up over his mouth, glowing and cool at the same time, and the scent was immediately stronger, tangible almost, so that he wanted to bite it. But before he could do that her arm had glided away again and he gave it up, and was merely irritated when a stray bit of her hair tickled his right cheek, so different to the lily, as they were pushing the stand away. (497)

Here John faces refusal and detachment from the appealing nurse Margaret – she will not go on a walk with him or perform anything other than her professional duties – but, unlike Stephen who immediately realizes he must “recreate life out of life,” John sulks for a bit and then devolves into a reflective reverie.

The failed encounter with the nurse has made John receptive to impressions, which first makes him irritable and then results in a seemingly more productive thought pattern produced by

the sound of bells outside: “suddenly and for no reason, like a gust of wind through the room, purifying it, came the sound of bells from the church along the street, tearing through the room, bells catching each other up, tripping, tumbling and then starting off again in cascades. Theirs was such a wild joy and they trembled at it between the strokes so that they hummed, making a background for the peals. He loved bells and, inexpressibly happy, he was swept back to Barwood and June” (501). This reminiscence, heavy with sensory and suggestive language, resonates with Proustian impressionism, but the significance of the beautiful epiphany is dampened by the rest of the line of thought, which leads to a childish *ressentiment* about his former school friends: “And he was not going to let them see him crushed under his blindness, they would despise him for it. He must first make out how he stood with life in general so that he could show them how much better off he was than they. He would start a crusade against people who had eyesight” (502). The affirmation of life and the subjective we find in parallel accounts of the modern artist like Stephen in *Portrait* or Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* is undermined here because, as this passage and much of the book suggest, John’s subjectivity which the genre of the *kunstlerroman* is intended to validate sometimes approaches baseness and is otherwise simply trivial and uninteresting. Although the form implies growth, development, and expanded receptivity leading to creativity, John does not grow. He turns further inward in ways that marry him to his own subjectivity while subverting the belief in productive self-coupling that Woolf in particular advocates<sup>34</sup>. Green’s muddled *kunstlerroman* denigrates the belief that subjectivity and introspection are at the root of great novels. The novel closes with an epileptic seizure brought on by the stimulating sound of bells, in which John feels “a deeper blindness closed in upon him,” and then there is an excerpted letter John writes to a school friend, where he explains, “They tell me I have had some sort of a fit, but it has passed now” and then “I have had a

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. the discussion of the androgynous mind in *A Room of One’s Own*.

wonderful experience. I am going to settle down to writing now, I have a lot to tell" (504). This conclusion makes two implications; on the one hand, that introspection like that incurred through blindness coupled with epilepsy is truly the key to great writing, and on the other hand, that because we do not see the development and because the included closing letter reverts to the diary and letter form of the "Caterpillar" section, the subjective version of artistic development is bankrupt.

Coupled with *Blindness*'s demonstration of the failure of subjectivity in the *kunsterroman* form is the game the novel plays with interpretation. In its emphasis on subjectivity, character, and development, Green presents the reader with a novel seemingly ripe for psychological analysis, and Rod Mengham takes Green up on this offer for deep reading. Joan/June becomes a double for John, blindness becomes castration, and John's obsession with his dead mother shapes his failure to progress. As Mengham writes, "The specifically Oedipal relationship of mother and son colonizes the entire text, and there is no significant divergence from its pattern in any of the other relationships portrayed" (8). Mengham takes the suggestion of incest further as a reason for the artistic self-coupling I have referred to: "*Blindness* ignores the lineaments of developmental time in opening up a discursive space; it is least like a novel in the blind paroxysm of its finale – it substitutes for analepsis *epilepsis*. Its writing is deliberately 'blind', in the way of disinheriting itself, giving up the enjoyments of a more seemingly legitimate tradition of the novel in favor of going 'unseen' to combine with its own illicit desires" (12). Overall Mengham's analyses of the novel are apt and very compelling, but they are in tension with the emergent anti-humanist aspects of the novel which develop further into the dynamic realism of Green's later novels.

Unlike Green's later novels *Blindness* is receptive to interpretation, but it also prefigures Green's late style because it heightens the form of the modernist *kunsterroman* such that it approaches a parody of interpretability. The quaint subjectivity Green presents us with in the character of John Hays also forces a distanciation because he is hollow, full of empty observations in the diary section on his daily activities and writers who influenced him, and because he is an example of Nietzsche's reactive man, encapsulating all that is bad about the inward turn of subjectivity. This counters the sense of privilege that the form of the *kunsterroman* typically confers on the developing subjectivity of the artist – Green subtly undermines the value of subjectivity in *Blindness* while also thwarting the idea of development, and this is tied to a facile interpretability, which has ramifications in the larger context of philosophical anti-humanism. Specifically, in Deleuze and Guattari's key anti-humanist study of literature, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, they build a model of reading literature outside the process of interpretation, which cannot adequately explain the work of writers like Kafka or, as I will argue, Henry Green, Christopher Isherwood, or Elizabeth Bowen. As Deleuze and Guattari describe Kafka's literary mode:

[T]his is the principle behind his antilyricism, his anti-aestheticism: "Grasp the world," instead of extracting impressions from it; work with objects, characters, events, in reality, and not in impressions. Kill metaphor. Aesthetic impressions, sensations, or imaginings still exist for themselves in Kafka's first essays where a certain influence of the Prague school is at work. But all of Kafka's evolution will consist in effacing them to the benefit of a sobriety, a hyper-realism, a machinism that no longer makes use of them. This is why subjective impressions are systematically replaced by points of connection that function objectively as so many signals in a segmentation, so many special or singular points in a constitution of series. (70)

The language here eschews subjectivity not just in content, but also in the form of the refusal of valuation. Kafka's evolution toward "hyper-realism" is neither a good thing nor a bad thing, but Deleuze and Guattari's very abstention from evaluative judgment – this style is neither better nor

worse – is a corroboration that Kafka’s counter-subjective style has triumphed and is the very idiom that Deleuze and Guattari write in themselves.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari lay the groundwork for this view of interpretation, aligning it with processes of subject formation (“subjectification”) and opposing it to experimentation. Borrowing the somewhat arbitrary distinction of the “tonal” and the “nagual” from Carlos Castaneda to make this point, they write: “The *tonal* seems to cover many disparate things: It is the organism, and also all that is organized and organizing; but it is also signifiante, and all that is signifying or signified, all that is susceptible to interpretation, explanation, all that is memorizable in the form of something recalling something else; finally, it is the Self (*Moi*), the subject, the historical, social, or individual person, and the corresponding feelings” (162). Meanwhile, the nagual presents a shift of the tonal: both are “everything,” but the nagual places the “everything” of the tonal “under such conditions that the body without organs has replaced the organism and experimentation has replaced all interpretation, for which it no longer has any use. Flows of intensity, their fluids, their fibers, their continuums and conjunctions of affects, the wind, fine segmentation, microperceptions, have replaced the world of the subject. Becomings, becomings-animal, becomings-molecular, have replaced history, individual or general” (162). Finally, whereas the tonal “includes all of the strata and everything that can be ascribed to the strata, the organization of the organism, the interpretations and explanations of the signifiable, the movements of subjectification,” the nagual “dismantles the strata. It is no longer an organism that functions but a BwO that is constructed” (162). In this discussion and their larger theory of literature, Deleuze and Guattari counter the subjective with the body without organs; they counter interpretation with experimentation – that is, the building of flows, the machining, the making of connections, all of which suggest an externality. This is a

sense of building and modeling that is opposed to a hierarchical sense of development and progress, too. While Green's novel *Blindness* does not go all the way toward the model Deleuze and Guattari outline – it draws attention to the imbrication of subjectivity with interpretation rather than envisioning another form – Green's later works develop a supple realism tantamount to the experimentation which functions to unravel interpretation that Deleuze and Guattari describe.

In his study of thirties literature, Valentine Cunningham memorably suggests that thirties writers contended with “voluble calls to take sides between Jolas and Marx” (10). In this iteration, Eugene Jolas of the little magazine *transition* evokes the nascent poststructuralist modernism of thirties writers like Stein and (late) Joyce, whereas Marx suggests the proclivities toward realism among thirties writers which developed alongside burgeoning class consciousness. This is a way of saying that thirties writers had to choose between modernism and realism, but in context Cunningham is also arguing that this is a choice between a reductive deconstruction and a robust multi-contextuality. Poststructuralist modernism, according to Cunningham, tends toward the refusal of history whereas realism seems more suited to showing that, as Cunningham nicely puts it, “[h]istory masticates texts” (11). Cunningham's account allows for the complexity of thirties writing, which navigates between these two poles and often falls under both: the problem of the thirties is that it fostered writing that seemed to be both modernist and something else. This formulation begs the additional question of modernism – realism – poststructuralism: *transition* and Jolas exemplify the specific link (based on a theory of language) between modernism and poststructuralism, but realism is aloof somehow, marking the thirties as difficult to reconcile to the literary narratives of the twentieth century. However, as the invocation of Deleuze and Guattari suggests above, realism is not one of two choices writers

in the thirties had to make, the other being modernism – rather, the larger tradition of anti-humanism in modernism, with its emphasis on impersonality and exteriority, reveals a continuity between modernism, realism, and poststructuralism. Realism, further, aligns with experimentation on the Deleuzo-Guattarian anti-humanist reading. The use of dialogue and other techniques emphasizing exteriority in novels like *Living*, *Party-Going*, and *Loving* not only reveal the realism we associate with British thirties writers to be more connected to modernism than Cunningham suggests – these techniques also suggest a whole way of reading modernism and poststructuralism as organically connected, through a realism that brings the counter-subjective trend familiar from early modernist poetics, as well as novelists like D.H. Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis, to narrative forms.

Although *Living* was first published in 1929 and is thus not technically a thirties novel, it shares, and perhaps even helped shape, the interests associated with the period. As Carol Wipf-Miller puts it, “*Living* was seen as anticipating the new or socialist realism of the 30s” (137). The novel treats the lives of certain individuals which connect through their various associations – as workers of varying skill levels, as owners, as family members or love objects of workers – with a factory in Birmingham. Green developed the idea for the novel while working at a factory owned by his family. *Living* is also an ideal novel for this discussion because it is more disagreed upon – and Green’s novels in general are more disagreed upon – than most thirties novels, in terms of the faulty distinction between modernism and realism. For instance, Cunningham points to Green’s novel *Party-Going* as perfectly epitomizing the tension between inward- and outward-oriented narrative forms that defines the thirties, and Wipf-Miller charts a scholarly tradition of reading Green too much outside thirties realism. As she explains, critics “touch[...] on the politics of Green’s work only delicately in order to dwell at length on his



formal experimentation” (137). The fact that Green’s ties to both modernism and realism are disputed, each on the grounds of the other, suggests that he fuses the two forms in ways applicable to Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation.

