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### Author

Kerschen, Paul Robert

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The Modernist Novel Speaks its Mind

By

Paul Robert Kerschen

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Committee in charge:

Professor Michael André Bernstein, Chair

Professor Katherine Snyder

Professor Alva Noë

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## Abstract

## The Modernist Novel Speaks its Mind

by

Paul Robert Kerschen

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Berkeley

This study conceives the modernist novel as arising from a problem in genre. The end of the nineteenth century left English literature with a rich tradition of narrative prose describing the social and material worlds. At the same time, its aesthetic discourse was dominated by a Romantic poetics which described artworks as staging an opposition between spirit and matter, nature and freedom; and which placed lyric poetry, as an expression of spirit rather than a mimesis of nature, uppermost in its ranking of genres. The difficulties in reconciling this aesthetic to novelistic form account for the strangeness of the modernist novel, whose linguistic form aspires to the condition of lyric at the same time that its plot stages the failure of such an aspiration, the inability of Romanticism to imagine its own fulfillment. I begin with Henry James as a transitional figure; continue with William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf as exemplars of a Romantic-lyric poetics of the novel; and conclude with James Joyce, whose fictional forms resemble those of his contemporaries but ultimately reject many of their Romantic commitments. Some reference is made to twentieth-century philosophers, in particular Ludwig Wittgenstein, as thinkers with points of concordance.

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## Preface

What follow are some notes on the modernist novel in English. In sequence they tell a kind of story. In assembling this story I have had to ask myself the same narrative questions that confronted the figures who are its subjects: where to start, where to stop, what balance to give empirical detail and imaginative pattern, how to draw a shape which both reflects facts as they are and displays intelligible form. If my answers are not always the best, I hope they cast some light on the answers the modernists found.

I conceive the modernist novel as arising from a problem in genre. The end of the nineteenth century left English literature with a rich tradition of narrative prose describing the social and material worlds. At the same time, its aesthetic discourse was dominated by a Romantic poetics which described artworks as staging an opposition between spirit and matter, nature and freedom; and which placed lyric poetry, as an expression of spirit rather than a mimesis of nature, uppermost in its ranking of genres. The difficulties in reconciling this aesthetic to novelistic form account for the strangeness of the modernist novel, whose linguistic form aspires to the condition of lyric at the same time that its plot stages the failure of such an aspiration, the inability of Romanticism to imagine its own fulfillment. I begin with Henry James as a transitional figure; continue with William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf as exemplars of a Romantic-lyric poetics of the novel; and conclude with James Joyce, whose fictional forms resemble those of his contemporaries but ultimately reject many of their Romantic commitments. While I am conscious that these experiments took place in particular historical moments, I have chosen not to structure this as a historicist study. For better or for worse, it is best classed with Charles Tansley's dissertation in *To the Lighthouse* as being about the influence of something upon somebody.

My working method has been to assume that literary forms carry within them philosophical commitments about language and its relation to other areas of human experience, and that criticism can do the work of elucidating these commitments, even—or especially—if the commitments prove incoherent. My own views on philosophical questions of language and knowledge have been influenced by modern philosophers including Ludwig Wittgenstein, Wilfrid Sellars, Donald Davidson, John McDowell, and Cora Diamond. Here and there I make reference to these philosophers, and over the course of my narrative it will become apparent that I see Joyce's fictional forms as providing an especially close fit to their views. It should go without saying that this concordance does not imply a critical judgment for Joyce and against others. To treat philosophy, including the subset of philosophy known as "theory," as an orthodoxy for the evaluation of literature is to obscure all literary interest. Nor would anything be at stake in such a judgment, since we are fortunate to occupy a historical moment in which a question like Lukács's "Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann?" does not make sense. A view that is incoherent as philosophical doctrine can become a productive tension in literature; at least I have assumed so.

Over the course of this project I received financial support from the Graduate Division and the English Department. Without the further support of Molly and Tom Erwin and Ed Kerschen I would have been unable to pursue doctoral study. I am grateful for the kind attention of my committee members, Michael André Bernstein, Katherine Snyder and Alva Noë; and especially for the encouragement and wisdom of John Bishop, who served as chair for most of the project. Some material was read in earlier versions by Brett Bourbon, Carolyn Porter, Ann Banfield and Dorothy Hale. Steven Goldsmith and Kevis Goodman were early guides on

Romanticism, as was Nada O'Neal on Wittgenstein. Joshua Kortbein pointed me toward a title. From Jessie Ferguson I have learned many things, not all to be categorized.

## One

### Henry James: Imagination and Bondage

There are two familiar ideas about the late Henry James, not easily reconciled to each other. On the one hand, James's attention to individual consciousness and point of view seems to indicate a single-observer epistemology and a corresponding perspectivism—a "relativistic universe" of "monadic isolation," in one formulation,<sup>1</sup> whose inhabitants have lost all common interpretive ground for making sense of the world. At the same time, James is understood as a paradigmatically social novelist concerned above all with nuances of interpersonal relations, a novelist for whom consciousness itself is "made to take shape—indeed, to become social—as an intersubjective phenomenon," who portrays minds as "locked into such tight relations of dependence and mutual reflection... that such minds themselves seem nothing but the tissue of their relations."<sup>2</sup> Of course these two Jameses, the observer of individual consciousness and the dramatist of social relations, are not necessarily incompatible; but to combine them will require a particular kind of account. I attempt such an account here, reading the late James as staging a repeated contest between public and private claims, which has the apparent effect of splitting his centers of consciousness into public and private selves. The "oddity of a double consciousness"<sup>3</sup> which burdens Lambert Strether among many others is a condition whose etiology reaches back to Romanticism, but which James presents in a particularly modern light. James restages the Romantic contest of nature and freedom not as a struggle between heaven and earth, as in Faust's two souls, nor as Emerson's "double consciousness" spanning "the two lives of the Understanding & of the Soul,"<sup>4</sup> but as a struggle between the private imagination and the public persona. Against his protagonists' need "to meet the requirements of their imagination"<sup>5</sup> James pits all the exigencies of the social and material worlds. The imagination can preserve its freedom only by detaching itself from the outside world, which entails a corresponding detachment from that portion of the mind practically engaged with the world—that is to say, the abandonment of personal will. Such are those gestures in James typically glossed as renunciation. And the darkest streak in James is the fear that even such extreme detachment will turn out not to provide sufficient protection, that the exercise of imagination will itself prove to be another determining force.

To see the public world not as the milieu in which one finds the ends of life, but rather an active impediment to reaching those ends, is to distrust the public discourse of history. The stylistic idiosyncrasy of James's later work, like that of the modernist fiction which follows him, is largely a result of rejecting the quasi-historical narrative style of the nineteenth-century novel and replacing it with a Romantic aesthetic that derives its values from lyric poetry. *The Golden Bowl*, as an example of a novel written under this aesthetic, also serves a bellwether of the philosophical and moral problems that arise once this aesthetic is adopted. The Romantic outlook carries with it a provisionality, an inability to imagine its own fulfillment within history—and

<sup>1</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) 357.

<sup>2</sup> Sharon Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 77; and Robert P. Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 68.

<sup>3</sup> Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (New York: Norton, 1964) 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume VIII, 1841-1843*, ed. William H. Gilman and J.E. Parsons (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970) 10-11. This passage, one of several in Emerson on double consciousness, was later worked into "The Transcendentalist."

<sup>5</sup> Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Norton, 1975) 160. Cited hereafter in the text as *PL*.

James may see this as a mercy. The first half of *The Golden Bowl* imagines a failed Romantic project, the second half a successful one, and it is not clear which is more unsettling; it may be that the only thing worse than Romanticism failed is Romanticism triumphant. The power of the subjective vision to transfigure the outer world is not necessarily benign or benevolent, and the plot of *The Golden Bowl* suggests a discomfort with the very strategy underlying its form.

### **From the Heart Outwards: Romanticism and the English Novel**

The story of James's innovation is not a simple account of nineteenth-century social realism giving way to a modernist portrait of private experience. A shift from the social to the individual is of course present, and requires explanation. But the nineteenth-century novel did not rest on a unified epistemology, and James worked within as much as against its contrary currents. Attempting in the 1880s and 1890s to establish aesthetic legitimacy for his form, he wrote in an environment already saturated with Romantic terminology, so that simply to note James's own frequent use of such language will not get us very far.<sup>6</sup> A more detailed account of Romantic theory is needed to place against James's practice, and this will take us backward to Coleridge and his thoughts on the novel. This does run the risk of taking James out of his own time; in himself, Coleridge had no particular influence on James and does not appear as an interlocutor in his work. But the aesthetic debates of the 1880s and 1890s, above all the contest between realism and romance, were undeniably formative for James; and these have roots stretching far back in English letters. As a writer whose criticism was as prolific, omnivorous and self-contradictory as James's own, Coleridge provides an excellent window on the beginnings of English Romanticism and the particular difficulty of reconciling its tenets to the novel form.

In general the English Romantics had less to say about the novel than their German counterparts; the nature of the medium seems not to have suited their critical habits. While Coleridge's collected works do yield occasional praise or critique of particular points in Richardson, Fielding and Scott, far more common are terrible blanket denunciations. "Where the reading of novels prevails as a habit," he says in 1811, "it occasions in time the entire destruction of the powers of the mind."<sup>7</sup> The nineteenth-century condemnation of novels was a polyvalent affair, but Coleridge seems especially to have feared that novels would exercise the passive rather than active faculties of the mind. They take advantage of the mind's "love of sloth"<sup>8</sup>; they engender "a sort of beggarly Day-dreaming, in which... the mind furnishes for itself only laziness and a little mawkish sensibility, while the whole *Stuff* and Furniture of the Doze is

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<sup>6</sup> The difficulty of distinguishing James's Romanticism from that of his contemporaries may be one reason that a connection between Henry James and Romanticism, while not a new idea, has not seen much airing in recent years. M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953) 319-320, in passing connects James's "The Art of Fiction" to Romantic aestheticism. Ralph Freedman's *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, André Gide, and Virginia Woolf* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) notes James as a writer whose perspectival technique might be considered lyrical without explicitly connecting him to the Romantic tradition that Freedman treats elsewhere. Two book-length studies, Charles Schug, *The Romantic Genesis of the Modern Novel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979) and Daniel Mark Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) connect James to Romanticism more extensively. I have found both helpful; I also think their insights can be extended by highlighting the ways that James questions the Romantic worldview while incorporating its aesthetics.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, 2 vols., ed. R. A. Foakes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 2:463.

<sup>8</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures* 2:194.

supplied *ab extra* by a sort of spiritual Camera Obscura.”<sup>9</sup> If the furniture of novelistic detail inhibits the mind’s active engagement (behaving, one can’t help thinking, rather like an opiate), no less a hazard is narrative progression itself. In one letter Coleridge opines that “incidents are among the lowest allurements of poetry”; in another he writes of Robert Southey, “I am fearful that he will begin to rely too much on *story* and *event* in his poems, to the neglect of those *lofty imaginings*, that are peculiar to, and definitive of, the poet.”<sup>10</sup>

Why should fictive story and event, surely the product of the storyteller’s imagination, appear to Coleridge as a limit on imagination? This question goes to the heart of the idealism behind Romantic aesthetics, with its central puzzle of reconciling nature and freedom. Kant had found himself compelled to define freedom in opposition both to the blind matter of the material world and to the mechanical causality which such matter was compelled to obey. His solution was to preserve human freedom by conceding part of the mind to nature; of the distinct faculties making up the Kantian subject, some are constrained by natural law while others manifest moral freedom, with aesthetic experience providing a bridge between the realms. Allowing for a wide difference in particulars, Coleridge’s theory of mind takes a similar tack. Early in *Biographia Literaria* he undertakes an extended argument against Hartley’s associative theory of mind, which sought to mechanistically explain all intellectual operations as associations between perceived and remembered impressions, realized physically in the brain as vibrations of different frequencies. While Coleridge points out some logical fallacies in the theory, his most sustained objection is moral; this mechanistic model would annihilate the categories of responsibility and will, “to the equal degradation of every *fundamental* idea in ethics or theology,” and indeed to the elimination of personhood:

Thus the whole universe co-operates to produce the minutest stroke of every letter, save only that I myself, and I alone, have nothing to do with it, but merely the causeless and effectless beholding of it when it is done. Yet scarcely can it be called a beholding; for it is neither an act nor an effect; but an impossible creation of a something-nothing out of its very contrary! It is the mere quick-silver plating behind a looking-glass; and in this alone consists the poor worthless I!<sup>11</sup>

Under an idealist framework, in which free will is the essential mark of the subject, a deterministic causality erases that subject entirely. Against this unacceptable picture Coleridge presents a more complex model; like Kant he partitions the mind, conceding certain faculties to natural law but supplementing them with vital faculties that manifest freedom. Often he stages this opposition as a contest between the eye and the mind. Thus Hartley’s associationism is a “despotism of the eye,” a “Slavery of the Mind to the Eye and the visual Imagination (or Fancy).”<sup>12</sup> Against this fancy, “a mode of Memory... which must receive its materials ready-

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<sup>9</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures* 1:124.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Volume I: 1785-1800*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 566, 320. See also Jay Clayton, *Romantic Vision and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 12.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) 1:119.

<sup>12</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 1:107; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *A Book I Value: Selected Marginalia*, ed. H.J. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 200. For more on this strain in Coleridge and Romanticism generally, see M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New

made from the law of association,”<sup>13</sup> Coleridge sets the imagination, which like the Kantian aesthetic occupies a mediatory role between nature and freedom: “at once active and passive,” “essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead,” it carries out the work of “organising (as it were) the flux of the senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the reason.”<sup>14</sup> And since Coleridge’s philosophy is always quick to shade into poetics, this classification of faculties turns into a classification of genres—the distinction between imagination and fancy, it seems, can adjudicate the old question of distinguishing between poetry and prose. In asking “What is poetry?” Coleridge finds himself asking “What is a poet?”; and the answer, naturally, is one who “brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity.”<sup>15</sup> A genius like Shakespeare is not bound to the physical eye but consults the “inward eye of meditation.”<sup>16</sup> But the novel, bound as it is to the camera obscura of physical imagery, stands condemned as a visual despot tyrannizing a passive mind. The causal sequence of story and incident is a lower form of creativity at best; it engages the associative fancy to the exclusion of those lofty imaginings which are the poet’s proper sphere. Lyric, not narrative, is the form “which in its very essence is poetical.”<sup>17</sup>

It is no surprise, then, that Coleridge finds Sir Walter Scott to be “mechanical,” a writer who “might be chosen by a philosophic critic to point out and exemplify the difference of fancy and imagination. Here is abundance of the former with the blindest absence of the latter.”<sup>18</sup> The Romantic doctrine privileging lyric expression over narrative mimesis runs counter to the English novel’s core epistemology. Standard accounts of the genre’s origin concur in grounding the novel on an empiricism in which meaning accrues from the detailed examination of particulars—individual persons, concrete objects, social mores—placed in specifiable geographical space and historical time.<sup>19</sup> Originally modeled after various types of historical writing, even after shedding its claim to historicity the novel would seem committed to some version of history’s grounding assumptions: that past events are knowable and meaningful, that we inhabit an intelligible world in which “apparently unrelated particulars sooner or later reveal a connectness, a pattern.”<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth in particular connects this assumption of intelligibility to the social grounding of evidence and evaluation; the omniscient, quasi-historical mode of novelistic narration implies a social consensus as to what counts as true and

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York: Norton, 1971) 366, and Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 39.

<sup>13</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 1:305.

<sup>14</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 1:124, 1:304; Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, in *The Collected Works*, VI, ed. R.J. White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) 29.

<sup>15</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 2:15.

<sup>16</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures* 1:310.

<sup>17</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures* 2:118.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Charles I. Patterson, “Coleridge’s Concept of Dramatic Illusion in the Novel,” *ELH* 18 (1951) 135.

<sup>19</sup> See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space and Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Ermarth 57. For a post-structuralist (and wildly inclusive) account of grounding beliefs common to history and fiction, see J. Hillis Miller’s catalogue in “Narrative and History,” *ELH* 41 (1974) 459-460: “the notions of origin and end (‘archeology’ and ‘teleology’); of unity and totality or ‘totalization’; of underlying ‘reason’ or ‘ground’; of selfhood, consciousness, or ‘human nature’; of the homogeneity, linearity, and continuity of time; of necessary progress; of ‘fate,’ ‘destiny,’ or ‘Providence’; of causality; of gradually emerging ‘meaning’; of representation and truth.”

meaningful.<sup>21</sup> To take Raymond Williams's phrase, novels are "knowable communities" in which persons and societies can be wholly understood through "visible and comprehensible relationship."<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, if empirical reality is taken as a meaningless assemblage of particulars, and if the inner landscape of the mind is the only true repository of value, then the novelistic method of generating meaning is invalidated. It follows that those passages in nineteenth-century English or American novels which seem most quintessentially Romantic—Frankenstein meeting his creature in the mountains, Ahab's soliloquies, Catherine and Heathcliff on the moor—would appear as points of rupture, bursting the bounds of narrative progression and temporarily occluding the physical and social worlds to clear space for a spiritual agon.<sup>23</sup>

Late in the nineteenth century, this begins to change. The work of Carlyle, Ruskin, Pater and others moves Romantic terminology to the center of English writing on art, even in the recalcitrant case of the novel, and it becomes commonplace to write that artworks express the creative imagination, that they assume organic rather than mechanical form, that they transcend the merely rational faculties.<sup>24</sup> The later nineteenth century finds the novel condemned less for a constitutive inability to meet Romantic criteria than for choosing not to meet them—and there is always an implication that it might be brought to the task. Carlyle reprises Coleridge's bias against the visual and material world in his complaint that "Your Shakespeare fashions his character from the heart outwards, your Scott fashions them from the skin inwards, never getting nearer the heart of them!"; yet his translation of *Wilhelm Meister* offers an alternate model for English prose.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, while the anonymous reviewers of the *Westminster* lament that "our descriptive writing is mere topography. Mind is not seen," they hold out hope for an alternative in the Schlegelian exhortation for the novel to incorporate the "subjective spirit."<sup>26</sup> But how to incorporate that spirit is an unresolved question. One possible avenue was the representation of consciousness; by the 1870s, the inner life was widely enough considered the novel's particular province that it had become customary to denigrate plot as a distraction from the more essential business of character portrait. *Middlemarch*, for instance, was taken as a definitive advance in the form "in so far as its incidents are taken from the inner life, as the action is developed by the direct influence of mind on mind and character on character, as the material circumstances of the outer world are made subordinate and accessory to the artistic presentation of a definite passage of mental experience."<sup>27</sup> Another avenue was the late-nineteenth-century vogue for romance, which in Robert Louis Stevenson's famous defense explicitly sets artistic meaning and value in opposition to the material world: "The novel which is a work of art exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work."<sup>28</sup> Stevenson follows Coleridge in defining poetry less as a genre

<sup>21</sup> See Ermarth. Watt 13-18 gives a famous account linking the realist novel to Cartesian and Lockean epistemology. Clearly he is right to see affinities between British empiricism and the British novel, but his emphasis on "the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigator" (Watt 12) can obscure the social element.

<sup>22</sup> Raymond Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970) 14-15.

<sup>23</sup> Clayton, *Romantic Vision and the Novel* develops this thesis at persuasive length.

<sup>24</sup> See Richard Stang, *The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) 159-190, and George Kenneth Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel, 1865-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 34-43.

<sup>25</sup> Stang 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> Graham 35.

<sup>27</sup> Graham 97-103.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Humble Remonstrance," *R.L. Stevenson on Fiction: An Anthology of Literary and Critical Essays*, ed. Glenda Norquist (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 85. See also a fine 1893 letter

than a state of mind; it is a “heat and height of sane emotion” which is “too seldom present in the prose novel.”<sup>29</sup> But Stevenson’s remonstrance is of course a direct reply to James’s “The Art of Fiction”; and the question of romance against realism, like the question of representing the inner life, will take us to the young James in his first phase, considering the question of what fiction ought to be.

### **The Art of Fiction and the Task of the Historian**

From the beginning of his career, James’s own criticism finds an entrenched opposition between the creative imagination and the empirical fact. This is not always to the detriment of factuality—especially in the 1880s, when James was aligned with William Dean Howells as the standard-bearer of a new literary realism—but however value is apportioned across the distinction, it is always prominent in his thinking. One of James’s earliest reviews, written in 1867, maps the opposition between fact and imagination onto a distinction between the novelist and historian:

Historians and story-tellers work each in a very different fashion. With the latter it is the subject, the cause, the impulse, the basis of fact that is given; over it spreads the unobstructed sky, with nothing to hinder the flight of fancy. With the former, it is the effect, the ultimate steps of the movement that are given; those steps by which individuals or parties rise above the heads of the multitude, come into evidence, and make themselves matters of history. At the outset, therefore, the historian has to point to these final manifestations of conduct, and say sternly to his fancy: So far shalt thou go, and no further. A vast fabric of impenetrable fact is stretched over his head. He works in the dark, with a contracted forehead and downcast eyes, on his hands and knees, as men work in coal-mines. But there is no sufficient reason that we can see why the novelist should not subject himself, as regards the treatment of his subject, to certain of the obligations of the historian; why he should not imprison his imagination, for the time, in a circle of incidents from which there is no arbitrary issue, and apply his ingenuity to the study of a problem to which there is but a single solution. The novelist who of all novelists was certainly to most of one—Balzac—may be said, to a certain extent, to have done this, and to have done it with excellent profit.<sup>30</sup>

Fact imprisons the imagination, imposing a regime whose strictness reduces the historian to a manual laborer. Yet storytellers, which James goes on to characterize as “an illogical, loose-thinking, ill-informed race,” may be said to profit from that stricture. “Particular facts of history,” he writes, “are useful in completing the discipline. When the imagination is sound, she will be certain to profit... We speak, of course, of a first-class imagination—as men have occasionally had it, and as no woman (unless it be Mme. Sand) has yet had it” (*LC* 1:1156). The

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from Stevenson to James: “How to get over, how to escape from, the besotting *particularity* of fiction. ‘Roland approached the house; it had green doors and window blinds; and there was a scraper on the upper step.’ To hell with Roland and the scraper! Yours ever affectionately, R.L.S.” *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Ernest Mehew (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 557.

<sup>29</sup> Stevenson, “A Humble Remonstrance” 82.

<sup>30</sup> Henry James, *Literary Criticism*, 2 vols. (New York: Library of America, 1984) 1:1154-1155. From here cited as *LC*.

gender distinction makes explicit a theme that has run through the essay, in which a female imagination—or a feminized storyteller with an undisciplined imagination—requires the supporting rigor of fact. It is much to the point that this discussion occurs in the context of reviewing one of Anne Manning’s historical novels, a work that James rapidly dismisses as a diversion for young girls, “sufficiently pleasing, even if it is somewhat insipid,” completely separate from the “real historical novel” as practiced by the great novelists: Scott, Bulwer, Victor Hugo, Dumas.