Although *Living* followed *Blindness* fairly closely in Green’s career, the latter almost entirely lacks the stylistic trademarks developed in the former and continued in Green’s later works. As Mengham points out, “The mutation in Green’s writing between *Blindness* and *Living* is surely greater than between any other two of his subsequent novels” (12). The most recognizable formal qualities of *Living* are the dropped articles when the narrator is speaking and the reliance on dialogue to emphasize various class-based dialects. This strategy also functions to minimize deep interiority as well as narrative authority. The opening of the novel, accordingly, feels more like a play than a novel:

Bridesley, Birmingham.

Two o’clock. Thousands came back from dinner along streets.

‘What we want is go, push,’ said works manager to son of Mr Dupret. ‘What I say to them is – let’s get on with it, let’s get the stuff out.’

Thousands came back to factories they worked in from their dinners.

‘I’m always at them but they know me. They know I’m a father and mother to them. If they’re in trouble they’ve but to come to me. And they turn out beautiful work, beautiful work. I’d do anything for ‘em and they know it.’

Noise of lathes working began again in this factory. Hundreds went along road outside, men and girls. Some turned in to Dupret factory. (207)

This opening sets up a pattern for the rest of the novel, of privileging the surfaces of human social interaction over their deep meaning in connection to memory and subjectivity. When we do get flashes of interiority from characters as the story develops they are usually not connected to memory, and are more oriented toward the moment at hand. Further, the style is complicated by the different possible readings of the dropped articles. When the narrator speaks, as in the opening passage, in a way that only relates to an external world and not to subjectivity the dropped articles suggest an economy of prose favoring heightened objectivity on the part of the

narrator: the point is to return to the dialogue quickly while also trimming excess language that would tinge the description too much with value and meaning. However, Green also drops the articles when the narrative voice temporarily delves into the thoughts of characters, which puts the reader more comfortably into a character's consciousness. The dropped articles in these circumstances add a feeling of intimacy associated with free indirect discourse or stream-of-consciousness, and have contributed to readings of Green emphasizing his modernist experimentation with form.

Although Green's assiduity in rendering speech forms in *Living* is undeniably a formal innovation, the fact that this skill functions to detach us from characters in a compelling way is also worthy of remark – especially in light of the fact that we often think of narrative modernism, if not poetic modernism, as using formal experiment to gain access to interiority, rather than deny access, as I argue Green's prose does. To return again to the opening passage, the quirk most noticeable after the dropped articles is the strange foreground/background or part/whole distinction. We are given lines demarcating the general situation – we are in Birmingham at 2pm, there is a factory, there are people – and then we are given lines of dialogue, with incredibly few details about the speaker and no context beyond the general information about the factory. This is an almost dizzying instance of *in medias res*, where we are forced into the middle of the action and consequently asked to work harder to understand the scene, but there are no forthcoming clues to the withheld meaning that *in medias res* typically implies. Interpretation is not invited.

Those studies that do interpret the novel tend to focus on the character of Lily Gates, a young woman who is arguably the character in whom readers are asked to invest the most. While Lily is the character the novel closes with and perhaps the one referred to in the epigraph,

something is missed by saying that the novel is about Lily. Truly, the novel is about a whole town, a whole cast of characters who are not clearly articulated as individuals. A poignant comparison here would be to Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. In that novel, there is a range of characters who share a space, and yet are presented as individuals. They are united only by the authorial voice that flutters between them, and enough of each of them is presented to the reader that we see them as if in close up. This is not the case in *Living*, where the characters seem far away – there are so many of them, and they are presented on such equal, non-evaluative terms with one another, that it becomes impossible to hierarchize them, to put them in an order that generates a convincing larger meaning. Yes, Lily's story of heartbreak seems as if it should be movingly significant, but it is also presented in terms both sparse and quotidian. We do not often dwell in her consciousness, and when we do we understand that she is ordinary: she has ordinary dreams – having children, getting married, moving away from her father – expressed in ordinary language. After daydreaming about her life with Bert Jones, Green transposes Lily's thoughts: "Why may I not have children, feed them with my milk. Why may I not kiss their eyes, lick their skin, softness to softness, why not I? I have no man, my work is for others, not for mine" (278). Lily's consciousness here is so simple, yet its simplicity is neither fetishized nor debased. She is as simple as the other characters, and as important. The novel is also about Mr. Bridges, and Mr. Tarver, and Tupe, and Mr. and Mrs. Eames. The novel is also about young Mr. Dupret, the upper class character in the novel, who picks his nose more than once during the book: "Mrs Dupret and her son, (who had walked round factory with Mr Bridges) these two were in drawing-room of the London house; each had engagement book, hers she had laid on her knees, he held his up close to his nose, so she would not see him picking his nose" (226). Not that the nose-picking is intended to be comical<sup>35</sup>. Rather, in the context of the novel details like

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<sup>35</sup> In this way Green diverges from Evelyn Waugh, with whom studies of thirties literature often align him. To add a

this one exist alongside each other without any triumphing over the others: Mr. Dupret picks his nose; Mr. Dupret fancies Hannah Glossop; Mr. Dupret's father dies; Mr. Dupret is the owner of the factory. The emphasis on exteriority over interiority, which comes from a refusal to dwell too long on any one character and not often in their consciousness, causes a sense of flatness to permeate the novel. Often line breaks mark switches between characters or clusters of characters – this lack of transitions also prevents the book from interpreting its fragments into each other and thus conferring priority. The emphasis is on objective presentation, not on meaning.

A comparison to another Virginia Woolf novel is instructive here. In *To the Lighthouse*, the strange section called “Time Passes” is sandwiched between the section that revels in Mrs. Ramsey's feminine brilliance before the war and the section that depicts the Ramsey family grown up after the war and Mrs. Ramsey's death. In “Time Passes” the vacation house is cleaned out and with the exceptions of the servant woman (Mrs. McNab) who does the cleaning and some brief, omniscient, parenthetical notes about what is meanwhile happening to individuals, there are no people. Woolf's intention was to represent a world entirely outside of human subjectivity, without the value and meaning human vision ascribes to its environs; in her novel, this section is a counterpoint to sections emphasizing characters' interiorities. At two points in Henry Green's novel this impulse, to objectively chart the passage of time, resonates. A little less than halfway through the book this isolated line opens a subsection: “And now time is passing” (266). Then near the end, another subsection begins with the single line, “And now time is passing now” (376). Time is always passing in *Living*, and the novel presents the passage of time as undifferentiated by reveries into memory or personal circumstance. Where Woolf dallies with the world outside of consciousness, that world comprises the whole of novels like

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comic valence here, as Waugh's prose often does, would undermine the larger work of the narrative that denies meaning or the imposition of value. The presentation in *Living* is, rather, entirely objective, detached from the operations of meaning wherever possible.

*Living, Loving, and Party-Going* which, although they are preoccupied with people, treat people externally, spatially, as part of a larger world – they are not treated as significant in themselves. In this treatment Green offers us a glimpse into a unique anti-humanism which, like the anti-humanism of life propounded by Nietzsche and Grosz, suggests that anti-humanism can facilitate rather than imply the extinction of human life.

Counter to the techniques Green uses to oppose interpretation, Mengham argues using a sharp close reading of the novel's epigraph that *Living* can indeed be read as offering meaning. The epigraph, which seems bizarre when juxtaposed with the opening passage, reads "'As these birds would go | where so where would this child go?'" (206). As the narrative wears on, the meaning of the epigraph might be seen to relate to Lily; she is possibly the "child" referred to. Lily half-develops a plan to flee Birmingham, get married, and leave the country. The resolution of the novel, to the extent that it has one, is the unraveling of this plan and Lily's return to Birmingham from Liverpool. The birds referenced in the epigraph also seem significant, as Green's novels often fixate on birds – sparrows in *Living*, pigeons in *Party-Going*, peacocks in *Loving*. Specifically, *Living* presents a scene where a sparrow is caught in the window of the home where Lily lives with her father, Joe Gates, a grandfather figure, Mr. Craigan, and their lodger, Jim Dale. Each of the three men tries and fails to release the bird, but then their neighbor, the fecund Mrs. Eames, easily coaxes the bird out. The epigraph, equating Lily to the sparrow, might suggest that birds and people equally require delicate handling – it is because Lily's father hits her that she finally feels she must act on her plan, just as the sparrow cannot respond to the awkward interventions of the men in the Gates home. Drawing on obscure connections to Milton and D.H. Lawrence, Mengham extracts from the epigraph a totalizing reading of the novel: "in terms of its own textuality, the book appears to finish on a

contradiction; the textual inertia of motherhood [which Lily witnesses in Mrs. Eames and seeks out for herself] is contraposed to the textual volatility of birds. The transubstantiation of a desire for change into an audacious metaphor is overtaken by the articulation of a more complacent sense, which can rely on a more conventional method of reading for its superior intelligibility. On balance, *Living* fails to provide a satisfactory solution to its problems; indeed, its epigraph asks an insoluble question” (30). Even this interpretation must admit the failure of interpretation with regard to the novel, although Mengham syntactically makes this a failure of the novel. As this reading inadvertently points out, the novel as a whole undermines a reading that would boil down to an edification of Lily’s circumstances through her likeness to the bird. The form Green uses, in its preference for exteriority over interiority, militates against the imposition of meaning and significance onto characters. The epigraph does function, as Deleuze and Guattari would suggest, to “kill metaphor.”

With regard to the context of realism in the thirties, David Lodge points out that, “[w]hereas the modernist novel was characteristically a novel of consciousness, of the subconscious and the unconscious, of memory, reverie, introspection and dream, the thirties novel is characteristically about social and verbal interaction, presented objectively and externally. The stream of consciousness gives way to a stream of talk, but it is talk without the reassuring gloss of the classic novel’s authorial voice, without a privileged access to the thoughts and motivations of characters, so that the ‘modern’ note of disillusion, fragmentation and solipsism persists” (81). The thirties novel does, in its very peculiar realism, continue the imperatives of anti-humanist literary modernism which give way to a poststructuralist philosophy stating that humans are not the agents of history, that value is conferred through external systems rather than inherent. Thirties realism, as the example of the novel *Living*

shows, heightens early modernism's investment in objectivity and suggests a world in which non-hierarchical relations among humans are productively striven for.