Yet James’s attachment to historical fact or a historiographical method can easily be overstated. Those famous passages in “The Art of Fiction” which declare that “as the picture is reality, so the novel is history,” and that the novel must speak “with assurance, with the tone of the historian” (LC 1:46-47), have sometimes been taken to betray a confusion between fictional and nonfictional discourse, falsely equating fiction with history.<sup>31</sup> But here and elsewhere, James is clearly asserting an analogy rather than an identity. What interests him is the use of the historian’s tone as a rhetorical technique. Even his famous protest against the “betrayal” of Trollope’s authorial intrusions, as against “the magnificent historical tone of Balzac, who would as soon have thought of admitting to the reader that he was deceiving him, as Garrick or John Kemble would have thought of pulling off his disguise in front of the footlights,” uses a theatrical figure to emphasize the performance of historical writing rather than on the ontology of historical fact (LC 1:1343).<sup>32</sup> James’s praise of those novelists whose “lines seem to carry a kind of historical effect”<sup>33</sup> must also be balanced against a good deal of criticism; he is the author of the acid quip, “The facts of history are bad enough; the fictions are, if possible, worse.”<sup>34</sup> His admiration for *Middlemarch* is qualified by that book’s density of historical detail—“If we write novels so, how shall we write History?” (LC 1:965-966)—and he is harsher still on *Romola*, whose air of historical research marks it as “the most Germanic of the author’s productions... it smells of the lamp... A twentieth part of the erudition would have sufficed” (LC 1:1006). Even Balzac comes in for remonstrance on this score: “It must be admitted that... in his enumerations of inanimate objects he often sins by extravagance. He has his necessary houses and his superfluous houses: often when in a story the action is running thin he stops up your mouth, as it were, by a choking dose of brick and mortar” (LC 2:50).

A certain amount of fact constitutes a beneficial discipline for the imagination; an overload throttles it. This ambivalence toward the empirical casts an interesting light on James’s aspersion against that sort of novel which “depends for a ‘happy ending’ on a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs and cheerful remarks” (LC 1:48). Such conventions, it would seem, could be taken as an offense either against

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<sup>31</sup> Roslyn Jolly, *Henry James: History, Narrative, Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 31, claims that in trying to pass fiction off as history, James merely exposes “the insecurities and contradictions in his own theoretical position.” Insofar as James’s defense of fiction “fears to confront” (Miller 473) the tenuous nature of fictionality and admits only the stark alternatives of truth and lies, it actually “shows itself to be produced by and complicit with the culture of censorship he deplored” (Jolly 33). Peter Rawlings, *Henry James and the Abuse of the Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 5-10, is more sensitive to the ambiguities and qualifications in James’s historical analogies, though in allying James with Michel de Certeau’s post-structuralist theory of history, he may err in the other direction, importing back into the 1880s too much of James’s late disparagement of the “fatal futility of fact.” In particular Rawlings’s model does not explain James’s admiration for Balzac.

<sup>32</sup> The metaphor of theater resumes shortly thereafter: “we are startled and shocked in quite the same way as if Macaulay or Motley were to drop the historic mask and intimate that William of Orange was a myth or the Duke of Alva an invention.”

<sup>33</sup> Here it is Turgenev whose historical tone is appreciated; LC 2:970.

<sup>34</sup> Henry James, *Collected Travel Writings: The Continent* (New York: Library of America, 1993) 64.

fact or against the imagination. On the one hand, the summary justice of the happy ending has no correlate in reality, and James and Howells intended their realism in part as a corrective to that popular fiction—especially women’s fiction—which “offered a heroine who the reader could playfully and temporarily become,” so that “the pleasure the reader experienced at the end was an ego-pleasure—a happy embrace, a successful coup, a completed journey, a threat finally averted.”<sup>35</sup> But the wish fulfillment of the happy ending is not merely an offense against fact; it is also a constraint on the imagination, one that cannot be transcended simply by inverting its terms. Those mechanisms which produce meaning in the realist novel operate within certain limits, and a form grounded in social consensus can allot fates to its characters only by way of social criteria—that is, the old categories of inheritance and marriage, profit and loss. As much as “The Art of Fiction” insists on granting absolute latitude to the artist’s *donnée*, any vision of life, no matter how individual, must still be trained on the public world. And James finds the values of the public world deeply suspect; too often they have degenerated into meaningless forms which serve to mask the self-interested pursuit of gain. For James the outmoded forms are, like unimaginative fictions, “conventional”; while the modern mercenary sensibility, like the wish-fulfillment of popular novels, is “vulgar.” How to write a narrative that is neither conventional nor vulgar is the question behind *The Portrait of a Lady*, which tries to give both fact and imagination their due. In one sense, as Roslyn Jolly argues, its plot constitutes “a disciplining of fiction by history”;<sup>36</sup> as in James’s review of Manning, a naïve feminine imagination must be educated by and through the harsh constraints of reality. But if James’s novel were only another version of *Madame Bovary* or *Nana*, concerned to discipline an errant heroine, then surely the simplest and most rhetorically effective conclusion would be the heroine’s death. That we have in fact a much stranger ending—a sexual temptation refused, a marital yoke replaced, a material defeat presented as a spiritual triumph whose particulars escape representation—suggests that history does not have the last word here; that rather it is transcended.

*The Portrait of a Lady* opens on a social scene heavy with material detail and thick with historical associations. “The peculiarly English picture” of afternoon tea sets a slow place for the novel’s first pages, with extensive room for specifics of physiognomy, clothing and architecture.<sup>37</sup> Even Mr. Touchett’s “unusually large cup, of a different pattern from the rest of the set and painted in brilliant colours” (PL 17) gets its due. And as is usual for the realist mode, these details are legible; the architecture of the Touchett house, for instance, is made to reveal a history stretching back to Edward the Sixth and touching in passing on Elizabeth, Cromwell, the Restoration and the eighteenth century (PL 18). When Isabel bursts onto this scene in the second chapter, not only is she a different kind of character; she seems to import a different set of literary conventions. In contrast to the detailed descriptions that open the novel, she appears only as “a tall girl in a black dress, who at first sight looked pretty” (PL 25), and her subsequent description is so scant that contemporary reviewers found it implausible that she should attract any interest from the other characters.<sup>38</sup> The best account Ralph can give, as a cue to the reader, is that she is “interesting”; and this interest is entirely a matter of potential, based upon what she might become in time.

<sup>35</sup> Alfred Habegger, *Gender, Fantasy and Realism in American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 108.

<sup>36</sup> Jolly 46.

<sup>37</sup> Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Norton, 1975) 18. From here cited as PL.

<sup>38</sup> See Margaret Oliphant’s March 1882 review from *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* at PL 657.

In line with the limited description of Isabel's outer self is her own avowed disinterest in that self. While Madame Merle, the novel's master of the social, posits that one's self inheres in "some cluster of appurtenances... one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps," Isabel objects that "nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one" (*PL* 175). Even her clothes, she insists, are imposed on her by society. Merle's arch reply—"Should you prefer to go without them?"—highlights the emptiness in Isabel's version of Romantic expressivism; a naked Isabel is an blank subjectivity with no objective component. The question of how she might be integrated into the world, how her potentiality might become actual, recapitulates the artistic question of how a Romantic aesthetic can be integrated into the novel form. In the early chapters Isabel knows only what she doesn't want; neither the conventional, which would involve a pat novelistic ending such as marriage to Lord Warburton, nor the vulgar as embodied in Henrietta Stackpole, who might amuse Isabel but would never make a Jamesian heroine in her own right. As soon as this desire attempts to realize itself in the social world, it precipitates two events—Mr. Touchett's bequest and the marriage to Osmond—which are the very stuff of conventional novelistic plot. And plot in James very much retains its old sense of intrigue; his plots turn on secrets, on deception and hidden dangers, and they require victims. Neither Ralph's secret role in the bequest nor Merle's secret relation to Osmond will come to light until late in the book, but the crucial event for Isabel—her first realization that she has fallen into a plot—comes earlier, and forms the subject of what is, paradoxically, the book's most plotless chapter. This of course is the showpiece of Jamesian consciousness, Isabel's famous fireside vigil, "obviously the best thing in the book" for James,<sup>39</sup> and a signpost for much of what will be technically distinctive in his late work.

Sitting alone at the hearth, Isabel realizes that her husband hates her, that he is after all a vulgar adventurer, that her desire for unconventionality has ground her "in the very mill of the conventional," as Ralph later puts it (*PL* 478). By keeping Isabel perfectly inactive in this chapter, sitting in silent meditation by the fire, James is able to work by a lyric rather than a narrative aesthetic. Isabel's memory ranges freely through space and time, jumping from Osmond's courtship to their just-completed conversation, then back to the recent, unsettling conjunction of Osmond and Madame Merle. Since the work of retrospection completely screens out the present fireside scene, its imagery is generated by the mind rather than imposed by the eye; more prominent than specific visual memories of the past are emotional impressions rendered in visual metaphors. Isabel reads her situation "as she would have read the hour on the clock-face" (363), and this interpretive work generates repeated images of darkness and enclosure: the "dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end" (356), the "dusk at first... vague and thin," the "house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation" with "neither light nor air," only a "small high window" from which Osmond's beautiful mind peeps down and mocks at her (360). It is that mind, an incorporeal but terrible adversary, which occasions most of the chapter's image clusters. "She had lived *in* it almost—it appeared to her to have become her habitation" (358). Osmond's personality "stepped forth and stood erect" (362); "his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers" (360). Once she had "seen only half his nature... as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth. She saw the full moon now—she saw the whole man" (357).

Isabel then goes to bed and the novel gets on with its narrative business. If this lyrical moment seems less of a rupture than those in *Wuthering Heights* or *Moby-Dick*, that is because

<sup>39</sup> Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York: Scribner, 1934) 57. From here cited as *AN*.

James has carefully restricted its reach. The form of Isabel's meditations may constitute a tour de force of imaginative freedom, but their subject is restriction and captivity. We read that "suffering, with Isabel, was an active condition; it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair; it was a passion of thought, of speculation, of response to every pressure" (PL 356), and this language of fine sensitivity comes right out of Pater. But Isabel's consciousness yields these rewards only because she is in pain, and because she will take no action to remediate that pain. Her passive stance of seated contemplation is the position she will retain, functionally, for the rest of the novel. Having been granted the imaginative freedom to understand the plot practiced on her, she also understands that any practical use of that freedom would involve initiating a plot of her own, and that the only way to escape complicity is to abjure them all. When Caspar Goodwood makes his overtures in the last chapter, he offers Isabel the chance to initiate another plot which, like those preceding, would work by exploiting a rift between appearance and reality. In leaving Osmond, Isabel would admit her marriage to be a meaningless form expressing no true devotion, and thus admit a corresponding split between her public and private selves. Her refusal to do this marks the cost of maintaining her integrity as a self, of keeping her private devotion aligned with the public profession she has made—not to Osmond, of course, but to the institution of marriage itself. If we find this decision to be upsetting, even a senseless acquiescence to principle, it may be that we no longer imagine such integrity as possible or desirable. But Isabel's decision, and those similar decisions in James which are called renunciations, amount to recognitions that the fruits of private reflection have become incommensurable with any public criterion. The gains of consciousness cannot be translated into any social correlative, for the social correlatives have turned out all to be conventional or vulgar. Of course James is not the first to exploit such disjunctions. When Dorothea ends the plot of *Middlemarch* by abandoning her inheritance for a love marriage, Eliot immediately shows us local gossip misinterpreting the act as not that of "a nice woman."<sup>40</sup> But Dorothea's marriage is still a kind of community, albeit a community reduced to its least possible term, while Isabel's final decision is explicable to no witness at all—other than the ghost of Ralph, perhaps, whom she sees in the last chapter and then joins in evanescence.

### **The Late Style: Time and Metaphor**

The paradox in Isabel's situation, of imaginative freedom tied to utter abnegation, is writ far larger in *The Golden Bowl*. James's late books no longer concentrate the values of the lyric aesthetic in a single character; rather these values seem to have taken dominion everywhere, to have become the law of the universe. *The Ambassadors*, for instance, may still turn on the revelation of a hidden fact to an observant American, but that fact no longer plays the same role. The discovery of Chad's liaison does not constitute Strether's adventure; rather it allows him to realize that his adventure has already taken place, in his shift from the Woollett viewpoint to one more cosmopolitan. Announcing his compositional plan for *The American Scene*, James declares that "I would take my stand on my gathered impressions, since it was all for them, for them only, that I returned; I would in fact go to the stake for them." It is the "cultivated sense of aspects and prospects" rather than the factual "thousand matters—matters already the theme of prodigious reports and statistics," which he finds worthy of his attention.<sup>41</sup> The old debate between imagination and what James elsewhere calls "the fatal futility of Fact" (AN 122) has at last been

<sup>40</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 682.

<sup>41</sup> Henry James, *The American Scene*, ed. John F. Sears (New York: Penguin, 1994) 3.

resolved; James may not quite say with Nietzsche that there *are* no facts, only interpretations, but it is interpretation that has earned his artistic fidelity.

With the disparagement of fact comes a definitive turn away from the public discourse of history. In the early pages of *The Golden Bowl* we seem to glimpse a narrator who calls himself, perhaps in jest, a “historian”;<sup>42</sup> but this assertion comes in the middle of a sentence with far too many subordinate clauses, branching metaphors, and temporal loops to appear in any historical record as we understand the genre. We have come very far from Mr. Touchett’s front lawn. *The Golden Bowl* contains almost no physical objects other than the polysemous artifact of the its title; nor is there much of a social world. The marriage ceremony of Amerigo and Maggie appears only in anticipation, and then as a faint memory; Adam’s business dealings are in the far past, his museum on a distant coastline; the Principino is little more than a handful of references in the book’s margins. For a novel depicting a social class which constantly traffics in dinner parties and evening galas, weekend visits and summer engagements, *The Golden Bowl* presents hardly anything that could be called a public event. The fateful breaking of the bowl occurs an hour before a scheduled dinner at the American Embassy (*GB* 209), which Maggie and Amerigo presumably go on to attend, though the text never again mentions it. There may be precedent for such elisions in *The Portrait of a Lady*, which ostentatiously skips Isabel’s marriage to Osmond and keeps its consequences in suspense until her vigil, but the late work pares out the public world to a far greater degree. One intimate of James to wonder at this alteration was Edith Wharton:

His latest novels, for all their profound moral beauty, seemed to me more and more lacking in atmosphere, more and more severed from that thick nourishing human air in which we all live and move.... Preoccupied by this, I one day said to him: “What was your idea in suspending the principal characters in ‘The Golden Bowl’ in the void? What sort of life did they lead when they were not watching each other, and fencing with each other? Why have you stripped them of all the *human fringes* we necessarily trail after us through life?”

He looked at me in surprise, and I saw at once that the surprise was painful, and wished I had not spoken. I had assumed that his system was a deliberate one, carefully thought out, and had been genuinely anxious to hear his reasons. But after a pause of reflection he answered in a disturbed voice: “My dear—I didn’t know I had!”<sup>43</sup>

The anecdote can make us wonder about James. It seems to call up the old caricature of a mandarin aesthete colossally out of touch with his surroundings, and may reinforce the uneasy sense that in the late books we have lost the world outright and have only the unconstrained movement of mind. Leo Bersani’s critical reading argues that Jamesian freedom transcends even those limits that define individual personalities. While the late style ostensibly represents the consciousness of characters, Bersani finds the thoughts of these characters to be consistently subordinated to—even supplanted by—the consciousness of the narrator. A representative passage from *The Wings of the Dove* shows Densher “positively throbbing” with an unspecified question, whose consequences we explore at some length before encountering the question itself.

<sup>42</sup> Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, ed. Virginia Llewellyn Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 13. From here cited as *GB*.

<sup>43</sup> Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: Scribner, 1964) 190-191.

Bersani takes this as evidence that James, or his narrator, has replaced Densher as an organizing principle:

The sequence of thought in this passage is determined by the narrator's sense of organization and logical connection. When Densher's question "connects itself" with his soreness and sense of shame, *he* is very aware of what the question is, but James follows through some of the consequences of the question before he comes finally to tell us what it is.... the pattern of much of the paragraph is determined not by the association of ideas in Densher's mind, but by the narrator's sensitivity to possible verbal sequences. Actually, the reader may feel here that there is no model of thought going on in Densher behind the words in the passage; the thought itself is created by James's picking up and developing the suggestions of the language he is using.<sup>44</sup>

Such a shift, which Bersani elsewhere characterizes as a movement from "the temporal logic of a character" to "the spatial perspective of a narrator,"<sup>45</sup> affords the Jamesian consciousness complete freedom at the cost of complete depersonalization. "Nothing impedes the play of the Jamesian 'I'—but the 'I' itself has become merely the neutral territory occupied by language, that is, by a system which is by nature always 'outside' any particular self... Intelligence detached from psychology traces designs that belong to no one."<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Sharon Cameron takes the late James to track the movements of an impersonal intelligence detached from the psychologies of those characters who are the ostensible subjects of the book, and a related Marxist critique takes the dominance of mind as the repression of material gain.<sup>47</sup> But I think it is possible to describe limits to what Jamesian consciousness can do, and that those limits appear most clearly if we take it as a kind of lyric subjectivity, as in Isabel's fireside vigil, whose insights are enabled specifically by its removal from the world. A sense of provisionality marks lyric from the Romantic era forward, a fear that its desire can never be fully actualized outside the imaginative realm. To imagine a radical impotence behind the seeming omnipotence of Jamesian consciousness has a logic in common with Adorno's claim that the very congruity of lyric form betokens an original alienation:

...our conception of lyric poetry has a moment of discontinuity in it—all the more so, the more pure it claims to be. The "I" whose voice is heard in the lyric is an "I" that defines and expresses itself as something opposed to the collective, to objectivity; it is not immediately at one with the nature to which its expression refers. It has lost it, as it were.... Even lyric works in which no trace of conventional and concrete existence, no crude materiality remains, the greatest lyric works in our language, owe their quality to the force with which the "I" creates the illusion of nature emerging from alienation. Their pure subjectivity, the aspect of them that appears seamless and harmonious, bears witness to its

<sup>44</sup> Leo Bersani, "The Jamesian Lie," *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 133-134.

<sup>45</sup> Bersani, "The Jamesian Lie" 143.

<sup>46</sup> Bersani, "The Jamesian Lie" 146.

<sup>47</sup> See Terry Eagleton on "the contradictions of James's spiritual aristocrats, parasitic on a bourgeois material base which must be ceaselessly suppressed," in *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 2006) 141-145.

opposite, to suffering in an existence alien to the subject and to love for it as well—indeed, their harmoniousness is actually nothing but the mutual accord of this suffering and this love.<sup>48</sup>

To map the place of suffering in *The Golden Bowl* will require a discussion of its characters' fates, and I will turn to them below. But first it will be useful to examine just how the lyric aesthetic functions in *The Golden Bowl*, and how such a hybrid form might be conceived.

Lyric form is often taken as halting temporal progression, as forcing the simultaneous rather than successive apprehension of its elements. But if we are to reconcile a lyric aesthetic with a novel of two hundred thousand words, we will need to understand that aesthetic as something other than simple timelessness. Accounts of the lyric as timeless tend to occur by analogy with the visual arts; Pound's sculptural Image, "which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," and Marinetti's multilinear lyricism, "with which I succeed in reaching that lyric simultaneity that obsessed the Futurist painters as well," lead forward into Cleanth Brooks's appropriation of Donne's well-wrought urn, which gave the New Criticism its defining figure for poetry and has continued to exert influence on later schools.<sup>49</sup> Yet there are obvious ways in which a poem is not like a painting or vase. For one, it cannot be apprehended in a single moment, not even in the approximate way that we might glimpse an image. Experiments suggest that a practiced reader can take in twenty to thirty characters at a glance, but that will not encompass even the briefest Imagist fragment.<sup>50</sup> As an artifact of language a poem comes in sequence, and those devices of repetition and return which are sometimes taken to halt the flow of time would seem rather to complicate that flow, requiring its measurement by multiple yardsticks.<sup>51</sup> Sharon Cameron improves on the New Critical urn by conceiving a struggle between time and stasis; in her description, "language in the lyric dispenses with the time that threatens to destroy it."<sup>52</sup> In Cameron's description, lyric is afraid of time because time implies death. "All action, these poems seem to insist, and consequently all

<sup>48</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," *Notes to Literature: Volume One*, ed. Rolf Tiedeman, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 40-41.

<sup>49</sup> See Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Rainey (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) 95, and F.T. Marinetti, "Destruction of Syntax—Wireless Imagination—Words-in-Freedom," Rainey, 33. For a discussion of the often unwitting persistence of New Critical spatial tropes in contemporary work on the lyric, see Mark Jeffreys, "Anecdotes of a Jar: The Dominion of Spatial Tropes in Recent Criticism of the Lyric," *Criticism* 40 (1998) 55-74.

<sup>50</sup> See K. Rayner, "The Perceptual Span and Peripheral Cues in Reading," *Cognitive Psychology* 7 (1975) 271-282, and Rudy Den Buurman, Theo Roersema and Jack F. Gerrissen, "Eye Movements and the Perceptual Span in Reading," *Reading Research Quarterly* 16 (1981) 227-235.

<sup>51</sup> See Susan A. Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 215-216: "Temporality unfolds in all lyric on many levels at once. We should consider not only the ways in which the future becomes past but also such aspects of lyric as the following: the tension—or, as Hopkins practiced in, the counterpoint—between metrical structure and the shifting progress of the individual line; the lexical transformation implicit in rhyme with its simultaneous link across time and denial of repetition; the tension between pronounced speech and fixed inscription; the reversal and reorganization of syntax and the disjunction between syntax and rhythm; the fluctuating stability of stanzaic structure and the spatial and temporal breaks effected by such forms as the caesura and the volta; and the historical accretions, borrowings, and metaphorical approximation." Derrida and Deleuze's writings on the paradoxes of repetition are also relevant, though it may be that only a preceding commitment to lyric simultaneity—an "immediate self-presence," in Derrida's language, without temporal structure—makes paradoxes of them.

<sup>52</sup> Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 196.

narrative and story on whose shoulders action is carried, leads to ending, leads to death.”<sup>53</sup> This formulation will be worth keeping in mind for the end of *The Golden Bowl*, which directly confronts the cost of narrative closure. But its early chapters seem to reject linear time for the somewhat different reason that the sequentiality of prose implies a mechanical causality and domination from without. The motivation for Pound’s instantaneous lyric is that “it is the presentation of such a ‘complex’ instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.” To describe space and time as limits to be transcended is to invoke the idealism of Romantic aesthetics; Coleridge too saw the poetic imagination as partaking of a realm inaccessible to the understanding and unconditioned by those modes of apprehension which we know as space and time. But there are alternatives to linear time beyond spatial simultaneity. A better analogy for James’s practice than Imagist spatialization might appear in the philosophy of Bergson, who was likewise concerned to separate the realm of consciousness both from mechanical causality and from the social and material worlds, and who attempted this separation by formulating a different concept of time. Bergson imagined mental time unconditioned by the external world to consist of pure duration, a qualitative time incommensurate with spatial or mathematical quantity, “when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states.... but forms both the past and the future into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another.”<sup>54</sup>

Such is time in *The Golden Bowl*. The novel opens with a description, of sorts, of the Prince musing in his urban environment:

The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him; he was one of the modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber. Brought up on the legend of the City to which the world paid tribute, he recognised in the present London much more than in contemporary Rome the real dimensions of such a case. If it was a question of an *Imperium*, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge, or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner. It was not indeed to either of those places that these grounds of his predilection, after all sufficiently vague, had, at the moment we are concerned with him, guided his steps; he had strayed, simply enough, into Bond Street, where his imagination, working at comparatively short range, caused him now and then to stop before a window in which objects massive and lumpish, in silver and gold, in the forms to which precious stones contribute, or in leather, steel, brass, applied to a hundred uses and abuses, were as tumbled together as if, in the insolence of the Empire, they had been the loot of far-off victories. The young man’s movements, however, betrayed no consistency of attention—not even, for that matter, when one of his arrests had proceeded from possibilities in faces shaded, as they passed him on the pavement, by huge beribboned hats, or more delicately tinted still under the tense silk of parasols held at perverse angles in waiting victorias. And

<sup>53</sup> Cameron, *Lyric Time* 203.

<sup>54</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson (New York: Harper, 1960) 100.

the Prince's undirected thought was not a little symptomatic, since, though the turn of the season had come and the flush of the streets begun to fade, the possibilities of faces, on the August afternoon, were still one of the notes of the scene. He was too restless—that was the fact—for any concentration, and the last idea that would just now have occurred to him in any connection was the idea of pursuit. (4)

In some sense this is a picture of the Prince's mental life, but the relationship is clearly not that of simple transcription. Though the fourth sentence purports to give us the Prince at a certain moment, very little in the lines before or after seems momentary. The first two sentences relate not particular events but general descriptions of the Prince's temperament tied to no point in time, and if the third sentence seems at first to track a silent utterance ("he said to himself"), immediately thereafter it broadens into another general opinion, as the winding syntax goes on to suggest two London locales which (we learn in the next sentence) are not the locale of the present scene, and a month which (we learn somewhat later) is not the month of present action, just as the paragraph concludes with an idea that is not the Prince's own. To the extent that the later sentences count as a description of Bond Street, they describe only effects and not particular things. The objects in the shop windows appear in the plural, tumbled together physically as they tumble together in a syntax which concatenates six kinds of material without fixing a more precise description to any. No more individuated are the faces on the pavement; indeed they are not faces at all but something more abstract and conceptual, the possibilities of faces, which might be teased into actuality only if there were room in the sentence for yet another subordinate clause.

This indeterminacy in the late style, its removal from the world of objects and attention to effects over things, has drawn comparison to Impressionist painting. But notwithstanding James's own frequent references to "impressions," the comparison is misleading. James does not share Impressionism's interest in immediate perception, in reproducing images as they strike the eye before the imposition of conceptual thought.<sup>55</sup> (James himself was horrified by his first encounter with Impressionist canvases, though later in life he came to a qualified appreciation.) The metaphor of point of view can confuse if taken too literally; while we do, in a sense, see from Amerigo's perspective, the text presents not visual aspects of things but interpretations of things. The objects in the shop windows appear just long enough to suggest the idea of looted treasure, thereby sounding the first notes of linkage between the art connoisseur and the conqueror, after which they disappear from the page. Thus the most familiar model of modern urban experience, that derived from Simmel and Benjamin which describes city life as a continual series of sensory shocks, is not applicable to this passage. Amerigo may be distractedly browsing commodities, like Benjamin's *flâneur*, and he may also be getting a faint sexual frisson from encounters in the crowd, as Benjamin notes in Baudelaire. But the consciousness that appears in the text is too detached from the external world to be seriously affected by either; it refuses to pursue the invitations of sensory experience, just as Amerigo has not come to Bond Street to pursue either purchase or seduction. The chapter's subsequent references to the external scene are so few that a sentence will exhaust them: we briefly see "the iron shutter of a shop,

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<sup>55</sup> Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 49, writes that "despite their common parentage, and despite certain similarities, the impressions of painting and literature are antonyms"—that while pictorial impressionism seeks to reproduce unmediated sensory experience, literary impressionism ceaselessly abstracts from the senses.

closing early to the summer day” and “the plate glass all about” (14), that the Prince “paused on corners, at crossings” (15), that “the image of Mrs Assingham made him presently stop a hansom” (16), and that “his cab stopped in Cadogan Place” (19). But bizarrely, these representatives of the physical world do not interrupt the Prince’s thought so much as they manifest in support of that thought. The iron shutter, for example, comes into being as a rhetorical prop:

They didn’t, the poor dears, know what, in that line—the line of futility—the real thing meant. *He* did—having seen it, having tried it, having taken its measure. This was a memory in fact simply to screen out—much as, just in front of him while he walked, the iron shutter of a shop, closing early to the stale summer day, rattled down at the turn of some crank. There was machinery again, just as the plate glass, all about him, was money, was power, the power of the rich peoples. (14)

The screening out of unpleasant memories is not, it seems, suggested to the Prince by the iron shutter; rather his thought calls the iron shutter into existence as an objective correlative. This exactly reverses the usual relation between eye and mind in urban fictions—think of Leopold Bloom’s monologues, which are interrupted like clockwork by the Dublin sights of commodities, signboards, appealing women, any of which may start its own train of association. The particular Romantic aesthetic which Coleridge and James share resists both the primacy of visual impressions and the associative structure of the stream of consciousness. Instead of the despotism of the eye, we have the analytic work of the mind; instead of metonymic chains of association, we have a metaphoric imagination which makes symbols of its surroundings.

This aesthetic also accounts for the structural oddity of beginning the novel in Bond Street—odd because at the level of plot it serves no purpose. Novels generally open with some material occurrence that sets the story in motion; the Prince ought to meet someone, to acquire some piece of information; at the very least he should be on his way to some such meeting or revelation. But Bond Street turns out to be a purely symbolic location, serving no function other than to introduce the ideas of precious things, of machinery and power. It cannot be accounted for even by spatial contiguity, since at the close of his reverie the Prince takes a cab to a different part of the city, where the novel’s first interpersonal encounter actually takes place. The action of the first chapter, and in fact of the greater number of the chapters that follow, is placed almost exclusively within memory. The opening paragraph, we note, is governed by the pluperfect tense; one reason for the people and things appearing only in the aggregate is that the text seems to be encountering them in near retrospect, as a cumulative memory of the recent past. This is the usual structure of memory in *The Golden Bowl*. James’s characters never experience the Proustian resurgence of moments a lifetime distant, but they do spend a good deal of time in recent memory, exploring what James calls the “nearer distances” of “a palpable imaginable *visitable* past.”<sup>56</sup> This results in a bizarre temporal structure. As with Densher’s thoughts in *The Wings of the Dove*, the consequences of Amerigo’s thoughts in the first chapter seem to precede

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<sup>56</sup> AN 164. George Poulet takes James’s interest in recent memory as one example of a spatial rather than a temporal logic; see *Metamorphoses of the Circle*, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966) 313-314, which describes the Jamesian past as being “without distance and without depth. Therefore it is not a true past. It is made on with places.” As will appear below, I think it is not quite right to characterize Jamesian time in spatial terms.

the thoughts themselves. The opening paragraph's idea of pursuit, which is not Amerigo's idea, in the next paragraph leads backward to his success in pursuing Maggie, a success whose potential dangers register in an alarming sexual figure: "the grimness of a crunched key in the strongest lock that could be made" (4). Further back lies an extended conversation with Maggie, embroidered with interpretive commentary, after which we reach the deepest and vaguest past in a brief allusion to the Prince's former futile impoverishment. His determination to escape that futility through Mr Verver's money calls up the iron shutter, thus bringing us back to Bond Street, at which point a narrator makes a sudden, summary appearance:

Something of this sort was in any case the moral and the murmur of his walk. It would have been ridiculous—such a moral from such a source—if it hadn't all somehow fitted to the gravity of the hour, that gravity the oppression of which I began by recording. (14)

For ten pages we have had no present action at all. These pages track no time but the time of memory, as the mental work of recollection and analysis occupies a conceptual space unconnected to the physical space of the street. Fictional convention encourages us to locate this memory and analysis within the Prince's consciousness, but the sudden appearance of a narrator implies that the Prince is not the only thinker in these pages and seems to raise the question of distinguishing between two adjacent minds. To an extent the text permits such a distinction. An outburst like "the poor dears" is the kind of thing usually assigned to free indirect discourse, while the complex hypothetical assertion that "Capture had crowned the pursuit—or success, as he would otherwise have put it, had rewarded virtue" (4) seems more the province of a narrator. But although certain locutions seem to assign themselves to one personage or the other, in general the chapter does not make such distinctions easy. Take the figure of the key crunched in the lock—who is responsible for this phrasing, Amerigo or the narrator? Bersani's analysis suggests the latter; other models of "figural narration" in the late James suggest the former.<sup>57</sup> But the question itself seems to take the late James in the wrong way, treating his prose as something akin to the stream of consciousness, which pictures thought as a verbal or quasi-verbal linear sequence which the text renders into a sequential prose, abetting it along the way with authorial commentary. Such a model may hold for Joyce, Woolf or Faulkner, at least in parts; but applied to the late James, it gives rise to temporal paradoxes and difficulties of attribution. More generally, it misconstrues the relation in these books between thought and narration, and between thought and time.

The concluding statement, that "something of this sort was in any case the moral and the murmur of his walk," muddies the waters in two ways. First, it raises the sudden question of how accurate an account this has been of the Prince's thoughts. Second, it gives us two opposed ways of understanding that account. That a walk might have a murmur is an idea familiar from stream-of-consciousness fiction; in retrospect, twentieth-century literature seems largely to have been about people talking to themselves while on the move. But what does it mean for a walk to have a moral? Perhaps, by analogy with the moral of a story, it means the retrospective understanding reached at the conclusion of the murmur, a sense of its significance and wider applicability. This fits the structure by which the first-person narrator, after noting the "gravity of the hour," refers us back to the opening description of the Prince as "rather serious than gay" (4), thus placing the

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<sup>57</sup> For example Adre Marshall, *The Turn of the Mind: Constituting Consciousness in Henry James* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998).

intervening ten pages of mental life in the functional role of explaining that seriousness. The content of those pages, it would seem, has not passed in sequence through the Prince's mind but has hovered there all at once. To examine the Prince's state of mind is to reveal it as a complex structure which, despite its rendering in sequential language, is organized in nonlinear terms. The text's progressive murmur can shade into its retrospective moral precisely because it is not the murmur of an interior monologue like Joyce's, which is synchronized to the clock time of Dublin and constantly interrupted by external stimuli. Rather than movement between moments, James gives us the elaboration of all that one moment might contain; consciousness for him is an infinite plenitude whose expression is bounded only by the fact that a complete account, as Bersani notes, would require an expansion to "monstrous proportions."<sup>58</sup> Indeed a complete account might not be possible in our mortal lifetimes. The Jamesian work of recalling and reviewing the past, whether in Isabel Archer's fireside vigil (the earliest extended pluperfect in James), the meditations of *The Golden Bowl*, or James's own recollections of his life in the autobiographies and his work in the Prefaces, always involves the discernment of more relations and interconnections than sequential prose can convey. The preface to *Roderick Hudson* identifies James's earliest aesthetic challenge as his "terror, fairly, of the vast expanse" of the "canvas of life," of the "boundless number of its distinct perforations for the needle," each of which turns out "so to invite, to solicit, to persuade, to practise positively a thousand lures and deceits" upon the novice embroiderer (*AN* 5). The preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* ends without room to finish its own thoughts, for "There is really too much to say" (*AN* 58), and *The American Scene* finds James repeatedly forced to omit those recollections which "would commit me, should I give them their way, to excesses of specification."<sup>59</sup>

This multifaceted present consciousness bears some resemblance to William James's theory of time.<sup>60</sup> In *The Principles of Psychology*, William approvingly cites E.R. Clay's theory of the perceived present moment as a "specious present," more accurately described as "a part of the past—a recent past—delusively given as being a time that intervenes between the past and the future." The present moment, William explains, is not a mathematical instant but rather a combination of memory and anticipation: "no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time." This conception of experience as "a synthetic datum, not a simple one" leads William to imagine the temporal moment as "a sort of 'perspective projection' of past objects upon present consciousness, similar to that of wide landscapes upon a camera-screen."<sup>61</sup> It makes sense that William should be drawn to the spatial imagery of perspective and landscape, as Henry constantly uses metaphors of painting and architecture. Space allows for coexistence in a way that time does not; the multiple dimensions of a spatial surface seem to accommodate more interrelations than the single dimension of time. Movement through space is also elective rather than compulsory, and thus it is not surprising that the ample returns and reperusals of Jamesian thought, dwelling at leisure rather than impelled forward, have suggested to Poulet and many others a spatial rather than temporal logic. Poulet makes much of James's "law of successive aspects," suggesting as it does the shifting of perspectives on an unchanging sculptural arrangement, altering nothing but the angle of vision. Bersani too takes the Jamesian text to be ordered from "the spatial perspective of a narrator" who, like Augustine's God, regards his time-

<sup>58</sup> Bersani, "The Jamesian Lie" 131.

<sup>59</sup> James, *The American Scene* 40.

<sup>60</sup> Poulet is one of several critics to have drawn attention to this resemblance; see *Metamorphoses of the Circle* 313.

<sup>61</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950) 1:630.

bound creatures from the vantage of eternity.<sup>62</sup> Yet we can hardly remove the dimension of time from *The Golden Bowl*. James may be concerned with arranging ideas inside his characters' consciousnesses, but these consciousnesses are never static—they vibrate, they throb with the energy of contemplation. What seems to be at work here is a concept of lyric time that does not reduce to linear succession, a kind of multidimensional or multivalent time which incorporates aspects of both sequence and stasis and allows types of connection beyond those of simple contiguity.

Most often, those passages that carry the text out of linear time turn out to be extended metaphors. The remembered conversation between the Prince and Maggie, which takes up the greater part of the Prince's walk, slips back and forth between a pluperfect which highlights its position in memory and a simple past suggesting a more immediate narration. Such an alternation is common enough in fiction, but it takes on especial interest in light of the extraordinary paragraph that interrupts the conversation at its midpoint:

He recalled what, to this, he had gravely returned. "I might have been in a somewhat better pecuniary situation." But his actual situation under the head in question positively so little mattered to them that, having by that time lived deep into the sense of his advantage, he had kept no impression of the girl's rejoinder. It had but sweetened the waters in which he now floated, tinted them as by the action of some essence, poured from a gold-topped phial, for making one's bath aromatic. No one before him, never—not even the infamous Pope—had so sat up to his neck in such a bath. It showed, for that matter, how little one of his race could escape, after all, from history. What was it but history, and of *their* kind very much, to have the assurance of the enjoyment of more money than the palace-builder himself could have dreamed of? This was the element that bore him up and into which Maggie scattered, on occasion, her exquisite colouring drops. They were of the colour—of what on earth? of what but the extraordinary American good faith? They were of the colour of her innocence, and yet at the same time of her imagination, with which their relation, his and these people's, was all suffused. What he had further said on the occasion of which we thus represent him as catching the echoes from his own thoughts while he loitered—what he had further said came back to him, for it had been the voice itself of his luck, the soothing sound that was always with him. "You Americans are almost incredibly romantic." (7)

This paragraph introduces the vulgar question of money only to assert that it doesn't matter, and with this declaration of freedom comes an extended piece of figuration which jerks the text out of narrative time. We begin with explicit indicators of the temporal situation—the Prince is recalling his own words, while Maggie's cannot be reproduced because he does not remember them. But this lapse has the effect of halting the hitherto straightforward transcription of the conversation; instead of the empirical fact of Maggie's words, suddenly we have a figural

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<sup>62</sup> Of course spatial form has long been associated not only with James but with modernist literature in general, from Pound's and Lewis's polemics forward to Joseph Franck's "Spatial Form in Modernist Literature," *The Idea of Spatial Form: Essays on Twentieth-Century Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 31-66. In general discussions of spatial form suggest an opposed idea of time as a single dimension too restrictive to accommodate the complex structures of modernist works.

interpretation of them as sweetening or tinting the water in which the Prince now floats—and this “now” is strikingly difficult to place. It might plausibly refer to either the original moment of conversation or the later moment of memory, and this ambiguity collapses those moments together. The tone of these sentences oddly combines immediacy and detachment; the Prince seems both to be in the conversation, working from moment to moment to interpret Maggie’s words, and to be studying it from a reflective distance. The two attitudes are so enmeshed that it seems wrong to place this episode of consciousness at any precise point in the narrative sequence; it takes place in a medium more like Bergson’s duration, at a remove from sequential time. Nor is this simply a Jamesian comment on the nature of memory, as some parts in *The Golden Bowl* will appear in the pluperfect without any corresponding moment of recollection in the simple past.<sup>63</sup> When the text does revive its narrative sequence, it does so with a locution contorted even by late Jamesian standards: “What he had further said on the occasion of which we thus represent him as catching the echoes from his own thoughts while he loitered—what he had further said came back to him.” The laborious re-establishment of the remembering situation, as if a complex piece of machinery were starting back up, highlights the actual awkwardness and implausibility of that novelistic convention which would have us take the Prince as reliving his entire conversation verbatim, in linear sequence. Like the “something of this sort,” the phrase “we thus represent him” sounds like an authorial vacillation, and suggests that James has staked little on this convention in itself; he is not advancing a psychological thesis on the nature of memory. Rather he is taking the grammatical mark of the pluperfect, which novels tend to associate with memory, and is altering its purpose. The auxiliary “had” no longer links one temporal moment to another moment in the past; instead it works to loosen the very idea of linear time, making possible a model of consciousness which does not follow strict sequence.

Rather than following the metonymic chains of the stream of consciousness, this paragraph carries out a metaphorical task of interpretation: Maggie’s rejoinder is interpreted as a rain of colored drops, which are interpreted in turn as the color of innocence and imagination, which are then taken to exemplify the romanticism of her national character. These are not obvious connections—to hear good faith in Maggie’s speech is perhaps understandable, but why do we travel there via a rain of colored drops? In what sense does good faith have a color? Because the material world is almost completely occluded in these pages, because all sensory images are generated on the fly by consciousness itself, there seems to be an excess or an arbitrariness in their selection, for which James has often been reproached.<sup>64</sup> Certainly these figures are problematic if taken as direct transcriptions of internal speech; for one thing, they seem to be shared between characters, a fact which is widely taken to undermine categories of individual personhood.<sup>65</sup> But the very extravagance of the metaphors seems to suggest that the situation is not one of transcription. If the characters do sometimes speak to one another in metaphors as complex as those in which they think, they never evince conceptual shifts as rapid

<sup>63</sup> The beginning of Chapter 13, for example, presents a typically Jamesian extended pluperfect with no moment of recollection attached.

<sup>64</sup> See Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 40-41.

<sup>65</sup> For Bersani in “The Jamesian Lie” this contagious imagery, like the temporal convolutions, demonstrates the dominance of James’s narrator over his characters. Likewise Cameron in *Thinking in Henry James* takes these metaphors as another sign of consciousness dissociating from individual psychology, while Judith Ryan in *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 88 takes them to show that “no character’s mental life is truly distinct from that of others.”

as that of Amerigo's bath. Seymour Chatman observes that many of James's psychological verbs suggest a state of "pre-cognition" less temporally specifiable than cognition proper; "pondering," "wondering," "feeling" are states that do not necessarily have a demarcated beginning and end.<sup>66</sup> This seems all the more true of those metaphorical passages which contain no psychological verbs at all, and thus cast only an indirect light on consciousness. The question of attributing the metaphor to either character or narrator—Genette's *qui parle?*—gets no traction here, because what is being depicted is nothing like a speaking situation. The first-person narrator, I think, is best seen as an existing convention, like the pluperfect tense, which James has re-engineered for his own purposes; for the only real function of the first person in *The Golden Bowl* is to comment upon its own narrative technique. In the first chapter it simply functions as a signal that an excursion into the past has been concluded; on the "occasion of which we thus represent him"; "that gravity the oppression of which I began by recording." To the extent that it shows any personality, it is apologetic for its excesses—in one case, after dozens of pages in the pluperfect, it brings us back to the present "occasion round which we have perhaps drawn our circle too wide" (111); elsewhere it graces a dense stretch of figuration with the aside, "might I so far multiply my metaphors" (302). All other narratorial function has been abrogated; it offers no Eliotic aphorisms, it does not comment or judge. It is merely an occasional device, and to some extent an apology, for the necessity of rendering in sequential language the infinite potentiality of the mind.

This technique is often described as a retreat into the bastion of the mind, and there may be truth in this, but James prefers to think of it as a discovery. This is why he declares in the preface to *The Golden Bowl* that filtering his observations through "some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter.... will give me most instead of least to answer for" (AN 328). Restriction to the realm of consciousness is not a removal of options, but a placement in the richest possible field. This is the essential difference between the "perspectivism" of James's technique and that of a writer like Flaubert. For Flaubert the mind is a simple extension of the social world, equally superficial and equally banal.<sup>67</sup> For James it is a realm distinct from and immeasurably richer than anything matter, or society, or history could encompass. The late style is determined above all else to deny what Joycean stream of consciousness and Flaubertian free indirect discourse both assert in different ways, that a state of mind is like a string of prose. For James as for Coleridge or Hegel, narrative prose always threatens to collapse into the prose of the world, the realm of physical objects and determining forces;<sup>68</sup> whereas the defining feature of imagination, or consciousness, or *Geist*, is that it is unlike any worldly object at all.

<sup>66</sup> Seymour Chatman, *The Later Style of Henry James* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972) 15-16.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) holds up Flaubert as the prime example of a counter-Jamesian tradition, a writing of "pure surface" which "discerns the void but refuses to read it as the abyss of occulted meanings" (198-199). I will return to Brooks's model in connection with Joyce.

<sup>68</sup> The famous phrase is Hegel's: "This is the prose of the world, as it appears to the consciousness both of the individual himself and of others:—a world of finitude and mutability, of entanglement in the relative, of the pressure of necessity from which the individual is in no position to withdraw." See *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Volume One*, trans T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 150.

### The Fate of the Clean Glass

The mind is privileged in James; it is distinct from the profane world surrounding it; but can it be said to triumph over that world? This question brings us to consider the positions of the characters in *The Golden Bowl*; for what we have are characters who want to do exactly those things in their lives that James does in his prose.<sup>69</sup> In the first book Amerigo and Charlotte sell off their public personae in marriage while conducting a private affair, and thus attempt to cordon off their private selves from the public world in the same way that James's style cordons off the private consciousness from empirical pressures. In the second book Maggie finds her very life threatened by the progression of a plot and in response undertakes to halt the flow of time, annihilating the past and equating it to a motionless present. The first of these projects fails disastrously; the second succeeds in its own terms, but so grimly as to cast suspicion on the terms themselves. Only James the artist can achieve transcendence through lyric form, and then only within the limited sphere of the artwork. His characters so often ponder the relations between art and life, and his own critical writing so often returns to the relationship between the artist and his invented characters, that it is tempting to take such a relationship as an ethical ideal, and expect it to work beyond the peculiar circumstances of artistic creation. But in *The Golden Bowl*, the result of trying to enact the lyrical impulse in the interpersonal realm is moral disaster; and the book's clearest message is that while art may be able to hold history at bay, life is another matter entirely.

From the first page we understand that history is to be cast as the villain. The folly and crime of previous generations has victimized Prince Amerigo, leaving him a pauper with no possessions other than the sole exchangeable commodity of his ancestry, which he has just arranged to sell off to the Ververs. The Prince is quite aware of the double consciousness produced by willfully alienating part of himself, and he has confessed it frankly to Maggie:

"There are two parts of me"—yes, he had been moved to go on. "One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless *bêtises* of other people—especially of their infamous waste of money that might have come to me. Those things are written—literally in rows of volumes, in libraries; are as public as they're abominable. Everybody can get at them, and you've, both of you, wonderfully, looked them in the face. But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant—unimportant save to *you*—personal quantity. About this you've found out nothing."

Maggie does not understand in what sense this might be a warning. "Oh, I'm not afraid of history!" she replies; indeed she is attracted to it, with the same aestheticizing romantic spirit that informs her father's art collection. She admits artlessly that she was not drawn to Amerigo by "what you call your unknown quantity, your particular self. It was the generations behind you, the follies and the crimes, the plunder and the waste"—not, of course, as anything that she

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<sup>69</sup> This somewhat counters Cameron's claim in *Thinking in Henry James* that the separation of thought and speech is an independent theme in the novel, completely disarticulated from the ostensible subject of adultery. Adultery connects to the thought/speech divide not because it brings up the problem of otherness—as Cameron suggests it might do in some different, non-Jamesian context—but because it nakedly demonstrates the social threat in individual desire, and is thus directly pertinent to the Jamesian negotiation between public and private claims.

herself might suffer, but as something to be contemplated from the safe distance of the present. This romantic young American is thus aligned with Isabel—and like Isabel, Maggie is being set up for disillusionment by discovering a secret relation from the past. But among many other differences between the two situations, Amerigo is no Osmond. At no point in the novel does he intend harm to anyone; his error is simply to believe that his two selves are in fact separable, that he can sell off his public self while keeping his private self in reserve. Amerigo understands that history has not stopped, and that to have joined the Americans is to have entered a “history, and very much of *their* kind”—that is, of his ancestors. But only gradually will the novel reveal that history penetrates even to Amerigo’s imagination; that he is not two separable beings, but only a single being with a crack running down his center. The novel’s first half seems to endorse the possibility that certain people, those sensitive and intelligent as Amerigo, might indeed possess secret selves which can be abstracted from their surroundings.