### *Christopher Isherwood*

Many of the anti-humanist strategies of experimental realism deployed by Henry Green are also found in Christopher Isherwood's 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin*. The narrative presents information directly at the level of prose even as it is disorganized into large fragments appearing outside of their proper chronological order (though not disorientingly so).<sup>36</sup> As with Green, the result is a studied and radical objectivity that pushes against interpretation, concurrently asking us to rethink the human as a mode operating outside the standard paradigm of humanist agency. The opening of the novel foregrounds this emphasis on an impersonal objectivity which would divest itself of the workings of history both to disavow the violence of that history but also to object to accepted models of linear history. First, Isherwood presents an image of the setting, entirely bereft of subjectivity with the exception of a possessive early on: "From my window, the deep solemn massive street. Cellar-shops where the lamps burn all day, under the shadow of top-heavy balconied facades, dirty plaster frontages embossed with scrollwork and heraldic devices. The whole district is like this: street leading into street of houses like shabby monumental safes crammed with the tarnished valuables and second-hand furniture of a bankrupt middle class" (1). The paragraph begins with a position – "from my window" – more than a person, and the resistance to subjectivity largely pervades. The first use of a metaphoric device is essentially a

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<sup>36</sup> This fragmentation is admittedly due in part to the novel's publication history. Isherwood explains a bit in his preface, "About This Book." After writing *The Last of Mr. Norris*, the novel which is now published with *Goodbye to Berlin* in *Berlin Stories*, Isherwood says, "[n]ext I wrote the story of *Sally Bowles*, and it appeared as a small separate volume in 1937. Three other pieces—*The Nowaks*, *The Landauers* and *Berlin Diary: Autumn 1930*—were published in issues of John Lehmann's *New Writing*. Finally, the complete *Goodbye to Berlin* was published in 1939" (vi). Interestingly, Isherwood also says that he originally envisioned the ideas behind *Goodbye to Berlin* as evolving into a Balzacian novel that he would call *The Lost*, but, as he says, "What I actually produced was an absurd jumble of subplots and coincidences which defeated me whenever I tried to straighten it out on paper" (v).

front – not only is it not used to reconcile the outer world to humanity, to anthropomorphize, but it resists interpretation entirely by invoking wording that suggests interpretation but then refusing the necessary difference between tenor and vehicle: the “whole district” is actually not “like” “street leading into street of houses” – rather, it *is* that formation. The second metaphor functions more familiarly – the houses are like safes, a clearer fissure between tenor and vehicle – but the wording still tenses against anthropomorphism, and the vehicle takes so much effort to unpack that the operation of meaning is disrupted. And although the human “bankrupt middle class” ostensibly has a privileged place ending the paragraph, it is also the object of a preposition. Isherwood’s prose already is athwart the subjective.

The second paragraph takes this detachment a step further while also setting up for the reader a model of moving through the book which diverges from interpretive modes. In the book’s most famous passage, Isherwood writes, “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Some day, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed” (1). In this context, “not thinking” means not imposing or inferring meaning, not evaluating – resisting the humanistic impulse toward dominance through narration. Like Green, Isherwood frames his text with very limited reference to interiority, even his own, even though “Isherwood” is himself the narrator. Obsessive, nearly mechanical objectivity is adopted because, the novel suggests, it is necessary, appropriate given what is being observed, but also for observation in general. This is the proper attitude to take when depicting humans in the world – the world first, then humans.

In spite of stylistic similarities to Green’s writing, the circumstances in Isherwood’s case are different because of historical hindsight about the Holocaust. Writings leading up to World



War II are still often seen by scholars as displaying an unsavory apathy toward the political climate in Europe at the time, and unlike Henry Green and Elizabeth Bowen, Isherwood tackles the world of the thirties more directly instead of retreating into a depoliticized factory setting or the anti-historical form of the novel of manners. This problem pertaining to the historical rawness of the thirties is exemplified by Samuel Hynes's brief reading of Isherwood's text: "[t]here are no public figures in the book, and no great events: Hitler never appears, and the political struggles of the time are virtually ignored" (354). In this instance, for Hynes, the historical moment of the Holocaust irrupts into the literary, and the impulse is clearly to formulate a critique of the book in these terms: the terms of explicit and direct representation of historical events. There is something retrospectively unconscionable about anything that looks like passivity or detachment at such a terrific moment, and the response, in Hynes's case, is to wish for more propagandistic, more didactic, or, in dignified politico-aesthetic terms, more avant-garde literary manifestations: any literature that might have prevented history from happening. The suggestion that literature of the thirties ought to be chastised for its failure to prevent history becomes a confusing anomaly when considered along with the argument that thirties novels are not modernist enough or experimental enough: not only is *Goodbye to Berlin* not precocious enough in its form – making it aesthetically inferior to modernism – it is also not invested enough in history or historicism – making it morally suspect.

An overlooked possibility in the reconciliation of the literary with the historical that is relevant for thirties literature and for *Goodbye to Berlin* in particular is Walter Benjamin's historical materialism, cogently elaborated in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Benjamin diverges from these other models by taking the temporal component—historicity—as prior, while also attempting to reinforce its significance by conferring a spatial resonance. His

discussion of what he terms the “angel of history” typifies the thoroughgoing perspectival dissociation necessary for a calibrated receptivity to the truly historical:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (257-8)

Here, transparent narrative becomes anathema to the representation of history. History as Benjamin sees it, in its most undiluted form, is inherently fissured, violent, and catastrophic. He describes this sense of the temporal alternately as heterogeneous time and Messianic time, where, specifically in Judaism, “every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter” (264). This radically indeterminate relation to the future is opposed, it seems, to the smoothness of narrative, to what he calls “homogeneous, empty time” (264). Though what the angel of history witnesses is horrific and destructive, his concession that he cannot know the future seems to figure positively, or at least as a better option; we are left to question whether the refusal to fit the piled wreckage into a narrative and the choice, instead, to leave the grotesquely physical matter of history undistributed is more monstrous than the alternative, namely, the neatly packaged diachronic history that claims a knowledge it could not possibly have. Notably, Benjamin and Isherwood point to a historical materialist subject for whom formal breaks, ruptures, and irruptions constitute what is ultimately the only ethical relation to history; their sense of history cancels the assimilation of futurity on the grounds of its cost. This attitude toward history, theorized by Benjamin and performed by Isherwood’s text, approximates an anti-humanist ethics, one that would follow Deleuze and Guattari in favoring experimentation as a tactic to disrupt the imposition of meaning through interpretation: history

cannot be accurately represented through the progressive linearity of narrative, or through the humanizing work of metaphor. Further, the parallel with Benjamin allows us to see the complexity of Isherwood's experimental realism as a way to treat the breakdown of history which makes thirties literature in general so strange to study.

A context other than the thirties in which Isherwood's text is often considered is that of cosmopolitanism. On the one hand, the ostensible tourism of Isherwood's experience in Berlin (his role as a cultural outsider of course also helps to occasion his objectivity) casts further doubt on the novel's credentials as a text that rethinks problems of realism and history. However, on the other hand, Amanda Anderson's theory of cosmopolitan detachment suggests an alternative reading. For Anderson, tracing cosmopolitanism back to its Enlightenment origins is productive because it "will allow for a more complex conception of detachment, which is often reductively opposed to a valorized conception of situatedness or, alternatively, too easily celebrated as negative freedom" ("Cosmopolitanism" 286). Through her lens, detachment becomes intricately linked with cosmopolitanism as a practice that removes the subject from home and any "natural" affiliations, often for rigorous critical purposes. Anderson establishes what she sees as the virtues of detachment more thoroughly in the Introduction to her book, *The Powers of Distance*:

The cultivation of detachment involves an attempt to transcend partiality, interests, and context: it is an aspiration toward universality and objectivity. The norms through which that aspiration finds expression may be situated, the aspiration may always be articulated through historically available forms, but as an aspiration it cannot be reduced to a simple form of illusion, or a mere psychological mechanism. (33)

It is significant, too, that she avows a special interest in "practitioners of detachment who are ambivalent, hesitant, uneasy, and sometimes quite thoughtfully engaged in a complex process of self-interrogation and social critique" (33). Here, detached cosmopolitanism depends on an evacuation of the self that is much more qualified than the stereotype of the Enlightenment's

scientific objectivity, which is often mistakenly reduced to a simple humanism. The perspective of the detached cosmopolitan is an *intermediate* one—rather than immediate or pointedly mediated—neither the imposing and transcendent perspective of the compiler of knowledge, nor the partial, situated perspective from below, the perspective of experience. It coincides nicely, then, with Isherwood’s camera perspective, as it does also with the perspective of Benjamin’s angel of history. Both of these views specifically do not represent a model of history told from below (or quite above), and so they are fragmented in an especially peculiar way. The perspectives they emphasize are still spectral, phantasmic, and incapable of being placed: the angel sees more than the person who is below, a part of the wreckage, but he still does not, or will not, see enough to make a narrative, and “Isherwood”/camera is not the Isherwood whose sexuality led him to Berlin, or the Isherwood who does not see what will come. These detached perspectives seem monstrous, because they should be able to see, because they have just a degree of foreknowledge beyond that of people on the ground—people for whom time still manifests as comfortably linear—which seems too little, at least for Isherwood and Benjamin, to change the future, but which seems just enough to make them horrified by what will come.

But in terms of form, the emphasis that detachment places on perspective has specific consequences for writings with cosmopolitan investments. While in one sense perspective is precisely what detachment hopes to transcend—Anderson mentions the classic misconception of detachment as the “view from nowhere”—this also means that the concern with perspective will be even greater, since perspectival partiality is exactly what must be effaced. As noted above, the perspective of detachment is an intermediate one, gathering perspectives at a distance, but not at so great a distance that the edges of figures become blurred and all sense of particularity is lost. The repercussions of this perspective for the form the writing will take is compelling: in

*Goodbye to Berlin*, the detached camera-ness of “Isherwood” yields, on the one hand, the character of the text as travel-writing combined with autobiography—emphasizing the character of photography as neutrally relaying details and simply showing what happened—but on the other hand, this perspective is also responsible for the fragmented, ruptured order of events. Specifically, even as detachment aspires to full impartiality, there remains a trace of the aspirant’s position and spatial orientation (although not of his or her interiority), and this results in a residual partiality of perspective that is most pronounced in a strange inability to register temporal movement – the narrative moves in fits and starts. In the overarching structure of *Goodbye to Berlin*, the fragments of narrative are related through “Isherwood” transparently, but their flow is disrupted in such a way that events happening at roughly the same time are sometimes separated into different sections—“Isherwood” says he sees Sally for the last time in the “Sally Bowles” section, though we find her again at a later point in the text, accidentally insulting Natalia in “The Landauers”—and at other times the sequence of events is directly misconstrued. Interestingly, what is most distinctive about the book’s form is ultimately its detached perspective; the kind of narrative that this perspective produces coincides with the problem of the historical because the narrative coheres not through a diachronic flow, but through synchronic moments of stasis, which signal an anti-humanist approach to history that would question the production of order and meaning out of a muddle of events. Isherwood produces a subject of history approximating a Deleuzian body without organs, opposed to the “organism” that is History.