Passive, well-intentioned, and fatally flawed, Amerigo recalls Merton Densher from *The Wings of the Dove*, and it is apposite here to return to the passage that Bersani cites as evidence of the narrator’s dominance; for Bersani spends a good deal of time on its form without stopping to examine its content. James writes at the end of the passage that Densher’s “question, as we have called it, was the interesting question of whether he had really no will left. How could he know—that was the point—without putting the matter to the test?”<sup>70</sup> This is significant. If Densher is reflecting on the disappearance of his will—or more accurately, if his reflective capacity has become disengaged from any sense of will—then the detachment that Bersani finds in the passage, its analytic impersonality and remoteness from immediate psychological concern, might have less to do with a narrator replacing Densher and more to do with Densher himself. We have seen that the vestigial first-person narrator of the late James has abdicated most of its Victorian duties; its sole function is to occasionally step in to give some shape to the description of consciousness. At the same time, the consciousness of characters has come to occupy a position like that of a novelistic narrator—able to describe the story’s events with great eloquence, but entirely detached from their course. The more complex the descriptions of consciousness become, the more they abdicate any direct bearing on the novel’s plot. Even when we witness a character forming a decision—as with Densher’s question, which will lead to his demand that Kate come to his rooms—the continual digressions and qualifications make the character seem more acted upon than acting. Densher’s subordination to Kate has placed his consciousness under great pressure, but in his response to that pressure he is not reacting so much as watching a reaction take place—a reaction which in the novel’s terms is completely ineffectual, since its only consequence is to entangle Densher further in his guilt and indecision until the catastrophe of Milly coming to knowledge of the plot.

This is nothing like the nineteenth-century novel driven by the forthright decisions and desires of more psychologically straightforward heroes—Stendhal’s, or Balzac’s. A good analogy in reverse might be Harry Shaw’s characterization of the Victorian narrator as a figure which “seems, at crucial moments... not quite to enter story space, but to evince a strong impulse to attempt such an entry.”<sup>71</sup> The Jamesian consciousness moves in the opposite direction. Though tied to a character, and to that extent occupying a position within the story it tells, its observations move it progressively farther from any effect on that story. Under this description, the purest example of Jamesian consciousness is probably the helpless Maisie, whose “doom of a peculiar passivity... as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane

<sup>70</sup> Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, ed. Millicent Bell (New York: Penguin, 2008) 369.

<sup>71</sup> Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) 250.

of glass”<sup>72</sup> separates her from her own life even as it offers her a unobstructed angle of vision. Likewise Prince Amerigo affords James a “clean glass” through which to present the first half of *The Golden Bowl*. In explaining the center-of-consciousness technique, that book’s preface claims that the use of Amerigo as a focalizer is “never a whit to the prejudice of his being just as consistently a foredoomed, entangled, embarrassed agent in the general imbroglio, actor in the offered play,” just as Maggie “duplicates, as it were, her value and becomes a compositional resource... as well as a value intrinsic” (AN 329). But this duplication of value entails a doubling of self; the private, observing consciousness separates out from the public, active personality and saddles the characters with the burden of Strether’s double consciousness, the “detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference.”<sup>73</sup>

What motivates this separation? A criticism like Frederic Jameson’s, which takes James to be writing fictions of “monadic isolation,” usually interprets the center-of-consciousness technique as an ideological response to an increasingly mercantile world. As “a protest and a defense against reification,” Jameson writes elsewhere, this technique counts among the “desperate myths of the self” generated in a rearguard defense of the “fiction of the individual subject.”<sup>74</sup> Certainly there is protest in James against reification, as a cursory glance at his recurrent themes—financial straits, ties between art and the marketplace, the horrible ease with which people become commodities—will show. But James’s characters are not isolated any more than they are monads. The barrier of alienation is situated not *between* his characters, but rather *within* them. These people are far too social ever to imagine themselves, like Conrad’s Marlow, living as they dream, alone; likewise, they are far too articulate ever to fall into the position of Eliot’s Prufrock, of finding it impossible to say just what they mean. Even those ambiguous texts such as “The Turn of the Screw” and *The Sacred Fount* do not derive their ambiguity from epistemological isolation as such; their narrators are not skeptical but monomaniacal, and the point of these stories is that the monomaniacal asking of certain questions can itself deform reality. By most measures, James’s characters are placed in society as securely as George Eliot’s. The difference is that they find they find their social positions newly intolerable in various ways, and can find no remedy but to split themselves apart.

We have seen in Isabel’s fireside vigil that lyric thought correlates with passivity against the outer world and, disturbingly, with present suffering. In Amerigo’s case this correlation is at once more pervasive and more insidious. Isabel may suffer terribly from Osmond, but the cause of her suffering is at least clear to her; when she perceives Osmond as a snake among flowers, as a beautiful mind mocking her from a high window, she has obtained an insight, even if she is not in a position to make use of it. But the ambiguously placed metaphors of the late style—tied to a character’s thoughts but not, strictly speaking, expressed by that character—seem to suggest more meanings, usually of the darker sort, than the character himself or herself perceives.<sup>75</sup> When Amerigo imagines the Verver wealth as a bath engulfing him up to his neck, we might wonder if this inundation is wholly safe; if the first chapter presents it as pleasant enough, seasoned with drops of good faith, by the end of the book it will have stranded him “absolutely... at sea” (GB 448), emptied of knowledge, his private self annihilated. And while *Portrait of a*

<sup>72</sup> Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 90-91.

<sup>73</sup> James, *The Ambassadors* 18.

<sup>74</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 221.

<sup>75</sup> Yeazell writes concerning one of Maggie’s famous figures, that of the small dog which may or may not have fallen into the water and may or may not have taken cold (GB 302), that “Maggie knows more than she knows she knows, and her metaphor mediates between conscious knowledge and deeper modes of awareness” (44).

*Lady* ultimately takes Isabel's inaction as a form of stoic virtue, *The Golden Bowl* demonstrates Amerigo's passivity as a moral flaw. Amerigo confesses in metaphor to Fanny Assingham that he lacks a moral sense of the English type, possessing only the backward Roman analogue of a staircase "slow and steep and unlighted, with so many of the steps missing that—well, that it's as short, in almost any case, to turn round and come down again" (GB 24). To imagine the moral sense as a path not worth taking, or a device not worth the effort of employing, signals Amerigo's flaw of passivity possibly better than he himself understands; this is the crack running through him which circumstances will later break wide open, the malleability which allows him to be sold to Maggie and swept into betrayal with Charlotte while his sensitive consciousness observes from its safe remove.

The book's opening does not find Charlotte suffering the same split as Amerigo.<sup>76</sup> We meet her as a creature of the social world, perhaps capricious but not duplicitous as such—when she makes her shopping trip with Amerigo, there may be a sense in which she is making up her motives as she goes along, but she does not seem to be concealing them. As she lacks Amerigo's disjunction between public and private, she is not initially employed by James as a reflector. We enter her consciousness only after her marriage, once she too has been compelled to sell herself, on her "first occasion of facing society"—in short, at the first point when it becomes truly plausible to imagine that she might be acting in bad faith. Charlotte perceives the Prince as "an actor who, between his moments on the stage, revisits his dressing-room and, before the glass, pressed by his need of effect, retouches his make-up" (182); and her awareness of their both being on display makes their appearance together into a certain theatrical gesture, as she explains to Fanny Assingham:

"Your situation's perfect," Mrs. Assingham presently declared.

"I don't say it isn't. Taken, in fact, all round, I think it is. And I don't, as I tell you, complain of it. The only thing is that I have to act as it demands of me."

"To 'act'?" said Mrs. Assingham with an irrepressible quaver.

"Isn't it acting, my dear, to accept it? I do accept it. What do you want me to do less?" (191)

With unusual directness for a late James character, Charlotte speaks the uncomfortable truth that her new position makes it impossible to speak the whole truth to Adam and Maggie. Later on Maggie will imagine their prior state as an unbalanced carriage with herself, Adam and Amerigo serving as the three wheels, and will ask, "what had Charlotte done from the first but begin to act, on the spot, and ever so smoothly and beautifully, as a fourth?" (314). The ambiguity in the verb "act," the suggestion that to serve a purpose might also mean to play a part, nicely encapsulates the difficulty of deciding whether or not Charlotte is acting in bad faith. She is not

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<sup>76</sup> Margery Sabin in *The Dialect of the Tribe: Speech and Community in Modern Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) has most forcefully made the point that Charlotte's early appeal as a character is very much "the appeal of a rich and integrated personality—body, mind, will; perception, action, speech—all working in harmony, and the whole human figure wonderfully ready to act in the given world" (68). This integration in the social world—existing within it rather than withdrawing part of herself—is why Charlotte, though "conscious of social values and of her own social performance, ... nevertheless rarely seems trapped in false or merely conventional scripts in Volume One" (71).

as cleanly divided as the Prince, and her attitude is more complex than simple hypocrisy.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless her marriage has begun to pry public and private claims apart.

The latter half of Book One shows Amerigo and Charlotte working through a murky blend of good intentions, duplicity and self-deception. The chapter immediately after they have “passionately sealed their pledge” (229) with a clandestine kiss on a rainy afternoon finds them scrambling for a moral vocabulary to justify their situation, and finding their solution in a poetic figure:

For her as well, in all his pulses, he felt the conveyed impression. It put them, it kept them together, through the vain show of their separation, made the two other faces, made the whole lapse of the evening, the people, the lights, the flowers, the pretended talk, the exquisite music, a mystic golden bridge between them, strongly swaying and sometimes almost vertiginous, for that intimacy of which the sovereign law would be the vigilance of “care,” would be never rashly to forget and never consciously to wound. (238-239)

Again the outer world is summarized almost into nonexistence, here with a strong sense of dismissal; the evening is but a lapse, the social arrangement a vain show, Adam and Maggie reduced in passing to a pair of faces. That “conveyed impression” which the Prince feels both for himself and for Charlotte converts these ephemera into an object of another order, the vertiginously swaying mystic golden bridge which carries not only emotional force but an ethical imperative: never to forget, never to wound. “Mystic” is a word that James associates with artistic creation, particularly in the Prefaces, which repeatedly invoke it to describe the conversion of lived impressions into the “stuff of drama.”<sup>78</sup> That the Prince imagines his relation with Charlotte to have a similar converting power suggests that he sees the relation as a kind of artwork, that he and Charlotte, having married into the Verver family by virtue of their supreme good taste, are bringing that taste to its highest fruition by exercising it on each other. And very scrupulously—since everyone in this book believes their conduct to be scrupulous—the Prince joins this aesthetic appeal to an ethical ideal of “care,” never rashly to forget and never consciously to wound. Yet that “consciously” is an odd qualifier; it suggests a belief that the Prince’s fine consciousness suffices in itself to protect the quartet from harm, that a wound inflicted outside the sphere of that consciousness would not count as a wound at all.

If there seems a false note here, it will be amplified in succeeding chapters, as the Prince continues to fall back on aesthetic vocabulary for increasingly troubling situations. His sense of complicity with Charlotte feels to him “exquisite” (246); in his reflection on how Maggie, Charlotte, and Fanny each contribute to this enjoyable effect, the word “mystic” recurs, this time in conjunction with a financial metaphor which, given the role of money in *The Golden Bowl*, ought to provoke alarm: “...he had, after all, gained more from women than he had ever lost by them; there appeared so, more and more, on those mystic books that are kept, in connection with

<sup>77</sup> Yeazell makes this point to emphasize the general complexity of moral positions in James; Charlotte’s point of view is not used simply “to confirm a sense of her hypocrisy, to heighten an awareness of the discrepancies between Charlotte’s public and private selves” (9-10).

<sup>78</sup> In the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* it is Isabel’s consciousness that effects the “mystic conversion... into the stuff of drama or, even more delightful word still, of ‘story’” (AN 56). Elsewhere James credits the “crucible” of the novelist’s imagination with the transformative “act essentially not mechanical, but thinkable rather—so far as thinkable at all—in chemical, almost in mystical terms” (AN 230); a formula he liked well enough to reprise in speaking of “that mystic, that ‘chemical’ change wrought in life by its dedication to an aesthetic use” (AN 248-249).

such commerce, even by men of the loosest business habits, a balance in his favour” (257). This casually exploitative observation can so easily coexist with the ideal of “care” expressed above because the Prince has become conscious of that splitting of himself which we saw in the first chapter, and is now working to use it to his advantage. In this portion of the first book we have a particularly explicit treatment of the situation:

...he had never so much as during such sojourns the trick of a certain detached, the amusement of a certain inward critical, life; the determined need, which apparently all participant, of returning upon itself, of backing noiselessly in, far in again, and rejoining there, as it were, that part of his mind that was not engaged at the front. His body, very constantly, was engaged at the front—in shooting, in riding, in golfing, in walking, over the fine diagonals of meadow-paths or round the pocketed corners of billiard-tables; it sufficiently, on the whole, in fact, bore the brunt of bridge-playing, of breakfasting, lunching, tea-drinking, dining, and of the nightly climax over the bottigliera, as he called it, of the bristling tray; it met, finally, to the extent of the limited tax on lip, on gesture, on wit, most of the current demands of conversation and expression. Therefore something of him, he often felt at these times, was left out; it was much more when he was alone, or when he was with his own people—or when he was, say, with Mrs. Verver and nobody else—that he moved, that he talked, that he listened, that he felt, as a congruous whole.

“English society,” as he would have said, cut him, accordingly, in two, and he reminded himself often, in his relations with it, of a man possessed of a shining star, a decoration, an order of some sort, something so ornamental as to make his identity not complete, ideally, without it, yet who, finding no other such object generally worn, should be perpetually, and the least bit ruefully, unpinning it from his breast to transfer it to his pocket. The Prince’s shining star may, no doubt, having been nothing more precious than his private subtlety; but whatever the object was he just now fingered it a good deal, out of sight—amounting as it mainly did for him to a restless play of memory and a fine embroidery of thought. (241)

The part of the mind engaged at the front slides to a consideration of Amerigo’s body being engaged at the front, so quickly that it might seem this part of the mind *is* the body, or at least is inextricably bound to it. The effect is to collapse the social and material worlds into a single sphere which the narration treats only glancingly; the social activities described lump together in a catalogue of gerunds, like the merchandise on display in the first chapter, which are quickly brushed aside to make room for the opposite portion of Amerigo’s personality, metaphorically described as the shining star. Significantly, the tenor of the metaphor—what exactly that shining star signifies—is not specified. The Prince himself doesn’t know what it is, other than “the restless play of memory and fine embroidery of thought.” This is of course a fine description of the Jamesian style itself, and it is of course in the Prince’s interest to leave it vague, since it serves his belief that it can be kept cordoned in a mental world with no bearing on the material. Maggie is managing his good conscience for him. (244)

The definitive step in Amerigo and Charlotte’s complicity, perhaps even more than the physical encounter arranged at the end of Book One, is the point when they begin to allude in

conversation to their situation. The purpose of these conversations, like many in James, is to find the proper terms to speak of their situation, to work out a description that will serve their purposes. And these descriptions must be very carefully managed, since in the rarefied world of *The Golden Bowl* it is vulgar and low even to contemplate taking direct action in one's own interest. Financial gain may be the most "livid vulgarity" (106), but it is equally vulgar to recognize any sort of incipient trouble (268), and all the characters repeatedly disclaim "any vulgar struggle" (281), any vulgar attempt to get *at* someone (536), whether it end in the "vulgarity of triumph" (193) or "the vulgar heat" (470) of recognizing oneself wronged. Thus when it comes time to allude to their situation in conversation, Charlotte pays "her tribute to the good taste from which they hadn't heretofore by a hair's breadth deviated" by speaking in a counterfactual: "If it didn't sound so vulgar I should say that we're—fatally, as it were—*safe*. Pardon the low expression—since it's what we happen to be" (251).

Charlotte's "fatally" is a real rhetorical coup; it manages to suggest both that they are absolved of responsibility for their safety—that it simply happened to them—and also that this condition is inalterably permanent. It suggests the same motive behind Amerigo's reflection on how accommodating Adam and Maggie have been to their liaison—"He might vulgarly have put it that one had never to plot or to lie for them" (230). For both Amerigo and Charlotte, it is essential to believe that they are carrying out no plot in any sense. To admit a plot would be to admit the passage of time, the uncertainty of the future, and also to admit the vulgarity of their won self-interest. Isabel Archer also fears the vulgarity of acting in a plot; but where she concludes her novel by refusing to initiate an adultery plot, Amerigo and Charlotte seek a more complex arrangement by which they might have it both ways. If rather than authoring a plot they are writing a poem, they are absolved:

...he knew why he, at any rate, had gone in, on the basis of all forms, on the basis of his having, in a manner, sold himself, for a *situation nette*. It had all been just in order that his—well, what on earth should he call it but his freedom?—should at present be as perfect and rounded and lustrous as some huge precious pearl. He hadn't struggled nor snatched; he was taking but what had been given him; the pearl dropped itself, with its exquisite quality and rarity, straight into his hand. (260)

This makes explicit the rhetorical structure that the first half of the book has struggled to build; the pearl is an expression of perfect completeness, of timeless plenitude, completely detached from the world of vulgar struggle—even from the sale of himself that Amerigo was forced to transact. This allows the exceptionalism of the Prince's final evaluation of their "case" ("There can't have been many") and Charlotte's smiling response: "Perhaps never, never, never any other. That, I confess I should like to think. Only ours" (252).

For a few hundred pages, as the Prince and Charlotte fall deeper into complicity, they are allowed to entertain the idea of their affair taking place in a transcendent realm cordoned off from the social world. But the novel's second half will refute this; it will show that their romance does have implications traveling beyond themselves, and that they can, from an external vantage point, be conceived as plotting. The question of whether Charlotte and Amerigo can keep their relation *safe*, whether their mystic bridge can remain untouched by its surroundings, is a version of the question of whether there can be a gratuitous gift, a gift with no corresponding obligation, that is first broached when Amerigo and Charlotte visit the antiques dealer. The novel answers

both questions in the negative. Though the bowl is not purchased, the mere entertaining of the thought sets in motion a series of second-order obligations which will return in time. The bowl occupies an odd symbolic position between the mental and material; with its lustrous surface and hidden crack, it would seem to fit comfortably among all the other artifacts—the mystic bridge, Amerigo’s pearl, the encrusted pagoda that Maggie seeks to enter at the start of Book Two. Yet it also exists in the physical world and plays a key causal role in the novel’s plot, by which even the earliest thoughts of Amerigo and Charlotte, what should have remained private and in the realm of possibility, come to radiate outwards.

Amerigo and Charlotte have to work very hard in the first book to keep the financial and material worlds, and indeed the passage of time, at bay; but Adam and Maggie are constitutionally impervious to such things. Like the God of the Scholastics, Adam is a “revelation of simplicity” (237), and he seems to be immutable as well; wanting for nothing, desiring nothing, he is not susceptible to a plot of any kind. His “pursuit” of Charlotte, as Maggie comes to realize, is undertaken for Maggie’s benefit alone, as one more act of munificence, and with notably less passion than his concurrent purchase of priceless Damascene tiles. The past self who vulgarly strove in the financial world, whose “years of darkness had been needed to render possible the years of light” (106), appears so briefly and so distantly in Adam’s thoughts that it seems to be another character entirely, like one of the servants who occasionally cross the novel’s pages to perform some incidental function. One might read in Adam the predicament of Hegel’s masters, alienated from the world around them, but Adam never seems particularly to lament his own alienation. At most it is an inconvenience to encounter in others that “attribution of power” by which it is “taken for granted that, as he had money, he had force” (96). The uncertainty as to whether he ever consummates his marriage suggests an emotional hell for Charlotte; for Adam it is of a piece with his impassivity. His only real display of emotion in the book is an outburst to Maggie: “Look here, Mag—I ain’t selfish. I’ll be blown if I’m selfish” (*GB* 489). But the remark is meaningless, since there are no criteria by which a man in Adam’s position could be characterized as selfish or the opposite; just as egoism is a condition that he can only pretend at, as if playing with “one of childhood’s toys” (93). Amerigo and Charlotte go to great lengths to obscure the vulgarity of their actively pursuing their desires, but Adam, blithely going about with Maggie in “the state of our primitive parents before the Fall” (246), need not fear this or any earthly power.

There is a certain continuity between Adam and Maggie’s transcendental freedom and the professed ideals of Romantic aesthetics; and it is common in discussing *The Golden Bowl* to take Adam, or Maggie, or both as ideals of the Jamesian artist.<sup>79</sup> But though James’s style tends to obscure the particulars of the material world, he hardly allows us to forget the material fact that their American innocence is buoyed on an infinite ocean of money. This brute fact gives an uneasy tinge of capitalist acquisition to Maggie’s project in Book Two, which is in essence the Romantic project of recapturing lost time, of recovering the golden bowl “as it *was* to have been” (456) and redemptively writing the profane world into a timeless poem. Having become aware of Amerigo and Charlotte’s liaison—realizing that they have, in essence, set a plot in motion—Maggie does not attempt to author a counterplot. Rather she attempts to unwrite their narrative, moving it backward to lyric stasis, and in the process wills a closure so extreme that it can’t even be called narrative closure. Fanny Assingham, who over the novel moves in and out of the role

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<sup>79</sup> For an older, influential view that takes Maggie’s project as fundamentally redemptive, see Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962). For an interpretation of both Maggie and Adam as artists, see Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination*.

of authorial delegate, gives a strange and apt prophecy at the end of Book One: “Nothing—in spite of everything—*will* happen. Nothing *has* happened. Nothing *is* happening” (294).

What does it mean to so emphatically refuse any event? Sitting at cards with the other three members of the quartet, Maggie considers how she might shatter the social order with a moment’s gesture:

They might in short have represented any mystery they would; the point being predominantly that the key to the mystery, the key that could wind and unwind it without a snap of the spring, was there in her pocket—or rather, no doubt, clasped at this crisis in her hand and pressed, as she walked back and forth, to her breast. She walked to the end and far out of the light; she returned and saw the others still where she had left them; she passed round the house and looked into the drawing-room, lighted also, but empty now, and seeming to speak the more, in its own voice, of all the possibilities she controlled. Spacious and splendid, like a stage again awaiting a drama, it was a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those formless fragments of her golden bowl she was trying so hard to pick up. (470)

Maggie’s key or spring is an emblem of withheld power, of secret possibility, a counterpart to the jeweled star that Amerigo toys with in Book One. But the point of imagining the key is to make clear that Maggie will not employ it. After the discovery of the bowl, the novel’s two climatic moments are two confrontations with Charlotte, both of which, infamously, involve no reference to the matter supposedly at stake. Since Maggie’s aim is not to expose the affair but to bury it, she and Charlotte end up making bizarre agreements: in the first confrontation, that Maggie has no grievance against Charlotte, in the second, that Maggie has worked against Charlotte by trying to separate her from Adam, and that Charlotte and Adam’s departure to America signifies the failure of Maggie’s plan. This insistent arbitrariness of conversation, here and at a dozen points elsewhere in Book Two, leads by the novel’s close to a weird dystopia in which the social order is preserved at the cost of effective silence; a world without difference, in which dialogue cannot take place, in which, as Sharon Cameron writes, “speech, opaque as thought, comes to mean nothing penetrable; almost, it seems, like the cry at the novel’s center, to mean nothing at all.”<sup>80</sup>

D.A. Miller has offered a theory that discord is the fundamental element of narration, and that narrative closure involves the reestablishing of non-narratable quiescence. But, says Miller, novels cannot really enact this quiescence in full; while they may build toward closure, “they are never fully or finally governed by it.”<sup>81</sup> What we have in *The Golden Bowl*, it seems, is a bizarre attempt to imagine what the achievement of complete quiescence would actually look like; what would happen if the stasis of lyric poetry could be taken out of its provisional realm and definitively imposed on the social world. Rather than synthesizing disparate elements or attempting to resolve the conflict between personal and social norms, the conclusion of *The Golden Bowl* shows competing subjectivities being silenced in the service of a single order. Quietly, meekly, and with absolute rigidity, Maggie makes this point to Fanny Assingham:

<sup>80</sup> Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James* 121.

<sup>81</sup> D.A. Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) xiv.

Maggie thoughtfully shook her head. “No; I’m not terrible, and you don’t think me so. I do strike you as surprising, no doubt—but surprisingly mild. Because—don’t you see?—I *am* mild. I can bear anything.”

“Oh, ‘bear’!” Mrs. Assingham fluted.

“For love,” said the Princess.

Fanny hesitated. “Of your father?”

“For love,” Maggie repeated.

It kept her friend watching. “Of your husband?”

“For love,” Maggie said again. (384)

There is no better illustration of Maggie’s non-dialectical, non-narrative method. To attain a narrative understanding of her situation would require her to alter in some way, to incorporate the past; but she settles for nothing less than the past’s annihilation. The introduction of the bowl into the Maggie’s home, before Fanny smashes it, occasions “a clearance... of other objects, notably of the Louis-Seize clock that accompanied the candelabra” (416). Readers of the novel have had a notoriously difficult time settling on a clear symbolic role for the bowl, but Maggie finds a meaning easily enough; she takes it to stand for the past “as it *was* to have been... The bowl with all our happiness in it. The bowl without the crack” (456). The bowl without any crack, of course, is not a bowl that ever existed, even before its shattering; and this counterfactual object seems to suggest other impossible objects, like Amerigo and Charlotte’s golden bridge, carrying an ethical imperative that turns out to be unsustainable. Given the very particular symbolic weight that Maggie places on the bowl, it also does not seem too great a stretch to take it as a version of Keats’s urn, that cold pastoral of unearthly happiness:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new;  
More happy love! More happy, happy love!<sup>82</sup>

These repetitive lines—particularly the last, which both evokes transcendent bliss and threatens to devolve into babble—are not wholly unlike James’s prose in upsetting the linear movement of time; and their subject, as in James, is the distinctiveness of experience available to aesthetic contemplation. Yet Keats as well seems to understand that this is an idealization of love, not love itself, and that timeless plenitude is incompatible with earthly life. The line chosen to rhyme with “love” is “All breathing human passion far above,” and the odd preposition does not make clear whether the urn is meant to be a *summa* of human passion or whether, on the contrary, all human passion must be set aside in favor of the breathless, motionless depicted scene.<sup>83</sup>

To live one’s life by aesthetic values, to seal up interpersonal relations as one might seal up an artwork, is not a choice that James views favorably, and there are strong indications that Maggie has taken this vexed path. In the first of his prefaces, written soon after completing his

<sup>82</sup> John Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, 3rd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1988) 345.

<sup>83</sup> Sabin points out that this radical exclusion of the past may be effective for the characters, but it cannot be for the reader (or, one assumes, for James); this helps to avoid implicating the novel itself in Maggie’s project. Here again it is important not to confuse the situation of James the artist with that of his characters.

last novel, he ponders the lack of any “visibly-appointed stopping place” for the author at work, and concedes that

We have, as the case stands, to invent and establish them, to arrive at them by a difficult, dire process of selection and comparison, of surrender and sacrifice. The very meaning of expertness is acquired courage to brace one’s self for the cruel crisis from the moment one sees it grimly loom. (*AN* 6)

Dire words for the act of ending a novel—and yet “sacrifice” is the word Maggie uses over and over, with regard to her fellows, to indicate how the plot must be finished. There are many troubling passages where Adam and Maggie seem to regard their spouses as aesthetic objects, from the early characterization of the Prince as a *morceau du musée* (*GB* 10) to the much-remarked closing scene with “Charlotte throned, as who should say, between her hostess and her host, the whole scene having crystallized, as soon as she took her place, to the right quiet lustre,” which moves very naturally into Adam’s appreciation of an early Florentine picture (559-560).<sup>84</sup> But even in those passages where Maggie’s sympathy seems most active, the aestheticizing attitude seeps through:

Behind the glass lurked the *whole* history of the relation she had so fairly flattened her nose against it to penetrate—the glass Mrs. Verver might, at this stage, have been frantically tapping, from within, by way of supreme, irrepressible entreaty...

She could thus have translated Mrs. Verver’s tap against the glass, as I have called it, into fifty forms; could perhaps have translated it most into the form of a reminder that would pierce deep. “You don’t know what it is to have been loved and broken with. You haven’t been broken with, because in *your* relation what can there have been, worth speaking of, to break? Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness; and if it was to have no meaning, no better meaning than that such a creature as you could breathe upon it, at your hour, for blight, why was I myself dealt with all for deception? why condemned after a couple of short years to find the golden flame—oh, the golden flame!—a mere handful of black ashes?” (538)

The rhetoric of this passage is so outré that some critics have questioned whether it can plausibly be assigned to Charlotte at all;<sup>85</sup> but the question of attribution aside, Maggie’s receptive imagination seems to respond to Charlotte’s suffering with something like aesthetic appreciation. The glass on which Charlotte taps is like the “clean glass” that Amerigo provides as a center of consciousness in Book One, or the glass in *What Maisie Knew* that shuts Maisie out from her own life; it affords unobstructed vision, and even some measure of sympathetic identification, at the cost of impotence. The sympathetic gesture is, in another respect, “one of the traps set for

<sup>84</sup> There are several persuasive critiques of Maggie and Adam as blind aesthetes; for one general argument that Maggie’s defense against reification turns into reification of another kind, see Carolyn Porter, *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant-Observer in Emerson, James, Adams and Faulkner* (Irvington, NY: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

<sup>85</sup> Sabin suggests that it might not be plausible to read these words as coming from Charlotte, as their melodrama seems very different from the Charlotte we knew in Book One; it may be that Maggie finds it in her interest to invent them.

Maggie's spirit at every turn of the road" (539), for sympathy is only possible once Charlotte is neutralized as a threat. Before their confrontation, Maggie thinks only that "the splendid shining supple creature was out of the cage, was at large," and wonders how she might be "hemmed in and secured" (472). Afterward, Maggie may weep for Charlotte—at least we see her "on the point" of it, her vision "all blurred and dim" (512)—but she may do no more.

The imagination is fully able to do its work in *The Golden Bowl* only when the object of imagination has been placed at a remove, behind a barrier that prohibits any engagement beyond the observant impression. This might account for the structural paradox of the novel's ending, that Maggie's projection of a personal vision, the imaginative redemption of a fallen world, ends up looking exactly like the ending of a conventional novel: child and parent parted, wedded couples in stable quiescence. The end of the book erases the discord between private and public at the cost of annulling the private entirely. "I see only *you*," Amerigo tells her at the book's end, and this truth lights his eyes so strangely that Maggie—in "pity and dread," like the spectator of tragedy—cannot bear to look (567). Everyone's subjectivity, perhaps even her own, has been silenced to clear room for the new order. What she has done, we understand at last, is to enact the redemptive project of Romantic lyric at its most extreme: to bring about utopia, erase history, undo the Fall. In the process she has immersed herself and her fellows in an unbreathable atmosphere.

The James who emerges from this reading is a creative artist who, within the sphere of his art, takes the creative imagination as his highest value, but who is suspicious of any effort to transport the imagination outside that sphere. Is it at all possible, then, to take the idea of freedom embodied in James's art and transfer it into the realm of interpersonal relations, into the practice of daily life? This seems a strange question. But a good deal of recent writing on James asks us to take the question seriously, insofar as it holds up his novels as paradigms of various kinds of moral or ethical thinking which, it is claimed, literature is uniquely able to provide us: openness and spontaneity, suspension of judgment, the adoption of others' perspectives.<sup>86</sup> The core thread of these arguments is that in suspending categorical judgment one manifests one's own imaginative freedom, as well as granting a kind of freedom to the persons who are the objects of one's thought, and that James's novels exemplify this suspension in two ways. First, James as a writer and we as properly trained readers will establish particular relations with fictional characters, relations which are characterized by empathetic imagination and deferral of judgment. Second, certain Jamesian characters—in particular Lambert Strether and Maggie Verver—are taken to themselves practice this imaginative suspension in their relationships with others, and thus to function as moral models.<sup>87</sup> To adjudicate these claims overall would broach some very broad questions in aesthetic and moral theory. Here I want only to suggest that James makes an odd choice as a paradigmatic writer in philosophical accounts of narrative fiction, given the idiosyncrasy of his own narrative practice. Philosophical accounts which address the perceived content of James's books—their plots, characters, interpersonal situations—without

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<sup>86</sup> Martha Nussbaum is the most prominent professional philosopher to have made this argument, but literary critics such as J. Hillis Miller and Judith Butler have recently made related ones. For a review of this trend, not limited to James though centered around him, see Dorothy J. Hale, "Fiction as Restriction: Self-Binding in New Ethical Theories of the Novel," *Narrative* 15 (2007) 187-206.

<sup>87</sup> See Martha C. Nussbaum, "James's *The Golden Bowl*: Literature as Moral Philosophy" and "Perceptive Equilibrium: Literary Theory and Ethical Theory," *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

taking up their literary form cannot consider the fact that the late style's lyric aesthetic emerges from a concern for imaginative freedom very like that behind these moral inquiries, and that James sets strict limits on this imaginative freedom, denying its benevolence as soon as it moves outside the sphere of art. Thus Ross Posnock's picture of a Henry James devoted (along with William James, Dewey and Adorno) to a "dialectical or mimetic cognition" which "resist[s] the repressions and closure of identity by conceiving of the very structure of selfhood as founded on otherness... devoted to maximizing a sense of spontaneity, fallibility, restlessness and ferment" seems blind to the ways that James's characters actually work out their selfhood in practice.<sup>88</sup> A similar blindness clouds Martha Nussbaum's call to "confront the reigning models of political and economic rationality with the consciousness of Strether."<sup>89</sup> Nussbaum admits this to be "an apparently thankless task," for the obvious reason that an interpretation of *The Ambassadors* is not much like a policy paper; but what she does not mention is the opposition that James himself so carefully draws between perception and praxis. Strether's defining feature, after all, is his scrupulousness in keeping consciousness separated from practical action. Of all Jamesian heroes he is the most determined, as he puts it, "Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself," other than the "wonderful impressions" that he will be taking home from Paris.<sup>90</sup> And even in this ideal there is a sour note; for in order to maintain his disinterested standing he abandons the chance of any relation with Maria Gostrey. For him this may be a lost opportunity; for her it seems an unwarranted injustice. Strether's conclusive last words—"So there we are!"—might set a capstone to his perceptual adventure, but so spoken to Maria, are they not callous as well?

In a way, these optimistic readings of James make the same logical leap as Bersani's unsympathetic reading in which a despotic narrator overrides his characters' autonomy. In both cases interpersonal ethical standards are applied to a specific relation—that between the artist and his subject matter—which does not provide a good model for our relation to the world. James may work very hard in *The Golden Bowl* to "get down into the arena and do my best to live and breathe and rub shoulders and converse with the persons engaged in the struggle" (*GB* xlii), but the novel has shown that there are many different ways of being in the same arena, and some are more efficacious—or more culpable—than others. We might do well here to remember Bernard Williams's warning that "philosophy, and in particular moral philosophy, is still deeply attached to giving good news."<sup>91</sup> The arts, by and large, have been less ready to share this attachment. If we want, understandably, to continue believing that they are good for us, we cannot forget the differences between art and life. Certainly James never forgets them. The freedom of the artist, his transmutation of life's gross matter, cannot extend past the sphere of art itself; and this chastened Romanticism, this delimited sphere of freedom, will weigh heavily on the next generation of modernist writers as they struggle to make use of their inheritance.

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<sup>88</sup> Ross Posnock, *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 106-107.

<sup>89</sup> Martha Nussbaum, "Perceptive Equilibrium" 192.

<sup>90</sup> Henry James, *The Ambassadors* 334.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard Williams, "The Women of Trachis: Fictions, Pessimism, Ethics," *The Greeks and Us: Essays in Honor of Arthur W.H. Adkins*, ed. Arthur W.H. Adkins, Robert B. Loudon and Paul Schollmeier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 43.

## Two

## William Faulkner: Analogy and Silence

“Words are no good,” says Faulkner’s Addie Bundren, apparently from inside her own coffin; “words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at.”<sup>1</sup> A name—Anse Bundren’s name, for one—is merely “a shape, a vessel” into which its bearer flows “like cold molasses,” until the vessel stands as “a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame.” Yet emptier are the names given to concepts: “sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have” (*AILD* 174). Addie’s sole bulwark against the emptiness of words is the materiality of action: “words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless,” while “doing goes along the earth clinging to it” (173). She strikes her students in the schoolhouse because “only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream” (172), and she attempts to redeem the word “sin” by enacting it bodily with Whitfield (174).

To the extent that *As I Lay Dying* comes with any interpretive key, it seems we must find it in this monologue. Presenting something like a theory of language at the precise center of an experimental work fascinated by linguistic form, it seems designed to force the conclusion that this is a book about incommunicability and linguistic failure. While *As I Lay Dying* has been read through as many different interpretive schemata as any work in the language, the resulting interpretations cluster around a shared belief in the fallenness or insufficiency of language, providing ballast for the claim that Addie’s despair of words is Faulkner’s as well. Criticism of the 1960s, mindful of the heresy of paraphrase, took Addie’s monologue as evidence that “truth... for Faulkner is ultimately experiential rather than metaphysical or linguistic,” and that language “is considered a barrier to truth... The thing itself is incommunicable, can only be shared, not stated.” Heideggerian criticism finds that any attempt to analyze Addie’s words would “sacrifice their ‘flooding,’ ‘boiling’ actuality, and enact the very process of abstraction that she has discovered and denounced”; deconstructive criticism sees a longing to exchange speech for the silent “region of writing, that place beyond the spoken”; Lacanian criticism finds that attempts in the novel to reconcile words to things are “themselves of linguistic and rhetorical nature” and thus “undermined by the inadequacy of their very medium”; Walter Ong’s distinction between oral and print culture is used as evidence that the novel’s printed text, like Addie herself, represents the “dark voicelessness in which words are deeds.”<sup>2</sup> A few critics have dissented. André Bleikasten argues that “the very fact that [Faulkner] chose language as his medium and was true to it to the very last proves that he did not despair of the power of words, under certain conditions, to approach truth,”<sup>3</sup> and Mark E. Boren is suspicious of “the increasing

<sup>1</sup> William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Vintage, 1990) 171. From here cited as *AILD*.

<sup>2</sup> The quotes from 1960s criticism appear at Olga Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner: a Critical Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964) 254, and Eric Larsen, “The Barrier of Language: the Irony of Language in Faulkner,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 13 (1967) 30. The Heideggerian example appears at “*As I Lay Dying*: Demise of Vision,” *American Literature* 61 (1989) 19; the deconstructive at John T. Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner’s Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) 41, the Lacanian at Michel Delville, “Alienating Language and Darl’s Narrative Consciousness in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*,” *Southern Literary Journal* 27 (1994) 66, and the oral-narrative at Michael Kaufmann, “The Textual Coffin and the Narrative Corpse of *As I Lay Dying*,” *Arizona Quarterly* 49 (1993) 112.

<sup>3</sup> André Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner’s Novels from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 207.

homage paid by critics to Addie and to her theories of language.”<sup>4</sup> But even Bleikasten feels obliged to concede that “all language, of course, is in the last analysis a failed or fallen language,”<sup>5</sup> thus granting the vital point both to Addie and to all those theories of language that follow her.

In this chapter I want to suggest a rather different model of how language works in *As I Lay Dying*, and by implication in the modernist novel generally. To talk in blanket terms of the success or failure of language is to make a sweeping generalization that overrides a good many distinctions important to a writer like Faulkner, in particular that between literary art and daily life. The sort of attributive narratology that assigns fictive utterances to characters or authorial personae has fallen out of vogue in Faulkner studies as elsewhere; the last substantial analysis of *As I Lay Dying* in these terms was made by Dorothy J. Hale nearly two decades ago. But such distinctions are worth revisiting, if only because the monologue of a dead woman carries different implications depending on whom we take to be speaking, and under what conventions. In my view the signature experiment of *As I Lay Dying* is a kind of analogic narration which represents mind and world by analogy and metaphor rather than propositional statements, thereby making words—as Addie would wish—into a kind of act. At the same time the novel telegraphs the limits of its own technique, which cannot extend outside the act of writing fiction. This model will make some reference to analytic philosophy of language, in particular Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose appearance is intended not as an argument from authority but as a point of comparison. A rough contemporary of Faulkner’s with a related intellectual heritage, Wittgenstein sought to counter certain philosophical problems with the concept of differing language-games, in which what is true of one game may not be true of all. This heterogeneous picture usefully counters the idea of wholesale linguistic failure, and can help to remind us of the distinction between a character’s use of language and an author’s use of language. Indeed the novel’s plot gives a particularly terrible embodiment in this distinction in the fate of Darl Bundren, who in some ways resembles his creator but has no access to Faulkner’s linguistic resources.

### Silence (1)

Twenty-three years after writing *As I Lay Dying*, by which time he had won the Nobel Prize and was well into the self-mythologizing phase of his career, Faulkner gave an interview in which he overlaid familiar modernist ideas of the artist with a sweeping pessimism:

I find it impossible to communicate with the outside world. Maybe I will end up in some kind of self-communion—a silence—faced with the certainty that I can no longer be understood. The artist must create his own language. That is not only his right but his duty. Sometimes I think of doing what Rimbaud did—yet, I will certainly keep on writing as long as I live.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mark E. Boren, “The Southern Super Collider: William Faulkner Smashes Language into Reality in *As I Lay Dying*,” *Southern Quarterly* 40 (2002) 22.

<sup>5</sup> Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy* 207.

<sup>6</sup> James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., *Lion in the Garden; interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962* (New York: Random House, 1968) 71. Aside from Lilly’s reference, it appears at Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy* 385 and as Hale’s epigraph.

Seeming as it does to complement Addie's theory of language, this quote shows up often in speaking of the character. The first critic to draw an explicit connection was Paul R. Lilly, who took it to show that Faulkner shared with his character an expressive ideal of silence, "some form of metalanguage in which words have no place." Lilly takes Addie's words both to advocate and to embody this silence; her monologue escapes the usual prison of language because "it *is* a poem: it has distilled the human condition."<sup>7</sup> Obvious questions are begged here: what could a metalanguage beyond words look like? How does Addie distill the human condition as other narratives do not?<sup>8</sup> Not only is her philosophy suspect in encouraging us to whip children, it is hard to square with the life of a man who published nineteen novels and nearly one hundred stories in his lifetime, who never *did* do what Rimbaud did. In Bleikasten's more persuasive reading, Faulkner is distanced from Addie, who appears as not an authorial mouthpiece but a "disillusioned Cratylist: having assumed a purposeful analogy between signifiers and referents, she feels betrayed when she finds out that the relations between them are arbitrary conventions."<sup>9</sup> Although she speaks as if her adultery with Whitfield could be a deed surpassing words, fulfilling her duty to the "terrible blood," it ends up looking more like an attempt to restore Cratylan qualities to language: "to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air" (175). The word "sin" may be dead, but she longs to revivify it. At heart, her complaint stems from a need to make words more than they are.

Yet the complaint cannot be dismissed. The appearance of Addie's monologue between Cora's moralizing and Whitfield's hypocrisy shows just how treacherous words can be, and one might say the same of Anse hiding within the word "love," "like within a paper screen" (172), in order to get a family to do his manual labor. Likewise Lilly's idea of a wordless metalanguage, while incoherent, does seem to gesture toward a distinction that Faulkner wanted to make; for clearly he has sympathy for Addie, as well as something of her paradoxical desire for a language which would not suffer the fallibility of language, which would enjoy either the force of action or the integrity of silence. The ancestor of this desire is perhaps less Rimbaud, who seems to have quit poetry for obscure personal reasons, than Mallarmé, whose writing often brushes against a kind of Cratylism. In assigning emotional charges to individual letters, or mourning the linguistic confusion that obscures the "supreme language" whose "immortal word" would itself be equivalent to material truth, Mallarmé toys with an old philosophical dream whose fulfillment, he nonetheless understands, would mean the end of poetry.<sup>10</sup> As is well known, his

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<sup>7</sup> Paul R. Lilly, Jr., "Caddy and Addie: Speakers of Faulkner's Impeccable Language," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 3 (1973) 172, 182.

<sup>8</sup> See Matthews 40-42 and Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy* 204. Matthews convincingly disarms Lilly's argument, but in its place offers the dubious reading that the silence of which Faulkner speaks is in fact writing. Matthews presumably has Derrida's *phonē/graphē* distinction in mind, but it seems clear enough that Faulkner means a cessation of writing. When Rimbaud renounced poetry and left for Africa, he presumably didn't stop talking.

<sup>9</sup> Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melacholy* 204.

<sup>10</sup> In *Les mots anglais* Mallarmé speculates that the letter M, for instance, "translates the power to make, thus joy, male and maternal, measure and duty, number and encounter, fusion, and the middle term; inferiority, weakness or anger" (quoted in Joseph Acquisto, *French Symbolist Poetry and the Idea of Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006) 86.) *La crise du vers* contains the famous quote that "Languages are imperfect in that, in their plurality, the supreme language is missing, since thinking is to write without accessories, nor a whisper, but the immortal word is still tacit on earth, the diversity of languages preventing us from proffering words that, otherwisae, would find themselves, by a single striking, materially speaking, truth," followed by the admission that "Only, let us realize that verse would not exist, verse which philosophically makes up for the lack of languages and is a superior component" (quoted in Acquisto 90). Acquisto, chapter 3, gives a good overall account of Mallarmé's wanderings in and out of Cratylism.

response was to create a poetics of silence; but this silence was of course selective, deployed to suggest things rather than naming them outright, to evoke an object little by little in order to convey a state of mind.<sup>11</sup> It is this aspect of lyric poetry that Faulkner most obviously adopts, augmenting his novel's Southern vernacular with a stylized diction completely unlike the public, social language that Addie finds so deceptive. Enigmatic, incantatory, sesquipedalian, this stylized language seems to be narrated by the novel's characters although—as has been widely observed—these characters could not possibly speak it. Olga Vickery first described it in Mallarméan terms as a “language of the unconscious” whose symbols carry “power to evoke rather than define reality”<sup>12</sup>; more recent criticism has emphasized its unsayability. Eric Sundquist calls it an “alienated language... disembodied, tragically cut off” from both characters and author,<sup>13</sup> while Hale sees it as figurally representing the unutterable “private language” of the characters' inner selves.<sup>14</sup> These descriptions clearly get something right, but in a sense they carry forward the novel's central difficulty without directly addressing it; for *As I Lay Dying* seems to give us characters whose inner lives both consist of language and lie beyond language, and so taken, this picture is incoherent. To untangle its components will take care.