The “I am a camera” passage at the novel’s outset also confirms the emphasis on detachment coupled with formal stasis. The passage offers a jarring pronouncement, not because it claims objectivity and detachment in the face of a monstrous history (though critics like Hynes

have certainly made this claim), but because of the conjoining of the “I” with the objective and thus typically invisible and unnamable subject: no, “Isherwood” does not disappear or become transparent in this moment; rather, he reminds us that he is making a choice. He tells us in these lines that his interiority will not figure in his narration, while at the same time reminding us that the perspective he gives us will be, like the perspective of a camera, always located at a specific point in space, and in time. This moment draws attention, too, to the specificity of Amanda Anderson’s choice of the term “detachment” to speak of admirable aspirations toward universality and objectivity. Detachment is, as she is careful to note, usually a derogatory term leveled at the person who is caught out for trying to speak for the universal and claim vision of the whole. Importantly, detachment is a term that cannot be used to describe the successfully impartial, transcendent, universal subject because that entity will have naturalized its objective status so effectively that there will be no way to identify it as such. So, detachment is a term that can only be invoked from the moment when the “view from nowhere” manifests as an individual, locatable person, and this is the term’s real value: there is a primary tethering of the detached perspective to a subject who has a material existence, and that initial grounding makes the floating, hovering perspective that follows a legitimate source of knowledge, one that does not cover up its roots and is thus incapable of being confused with an objectivity that would present itself, impossibly, as pure. The detached “I” of “I am a camera” is a hybrid modern subject whose view of the world cannot be explained as either situated or dissociated, and this results in an estrangement in narrative form.

Given the theoretical framework plotted above, Samuel Hynes’s diagnosis of the distinctive form of *Goodbye to Berlin* is more prescient than it at first seems. He parses it as a text structured through oppositions: “[t]hough it is made of fragments, *Goodbye to Berlin* has a

firm structure, which depends mainly on two factors. One is the symmetrical balancing of opposites—rich/poor, Jew/gentile, fascist/communist, German/alien, homosexual/heterosexual, all the polarities that separate and isolate human beings from one another” (355). This delineation stems partly from the fact that Hynes sees an important connection between this novel and T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* based on a shared anxiety over modern alienation—a claim which, though it stands to be corrected in the face of Miller’s more recent periodization of the thirties in terms of form, is nonetheless quite interesting. Hynes then goes on to pair sections of the book based on these polarities: the opening and closing diary sections go together, Sally’s heterosexuality pairs with homosexuality in the Reugen Island section, and the Nowaks’ poverty structurally opposes the wealth of the Landauers. Though the inconsistency of Hynes’s appreciation of the text’s form coupled with his devaluation of it in historical terms has been suggested above, there is something compelling in a comparison to Eliot’s work which is, on its face, an irreconcilably divergent example of modernist form. Michael Levenson’s discussion of *The Waste Land*, drawing in part on an essay by Joseph Frank dealing with spatiality in modernism, sheds some light on this tension: “[t]he poem moves forward only as it moves sideways, toward new analogies, new parallels, new possibilities for comparison. The completion of the quest becomes of less central dramatic emphasis than the recognition of other quest-motifs in other cultural settings” (201). This assessment presents an interesting problem: it is Eliot’s cryptic historical incorporations—the acquisitive gestures he makes across spatial and temporal boundaries for the material references of his Ur-modernist poem—that consummately fulfill the New Critical/formalist criteria of self-reflexive literariness, at the same time that, given the preoccupation with historical materials, these incorporations most seem to violate them. Of modern literature in general, Levenson goes on to suggest that “[m]odern poetry [...] aspires to

static simultaneity rather than to linear sequence” (201). On this view, it becomes possible to see Isherwood and Eliot as much more closely related, with the difference that Isherwood’s static disruptions, in contrast to Eliot’s, do more to decenter the temporal than the spatial.

To again connect form to detachment, what Anderson does not draw our attention to, and what *Goodbye to Berlin* forces us to consider, is that the spatial element of detachment—it is a view from *nowhere*, or in Anderson’s more positive estimation, a view from an indeterminate or intermediate *where*, a place between places—is necessarily supplemented by a temporal element: the pure objectivity that detachment corrects is always also a view from *no-when*, a view taken out of a temporal sequence that would limit the availability of knowledge, in addition to being a view out of spatiality, which tends to place figural limits on visual epistemological enterprises. Detachment can thus be separated into two comparable increments on a scale of engagement: displacement and anachronism. Because the form of *Goodbye to Berlin* shows “Isherwood” both out of place—in Berlin and located in the position of a camera rather than inside a character with interiority—and out of time—it demands an approach that can account for disruptions in movement through space and movement through time.

This consideration of detachment and objectivity in narrative as anti-humanist modes has a correlative in Paul Sheehan’s study, *Modernism, Narrative and Humanism*. Sheehan establishes but also complicates the connection between narrative and the human by focusing on the way traditional relations of the human to time and space, originally smoothed through narrative, can be undermined through modernist experiment. He writes: “Because narrative is *language* arranged meaningfully over time, it possesses the ability to divest consciousness of linearity and causality, to neutralise the urge to turn raw sensation into perception. And because narrative is also language arranged meaningfully over *time*, it reaches into the heart of human



epistemology. Our cognitive apparatus is inescapably temporal; once we begin to think in self-consciously temporal terms, we have already allowed in the possibility of narrative” (22). In Sheehan’s opinion, this means that narrative – thus prose modernism – can never be fully anti-humanist, but it also strives for that goal through techniques like Isherwood’s objectivity and formal fragmentation. As Sheehan also points out, “By problematising narrative, the modernist novel brings to the fore narrative’s various struggles – with time and language, subjectivity and desire, voice and machine. It can be explored, therefore, for signs of the struggle between the human and the inhuman. Literary modernism, in trying to break free of narrative, is also seeking release from the grip of the humanistic discourse of Victorian liberalism” (23). Christopher Isherwood, like Henry Green, effectively furthers this break, but not with the passionate and, from the perspective of anti-humanism, misguided fervor of familiar modernist experimentation. Rather, the emphasis on a staid detachment in *Goodbye to Berlin* asks us to move a step beyond the residual self-referentiality – the hint of genius – that lingers in modernist experiment. The experimental realism suggested by the model Deleuze and Guattari envision actually constitutes, in spite of misgivings like those of Samuel Hynes, a provocatively ethical attitude to have toward a history as catastrophic as that which shaped the thirties and developed into the forties. Isherwood’s treatment of Berlin suggests that anti-humanism and ethics are not antithetical.

### *Elizabeth Bowen*

Elizabeth Bowen’s late thirties novel *The Death of the Heart* makes effective, anti-humanist use of objectivity, but does so in a way that seems very different from *Goodbye to Berlin*. Published in 1938, *The Death of the Heart* treats, often with compelling indirectness and calculated detachment, the alienation and development (or non-development) of a young woman,

Portia, sent to live with unsympathetic relatives. The dead heart referred to in the title is Portia's: after having a relatively innocent flirtation with Eddie, a family friend, which hinges on a diary, Portia comes to the realization of the failure of human connection. As the narrator writes, "There seemed to be some way she did not know of by which people managed to understand each other" (322). This recognition of the inability to know signifies in the context of the novel as a sort of end to innocence, and manifests also as a loss of agency: to be unable to know others is to be unable to order or manipulate the world. The concern with connections between people aligns the novel with the tradition of the novel of manners, which enjoyed a resurgence as a form during the thirties due to its privileging of interrelationality and the social, as modes of exteriority, in opposition to the interiority of high modernism's literary impressionism. *The Death of the Heart* loosely uses the form of the novel of manners to reveal continuities between modernism and thirties realism, to establish another form of anti-humanist, experimental realism. Through the incorporation of segments from Portia's diary into the novel as several autonomous chapters that disrupt the flow of the book, Bowen stages a mode of subjectivity that emphasizes affinities rather than breaks between modernism and literature of the thirties. Before moving on to this reading of the novel, let me first briefly gloss the category "novel of manners" and explain its importance in this context.

The novel of manners can be said to have reemerged during the thirties, although it never precisely went out of style. Beginning in most accounts with Fielding's *Tom Jones* and achieving formal perfection in the works of Jane Austen, the history of the genre is otherwise uneven and largely without chronological pattern, no doubt on account of its unwieldy generality. The critics who discuss the novel of manners, of whom there are few (Lionel Trilling being the first and most famous), tend to agree on several criteria that lend the genre a sense of

coherence: it privileges the texture of society over the individual, it tends to be written often by and almost always about women, and it places the emphasis on determining social conventions, or on individual development as occurring only in and through those conventions. This last criterion, allowing development only through conventions, intensifies as the genre approaches modernity in the works of, for instance, Henry James, and it adds the appearance of stasis to the genre. That is, as a response to modernity, the novel of manners provides a ready vocabulary for the precisely modern curtailment of individual agency in the face of constraining social and economic conventions. By stasis, I mean the loss of movement, both in terms of supposed social mobility, but also in terms of the development of characters through the narrative. Interesting enough in this transhistorical frame, these characteristics of the form take on particular significance when they are situated, in Bowen's novels as well as those of Henry Green, Evelyn Waugh, and others, at a historical point identified as just beyond modernism. What does it mean, at the periphery of a period defined aesthetically by formal experimentation focalized through individual subjects, to reject the imperative of newness? To opt instead for a staid prose and direct presentation seemingly steeped in the anti-modernist tradition of realism? What does it mean to close off the consciousnesses of characters as unknowable, to each other and to themselves as well as to the reader? The relationship to modernist form is twofold here, for while the novel of manners stands in opposition to the theory of modernist fiction delineated in, say, Virginia Woolf's "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" because it does not privilege or revolutionize the depiction of character, it nonetheless reinvests the aesthetic of "direct presentation of the thing itself" and intense objectivity familiar from modernist poetics, specifically from Pound's criteria for Imagism. The strange and often overlooked opposition between modernist prose and modernist poetry is brought interestingly to a head in the form of

the novel of manners, which gets excluded from accounts of modernism on the grounds of its refusal to showcase subjectivity, yet its objectivity aligns with the anti-humanism – termed impersonality by critics like Michael Levenson and Sanford Schwartz – of modern poetry. What is at stake, then, in a classification of *The Death of the Heart* as a novel of manners is a challenge to modernist canon formation: insisting that realism is modernism's formal other negates the continuity of poetry and prose during the modernist period and diminishes the potential for thinking subjectivity more dynamically. Realism, linked up with objectivity as it is in the context of the novel of manners during the thirties, is very capable of breeding its own aesthetic experiments, as we have seen already in the writings of Henry Green and Christopher Isherwood. In *The Death of the Heart*, Bowen's realist experiment is to depict objectively a world of humans, dramatically curtailing their capacities as subjects. Here, manners and the impossibility of communication they inadvertently emphasize undermine human agency and compel an examination of what modern subjectivity can be.

The function of diary entries in Bowen's novel reveals this changed attitude toward subjectivity quite effectively. In addition to the strange inclusion of diary passages in the novel as separate chapters bereft of transitions to the surrounding chapters, the specter of the diary also opens the novel. Anti-subjective even at the outset, the novel begins with the landscape of a wintry park:

That morning's ice, no more than a brittle film, had cracked and was now floating in segments. These tapped together or, parting, left channels of dark water, down which swans in slow indignation swam. The island stood in frozen woody brown dusk: it was now between three and four in the afternoon. A sort of breath from the clay, from the city outside the park, condensing, made the air unclear; through this, the trees round the lake soared frigidly up. Bronze cold of January bound the sky and the landscape; the sky was shut to the sun—but the swans, the rims of the ice, the pallid withdrawn Regency terraces had an unnatural burnish, as though cold were light. There is something momentous about the height of winter. Steps rang on the bridges, and along the black walks. This weather had set in; it would freeze harder tonight. (3)

Like the opening of *Goodbye to Berlin*, there is very little of the subjective here, minimal anthropomorphization – the swans’ indignation and the breath of the clay are exceptions. Even when subjectivity does intrude it does so coldly, in keeping with the icy, deanimated setting. The ice conjures the hardened, inhuman externality favored by Wyndham Lewis.

Only in the second paragraph does the novel slowly fix its attention on two figures in this cold space, and focusing cleanly on their exteriorities rather than their interiorities: “On a footbridge between an island and the mainland a man and woman stood talking, leaning on the rail. In the intense cold, which made everyone hurry, they had chosen to make this long summertime pause” (3-4). These figures turn out to be Anna Quayne, who is Portia’s half-brother’s finicky wife, and her friend St. Quentin. They turn out to be talking scandalously about Portia’s diary, which Anna has found and read. As the novel unfolds it comes out that Portia has written little to justify Anna’s reaction to the diary as “completely distorted and distorting. As I read I thought, either this girl or I are mad” (7). The tension between what we are led to believe the diary contains and what it actually contains – namely the most banal and chiefly objective observations of Portia’s surroundings – suggests that for Anna the problem of other minds and the modes of communication between them are a source of horror, but the book leaves somewhat open the question of how Portia experiences the same phenomenon. The novel leads us to the understanding that what offends Anna must precisely be the refusal to grant her any interiority: she is merely, for Portia, what she does and how she behaves. In fact, Portia’s whole theory of character is based on exteriority and behavior. In a discussion she recounts in one of the diary entries we get a glimpse of this attitude: “[Dickie] said, [Eddie] is something of a Lothario, isn’t he? I said Eddie was not really, and he said, well, he loses his head a bit, if you know what I mean. I said I did not quite, and he said, well to my mind it is largely a matter of character. He

said he judged people by their characters. I said was that always quite a good way of judging, as people's characters get so different at times, as it depends so much what happens to them. He said no, I was wrong, that what happened to people depended on their characters. I know Dickie sounds right, but I don't feel he is" (294-5). If the "death" of Portia's heart can alternately be described as her education into subjectivity, or her development into a social economy where character or who you are trumps what you do, then do she and the novel lament this, or is it an accepted effect of modernity?

Anna is not the novel's only character who fears Portia's diary. Eddie, Portia's love interest, demands that she not write anything about them, about herself and her relationship to him, in the diary. It is not until later that we see the sorts of things she actually was writing, and with what sort of tone. The sense of what happened in its fullness and complexity emerges to the extent that it does, which is small, only through the most meticulous and detached narration. Here is an example, where Portia seems to be registering the concern of her beach house host for Portia's mental health after a disruptive and unpleasant visit from Eddie: "Mrs. Heccomb and I went into Toyne's this morning, to buy clips to stop things blowing away, and coming out of Toyne's she looked as though she was going to say something but she did not, perhaps she was not going to" (290). And in a later entry: "I got a letter from Eddie, so did Mrs. Heccomb, he says to her he will always have memories of here. She showed me the letter and said wasn't it nice, but still did not say any more about Eddie. She looked once as if she was going to but she did not, perhaps she was not really going to" (291). The significance of the diary's presence here emerges more clearly, perhaps, when read against the tradition of the diary in realist fiction. Where the diary form is used in Richardson's *Pamela* (and parodied in Fielding's *Shamela*) to stage the textual drama of concealment and revelation, private and public, interiority and

exteriority, Bowen uses it here to evacuate interiority; the use is comparable to but more sharply felt than Henry Green's use of John Haye's diary in *Blindness*. Portia's diary ostensibly treats matters of the heart, specifically her entanglement with Eddie, yet her fantasies and feelings are almost entirely absent. Everyone in the novel except Portia invests her diary with personality and humanity, but the inclusion of the diary in the book casts doubt on these perspectives, which were never, because of Bowen's encompassing denial of deep interiority, stable places for the reader's consciousness to rest anyway.

As I briefly suggested earlier, when the novel of manners intersects with modernity a kind of stasis is effected – and *The Death of the Heart* is no exception. However, where early modernist examples such as *The Portrait of a Lady* treat stasis or the inability of characters to master their circumstances in negative terms, so that stasis itself constitutes the object of critique, the form of the novel of manners in Bowen develops as a site in which stasis can be used as a critical tool rather than serving as its object. *The Death of the Heart*, by casting as its heroine a confused teenage girl reminds us of the trajectory toward adult subjectivity implied by a reading of the novel of manners as a novel of development, or *bildungsroman*, while entirely undermining the sense of progress that trajectory entails. We watch Portia attempt to be interpellated into a structure of romantic love, and thus adult subjectivity, and fail repeatedly, being thwarted by her guardians and Eddie through the opacity of linguistic communication. As we have seen with the diary, there is so much mediation required to explain not only what was said but also what might have been said but wasn't, so much emphasis on the surface of language and the surface of social convention, that interiority or subjectivity as the object or meaning of the text is only ever obscured further by its treatment in the novel. The diary is comprised not of descriptions of significant or transformative events, but truly objective accounts of conversations

between herself and Eddie that deny the accrual of meaning to the exchanged words. What is interesting here is that Bowen does not directly posit the failures of meaning, development, and progress as a problem. Rather, the book seems almost to appreciate the realism of stasis – depleted human agency – as a non-aggressive alternative to some aspired-to mastery of the world, for which a novel like *The Portrait of a Lady* still hoped. Stasis here serves the ends of social critique by suggesting a harmony between individual and world not occasioned by mastery. Though Portia’s lack of agency in the book is something she lashes out against and experiences negatively, it is opposed to the more negatively rendered machinations of her selfish guardians, who do control the world around them with a measure of success. The novel leaves open the possibility that the “death of the heart” might be a development away from rather than toward subjectivity that Portia must experience in order to live ethically as an adult, as the adults surrounding her do not, obsessed as they are with character and the attendant assignment of meaning to action.

### *Conclusion*

As I hope this chapter has shown, the relationship between thirties realism and literary modernism is more complex than a historical narrative pinpointing the end of modernism would imply. It is the figuration of subjectivity in the thirties novels by Henry Green, Christopher Isherwood, and Elizabeth Bowen that suggestively expresses the tension between what Michael Levenson calls the modernist “enshrining of consciousness as the repository of meaning and value” and the seemingly anti-modernist shift to exteriority and objectivity. Portia’s diary, with its opaque language yet generic claims to represent interiority, effectively captures Bowen’s ambivalence toward subjectivity. In this historical perspective, a depiction of subjectivity as



agentive and autonomous no longer approximates an ethical mode. Elizabeth Bowen, in *The Death of the Heart*, like Henry Green and Christopher Isherwood in their thirties or inter-war novels, offers a rapprochement between realism and more “modernist” prose forms in her anti-humanist presentation of subjectivity. In spite of its realism, Bowen’s novel is formally ruptured by the diary, which foregrounds the problem of the subject without allowing character and interiority to eclipse the otherwise radically objective treatment of the story. The formal particularity of thirties realism, as evinced in writings like those considered here, demands a more sophisticated vocabulary for describing both developments in subjectivity and historical transformation. Experimental realism provides that vocabulary.

## Conclusion

### Wyndham Lewis and the New Modernist Studies: Anti-Humanist Lines of Flight

In this closing section, my aim is perhaps less to conclude than to consider two issues that have hovered around the periphery of this study. The first is the “new modernist studies,” the newest expression of which is a state-of-the-field article by Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz that, after broadly offering expansion as the primary watchword of modernist studies today, suggests “The Transnational Turn” as the most significant recent development in the field (738). The second is Wyndham Lewis, without whom any study of modernist anti-humanism would be woefully incomplete. I made my reasons for keeping Lewis on the periphery of my study fairly clear early on, when I associated him with an anti-humanism of the deathly rather than an anti-humanism of life – and clearly I have been invested in this study with distancing modernist anti-humanism from the associations with fascisms of various stripes that have kept it a relatively touchy subject in modernist studies. However, having relegated Lewis to the background in order to emphasize an anti-humanism of life – of people, of interrelationality; an anti-humanism that is productive rather than negative – we can now turn back to him. While Lewis’s anti-humanism tends, indeed, toward the negative – toward the vitriolic, toward figurations of the humans as grotesque, as husk-like shells or carapaces – it is not immune to other assertions I have made here about anti-humanism: Lewis sought, throughout his career, to imagine ways out of the human. The often angry fervor that tended to be the idiom of his anti-humanist expressions might be seen as productive, however idiosyncratically, after all.

By reading Lewis through the lens of the new modernist studies here I hope to close by suggesting that even the most troubling anti-humanists should have a home in modernist studies, because they are the ones who take Nietzsche's imperative to rethink value seriously. Like the other anti-humanists I have considered in this study, Wyndham Lewis is not so much a bad modernist as he is a modernist who operates in an anti-humanist mode that allows him to see through to how the bad became defined – and devalued – as bad. He reminds us to question the value systems underwriting our behaviors and actions, and those value systems are almost always damagingly humanistic, constitutive of a status quo that polices the human and forces “life” into corners where its evolution and generation are fettered. If this attitude sometimes requires that we question Lewis's own value systems – at times when we recall that he wrote a book in praise of Hitler, that was otherwise anti-semitic, that he was misogynistic – then so much the better.