Hale's is the best narratological model that has been given of *As I Lay Dying*; its central insight is a recognition of the extreme heterogeneity of the novel's language, not only between monologues but also within them. As Hale points out, the very first monologue already mixes the vernacular with the literary: “Colloquial expressions such as ‘come up’ and ‘laidby cotton’ stand side by side with sophisticated vocabulary like ‘dilapidation,’ ‘undulation,’ and ‘endued.’”<sup>15</sup> The difference between the former language, which is like what the characters speak aloud, and the latter language, which is wholly unlike their speech, is taken by Hale to allegorize the difference between the public persona and the private self. Characters like Anse or Cora, whose monologues are entirely in the vernacular, are taken to lack any distinctive private self; while the metaphors, neologisms, and typographic oddities of Addie's monologue show that her “private self differs dramatically from her public persona.” Since Addie presumably could not generate such a text on her own, Hale takes her monologue not to transcribe, but to figuratively stand in for the “private... wholly unsayable language” by which she represents her experience to herself.<sup>16</sup>

Attractive as this model is, it does not seem quite to dispel the paradox of imagining something that both is and is not language. The idea of a private, incommunicable language recalls the so-called “private language argument” which forms the kernel of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, and the coincidence of terms seems significant. Wittgenstein is very close to a modernist author like Faulkner in questioning the extent to which language might constitute both the inner self and the outer world; in addition, his early fascination with

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<sup>11</sup> The most famous programmatic statement comes from an 1891 interview: “*Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trios quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu à peu; le suggérer, voilà la rêve. C'est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole: évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d'âme.*” Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes, tome 2* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003) 869. In the fragmentary *Le Mystère dans les lettres*, Mallarmé discussed the poetic use of blank space in order to “authentifier le silence.... Virginité” (387). The closeness to Addie's “The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of

a                      and I couldn't think *Anse*” (173) is apparent.

<sup>12</sup> Vickery 51.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Sundquist, *Faulkner: the House Divided* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 29.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Hale, “*As I Lay Dying's* Heterogeneous Discourse,” *Novel: a Forum on Fiction* 23 (1989) 12.

<sup>15</sup> Hale 7.

<sup>16</sup> Hale 12.

Schopenhauer marks an idealism whose influence he will spend his career trying to incorporate and transcend, rather as Faulkner does with the Symbolists. Their working methods also permit the drawing of parallels. A number of commentators on the *Investigations* have suggested that it forms not a treatise but a kind of modernist narrative—under this reading, Wittgenstein’s text presents multiple speakers, versions of himself, who are led by certain quandaries about language into the idea that there must be a private language in which the soul speaks to itself, in which its knowledge is infallibly grounded, and of which public utterances are only more or less accurate translations.<sup>17</sup> Implicit believers in a private language would include philosophers such as Augustine, whose quoted words begin the *Investigations*, and Descartes, whose *cogito* is an unnamed antagonist throughout; but the link between privacy and infallibility also implicates a writer like Mallarmé in his Cratylist moments, and Addie as well. Like Addie, and like those Faulkner critics who have tried to imagine a metalanguage beyond words, Wittgenstein’s speakers ultimately fail to render the idea of a private language coherent.<sup>18</sup> In the context of Wittgenstein’s “therapeutic” method, which aims to give philosophy peace by removing troubling questions,<sup>19</sup> this incoherence leads to relief; it is meant to show that a private language was never a necessary concept to begin with. But a character like Addie, who has staked her hopes on such private infallibility, will experience its failure as a tragedy.

The *Investigations* sets forth private language as a thought experiment, an invitation to imagine a language whose words “are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language” (PI 88–89). This excludes cases such as talking to oneself, or keeping a diary in code; such utterances, though privately voiced, would be in public language or could be translated into public language. The point is to ground this language in the unbridgeable privacy of inner experience; yet once this is done, Wittgenstein’s speaker cannot find a way to make it function as language. “I want to keep a diary,” he proposes, “about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign ‘S’ and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation” (PI 92). But how has “S” been defined? One can imagine a process similar to the definition of words in public language: speaking a word while pointing to an object, for example. Presumably the private linguist does something similar: “I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same

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<sup>17</sup> For treatments of the *Philosophical Investigations* as a narrative text, see Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), chapters 5 through 9, and Timothy Gould, “Restlessness and the Achievement of Peace: Writing and Method in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*,” *The Literary Wittgenstein* (New York: Routledge, 2004). For a discussion of the *Philosophical Investigations* as a self-reflective modernist work, see Stanley Cavell, “The *Investigations*’s Everyday Aesthetics of Itself,” *The Literary Wittgenstein*.

<sup>18</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 101, gives one useful reminder that this failure of coherence is not the same thing as a *reductio ad absurdum* proof: “Wittgenstein, for example, has sometimes been interpreted as trying to offer a proof of the logical impossibility of a private language, conjoining an analysis of the notion of language as essentially teachable and public and an account of the notion of inner states as essentially private in order to show that a contradiction is involved in speaking of a private language. But such an interpretation misconstrues Wittgenstein who, I take it, was saying to us something like this: on the best account of language that I can give and the best account of inner mental states that I can give, I can make nothing of the notion of a private language, I cannot render it adequately intelligible.”

<sup>19</sup> The most famous statement of this program appears in section 133 of Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1958) 51: “The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.... There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.” From here cited as *PI*.

time I concentrate my attention on the sensation—and so, as it were, point to it inwardly... But,” interrupts another speaker, “what is this ceremony for? for that is all it seems to be!” (PI 92). The inner definition cannot work as a definition because words are defined interpersonally; as in the more general case of following a rule, a public context is presupposed. “A person goes by sign-posts only in so far as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom... It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule” (PI 80-81).

This conceptual dead end is meant to cast new light back on earlier sections of the *Investigations*, in particular its opening quote from Augustine’s *Investigations* describing the childhood acquisition of language. By paying attention to bodily movements, “the natural language of all peoples,” Augustine learns to connect words and things, “and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires” (PI 2). This account strikes Wittgenstein “as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already has a language, only not this one. Or again: as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak. And ‘think’ would here mean something like ‘talk to itself’” (PI 15-16). Having traced out the root notion of a private language, we see that abandoning this idea entails abandoning the idea that our thoughts are somehow structured like language without quite being language, that in speaking we translate thoughts into words and back again: “When I think in language, there aren’t ‘meanings’ going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought” (PI 107). Certainly thinking in language is not the only way to think. But whatever we might bring forth as examples of nonlinguistic mental work—sensory perceptions, emotional charges, behavioral dispositions—do not carry with them any of the architecture by which language produces meaning; they are not a primordial speech in the soul. A model of mind like Augustine’s, in which a subject can have language-like thoughts independent of language as such, ends up an incoherent attempt to have it both ways.

### Analogy

This model of mind has also caused some difficulty in Faulkner criticism. In an early account of *As I Lay Dying*, R.W. Franklin attempted to map Faulkner’s technique onto something like the Augustinian theory:

The opening sentence of *As I Lay Dying*—“Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in a single file.”—is a verbal representation of Darl’s mental representation of the external phenomenon of their walking. There are three planes of reality: the verbal, the mental, and the external. The latter two are dependent upon the first and constitute the internal and external reality of the fictional world.<sup>20</sup>

When this tripartite division—world, mind, and language—turns out to founder on the same shoals as Augustine’s account, Franklin takes the problem to be Faulkner’s. He singles out for criticism Vardaman’s encounter with Jewel’s horse in the barn:

It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components—snuffings and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and

<sup>20</sup> R.W. Franklin, “Narrative Management in *As I Lay Dying*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 13 (1967) 58.

ammonic hair; an illusion of a coordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an *is* different from my *is*.  
(56)

as “not appropriate to the mind of a child... the passage gives little plausibility to its referent, and the existence of another person—that of the author-narrator—is postulated.”<sup>21</sup> This seems to assume that even if these precise words are not passing through Vardaman’s mind, his thoughts are near enough this language that we ought to read it as somehow generated by him. When this strains credibility, we cast around for another agent and are forced to introduce an author-narrator, which Franklin sees as a problem. But if we accept that the mental processes described in this passage consist of perceptions and emotional states completely unlike language, then it is not surprising that we would need an author-narrator to render them into language, just as we unproblematically imagine an author-narrator who generates, for example, physical descriptions in third-person narrative. While Franklin claims that “in the present discussion the intricate psychological question whether the human mind thinks with words or images or with both is not to the point,” in fact he seems rather inflexibly committed to the first alternative.<sup>22</sup>

As we have seen, Hale replaces Franklin’s literal reading with a model in which the relationship between the novel’s words and the characters’ thoughts is figural rather than direct. In Faulkner’s “spectrum of symbolic meaning for narrative discourse... private language, wholly unsayable language, is figured by nonmimetic vocabulary and tone.”<sup>23</sup> This avoids Franklin’s pitfall of imagining the characters as actually thinking Faulkner’s words; but keeping in mind that an unsayable language is a contradiction in terms, it would seem that Hale’s insight as to the *figurative* role of this nonmimetic language eliminates the need for any unsayable language to be figured. A representative example of nonmimetic language is Darl’s narration of the river’s surface as “silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive walked in lazy inertness” (141). Indeed this is nothing like what Darl speaks aloud, but we should consider precisely what here is sayable and what is not. If we want to pin down what may be conceptual in Darl’s thought, it seems limited to a recognition of the river’s changefulness and perhaps the imagination of the living thing beneath it; neither idea is in principle inexpressible even for an unlettered farmer, though we might be surprised if he chose to speak them aloud. (Anse would presumably adduce it as another of “such things as that that makes folks talk about him” [105].) The nonmimetic vocabulary—“impermanent,” “lazy inertness”—conveys a hazier sense of Darl’s visual impressions and unease of mind, and seems also to carry a surplus of enigma (in what way is a river “profoundly significant”?) which is hard to account for at all. All of this may indeed be inexpressible for Darl, but that is precisely because it lies outside the sphere of concepts. To the degree that his thought is language, it is not private; to the degree that it is private, it is not language.

Having laid out this distinction, we must immediately turn around and admit that Faulkner’s prose works very hard to blur it. The strangeness of *As I Lay Dying*, its resistance to narratological models, comes from its stretching the first-person pronoun far beyond its usual function, placing it in sentences where it denotes neither a speaking subject nor anything much like it. Critics such as Eric Sundquist take a skeptical stance in response, insisting that we not confuse the “author” with the “narrator,” nor the “characters” with the “speakers,” thereby

<sup>21</sup> Franklin 59.

<sup>22</sup> Franklin 58.

<sup>23</sup> Hale 12.

doubling the number of entities up for analysis.<sup>24</sup> But such a solution is too awkward to be consistently maintained, and discounts the way that readers will normalize even the most forbidding conventions; Sundquist can go on to discuss Vardaman's monologues as instances of his "psychological disorientation" without any qualifying language about the distinction between character and speaker.<sup>25</sup> Faulkner has stretched the pronoun "I" beyond its usual function, using it as a kind of grammatical solder to hold mimetic and non-mimetic language together, and the sort of narratology which concerns itself with attribution of language—determining where the characters "speak," or where a narrator or author "speaks"—will have difficulties navigating it. In order to map the functional positions of characters and author in the text, it is best to take seriously the idea that Faulkner's changes of register play an essentially figurative function, and to define more precisely the nature of that figuration.

After the immediately jarring features of typography and vocabulary, the most striking formal feature of *As I Lay Dying* is the frequency of simile and metaphor. Nothing and no one appears in this text, it seems, without immediately turning into something else. Whitfield and his voice become two horses crossing a ford (91), Anse's eyes become hounds driving at Addie (171), Dewey Dell sees herself as a seed (64), Tull sees Cora as a jar of warm milk (139), a log recalls in succession an old man, a goat, Christ (148). Clearly a kind of symbolist aesthetic is at work here, privileging metaphoric suggestion over bald statement; but there is also an implicit response to Addie's frustration with language. Donald Davidson gives an theory of metaphor in which metaphors do not have "meaning" as nonmetaphorical propositions do; if they obliquely expressed propositional content, then they could be easily paraphrased as propositions. But, as with jokes, any attempt to rewrite metaphors in literal language obliterates their effect. In Davidson's view, this effect lies not in any "content to be captured" but in "what it makes us notice."

... in fact there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character. When we try to say what a metaphor 'means,' we soon realize there is no end to what we want to mention. If someone draws his finger along the coastline on a map, or mentions the beauty and deftness of a line in a Picasso etching, how many things are drawn to your attention? You might list a great many, but you could not finish since the idea of finishing would have no clear application. How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph? None, an infinity, or one great unstatable fact? Bad question. A picture is not worth a thousand words, or any number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture.<sup>26</sup>

By this account, metaphors fall nearer deeds than words in Addie's dichotomy; they verbally produce an effect best likened to that of nonverbal media. Without abandoning language, they

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<sup>24</sup> Sundquist 29. This splitting of personages into characters and speakers comes up quite often in Faulkner criticism. Bleikasten insists that we "distinguish Vardaman the speaker-narrator from the confused little Bundren in the novel's world" (*Ink of Melancholy* 155), while Austin M. Wright, *The Formal Principle in the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) 48, makes a similar distinction between Darl-the-narrator and Darl-the-character, rejecting Darl's clairvoyance out of hand in the process.

<sup>25</sup> Sundquist 31.

<sup>26</sup> Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," *Inquiries into Truth & Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 263.

redeploy it.<sup>27</sup> Wittgenstein famously believed that we must pass over in silence what cannot be spoken of, but there are different varieties of silence, and in the same work he made explicit his belief that things which cannot be said—that is, which are not propositional in nature—can nonetheless show themselves in language.<sup>28</sup> Such a view corresponds to the symbolist belief that certain aspects of reality are falsified by bald statement, and to the absence in *As I Lay Dying* of any omniscient authorial voice. The author appears not through the mode of third-person narration, but rather through a stylistic augmentation of the characters' first-person statements. Whether or not these augmentations take the form of metaphor on the page, they do—as Hale notes—play an essentially metaphoric function, suggesting rather than stating the elusive conditions in the characters' minds. But Davidson's account implies that metaphor carries such power precisely because it is nothing like translation. It conveys not propositional content but non-propositional aspects of experience which cannot be said to exist as language within the world of the novel, private or otherwise.

If we understand that much of the language in *As I Lay Dying* cannot come verbatim from its characters, and if we reject the idea that it translates a private language in the characters' minds, then the only possible remaining source for this language seems to be William Faulkner—an assertion less trivial than it might seem. While the non-mimetic language of *As I Lay Dying* telegraphs an author's presence, the straightforward attribution of this language to the author has met with considerable resistance. Bleikasten prefers to call it an “extradiegetic voice, which should not be automatically assigned to the novelist himself.”<sup>29</sup> Stephen M. Ross argues that it is fruitless “look behind the fiction for an author” when the novel is “originless” and “fundamentally silent,”<sup>30</sup> and we have seen how Sundquist attempts to dissociate the monologues from both author and characters. I respect the concern for clarity that might move one to distinguish the author as biographical figure from the author as voice within the text, but much of the drive to remove Faulkner from the novel seems motivated by theories of language which, like Addie's, are skeptical of communication and which can generalize too broadly. The most plausible account of *As I Lay Dying*'s nonmimetic language would attribute that language to an author, or at any rate an authorial presence, working in a mode that might be called analogic narration. When the characters' thoughts consist neither of language nor of propositional content translatable into language, the author brings his technique to bear in order to create a mode of language in some way analogous to the character's mental state. A succinct example is Vardaman's narration of the coffin's loss in the river:

Cash tried but she fell off and Darl jumped going under he went under and Cash  
hollering to catch her and I hollering running and hollering and Dewey Dell  
hollering at me Vardaman you vardaman you vardaman and Vernon passed me

<sup>27</sup> For more on verbally approximating the nonverbal, see Calvin Bedient's view in “Pride and Nakedness: *As I Lay Dying*,” *Faulkner (New Perspectives): Twentieth Century Views*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983) 136, that Faulkner's style most easily finds “analogies in painting and music... an expressive verbal gesture, a mood-painting; they are as immediate in interest as the sudden clutching of a hand or the swirls in a Van Gogh cypress.”

<sup>28</sup> The relevant passages appear in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1990) 79: “That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent. / That which expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express by language. / The propositions *show* the logical form of reality.... / What *can* be shown *cannot* be said.”

<sup>29</sup> Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy* 153.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen M. Ross, “‘Voice’ in Narrative Texts: The Example of *As I Lay Dying*,” *PMLA* 94 (1979) 305.

because he was seeing her come up and she jumped into the water again and Darl hadn't caught her yet (150)

Bleikasten writes that “panic... erupts into the narrative and causes it to disintegrate,” and goes on to list its stylistic irregularities: lack of capitalization, punctuation, or conventional sentence structure.<sup>31</sup> This seems right, but why do we associate the absence of periods and capital letters with panic? They seem to imply words written in haste, under panicked circumstances that allow no time to capitalize or punctuate one's sentences, nor to sort out their syntax. However, this writing in haste does not exist as such either within or without the world of the novel; one wouldn't want to argue that Vardaman is too panicked to capitalize the proper names in his head, nor that Faulkner was too panicked to capitalize them in his manuscript. The idea of writing in haste is the pivot around which the analogy turns, but it drops out as soon as we have made the connection to Vardaman's panic—probably before we even realized it was there. Vardaman's meeting the horse allowed as similar account: since Faulkner's stylized language cannot be attributed to the child, it seems likely that very little language is passing through his mind at all, not even the word “horse”—which, significantly, does not appear in the passage. By this interpretation the passage seems extraordinarily appropriate to the mind of a child; Vardaman is too young to be initiated into habits of linguistic thought, and he can have vivid sensory and emotional episodes without naming what he sees.

Cash's numbered list of reasons for making the coffin on the bevel (82-83) is stranger, since it is not only unlike anything he would narrate to himself, but does not even seem to correspond to any specific episode of thought. But there is no reason that non-propositional aspects of his mind must be tied to a definite event, as an internal or external utterances would be. We know that Cash's turn of mind is literal and numerical: asked how far he fell from the barn roof, he replied, “Twenty-eight foot, four and a half inches, about” (90). If someone were to ask him why he beveled the coffin, something similar to this list might well be the reply. (Something even more similar might appear were he asked to write it.) Thus the convention of analogic narration presents us with the list itself: it is analogous to Cash's personality in that we can imagine it being produced by him. But it is not necessary to imagine Cash speaking the list to himself, nor its appearing in any particular episode of thought. The author shows Cash's mind by impersonating his voice.

This model also provides a useful way to discuss Addie's monologue; notably, it can explain why her words appear in the novel although she despairs of language. Her monologue suggests the explanation that she might give of herself, were it somehow compelled of her (and granting her a bit of Faulknerian cadence), but the insight it gives into her personality and beliefs does not depend on its actually being spoken, either to others or to herself. The monologue's timeless quality has been widely remarked upon; it might have been spoken at any time after Vardaman's birth, and as it appears several days after Addie's death, we are checked in our attempts to equate it with a particular episode of inner speech. One might construe it as a message from beyond the grave, but one could equally well say that such factors as time and place of narration simply do not carry across in the analogy. Nor does the decision to speak or be silent. Bleikasten believes that the monologue's very existence undercuts Addie's claim to resisting the lures of language,<sup>32</sup> but while we may suspect Addie of giving more credit to words than she admits, the monologue's existence does not automatically imply a speech act by her.

<sup>31</sup> André Bleikasten, *Faulkner's As I Lay Dying* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973) 62.

<sup>32</sup> Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy* 205.

Nor can we say with Hale that Addie's experience "remains essentially incommunicable" because "[her] language can only be self-addressed."<sup>33</sup> Certainly she chooses to address no one else, but not because of any essential incommunicability; insofar as her monologue contains anything that she does voice to herself, it uses public language. In fact it is much closer to speech than monologues such as Darl's; its relative lack of colloquial diction, which Hale takes as non-mimetic, has more to do with her background as a Jefferson schoolteacher. (Her conversation with Anse [171] demonstrates the difference between their speech patterns.) One can easily imagine her repeating certain bitter aphorisms, such as "words dont ever fit even what they were trying to say at," over and over to herself. It is a private mantra, but its language is public; and while it may be ironic to condemn public language with public language, it is hardly a logical impossibility. The monologue's very existence shows otherwise.

## Silence (2)

Readings of Addie's complaint thus tend to run together two separate grievances, one metaphysical and one social. Her realization that language does not work through a mystical Cratylan correspondence is of course correct; but even if we were inclined to think that the arbitrariness of the sign severs language from the world, Faulkner's use of non-propositional mechanisms of meaning shows just how varied and resilient its functions are. But insofar as the monologue treats the limits of expression within her social world, the novel entirely bears her out. Her realization that "words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at" occurs at Cash's birth, when she comes to think "that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not" (171). This is phrased as a philosophical statement about language, but it has a much more locally applicable meaning, given that we read it mere pages after hearing Cora tell Addie: "God gave you children to comfort your hard human lot and for a token of His own suffering and love, for in love you conceived and bore them" (166). The language that Addie rejects is primarily Cora's language; in fact Cora is invoked at the end of her monologue as the epitome of those to whom sin and salvation "are just a matter of words" (176). Cora's language of easy pieties and reductive emotions is the language available to Addie as a wife and mother; rejecting this language in particular is what occasions her silence.

To describe Faulkner's technique as an analogic narration rather than a representation of private language is to insist that public language is the only language available to the novel's characters, and that they cannot surpass its limits. A narrative model which assign non-mimetic language to the characters, even in a figurative sense, implicitly credits those characters with that language's sophistication and beauty: "By giving some of those family members non-mimetic internal voices, by allowing them sophisticated vocabulary, complex metaphorical imagery, and moments of investigation into the very issues of ontology and existentialism which concern Faulkner himself, Faulkner shows an Addie or a Darl Bundren possessing all the complexity and intelligence of a Stephen Dedalus."<sup>34</sup> But the model of analogic narration, which squarely locates the language as the author's, complicates this view; does the sophisticated vocabulary in Vardaman's sections, for example, evoke the child's complexity and intelligence, or the complexity and intelligence of William Faulkner describing the nonverbal mind? To attribute such language to the characters is to imagine for them expressive capabilities they cannot have,

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<sup>33</sup> Hale 15.

<sup>34</sup> Hale 11.

and runs the risk of obscuring the extent to which Darl *cannot* be like Stephen Dedalus, because ontology and existentialism cannot look the same in Yoknapatawpha County as they do at Trinity College. Faulkner's narrative innovation answers Addie's complaint against language, and then again it cannot answer that complaint. Within its social context of an author addressing readers through the medium of fiction, it is a grand achievement. But this achievement is necessarily restricted to the literary context. Within the world of the novel it does not exist as language, figurally or otherwise, and can do nothing to rework that world's limits. The fate of Darl demonstrates those limits very clearly.

Darl's particular role as a stand-in for the author or artist has not been lost on the novel's readers.<sup>35</sup> The most prominent of Faulkner's narrators, he is also the most trustworthy. Cora surmises incorrectly that Jewel and not Darl chooses to miss Addie's death for a three-dollar business opportunity, Anse's self-pitying pieties fail to mask his essential selfishness, Whitfield implicates himself with his own strained rhetoric, but there is no such false note in Darl's speech. His narrative abilities are augmented by his apparent clairvoyance; he narrates Addie's death from afar (48) and divines Dewey Dell's pregnancy and Jewel's adulterous parentage without being told (40). What distortions arise in his narration come not from an excess of words but from their omission; for instance, we must deduce his hatred of Jewel from his relentless taunting. In this way he enacts something like the narrative function of suggesting rather than stating; and if his ability to sidestep conventional patterns of thought is in one sense like Vardaman's childish perceptions, in another sense it is like the artist working to see the world anew. Faulkner made this lineage perfectly clear in a late interview when, asked about Darl's clairvoyance, he invoked the old Romantic idea of the madman-artist: "Who knows how much of the good poetry in the world has come out of madness...? ...maybe the madman does see more than the sane man... he is more perceptive."<sup>36</sup> But Darl only makes it halfway to becoming an artist. He may indeed perceive more than others, but he cannot express more. His fineness of perception and his ability to communicate wordlessly with others give him access to a sort of experiential truth apart from language; but if the most distinctive language of his narration is not his own, then it would seem that he cannot reconstitute this experience in language at all. This leaves him in a grave predicament. Without any workable linguistic structure to define his self against the world, Darl finds that self in constant danger of dissolution; to perceive and know what others perceive and know carries the corollary of ceasing to be oneself.