Instead of using this section to end the discussion I have conducted throughout this study, I prefer to use it to open up new questions, not just through juxtaposing Lewis and the new modernist studies, but also by bringing Fredric Jameson's perspective – anti-humanist in its own way – to bear on the discussion. At the beginning of his career Jameson was interested in modernism, as evinced by his study on Wyndham Lewis, and now, after practically inventing postmodernism, suggesting that modernism was over, he has turned back to modernism in *A Singular Modernity* and *The Modernist Papers*, even giving the keynote address at 2008's annual Modernist Studies Association conference. As I discuss in what follows, Jameson's approach in his recent modernist works has been to show the connections between modernism and now, and this seems to be done in terms of an anti-humanist worldview and range of references. He even specifically argues for figures I have been discussing as anti-humanist philosophers to be

classified as modernists: “Deleuze remained essentially a modernist, and everything prophetically ‘post-modern’ about the second volume of the film books is then withdrawn by their aestheticist framework and that very open philosophical commitment to art and to the New that makes it incongruous to characterize Deleuze as a ‘closet’ modernist: however much he may have been an ‘apartment’ modernist and a sedentary one, [...]” (*A Singular Modernity* 203). Jameson himself models the continuity of history through anti-humanism. In the rest of this section I tie that continuity to the emphasis on “the new” in the new modernist studies (mirroring the emphasis on “the new” in modernism itself) and to Wyndham Lewis’s refusal of the new, of the “revolutionary,” that led him to the ultimately repugnant alternative of fascism. Although the vision of history that emerges here at first seems homogeneous, unchanging and unchangeable, I will point instead to the way that, drawing implicitly on Deleuzian anti-humanism, Jameson uses that historical monism to help us imagine a future – a future that is anti-humanist yet that also favors the evolution of life.

### *The New Modernist Studies*

Modernist studies, ten years in, is still a comparatively new professional configuration. In 1999 the “New Modernisms” conference, which was affiliated with the relatively new (1993) scholarly journal *Modernism/Modernity*, ushered the Modernist Studies Association into being. At the conference, modernism was diversified. As an account in the recent collection *Bad Modernisms* puts it, the works showcased evinced, as a whole, “at least two significant enterprises: one that reconsiders the definitions, locations, and producers of ‘modernism’ and another that applies new approaches and methodologies to ‘modernist’ works” (1). A contemporary article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* similarly talks about the “New

Modernisms” conference as a positive resurgence for the field focused through cultural studies, which made a wider array of artifacts legible as modernist. The fallout from the success of the conference has meant that our current moment has become an exciting time for the study of modernism. However, there is a niggling feeling – the feeling that the integration of modernism, which has for so long been a stodgy underdog in literary studies, is now going too smoothly. The problem can be pinpointed in the rhetoric of newness that permeates the modernist studies phenomenon: there is a complex symmetry between the modernist imperative to “make it new” and the call of modernist scholars for a “new” modernist studies that demands our attention.

Recently, several scholars have grappled with this problem of the “new.” Jennifer Wicke addresses it in an article for *Modernism/Modernity* using the doubled language of appreciation, and drawing on Ernst Bloch’s mystically-inflected idea of the *Novum*. Though the paper seems to be responding to an anxiety with which it never fully contends, Wicke concludes optimistically: “The modernist bubble of our speculations, set aloft by our appreciations as by our depreciations alike, enlarges the surface of what has been and might be the case, allowing modernism into our moment’s world experiment, making modernism anew. In retailing modernism this way, we don’t risk selling out—the only danger lies in failing to appreciate and give value, thereby selling modernism short” (402). The article flirts with an economic discourse but ultimately settles for one of taste, in which the marketing of modernism is an unproblematic side effect of bringing a revalued modernism to the masses (here, implicitly our students). Edward Comentale deals with newness, or what Wicke reduces to the fear of “selling out,” rather differently, and much more warily. In his book, Comentale refocuses the tradition of aesthetic modernism through the figure of Wyndham Lewis and against the backdrop of the 1999 conference, and the result of this focus with regard to the designation of “new modernisms” is

suspicion. For Comentale, the institutionalization of 1990s-style notions of difference as central to modernism seems to be somehow implicated in market logic. He speaks of “the continual production and consumption of cultural difference, the ceaseless labor and endless discourse that shapes our own profession” as “phenomena [that] feed as they affirm the activity of a voracious market” (3). The flipside of this suspicion, however, is an investment in the reconsideration of fascism or certain unpopular modernisms that are exactly what the “new modernisms” exclude; he speaks of the conference’s “act of renewal” as being “accompanied by a rather anxious need for differentiation and disavowal. Now, at last, a ‘new’, brighter modernism would lay to rest the specter of fascism. For once and for all, modernist scholars would slough off the reactionary politics of their field” (2). Comentale invokes and critiques the conference in order to create a more hospitable climate of analysis for Lewis and the “classical” modernism he typifies, and could thus be accused of a similar economically or professionally advantageous diversifying gesture. But that does not detract from Lewis’s potential as a figure available for a certain probing of the contradictions inherent in a “new” modernist studies.

Lewis scholarship has not been unaffected by the boom in modernism. One book review notes the high number of recent studies of modernism that have fixed on Lewis as a central figure<sup>37</sup>, and in the *Bad Modernisms* collection, Lewis is the only writer to be the focus of two contributions. Still, recuperations of Lewis sit uneasily with a framework of new modernism that is predominantly liberal and invested in a politics of difference. Scholars remain hard-pressed to contend with Lewis’s fascism, and even in *Bad Modernisms* – the only logical place to file a fascist modernist as unapologetic as Lewis was – fascism remains the part of Lewis that must be more or less expurgated for recuperation to occur. Martin Puchner begins his contribution by

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<sup>37</sup> The review is of Comentale’s book. Jonathan Greenberg writes, “Indeed, the centrality of Lewis not only to this work, but also to studies by Douglas Mao, Tyrus Miller, and Paul Peppis, among others, indicates that it may be time to rechristen this period of literary history ‘The Lewis Era’”.

setting out Lewis's sins as topoi to be moved away from in our interpretation of Lewis by the end of his argument: "Among the many bad British modernists, Wyndham Lewis stands out as the inventor of a particularly unsavory brand of modernism, an amalgam of racial hysteria, homophobic diatribes, fascist politics, and social resentment" (44). However, as this uneven recuperation progresses, Puchner also reminds us that Lewis's fascism was animated by a much more agreeable form of loathing for the market and the obsession with the "new," that Georges Sorel's formulation of syndicalism stood for Lewis and many others as the "missing link" between fascism and communism (57). Though analysis of Lewis is beginning to be undertaken in such terms, his oeuvre remains primarily intransigent in the face of recuperative attempts like those which constitute the configurations of "new modernisms."

What the ongoing critical conversations about the "new modernist studies" and Wyndham Lewis suggest, in different ways, is that we lack a sufficiently aggressive vocabulary of critique for talking about modernism and about the way we conduct our business as scholars of modernism. The insistence on subterraneously translating Lewis's rancor into our own twenty-first-century terms – terms which at the same time oddly recapitulate a much earlier modernist vocabulary – has resulted in a refusal to engage with fascism, as Lewis imagines it, as a suggestive if unlikely placeholder for utopia. It may seem equally unlikely that Fredric Jameson, whose early study of Lewis has been vilified by many Lewis enthusiasts as pigeonholing the writer and painter as a fascist, could be the source of such a vocabulary. Still, I will argue here precisely that Jameson's supple Marxist historicism, both in *Fables of Aggression* and the more recent *A Singular Modernity*, provides us with a way of thinking about modernism and modernist studies through Lewis that repudiates the model of recuperation on which the "new modernist studies" continues to thrive.

## *Reconsidering Fables of Aggression*

In *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, Fredric Jameson situates Wyndham Lewis both within the historical-economic context and against the aesthetic current of modernism proper – that is to say, the “make it new” version of modernism, but also modernism’s “impressionistic aesthetic,” and modernism as fragmentation (2). Jameson is able to variously mark Lewis out as an interesting modernist specimen, imply the necessity of his inclusion in the modernist canon, and figure him as unrecoverable politically. Within the historical context of Lewis scholarship, the book thus productively situated Lewis in what is now seen as his proper position as one of the “great modernists,” but it also cast him for years to come as the irreconcilable modernist fascist par excellence, even less reconcilable politically than Yeats, Eliot, or Pound. In the context of Jameson’s body of work, however, the book holds a rather different place. Published in 1979, *Fables* came out right before *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and bears the mark of the later book’s methodology as early as its opening sentence: “Ideology, psychoanalysis, narrative analysis: these are the coordinates within which the following study seeks to construct an interpretive model of one of the most striking, ambiguous and little known bodies of fiction written in English in recent times” (1). Other Jamesonian concerns pervade the book as well, for instance, the sense of critical distance as a historical phenomenon and the interest in foregrounding relationships between contemporary aesthetic and economic modes of production. I am interested here in what Jameson does with Lewis in these terms, why he finds Lewis useful for his larger theoretical project, while also considering the frustrating yet compelling version of modernism that emerges in this account of Lewis.



Early in the book, Jameson clearly explains modernism and Lewis's relation to it. Jameson distinguishes between two possible theories of modernism. The first belongs to Lukács, and it sees modernist aesthetic fragmentation (a key criterion of modernism throughout the book) as a continuation and incessant reproduction of the reification and self-alienation germane to modernity. The second he attributes to the modernists themselves, Adorno, and the Tel Quel group; they see modernism as formally revolutionary, and this can be extrapolated to the optimism of "make it new," where the modernist aesthetic is radical, and laudable, insofar as it differs from the contemporary mode of economic production. This second view seems to involve a mistaken sense of the relationship between the socio-economic and the aesthetic, at least in terms of its belief that a change in the mode of artistic production could work a change in the mode of economic production. The first view, on the other hand, positions the artistic as a mirror of the socio-economic, suggesting that the artistic is determined by and structured the same way as the economic. The third view Jameson introduces (and espouses) is a conflation of these two: "modernism not only reflects and reinforces such fragmentation and commodification of the psyche as its basic precondition, but [...] the various modernisms all seek to overcome that reification as well, by the exploration of a new Utopian and libidinal experience of the various sealed realms or psychic compartments to which they are condemned, but which they also reinvent" (14). In other words, modernists and theorists of modernism either mimetically produced in their art the fragmentation of the social world – thinking of this as a repudiation of Victorian forms like naturalism and realism, not realizing that they were in a synergistic relationship with the current mode of production, at least on the point of reification in social life – or they recognized their problematic relation to reification and attempted to imagine an outside. What is most notable in Jameson's presentation of modernism in this book is that the two

versions are capable of being combined, and that they are not evaluated even as Jameson makes the failure of modernism to effectively “resist” or “revolt” under either model a forgone conclusion: something so obvious it doesn’t even need to be mentioned. That is, what makes the two models indistinguishable from each other in the perspective Jameson details is that every gesture of aesthetic modernism is always simultaneously and equally an enactment of reification and a protest against it. To separate the two impulses out as distinct would itself be an endorsement, or at least an acknowledgment, of modernism’s potential for resistance, a phantom possibility in which Jameson is singularly uninterested here.

In some ways, Lewis is typical of modernism as Jameson construes it: “Lewis’ ‘modernism’—but also, as we shall see, his ‘fascism’—is to be understood as just such a protest against the reified experience of an alienated social life, in which, against its own will, it remains formally locked” (14). In all Lewis’s works, aggression (hence the book’s title) marks the desperate and frenzied, yet otherwise predictably modernist, attempt to get outside, to transcend reification and the bourgeois values of modernity. However, Jameson also sets Lewis apart as different, partly due to intrinsic peculiarities in his aesthetic, and partly due to his reception. On the first count, Lewis’s aesthetic is undeniably flat and arguably even poststructuralist. As Jameson explains, “Anglo-American modernism has [...] traditionally been dominated by an impressionistic aesthetic, rather than that—externalizing and mechanical—of Lewis’ expressionism” (2). And on the second count: “The neglect of Lewis is thus a happy accident for us, who can then, as from out of a time capsule, once more sense that freshness and virulence of modernizing stylization less and less accessible in the faded texts of his contemporaries” (3). Lewis’s usefulness as a modernist who had not, at the time of Jameson’s writing, been exhaustively subjected to the apparatus of modernist scholarship, strikes me as being significant.

It suggests a problem in the present; it divides the analysis between modernism and the realm of contemporary theory, where our attention is drawn not only to Lewis, but also to the particular work Jameson does in theorizing the position of the observer as part of any complete historicist project. This is one way in which the problem of critical distance emerges in the study, as Jameson insists on relationality (horizontal rather than vertical) as the preferred mode of interpretation.

The second focus on critical distance comes with the genealogy of Lewis's aesthetic that the book effectively charts. Namely, the trajectory begins with the aesthetic in *Tarr* (Lewis's 1918 novel), which Jameson identifies as "national allegory." As he says, national allegory is, like all forms, historically contingent and thus dependent on a particular animating social logic; contextually, national allegory presupposes "the nation-state itself as the basic functional unit of world politics, but also the objective existence of a series of nation-states, the international diplomatic machinery of pre-World-War-I Europe which, originating in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was dislocated in significant ways by the War and the Soviet Revolution" (94). The function of national allegory as a form unfolds from this context; it "should be understood as a formal attempt to bridge the increasing gap between the existential data of everyday life within a given nation-state and the structural tendency of monopoly capital to develop on a worldwide, essentially transnational scale" (94). That is, here as elsewhere in Jameson's works, allegory is posited as a way to connect the economic to the aesthetic without being deterministic, without imposing a hierarchy. Jameson considers other nodes in the modernist evolution of forms which Lewis instantiates, but satire, as it emerges from and against national allegory in response to changed historical circumstances, is the most significant. Later works like *The Childermass* and Lewis's cultural criticism are where we begin to see the unfolding of Lewis's satiric program and

a fixation on “strong personality.” In modernism in general and Lewis’s works in particular, satire develops in such a way that it can no longer be manipulated by a stable subject (because that subject no longer exists), and it thus turns against the person who wields it. As Jameson writes, “the content of satire slowly becomes transformed: continuing all the while to denounce his traditional objects, the satirist becomes self-conscious about his own activity. With the problematization of his own place as a judging and observing subject, he begins to reckon himself into the universal condemnation which only awaited his own presence to be complete” (138). As satire typically thematizes critical distance by staging a conflict between the satirist subject and his or her objects, these changes in the form are significant for a tradition of social criticism – Marxism – that Jameson is in many ways aligned with, which relies on the very possibility of critical distance to make the kind of judgments that will give way to “revolutionary” changes in consciousness. However, the moment in the *Postmodernism* book where Jameson accepts the fact of critical distance as an extinct mode is directly prefigured in the book on Lewis: modernism and Lewis become important in this light as registering the actual moment of rupture, the moment in which critical distance violently collapses on itself. Focusing on this moment allows Jameson to insist that we deal with the loss of critical distance, instead of inviting us to reinstate it in some hollow form that would encourage misrecognition of social problems and their possible solutions.

The relationship between the mode of artistic production in Lewis’s works and the contemporary mode of economic production is interesting because Lewis is without parallel as a modernist. This, to Jameson, signaled changes in the economic system, and with Lewis, these changes are best indexed by the complex of ideologies and political alliances we know as fascism. As Jameson points out, fascism – and Lewis as fascist – was tenuously positioned

between Marxism and bourgeois culture: “If therefore as a reaction-formation it defines itself against Marxism as the fundamental enemy, protofascism grasps itself consciously as the implacable critique of the various middle class ideologies and of the parliamentary system in which they find representation” (15). Fascism is first and foremost economic on this reading. However, the book also foregrounds a sense of ambiguity and maybe even mild anxiety about Lewis as a figure worth talking about or not in the larger project of connecting modernist aesthetics to modern economics. The vocabulary itself is unusual and suggestive of recuperation. Jameson speaks of being “content to rest my case for him,” and even expresses polite squeamishness: “However embarrassing the content of his novels may be for liberal or modernist establishment thought, it cannot but be even more painful for protofascism itself, which must thereby contemplate its own unlovely image and hear blurted out in public speech what even in private was never meant to be more than tacitly understood” (23). And this is where Lewis’s position in modernist scholarship is worth saying something about (though more will be said later). As Jameson suggests and as research on Lewis shows, prior to the modernist studies boom, Lewis was not often read, and even less often read favorably, largely because of his journalism on Hitler prior to the outbreak of World War II. The fact that the book *Hitler* exists, and that it is known to take a jocular attitude toward Adolph Hitler and the development of Nazi Germany, is enough to have rendered Lewis unapproachable for many years. It is not widely known that the book was censored in Germany during World War II, and that Jameson was right: fascism did not want to be confronted with its own “unlovely image,” and that that was just what Lewis did. The seemingly unfortunate thing about *Fables of Aggression* from the perspective of Lewis scholarship – if not modernist studies as a whole – is that even as Jameson works exhaustively in the book to show that Lewis is “of interest” just as much as fascism is “of

interest,” the vocabulary of the book – specifically the vocabulary of fascism, violence, and aggression – makes it unlikely that Lewis will finally find his readership. Whether or not we, as Marxists, can be concerned with this problem is another question, one which I hope to address shortly.

### *Jameson and “New” Modernism*

Where *Fables of Aggression* considers Lewis as a figure excluded from modernist genealogies and accordingly attempts to rethink modernism as a formation which could and necessarily did include Lewis, Jameson’s more recent study of modernism, *A Singular Modernity*, thinks broadly about the emergences and resurgences of modernism and the failures of periodization to which these point. Showing how modernity has managed to increase its reach both further backward and forward temporally – into what used to be recognized as pre-modern and postmodern temporal areas – Jameson suggests here that the confusion over historicity emerges from developments in capitalism. A discussion of our current failed perception of a postmodern break with the modern leads up to a thesis: “No ‘theory’ of modernity makes sense today unless it comes to terms with the hypothesis of a postmodern break with the modern” (94).

As he notes, current social theory (among other phenomena) evinces an

insistence on maintaining older conceptions of modernity in the face of the situation of postmodernity, with its multiple transformations. I choose my terms carefully here for it is the situation that has changed and that demands a modified theoretical response, without necessarily imposing any particular ‘concept’ of postmodernity or even ruling out the argument that there has been no such transformation and that we are still in modernity itself, all indications to the contrary. (93)

Coming from the foremost theorist of the postmodern, such a casting of doubt on the transition from – or lack of transition; the fundamental break between – the modern to the postmodern seems shocking. Where (when) are we, if not in postmodernity?

The language of doubt and openness are selected, it seems, not to suggest that really nothing has changed, that it was wrong to hail the arrival of the postmodern so soon. Instead, Jameson uses this language to make us think earnestly about our temporal positionality and wonder at the persistent use of vocabularies proper to modernity or modernism for describing phenomena unconnected to those designations. As he goes on to argue, there have been changes in capitalism that have been masked by various modern or modernist cultural and aesthetic renewals. These changes are indexed by the concept of autonomization. Moving on from Niklas Luhmann's concept of "differentiation" and Foucault's idea of "separation," Jameson suggests that "it might be best to take another step further and to speak, instead of differentiation, of a process of autonomization (with stages of semi-autonomization in between). Here what is stressed is not the moment of separation itself, but what happens to the previous parts, now new entities and small-scale wholes and totalities in their own right, after the event of mitosis has taken place" (91). Though autonomization is seemingly located in this passage sequentially, as what comes after the primary modernist moment of break or separation – earlier in the book he reminds us that the inaugural moment of modernity's instantiation of capitalism was the birth of commodity fetishism charted by Marx in which man's labor confronts him as something alien, with the secondary moments of reification in Lukács and rationalization in Weber – Jameson seems to intend something more complicated than this, as the vocabulary of autonomization in art has long been associated with aesthetic modernism, as in Théophile Gautier's famous wording, "l'art pour l'art." Elsewhere, Jameson makes the problems of periodicity raised by the concept of autonomization clearer. In the essay "Culture and Finance Capital," speaking of Luis Bunuel, Stan Brakhage, and Derek Jarman, he writes:

each former fragment of a narrative, that was once incomprehensible without the narrative context as a whole, has now become capable of emitting a complete narrative

message in its own right. It has become autonomous, but not in the formal sense I attributed to modernist processes, and rather in its newly acquired capacity to soak up content and to project it in a kind of instant reflex. Whence the vanishing away of affect in the postmodern: the situation of contingency or meaninglessness, of alienation, has been superseded by this cultural renarrativization of the broken pieces of the image world. (160)

That is, culturally, the economic moment of what Jameson, following Arrighi, designates as finance capital is coded as something like autonomization plus meaning, or refigured plenitude. The autonomy of fragments which in modernism was still just that, an autonomy of fragments visible as such, fragments jarringly disassociated from each other in art to mirror the fragmentation of social life, has now become a meaningful rather than traumatic autonomy.