In notes dictated a few years after *As I Lay Dying* was published, Wittgenstein set himself the task of analyzing "the peculiar grammar of the word 'I.'"<sup>37</sup> Writing in the wake of Ernst Mach's and William James's empiricist psychologies, which dissolved the self into a flux of passing thoughts,<sup>38</sup> he pondered the structure of a sentence such as "I am in pain," which seems to present a pronominal subject encountering a sensory object, even though there may be no clear distinction between the two. His radical conclusion—that the word "I" stands as a grammatical

<sup>35</sup> For example, Slaughter's melodramatic insistence: "The artist is Darl—the rejected seer, oracle, prophet... the tell-tale indicator of the truths about themselves... Crucify him!" (28).

<sup>36</sup> Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958* (New York: Vintage, 1965) 113.

<sup>37</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) 66.

<sup>38</sup> James's no-nonsense formulation appears at *The Principles of Psychology* 1:342: "The passing Thought then seems to be the Thinker; and though there *may* be another non-phenomenal Thinker behind that, so far we do not seem to need him to express. Judith Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), chapter 1, connects these fragmenting psychologies to the birth of literary modernism, though she associates Faulkner with a later, non-empiricist Freudian psychology (206).

marker rather than the name of a thing—is less relevant here than a peculiar thought experiment he conjures along the way, which actually invites us to imagine a case much like Darl's: "a, so to speak, wireless connection between the two bodies which made one person feel pain in his head when the other had exposed his to the cold air."<sup>39</sup> Grammatical confusion enters here: do we speak of a single pain, or two separate pains? In Wittgenstein's view, the inseparability of subject and sensation means that we will speak of two separate pains as long as we speak of two separate subjects; but in Darl's case we might reverse this, and say that the sharing of thoughts and perceptions between two people would tend to annul their identity as separate subjects. Under such circumstances the established rules for the word "I" would not obtain.

Given such a predicament, it is not surprising that Darl spends a fair amount of time trying to pin down a referent for the word "I," most exhaustively as he falls asleep after Addie's death (80-81) and in conversation with Vardaman (101). Bleikasten sees these "speculations on being and nothingness" as exemplifying non-mimetic narration, since they "far exceed the capabilities of an uneducated Mississippi farmer," but in fact they are among the most mimetic of Darl's passages; aside from occasional images such as "the rain shaping the wagon," (80) they contain nothing that Darl would not speak aloud—indeed, he does speak them aloud to Vardaman. The grammatical oddness which might tempt us to assign these speculations to an extradiegetic voice comes from the mangling of parts of speech, notably the use of the conjugated verb "to be" as a noun: "And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are *was*, it is not" (80). Darl is stretching the fundamental components of his language beyond their usual function because their existing function is inadequate to his perceptions; his clairvoyance has removed the defining boundaries of his "I."<sup>40</sup> "I dont know if I am or not," he confesses, and can establish his identity only by the inference that if he has knowledge of others, then there must be a subject to do the knowing: "And Jewel *is*, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*" (81). But his conclusions never hold for long. Soon afterward, he repeats them to Vardaman in a kind of demented Socratic dialogue, with different results:

"Then what is your ma, Darl?" I said.  
 "I haven't got ere one," Darl said. "Because if I had one, it is *was*. And if it is *was*, it cant be *is*. Can it?"  
 "No," I said.  
 "Then I am not," Darl said. "Am I?"  
 "No," I said.  
 I am. Darl is my brother.  
 "But you *are*, Darl," I said.  
 "I know it," said Darl. "That's why I am not *is*. *Are* is too many for one woman to foal." (101)

The concluding pun on *are* is the sort of thing that repeatedly leads astray Wittgenstein's speakers in the *Investigations*; since the second person singular and the third person plural take

<sup>39</sup> Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* 54.

<sup>40</sup> Discussion of Darl's predicament often reverses this causal relation; Vickery, for instance, thinks that Darl's clairvoyance is caused by his "absence of defining and limiting outline" (58), which is ultimately due to Addie's rejection of him. The text certainly bears out this account, but I think that some causality also runs the other way; that Darl's clairvoyance also heightens his feelings of dissolution.

identical forms, Darl seems to have proved that he too is plural, lacking a singular self. The grammatical shift gives his speculations a touch of absurdist comedy, as in a “Who’s on First?” routine; they also demonstrate the inability of language to provide the coherence he needs. For Wittgenstein language might cause us to construct mistaken theories about identity, but the existential consequences are not dire; his therapeutic method aims to show that we have not lost the ability to negotiate the world. But Darl needs much more. With his clairvoyance undermining his self, he seeks refuge in the basic grammatical markers of identity—the pronoun “I,” the verb “to be”—and they fail him.

In Darl’s final section, the grammatical stretching of the “I” that underlies the novel’s analogic narration reaches its limit. Hale and others have noted that Darl refers to himself in both the first and third person;<sup>41</sup> the first person also seems to refer to people who are not Darl. “Darl is our brother, our brother Darl” (254) expresses a sort of communal Bundren viewpoint, or perhaps that of Vardaman, who has similar thoughts in the preceding sections; while the “I” who asks “What are you laughing at?” (253) seems to be one of Darl’s caretakers. The pronoun has lost its ability to designate a subject, and with it Darl’s language has lost its candidacy for meaning. This limit case of analogic narration presents language analogous to a mind whose workings no longer fit the standard of intelligibility by which we characterize thought. Its locutions are, as Wittgenstein puts it, “a combination of words... excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation” (*PI* 139). What does it mean for Darl to say that “the state’s money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state’s money which is incest. A nickel has a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back. I dont know what that is” (254)? Like metaphors in Davidson’s account, these sentences make no sense as propositions; but neither do they evoke a clear non-propositional realization. At most we can give the weak paraphrase that Darl is free-associating about the shape of a coin, or we can attempt an exegesis such as Bleikasten’s:

Originally a “nickel” designated a dwarf or a devil. And there is indeed something “dia-bolic” (rather than “sym-bolic”) about this nickel. For the woman and the buffalo are forever disjoined, even though they are the two sides of the same coin. Beauty and the Beast? Woman ideally exempted from the assaults of male animality? The inviolate virgin, the unsoiled mother? Darl does not know “what that is,” and neither do we.<sup>42</sup>

If we see some strain or arbitrariness in this explanation, it is because Darl’s words give no better guide. They no longer mean as language does—they have lost that interpretability within a linguistic community that is a criterion of rationality—and in seeking to account for them we move toward a more behavioristic model, trying to determine *why* Darl says what he does rather than what he *means* by it. We treat his words as verbal behavior rather than language. In effect Darl has withdrawn to precisely that self-communion imagined in Faulkner’s quote on Rimbaud, and the horror of his fate should demonstrate that, far from being Faulkner’s ideal, such a communion was his nightmare. “Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams” (254), repeating an affirmative that affirms nothing, is the artist imagining his own fate in a different world, lacking the language to reassemble his experience once he has taken it apart.

<sup>41</sup> Hale 18.

<sup>42</sup> Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy* 193.

Bleikasten has called Darl the “novelist’s accursed double,”<sup>43</sup> sacrificed in Faulkner’s stead so that the author can bring off a narrative success. In different terms, one might say the same of Addie. Both characters come up against the limits of language, and ultimately find language wanting, because they need it to do more than it can: Addie needs it to possess the incontrovertible strength of physical action, while Darl needs it to hold together his fracturing self. It is this very failure which most convincingly demonstrates that Faulkner’s own linguistic experiments refer to a concrete social world. He does not ignore the limits of discourse in rural Mississippi and does not cheat in allowing his characters speech outside their experience; nor does he suggest that any of the self-fashioning that we perform through language is possible without language. Only the author, standing outside the world of the novel, is able to rename that world.

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<sup>43</sup> Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy* 209.

### Three

#### Virginia Woolf: Viewpoint and Veil

One consequence of the reading of Henry James offered earlier is to cast James—with clear reservations—as a kind of feminist. In a pattern most apparent in *The Portrait of a Lady*, his heroines discover that their finely developed consciousnesses can find no worthy correlate in a marriage economy, and that their powers of imaginative insight only confirm the melancholy fact of their own impotence. In this and other respects Virginia Woolf, who for a time kept a photograph of James on her writing desk, is an inheritor of his concerns and his methods, and her link to James is also a link to the nineteenth-century aesthetic debates which lie at the center of James's experiments. The essays "Modern Fiction" and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," often described as avant-garde manifestos, in fact reprise questions that had been asked of the novel for decades: whether its amassing of physical objects and subjection to linear narrative are not somehow inimical to the imaginative process of art. Woolf's polemic against Arnold Bennett's fiction of houses and hot-water bottles, rents and freeholds, is recognizable as a version of Carlyle's complaint about Scott, and her famous diary entry rejecting "this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional"<sup>1</sup> makes use of James's preferred word for the received ideas and restrictions that he and his heroines sought to circumvent. If Woolf is avant-garde, then she is such, as Christine Froula has recently argued, in a sense stretching back to Kant and Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>2</sup> In Froula's credible reading, Woolf and her larger Bloomsbury circle were dedicated to the ideal of equality of human reason (Kant's *sapere aude*) and to the Enlightenment project of demystification, unmasking hidden prejudices and opening established traditions to rational critique. Woolf's call to liberate fiction from convention, along with her political feminism, are thus exemplary of a general humanism in the Kantian tradition.

Nonetheless there were many sides to the Enlightenment, and invoking one aspect of Kant's philosophy often involves an importation of others. The talk in Kantian progressivism of unmasking, of appearances opposed to things, also evokes Kantian isolation, the sense of a mind cut off from a world that it cannot truly know, and reopens the skeptical problems that come of separating out the observing mind as a particular object of philosophical study. This kind of skepticism is a central force in Woolf's writing, though she somewhat shifts its terms. The deceptions of the senses do not concern her so much as the deceptions of language, which she sees in Kantian terms as a distorting medium, misrepresenting the things of the world even as it renders them comprehensible. Against the veil of language her writing seeks to bring about an apocalypse, in the etymological sense of uncovering, and this too marks a continuity with the revolutionary strands of the Enlightenment. But to treat language as a distorting mask broaches many philosophical and aesthetic problems, particularly for a novelist, and the increasing radicalization of Woolf's narratives from *Jacob's Room* to *The Waves* attempt to deal with these problems as they arise. In essence Woolf tries out a series of alternative answers to the question that Madame Merle posed Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady*: if Isabel throws off the clothes that society has forced upon her, what remains of her beneath?

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three, 1925-1930*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harvest, 1980) 209.

<sup>2</sup> Christine Froula, *Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). See particularly the first chapter for Woolf in a Kantian context.

### Empiricism, Perspective, Foundation

Those qualities which single out James's fiction as a kind of Romantic lyric—the interruption of linear time, the prevalence of metaphor, the privileging of consciousness over the material world and of private experience over public norms—all apply to Woolf's fiction as well, and are similarly motivated.<sup>3</sup> Like James, Woolf is concerned to preserve the autonomy of the private self against the encroaching outer world, and to this end her fiction is concerned to mark the mind as fundamentally distinct from the world around it. Where her distinctions depart from James's are in their connection to her own philosophical background. For all his interest in consciousness, James had little direct engagement with the philosophy of his day (though he did, of course, follow his brother's writings with interest). Woolf, however, inhabited a social circle including figures like Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore; she was conversant with their work and, as Judith Ryan and Ann Banfield have argued, seems to have put a version of their empiricist theories into fictional practice.<sup>4</sup> Certainly her use of philosophical language can be loose and figurative, and she herself disavowed any claim to philosophic doctrine: "I don't want a 'philosophy' in the least," she once declared to her diary.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless her suspicion of language and her belief in sense perception as a more trustworthy mode of experience can reasonably be described as philosophical convictions in themselves. While James's picture of the human mind gives comparatively little attention to sensory experience, preferring to foreground the act of analysis and interpretation, Woolf's convictions are precisely the opposite. For her, the eye is not Coleridge's despot seeking to overpower the mind; instead the senses give an authentic core to experience, and only when language intervenes, attempting to interpret and analyze, does that experience lose its integrity. For James, the basic unit of thought is the sentence; for Woolf, it is the sense impression.

In discussing *The Golden Bowl* I noted in passing the common use of pictorial metaphors, such as "impressionism" and "perspective," to characterize James's style. Woolf attracts similar metaphors, but her privileging of the senses over language changes their application. "Perspective," as applied to literary language, is an ambiguous term: there is the narratological sense of perspective as point of view, which would foreground the way that Woolf creates particular effects by moving between the thoughts and emotions of different fictional characters; but there is also the more general metaphor of language as viewpoint, under which a linguistic description of a thing is analogized to that thing's appearance from a certain angle, so that speaking a certain language becomes analogous to occupying a certain perspective on the world. This second metaphor, a key structural element in Woolf's work, derives originally from German idealism. In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant had incidentally coined the term *Weltanschauung*

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<sup>3</sup> I am particularly indebted to Freedman's extensive treatment of Woolf in *The Lyrical Novel*, although the link between Woolf and Romanticism generally is apparent enough to have produced a large body of criticism. Ellen Tremper, *Who Lived at Alfoxton?: Virginia Woolf and English Romanticism* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1998) is a more recent study which lists many affinities (especially to Wordsworth), though it has less to say about the contradictions between these affinities and novelistic form.

<sup>4</sup> Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject* 190. For an in-depth comparative survey of Woolf, Russell and Moore, see Ann Banfield, *The Phantom Table: Woolf, Fry, Russell and the Epistemology of Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Four, 1931-1935*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harvest, 1982) 126.

for the “contemplation of the world given by the senses”<sup>6</sup>; along with the equivalent term *Weltansicht*, it was enthusiastically taken up by followers including Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose 1820s writings proposed an explicit link between language and worldview:

...the whole mode of *perceiving* things *subjectively* necessarily passes over into cultivation and the use of language. For the *word* arises from this very perceiving; it is a copy, not of the object in itself, but of the image thereof produced in consciousness... there resides in every language a characteristic *world-view* [*Weltansicht*]. As the individual sound stands between man and the object, so the entire language steps in between him and the nature that operates, both inwardly and outwardly, upon him.<sup>7</sup>

As a description of language, this short passage is as transformative as the so-called “Copernican revolution” of Kant’s epistemology. From the fact that words, by virtue of their sounds, have a sensory component, Humboldt infers that words must play the same mediating role as the senses: the individual word, like a sensory image, stands as an intermediary between consciousness and the world, so that the wider structure of language becomes analogous to Kant’s categories, imposing form on the flux of perception to render it comprehensible to the mind. As with Kant, the cost of this mediating relation is an estrangement from the world as it is. If the speaker of a language has access to the world only through that language, then the world in its true state remains inaccessible. George Steiner considers Humboldt’s most revolutionary thought to be

...the idea that language can be adverse to man. So far as I am aware, no one before him had seen this point, and even now we have hardly grasped its implications... Language makes man at home in the world, ‘but it also has the power to alienate.’ Informed by energies proper to itself, more comprehensive and timeless than any who make use of it, human speech can raise barriers between man and nature. It can bend the mirrors of consciousness and of dreams.<sup>8</sup>

After Heidegger and Foucault, we are of course familiar with the idea of language as a superpersonal structure which shapes the channels of thought. To dwell here on Humboldt’s particular formulation is only to emphasize its links to Kant’s theory of knowledge. Humboldt’s treatise was posthumously published and slow to gain attention, and would have exercised little direct influence on Woolf or her milieu; but it excellently forecasts the attitudes toward language that would develop over the course of the nineteenth century, as the impact of German idealism and Romanticism was gradually assimilated. One response was Mallarmé’s version of Cratylism, whose influence on Faulkner we have seen: the search for a language which would not be a perspective position but would somehow equate to things in themselves. And the other side of Mallarmé’s idealism is a thoroughgoing skepticism toward all human language, as in Verlaine’s

<sup>6</sup> The phrase is Martin Heidegger’s, from *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 4.

<sup>7</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language*, ed. Michael Losonsky, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 59-60.

<sup>8</sup> George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 86.

turn against his own medium with the dismissive “*Et tout le reste est littérature*” and the polemic “*Prends l'éloquence et tords-lui son cou!*”<sup>9</sup>

Woolf's argument against Arnold Bennett seeks to wring the neck of a specific kind of eloquence: the conventionalities of the Edwardian novel, with their predetermined descriptive and narrative codes that, for her as for Humboldt, carry inside them a whole body of social and cultural assumptions. The British reading public, described by Woolf as an organism unable to penetrate the veil of language, has grown so accustomed to these codes that it takes their corresponding assumptions for granted:

Now the public is a strange traveling companion. In England it is a very suggestible and docile creature, which, once you get it to attend, will believe implicitly what it is told for a certain number of years. If you say to the public with sufficient conviction: “All women have tails, and all men humps,” it will actually learn to see women with tails and men with humps.... But to return. Here is the British public sitting by the writer's side and saying in its vast and unanimous way: “Old women have houses. They have fathers. They have incomes. They have servants. They have hot-water bottles. That is how we know that they are old women. Mr. Wells and Mr. Bennett and Mr. Galsworthy have always taught us that this is the way to recognize them.”<sup>10</sup>

It is easy to recognize here the Jamesian theme of material objects and social roles oppressing individual subjectivity; once again the superficial has crowded out the essential. What is new in Woolf is the linking of this oppressive superficiality to a certain kind of language, and the suggestion that one kind of language can be made to silence others. Of the title character in Bennett's *Hilda Lessways*, Woolf says: “we cannot hear her mother's voice, or Hilda's voice; we can only hear Mr. Bennett's voice telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines.”<sup>11</sup> What Hilda's voice would sound like—what sort of language would be expressive rather than oppressive—Woolf does not make clear, in part because she is wary of setting premature limits, but also because she casts language itself as an adversary. Her characters find their moments of greatest freedom outside the linguistic realm, in those privileged moments of wordless sensation that she describes as “colour-and-sound memories”<sup>12</sup>—a fabric pattern, the hum of a bee, the sound of waves. These “moments of being,” which lie behind the “cotton wool” of everyday experience, appear to signify “a revelation of some order; a token of some real thing behind appearances.”<sup>13</sup> As a philosophical framework, this is a kind of transposed Kantianism; instead of sensory phenomena veiling the reality of things, language veils the reality of perception. This reality is permitted to intrude only in fleeting moments, in what Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* calls “that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Both the dismissal, “All the rest is literature,” and the injunction, “Take eloquence and wring its neck!” are from the 1884 “Art poétique,” *Œuvres Poétiques Complètes*, ed. Y.-G. Le Dantec (Paris: Gallimard, 1954) 206.

<sup>10</sup> Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1950) 113.

<sup>11</sup> Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” 109.

<sup>12</sup> Virginia Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past,” *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) 60.

<sup>13</sup> Woolf, “A Sketch of the Past” 70-72.

<sup>14</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harvest, 1989) 193. From here cited as *TL*.

The jar on the nerves is a basic structural element of Woolf's fiction. Early in *To the Lighthouse* Mrs. Ramsay, at work knitting a stocking, is visited by a private, mystic perception:

sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at—that light, for example.... She praised herself in praising the light, without vanity, for she was stern, she was searching, she was beautiful like the light. It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself. There rose, and she looked and looked with her needles suspended, there curled up off the floor of the mind, rose from the lake of one's being, a mist, a bride to meet her lover. (TL 63-64)

The connection is well documented between such Woolfian moments and the Romantic tradition of visionary experience, above all Wordsworth's "spots of time" in *The Prelude*.<sup>15</sup> One could also draw a link to the Christian mystic tradition in the shift from action to contemplation, and in the easing of the boundaries between self and world so that perceived objects come to express the perceiving mind. "In a sense" self and world become briefly identical, as underlined in the perennial mystical figure of bride and bridegroom for the soul's union with God. The particular Woolfian tinge to this moment is the extent to which it is a solely perceptual experience, happening—so far as Mrs. Ramsay is concerned—outside the realm of language. Some phrases do suggest the technique of free indirect discourse, as if obliquely quoting Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts ("It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone..."), but more common are lines unlike anything she ever says aloud: "She praised herself in praising the light," or the misty image of bride and lover. It would seem that, as in parts of *As I Lay Dying*, the novelist is stepping in to linguistically render something not in linguistic in itself, and that the text formally signals this by a shift in diction. The division between words and sensations becomes still starker when language does explicitly enter, and immediately commits a betrayal:

And it would lift up on it some little phrase or other which had been lying in her mind like that—"Children don't forget, children don't forget"—which she would repeat and begin adding to it, It will end, it will end, she said. It will come, it will come, when suddenly she added, We are in the hands of the Lord.

But instantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that. Who had said it? Not she; she had been trapped into saying something she did not mean. (TL 63)

The religious sentiment in the phrase is not exactly a break in continuity, since the perceptual metaphors have already come with a religious tinge. But it seems that such a sentiment can be incorporated only obliquely. Once it becomes a direct statement in Mrs. Ramsay's mind, it proves to be speaking in a different voice, not her own but some aggregate voice of the public world. Her response is to argue with it:

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<sup>15</sup> For one recent summary of critical parallels between Wordsworth and Woolf, see Jane de Gay, *Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) 166-168.

The insincerity slipping in among the truths roused her, annoyed her. She returned to her knitting again. How could any Lord have made this world? she asked. With her mind she had always seized the fact that there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit; she knew that. No happiness lasted; she knew that.  
(*TL* 64)

Yet these counterarguments are every bit as trite as the offending phrase itself. Spoken aloud, they might be lines given to the little atheist Charles Tansley, for whose jeering pretension the novel has no sympathy. Once language has pulled Mrs. Ramsay out of her vision, it will not afford her a way back in.

Woolf thus finds herself confronting something like the private language paradox in Faulkner's fiction, the contradictory desire for a medium that will both possess the signifying power of language and somehow equate to nonlinguistic experience. This connection might be expected both as a matter of temperament and as a matter of intellectual history, since the concerns that led Wittgenstein to formulate his private language paradox largely derived from his involvement in the same Cambridge philosophical circles that Woolf frequented. Woolf and Wittgenstein seem to have had negligible personal contact (Leonard Woolf remembered him as someone who was "brutally rude" at a Bloomsbury lunch, and whose "philosophy is so difficult that it would not influence anyone but the professional philosopher"),<sup>16</sup> but they shared the close acquaintance of figures like Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore, whose philosophy Leonard Woolf later described as having given "the colour of our minds and thought."<sup>17</sup> Russell in particular forms a natural bridge between the two figures, since all his life Wittgenstein would use Russell as a springboard for his own (generally antagonistic) conclusions, and Russell's views of perception and language, as many have noted, seem to have run in parallel to Woolf's own.<sup>18</sup>

After his early work in the philosophy of mathematics, Russell turned to the longstanding empiricist questions of perception, knowledge and doubt, and proceeded to work out a theory of perceptual knowledge. In his 1910 account of truth and falsehood, he proposed that while judgments may be subject to error, perceptions are infallible: "it is true that there are cases where perception *appears* to be at fault, such as dreams and hallucinations. But I believe that in all these cases the perception itself is correct, and what is wrong is a judgment based on the perception.... I shall take it as agreed that perception, as opposed to judgment, is never in error."<sup>19</sup> Russell's subsequent work on the theory of knowledge expanded this idea, adopting Moore's term "sense-data" for the "things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on." (*PP* 16) Such knowledge is infallible both because it is derived from direct acquaintance, without any inferential steps, and

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<sup>16</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Penguin, 1991) 256; and Banfield 45. Victoria Glendinning, *Leonard Woolf: A Biography* (New York: Free Press, 2006) 378, mentions Leonard's correspondence on Wittgenstein: "He stayed with Maynard Keynes one summer in a house near here and we saw a certain amount of him then. My wife did not go to his lectures."