The new modernist studies effectively stages this confusion over the break between modernity and postmodernity, between different ways of thinking autonomization. For scholars of modernism, it seems natural to excavate the historical conditions of the imperative to “make it new,” to ask why, for Pound and Eliot and so many others, newness might have been important. It seems less natural, however, to ask why the study of modernism has emphatically adopted newness as its own imperative, or whether that gesture might be shot through with capitalist ideologies that are very much of the current moment.

In the terms set forth by Jameson, we might reconsider the two sides of the “new modernisms” debate already introduced: namely the argument that the designation of “new modernisms” is a cause célèbre for the fuller and more authentic – because more inclusive – version of modernism that it reveals, and the counter-argument that this new formation is not authentic, because it imposes anachronistic vocabularies of identity politics and resistance onto an unmatched temporality, and that it is not inclusive enough. Under the prospect of autonomization as linked with finance capital, this debate becomes legible differently. The impulse to “make it new” in modernist studies – to find undiscovered writers, to match new



methodologies to more familiar topics – is revealed as an anxious reproduction of the initial production of the new in modernism. Modernist scholarship has succumbed to a zeitgeist that distracts from the economic shift to finance capital by reorganizing temporality as all modernity all the time. It is only because the field occupies a moment in which newness has triumphed as the superlative criterion of evaluation that it is standard practice to mime the gestures of artists and writers from the early twentieth century as though they retained their original meanings and assumed potentials. Though this same phenomenon is transpiring in other areas of study in the humanities – the new Southern studies, the new cosmopolitanism, etc. – modernist studies is particularly inclined to experience an awkward moment of recognition, of the symmetrical logics animating its own scholarly inquiries and its chosen objects of study.

#### *Wyndham Lewis and Capitalist/Humanist Temporality*

As we have seen in the discussion of *Fables of Aggression*, at the time that book was written, Jameson still had some nominal investment in something approximating recuperation for Lewis, or a reconstruction of modernism through the figure of Lewis. But as we have also seen in the more recent *A Singular Modernity*, recuperation is implicitly outside the program for thinking modernity that Jameson now envisions: “What we really need is a wholesale displacement of the thematics of modernity by the desire called Utopia. We need to combine a Poundian mission to identify Utopian tendencies with a Benjaminian geography of their sources and a gauging of their pressure at what are now multiple sea levels. Ontologies of the present demand archeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past” (215). Recuperation, particularly as practiced in literary studies, is a gesture that involves a reworking of the past, and in many ways – though this is not often openly acknowledged – a bringing of that past up to date: this is

precisely what Jameson argues against as “forecasts of the past.” Thus, instead of recuperating Lewis, I suggested before that he would be useful in probing the contradictions of the new modernist studies, and simultaneously in moving us toward a viable anti-humanist modernism.

Insofar as what Jameson proposes as an approach to thinking modernity is a theory of temporality that doubles as a philosophy of historical change, this approach can be productively brought into conversation with Lewis. Lewis, in his non-fictional writings, was often a theorist of temporality, at least to the extent that lambasting the “time-mind” of his literary competitors and the public’s rampant obsession with revolution constitutes a mode of theory. Without teasing out the implications of revolution as a temporal phenomenon, Lewis writes at length about it in *The Art of Being Ruled*: “Every one today, in everything, is committed to revolution. [...] The revolutionary state of mind is then, today, instinctive: the *all that is is bad and to be superseded by a better* attitude” (17). The proliferation of the rhetoric of revolution syncs up, in Lewis’s mind, with the rhetoric of newness in advertising, and at another level, with the rhetoric of progress in history. It is partly this distaste for the form of the new as revolution that leads Lewis to repudiate Marxism: “‘Revolution’ is accepted everywhere, the battle is everywhere won, and yet nothing happens. When it does happen, as in Russia or Italy, no one can pretend that things are changed enough to meet our expectations” (32). For Lewis, the political regime changes transforming Europe during his lifetime were intricately connected to the faddishness of bourgeois values. Rather than treating the concept of “revolution” as a metaphor, which would imply a belief that all these different phenomena are not really “revolutionary,” he suggests that revolution has truly saturated daily life at all levels in modernity.

This view would seem to place Lewis in opposition to Perry Anderson’s argument in his essay “Modernity and Revolution,”

“Revolution” is a term with a precise meaning: the political overthrow from below of one state order and its replacement by another. Nothing is to be gained by diluting it across time or extending it over every department of social space. [...] it is necessary to insist that revolution is a *punctual* and not a permanent process; that is, a revolution is an episode of convulsive political transformation, compressed in time and concentrated in target, with a determinate beginning—when the old state apparatus is still intact—and a finite end—when that apparatus is decisively broken and a new one erected in its stead. (332)

The stakes for Anderson in refusing the broad application of the term “revolution” are twofold: to value revolution more positively, and more importantly, to show that because revolution is scarce, we still inhabit the capitalist moment of modernity or earlier. As he goes on to suggest, “If we ask ourselves what revolution (understood as a punctual and irreparable break with the order of capital) would have to do with modernism (understood as this flux of temporal vanities), the answer is, it would surely end it, for a genuine socialist culture would be one that did not insatiably seek the new, defined simply as what comes *later*, itself to be rapidly consigned to the detritus of the old [...]” (332). However, in spite of apparent differences, deeper similarities emerge between Anderson and Lewis when Lewis’s reasons for repudiating revolution are considered. In contrast to Anderson, Lewis devalues the concept of revolution by finding it everywhere, but he does so precisely because it has been devalued and emptied of its meaning (the meaning to which Anderson wants to return) through repetition. Lewis and Anderson share a diagnosis of modernity, or in other words, capitalism, as unscathed by revolution; Lewis, however, pushes beyond Anderson’s position with the more cynical argument that we are not waiting for revolution. Rather, revolution and the new are part of capitalism and modernity, not a path to some alternative.

This begs the question of fascism. If fascism is the aspect of Lewis’s thought that has prevented him from being recuperated along recognizable lines – and which also in part holds back modernist studies from the prospect of an anti-humanism that would generate life instead of

ending it – as part of the “new” modernist canon, and if the recuperative operations of that canon are part of what is being scrutinized here, Lewis’s particular relation to fascism requires some consideration. In spite of his adamant rejection of all things revolutionary and specifically Marxism, socialism, or communism, Lewis tentatively prefers fascism: “I am not a communist; if anything, I favour some form of *fascism* rather than communism” (35). And he recognizes commonalities between fascism and socialism: “The only socialism that differs very much in principle from *fascismo* is reformist socialism, or the early nineteenth-century utopias, or, to a somewhat less extent, Proudhon. All marxian doctrine conforms very nearly in practice to the fascist ideal. *Fascismo* is merely a spectacular marinettian flourish put on to the tail, or, if you like, the head, of Marxism: that is, of course, fascism as interpreted by its founder, Mussolini” (321). This evokes Benjamin’s famous description of fascism as “the aestheticization of politics.” But remaining in Lewis’s formulation is the distance, inscribed at the end, between fascism as it is practiced and fascism as it might be. With communism, after the failures and tragedies of Stalinism it was still possible to return to an original source to trace the utopian impulse animating what became a failed political system and attempt to begin that thought process again. But fascism has no philosopher equivalent to Marx; the closest approximation might be Carl Schmitt, or perhaps Georges Sorel if you trace fascism back to its earlier roots. This, among other aspects of fascism, enables the repudiation of figures like Lewis on the neo-humanist grounds of identity politics, but it should not prevent the consideration of Lewis’s abstruse philosophy from a Marxist perspective – an anti-humanist version of Marxism which recognizes the constraints of capitalism on humans as humanist ones – as this perspective is the only surviving one which retains the climate of skepticism toward capital in which Lewis would be at home. The reasons for this consideration cannot be something like recuperation – they

must address instead the appeal of Lewis as a diagnostic figure, for understanding how we might have failed to recognize not only that newness is not new, but that even some position of suspicion which we might strive to occupy somewhere beyond the new modernist studies would itself be rather old. Is it possible to shed the vocabulary of old and new, progression and regression, and still turn up anti-capitalist strategies?

### *Conclusion*

The mise-en-abyme vertigo of the new that we experience through the phenomenon of the new modernist studies cannot, I think, be fully explained by any of the vocabularies of social change that are available to us. The “revolution” for which Perry Anderson still holds out hope seems dubious in the face of Jameson’s recent rethinking of our placement vis-à-vis modernity, though the supplanted vocabulary of finance capital and autonomization also seem somehow incomplete, as evinced by the omission of finance capital in *A Singular Modernity* when Jameson diagnoses our current moment. What is missed by these accounts is the place of the *familiar* in theories of historical change, an emphasis on moments of transformation in a monistic worldview instead of dialectical shifts. In modernism and Marxism alike, theories of historical change proliferate: Yeats’s gyres, Benjamin’s angel of history, the allegiances of so many modernists to political regimes or syndicates or organizations they believed would carry them into the future. All these exempla emerged to contend with the occurrence – which everyone believed was imminent – of a radical historical break. Though many of these theories of history were cyclical, none were designed to explain the familiarity with past moments – moments that we will not allow to be properly past – that we experience now.

Accordingly, an anti-humanist modernist studies particularly invested in history would start with Lewis. It would consider fascism not as a viable political system, but as an attempt to back away from or move beyond the familiarity of the new: an attempt to imagine a future outside of the tyranny of the new. It would be naïve to expect that this mode of thought could ever occur someplace beyond capitalist humanism or at any distance from capitalist humanism, but it will, I hope, come closer to an awareness of its relationship with capitalism than the formation of “new modernisms” has been able to so far. Wyndham Lewis, like the other anti-humanist modernists I have considered in this study, asks not just that we imagine alternatives to the human, but that we do so in an alternative way, by trying incredibly hard to step outside of humanism. In order to break with humanist history we have to imagine a future outside of our own humanist perspectives, and this is what Lewis and Jameson – and in their own ways, Nietzsche, Hulme, Yeats, Lawrence, Deleuze and Guattari, Zola, James, Foucault, Woolf, Green, Isherwood, and Bowen – advocate. To be humanist is to accept the present as the past, to let the residue of humanist hierarchies, which in practice *dehumanize*, accrete around us, shielding us from the transformations of life. From modernist anti-humanism – or anti-humanist modernism – we can learn to be less human: to, instead, be alive.

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