<sup>17</sup> Paul Levy, *G.E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979) 295.

<sup>18</sup> Banfield's comparative study makes this argument at greatest length; but see also Jean Guiget, *Virginia Woolf and Her Works* (New York: Harcourt, 1976) 33-34; Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971) 124-127; and Jaakko Hintikka, "Virginia Woolf and Our Knowledge of the External World," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 38 (1979) 1-14.

<sup>19</sup> Bertrand Russell, "On the Nature of Truth and Falsehood," *Philosophical Essays* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 156.

because it does not partake of linguistic structure. While a judgment has a sentence-like propositional form, and thus can be either true or false, the “object of acquaintance” given by perception “is not true or false, but is simply what it is.”<sup>20</sup> It is only within a language-like structure, in particular everyday language with its natural “muddle-headedness,”<sup>21</sup> that the possibility arises of articulating things that are false or, more often, simply meaningless. Russell’s 1918 lectures on logical atomism (which he presented as a paraphrase of Wittgenstein’s early philosophy) are particularly harsh on the logical insufficiency of everyday language:

“Suppose you made any statement about Piccadilly, such as: ‘Piccadilly is a pleasant street’. If you analyse a statement of that sort correctly, I believe you will find that the fact corresponding to your statement does not contain any constituent corresponding to the word ‘Piccadilly’... That is to say, if you take language as a guide in your analysis of the fact expressed, you will be led astray in a statement of that sort... ‘Piccadilly,’ on the face of it, is the name for a certain portion of the earth’s surface, and I suppose, if you wanted to define it, you would have to define it as a series of classes of material entities, namely those which, at varying times, occupy that portion of the earth’s surface.... I believe that series and classes are of the nature of logical fictions: therefore that thesis, if it can be maintained, will dissolve Piccadilly into a fiction.”<sup>22</sup>

In contrast with this muddle Russell proposes the idea of a logically perfect language along the lines of his own *Principia Mathematica*, in which “the words in a proposition would correspond one by one with the components of the corresponding fact.... A language of that sort will be completely analytic, and will show at a glance the logical structure of the facts asserted or denied.” Russell does not, however, propose the introduction of any such language into everyday life, for the curious reason that “A logically perfect language, if it could be constructed, would not only be intolerably prolix, but, as regards its vocabulary, would be very largely private to one speaker. That is to say, all the names that it would use would be private to that speaker and could not enter into the language of another speaker.”<sup>23</sup> Russell’s reasoning draws on his technical concept of “names,” which for him provide the necessary link between language and the senses by pointing directly to sense-data. This results in “a very odd property for a proper name, namely that it seldom means the same thing two moments running and does not mean the same thing to the speaker and to the hearer”; and further, that “since different people are acquainted with different objects, they would not be able to talk to each other unless they attached quite different

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<sup>20</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Theory of Knowledge: The 1913 Manuscript*, ed. Elizabeth Ramsden Eames (New York: Routledge, 1992) 108. Russell’s objects of acquaintance included not only sense perceptions but various logical constructions which he took as fundamental to reasoning; but it is the empiricist rather than the rationalist Russell who shows the strongest affinity to Woolf.

<sup>21</sup> See Russell’s attack on Oxford ordinary-language philosophy, which “makes almost inevitable the perpetuation among philosophers of the muddle-headedness they have taken over from common sense,” in “The Philosophy of Ordinary Language,” *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell, 1903-1959*, ed. Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961) 137.

<sup>22</sup> Bertrand Russell, “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism,” *Logic and Knowledge: Essays, 1901-1950*, ed. Robert Charles Marsh (New York: Putnam, 1971) 191.

<sup>23</sup> Russell, “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism” 198.

meanings to their words.”<sup>24</sup> On this view every speaker of a language uses a kind of private idiolect, and it is only the constant approximations, distortions and vaguenesses of public language that permit any communication between them.

This version of the sense-data theory yields three theses about sensory knowledge: it is infallible, it has no linguistic or propositional component, and it is wholly private. The difficulties attending such a theory are among the spurs motivating Wittgenstein’s private language argument, since it seems to require that there exist, in addition to public language, a private language for each individual, based entirely on that individual’s private experience. “Is it like this?” Wittgenstein asks, “the word ‘red’ means something known to everyone; and in, addition, for each person, it means something known only to him?” (*PI* 95). Wittgenstein’s pursuit of this question into incoherence has the effect of dislodging private perception as an infallible foundation; without a reference to public norms, its supposed infallibility is comparable to “someone saying ‘But I know how tall I am!’ and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it” (*PI* 96).<sup>25</sup> Yet instead of short-circuiting Woolf’s fiction, these paradoxes actually open possibilities, precisely because Woolf does not approach the theory as a philosopher. Her fiction presents no explicit formulation of Russell’s or Moore’s ideas; instead they register as a kind of background characterization of perception and language, which becomes apparent in scenes such as Mrs. Ramsay’s vision. It is the concerns of privacy and incommunicability, of the deceptions of language, of the truth of private experience against the distortions of the public world, that motivate the events of Woolf’s novels and structure their experiments in form. Her project of unmasking the falsehoods of language runs parallel to Russell’s desire for a secure and rigorous account of knowledge. And the limits of Russell’s theories run parallel to Woolf’s own melancholy, her persistent sense of boundaries beyond which the unmasking project cannot pass.

### ***Mrs. Dalloway and the Prison of Perspective***

The metaphor of perspective comes early to *Mrs. Dalloway* in a pair of urban parables. A motor car, inside which “a face of the very greatest importance” has supposedly been glimpsed, plies its way through the crowds of Bond Street, followed by the spectacle of an airplane writing

<sup>24</sup> Russell, “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism” 201, 195.

<sup>25</sup> A related and roughly contemporary criticism of sense-data theories appears in Wilfrid Sellars’s 1956 essay “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), which calls into question attempts such as Russell’s to finesse the distinction between perception and judgment. On Sellars’s view, the sense-datum is a “mongrel resulting from the crossbreeding of two ideas”; it seems that to function as a foundation for knowledge, the sense-datum must be simultaneously a bare perception without sentence-like form (the sensation of a red thing), and a sentence-like judgment (“this is red”) (21). (This logical strain already registers in Russell’s “On the Nature of Truth and Falsehood,” which offers as an example of perception the complex object “knife-to-left-of-book,” and as an example of judgment “the knife is to the left of the book” [157], the syntactical restructuring made necessary by the imperative for the two things to be both different and the same.) From this Sellars draws out a version of the Kantian point that intuitions without concepts are blind; he calls for rejection of the “Myth of the Given,” the idea that knowledge could be based on any bare, unstructured perception, and like Wittgenstein he insists on language and public norms as necessary components of experience. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 18-21, interprets the “private language” passages in Wittgenstein to be making precisely the same argument as Sellars. At its strongest and most controversial, this argument takes the form of a claim that knowledge from the beginning makes use of “primarily and essentially *intersubjective*” concepts (107), for “all awareness of *sorts, resemblances, facts*, etc., in short, all awareness of abstract entities—indeed, all awareness even of particulars—is a linguistic affair” (63).

illegible letters in the sky.<sup>26</sup> Both vehicles excite attempts at interpretation from the crowd, but their nature remains opaque. The important face in the car is never identified; a male hand has drawn the blind, leaving only “a square of dove gray” to be seen through the window, and the “white, magical, circular” disc in the footman’s hand, which seems to be inscribed with the personage’s name, remains unread, so that the crowd can only guess at the face’s identity: the Queen, the Prime Minister, the Prince of Wales (*MD* 17). The plane’s message proves a similar enigma, dispersing the moment it is written: “But what letters? A C was it? An E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still, then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, an E, a Y perhaps?” (20). Like the earlier literary keys to which Woolf might be alluding—the prison key of *The Waste Land*, Bloom’s lost house keys in *Ulysses*, Casaubon’s “Key to All Mythologies” in *Middlemarch*—this key opens no lock. On the ground the words are variously read as “Glaxo,” “Kreemo,” or “toffee”; each new perspective brings with it a new interpretation of the thing observed, and no consensus is reached.

Nonetheless these interpretations possess a degree of unanimity. The car’s occupant may remain a mystery, but its significance as a symbol is not in dispute. The observers receive it all alike, with a “dark breath of veneration,” for “greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street” (16); they are inspired, this first summer after the Armistice, to thoughts “of the dead; of the flag; of Empire” (17). Likewise the crowd encounters the airplane with enough contextual information about skywriting to understand that it is advertising a consumer product. Once the skywriting is finished and the airplane departs over Greenwich, it is interpreted by one Mr. Bentley just as Bond Street interpreted the motor car, as a symbol of collective cultural achievement: “an aspiration; a concentration; a symbol... of man’s soul; of his determination, thought Mr. Bentley, sweeping round the cedar tree, to get outside his body, beyond his house, by means of thought, Einstein, mathematics, the Mendelian theory—away the aeroplane shot” (27). The one observer whose interpretation does not fit, and who is thereby marked as estranged from his society, is the traumatized war veteran Septimus Smith. Like Darl in *As I Lay Dying*, Septimus is cast as a sacrificed double; incorporating the story of his suicide allowed Woolf to modify her original plan to have Clarissa Dalloway kill herself, and to the extent that his story borrows from Woolf’s own mental breakdown, Septimus doubles for his author as well.<sup>27</sup> Like Darl, he experiences acute perceptual states which are incommensurable with the language available to him, and like Darl he lacks access to a language in which he might create an alternate account. The remoteness of his metaphorical perspective is introduced by Woolf figuratively, by means of his visual perspective on the airplane and car.

“Septimus Warren Smith, aged about thirty, pale-faced, beak-nosed, wearing brown shoes and a shabby overcoat,” appears on the page just after the car has been identified, perhaps in jest, as the Prime Minister’s (14). The next paragraph treats him solely in terms of his reaction to the car, which accords with neither the general curiosity nor the general awe:

<sup>26</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, ed. Mark Hussey and Bonnie Kime Scott (New York: Harcourt, 2005) 13. From here cited as *MD*.

<sup>27</sup> For one of many accounts of Clarissa and Septimus as doubles, see Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 38-39. Michael Whitworth, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 10, notes that Woolf’s own 1904 breakdown included hallucinations of birds singing Greek choruses, an experience also given to Septimus.

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 center before his eyes, as if some horror had almost come 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. (*MD* 14-15)

Septimus's belief that the car has a special relation to him, that he is solely responsible for its halt, is the earliest sign in the narrative of his paranoia. Likewise the tree pattern stands out for him as a significant motif of his delusion. But most indicative of his alienation is his fear of the car drawing everything to a single center; the very unanimity of the crowd's response is what confirms his position as a being apart. Likewise, when his attention is called to the airplane he immediately assumes a personal relation to the spectacle: "So, thought Septimus, looking up, they are signalling to me. Not indeed in actual words; that is, he could not read the language yet; but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty" (21). The illegibility of the letters, which for most observers indicates epistemological uncertainty, suggests to Septimus that he, like Darl, may have access to privileged knowledge. Of course Faulkner chooses to make Darl actually clairvoyant, while Woolf is clear that Septimus's delusions are only delusions. Nonetheless his ignorance of the plane's purpose as advertisement allows him to perceive the letters simply as shapes, without trying to parse them as language; and this aesthetic rapture turns his estrangement from language into a momentary privilege. Spoken language undergoes the same transformation, disassembled into sound:

"K... R..." said the nursemaid, and Septimus heard her say "Kay Arr" closed to his ear, deeply, softly, like a mellow organ, but with a roughness in her voice like a grasshopper's, which rasped his spine deliciously and sent running up into his brain waves of sound which, concussing, broke. A marvellous discovery indeed—that the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions (for one must be scientific, above all scientific) can quicken trees into life! (*MD* 21)

Behind this narration lies an authorial ambivalence. In some sense Septimus's disassembly of language into shapes and sounds is a true discovery, comparable to other modernist efforts at abstraction. The striving of Mallarmé's poems toward "pure sound" reaches a kind of fulfillment here, as it later will in the battered woman at the Regent's Park Tube station, "singing of love" in wordless sound: "ee um fah um so / foo swee too eem oo" (79).<sup>28</sup> But neither Septimus nor the battered woman is an artist, any more than Darl is, and Woolf is no more sanguine than Faulkner about the possibilities of wordless self-communion. If Septimus's mercurial moods, constantly swinging from ecstasy to panic, are not torment enough, Woolf also makes clear their effect on his wife Rezia: "She could stand it no longer. Dr. Holmes might say there was nothing the matter. Far rather would she that he were dead! She could not sit beside him when he stared so and did not see her and made everything terrible" (22). Septimus's ecstasy and terror alike are private matters, and his attempts to make them intelligible result only in weird maxims without the force of experience behind them: "Men must not cut down trees.

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<sup>28</sup> Compare the account of Mallarmé's "Sonnet en -yx" in Roger Pearson, *Unfolding Mallarmé: The Development of a Poetic Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 157-65.

There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred (make it known). He wrote it down" (24).

This communicative failure occasions one of the novel's dry and tragic jokes—

"Communication is health; communication is happiness, communication—" he muttered.

"What are you saying, Septimus?" Rezia asked, wild with terror, for he was talking to himself. (*MD* 91)

—just before the central confrontation of Septimus's day, his noon-hour appointment with Sir William Bradshaw. In this brief encounter Sir William identifies Septimus as a severe nerve case, arranges for his admission to a rest home, and reduces him to stammering silence by sheer personal force; it is a confrontation not only of two characters but of the private world against the public, and more generally of irreconcilable linguistic perspectives. For Humboldt the *Weltanschauung* of a national culture was embodied in its language, but one effect of the Great War was to emphasize that fault lines can lie within nations as well as between them, and that different elements within a single nation may apprehend the world through very different vocabularies. Paul Fussell's cultural history of the Great War includes one of the clearest anatomies extant of a linguistic *Weltanschauung*, setting forth in a page-long table the "essentially feudal" Edwardian language of warfare: a friend is a *comrade*, a horse is a *steed*, to conquer is to *vanquish*, to attack is to *assail*, obedient soldiers are *the brave*, to show cowardice is to *swerve*, the legs and arms of young men are *limbs*, the blood of young men is *the red sweet wine of youth*, and so forth.<sup>29</sup> As Fussell describes it, this system of diction was one of the war's casualties, but it died out asymmetrically between those who did and did not fight, and the resulting division in language was one cause of the feeling that "two distinct Britains" had come out of the war.<sup>30</sup> Both *Jacob's Room* and *To The Lighthouse* feature young men who die in the trenches of Europe, but *Mrs. Dalloway* features a survivor, and this allows for a different kind of wartime tragedy. Septimus is first introduced alongside Rezia's thoughts, which set the terms by which he will be evaluated throughout the novel: "And it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself, but Septimus had fought; he was brave; he was not Septimus now" (22). This is the language common to those who surround Septimus, and will be reprised verbatim at his death, as Dr. Holmes cries "The coward!" on seeing that he has flung himself out the window (146). For Septimus himself such phrases have no meaning, and when Sir William tries to use them he meets with incomprehension:

"You served with great distinction in the War?"

The patient repeated the word "war" interrogatively.

He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom, to be noted on the card.

"The War?" the patient asked. The European War—that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed. (93-94)

<sup>29</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> Fussell 89.

To speak of the war as a game of armed schoolboys nicely collapses the prewar sentiment of innocent sportsmanship (British troops would actually go into battle kicking a football) with the postwar disillusionment that took the war as grand farce, played by an army “whose members know they are only temporarily playing their ill-learned parts.”<sup>31</sup> Lacking Septimus’s experience, Sir William is unaware of the theatricality in his language of “great distinction”; meanwhile, the word “war” estranges Septimus to such a degree that his thoughts cannot be followed. The “War itself” in which Septimus has failed seems to be something distinct from the European War, but what exactly it means, and how it connects to Septimus’s utopianism and sense of guilt, remain opaque. The reader is left in the position of Sir William, who can only note a meaning “of a symbolical kind” on his card; but fortunately Rezia is on hand to carry the public vocabulary forward.

“Yes, he served with the greatest distinction,” Rezia assured the doctor;  
 “he was promoted.”  
 “And they have the very highest opinion of you at your office?” Sir  
 William murmured, glancing at Mr. Brewer’s very generously worded letter. “So  
 that you have nothing to worry you, no financial anxiety, nothing?”  
 He had committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by  
 human nature.  
 “I have—I have,” he began, “committed a crime—”  
 “He has done nothing wrong whatsoever,” Rezia assured the doctor. (94)

The background to this scene appears in the preceding summary, which describes Septimus’s military service in conventional terms of innocence destroyed: “Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare’s plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” (84). The ironic tone, with its implication of a narrator passing judgment, is unusual in Woolf’s fiction; it sounds much more like Conrad, and Septimus’s story will in fact follow a Conradian path of demystification. The death of his commanding officer Evans seems to instigate a split between his private and public selves. Initially he “congratulate[s] himself on feeling very little and very reasonably,” on being “still under thirty and... bound to survive,” and crowns his success with marriage to an Italian wife; but in time the memory of combat moves him to a perspective under which his actions are unmasked as monstrous. That he has not sufficiently mourned Evans is presented as his principal crime; but his marriage is an ancillary offense, a loveless seduction based on lies (89). As in *Heart of Darkness*, a traumatic experience exposes the emptiness of moral rhetoric, and is generalized into the terrifying picture of an amoral world governed by blind drives:

One cannot bring children into a world like this. One cannot perpetuate suffering, or increase the breed of those lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that.... human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen. (87)

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<sup>31</sup> Fussell 191. For football anecdotes, see Fussell 27-28.

In such a world Septimus's courtship of Rezia can only be hypocrisy, as his emotional detachment from his fallen comrade can only be selfish betrayal. The extremity of the account reads something like Nietzsche's late description of the world as a "monster of energy" governed by the will to power, a description that comes as a corollary to linguistic perspectivism.<sup>32</sup> Once it is accepted that language or the senses stand as a veil between consciousness and the world, it is a small step to conjecture that the knowledge they provide is mere illusion, behind which an unthinkable reality lies. It is Nietzsche's abyss—as well as Baudelaire's and Conrad's—that stares Septimus in the face.

In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow despairs of communicating his experience: "it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence.... We live, as we dream—alone."<sup>33</sup> Nor can Septimus articulate the horror of his vision. His madness, like Darl's, is a condemnation to privacy, engendered by his inability to align his experience with the language available to him. It is one of the famous peculiarities of *Mrs. Dalloway* that the novel nonetheless seems to attempt a kind of posthumous communication. At the novel's end, once Clarissa's party has begun, Sir William and his wife appear with the news that a young man has killed himself. Initially Clarissa takes this communication as an affront, spoiling the atmosphere of her party, but her irritation soon gives way to the reflective episode that is meant to unite the novel's two strands: "Death was defiance," she thinks. "Death was an attempt to communicate" (180). What is communicated, on Clarissa's interpretation, is the autonomy of the private self: "A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved" (180). Clarissa shares with Septimus an antipathy to Sir William, whom she finds "obscurely evil, capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it" (180), an emblem of the forces against which Septimus had sought to preserve himself. Thus while Clarissa may be compromised by her social existence, her comprehension of Septimus's action proves that some aspect of her private self has remained intact: "She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away" (181).

Indeed Clarissa is in some ways like Septimus, and the novel's structure is staked on our recognizing this similarity. But—and here enters the unease of many readers with the conclusion—it doesn't seem that she should be able to know this. What she hears from Lady Bradshaw is essentially nothing, only that "a young man... had killed himself. He had been in the army" (179). All other discussion concerns the effects of the case on the bill that Sir William hopes to get through the House of Commons, and none of it seems to license Clarissa's extraordinary sense of identification with the Septimus that we know but she does not. This staging suggests that Woolf, like James, is refusing certain constraints of novelistic plot and turning to a more lyric model; for as lyric, the juxtaposition of Clarissa's and Septimus's consciousnesses would become its own justification, detached from the question of plausibility as a matter of plot, and would provide a solution to the novel's problems of privacy and communication. The social and class barriers between Clarissa and Septimus are only a particular instance of the broader incommensurability between language and what Marlow calls "life-experience"; it does not seem possible, in this novel, that they could have achieved any understanding of each other in life. Only an inversion of public language makes Clarissa's posthumous understanding possible; having heard the news from Sir William and Lady

<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968) 550.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Norton, 2006) 26.

Bradshaw and instinctively mistrusting them, she intuitively feels that the dead man must have mistrusted them as well, projects herself into his place and methodically upends every cliché she is given, until Lady Bradshaw's "very sad case" (179) has been inverted into Shakespeare's "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy" (80).

Certainly we should suppose some irony in Woolf's treatment of the scene. Clarissa's raptures may convey some authorial endorsement of Septimus's refusal to submit, but they also sit uneasily beside the novel's actual account of his last moments, with their humble confusion: "He considered Mrs. Filmer's nice clean bread knife.... Ah, but one mustn't spoil that. The gas fire? But it was too late now," and final perplexity: "He did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings—what did *they* want?" (145-146). Insofar as Clarissa's posthumous understanding makes use of rhetoric, it cannot help suggesting just that sentimentalization of death which Woolf hated in the public response to the war. But partial and qualified as Clarissa's understanding may be, it still forms the crux of the novel and must carry the principal burden. Like James, Woolf chooses to stage her climax outside the causal structure of plot and the milieu of the public world; and as in James, the result is to severely restrict its consequences and to make clear the separation between art and life. Clarissa and Septimus can be brought into conjunction only by way of a third term: either Woolf's narrator, who has privileged access to the experiences of both, or Woolf herself, whose biographical relation to both supports their doubling. In either case the identification is restricted to the aesthetic sphere and brings about nothing in the public world; like poetry for Auden, it makes nothing happen. No argument is undertaken against Sir William or the forces he represents, and the course of Clarissa's party remains unchanged—except insofar as Clarissa is prepared for her final moment of recognition with Peter. But that moment too hangs free in the lyric sphere, its value unattached to any material consequences, as the novel makes clear by suddenly ending.

### ***The Waves: Narrative as Veil***

*To the Lighthouse* restages the climax of *Mrs. Dalloway* in altered terms. Once again the living and the dead, represented by two consciousnesses, are to be brought in conjunction by an imaginative act, this time performed by Lily Briscoe in completing her abstract portrait of the deceased Mrs. Ramsay. Lily's status as an artist, even if unrecognized, brings a new dimension of permanence to this recognition: "it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa; yet even so.... one might say, even of this scrawl, not of that actual picture, perhaps, but of what it attempted, that it 'remained for ever,' she was going to say, or, for the words spoken sounded even to herself, too boastful, to hint, wordlessly" (TL 179). It is consistent with *Mrs. Dalloway's* picture of language that Lily should feel more comfortable with wordless hints than words, and that her art should be undertaken in a wordless medium. She too encounters perspective as a recurrent problem, a kind of confinement she must break: "one wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with... fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with" (198). From what we know of the portrait—at one point we are told that Mrs. Ramsay appears as "triangular purple shape" (52)—it seems to follow the post-impressionist technique of simultaneously presenting multiple perspectives in order to comprehensively render its subject. In the same way that abstraction circumvents the limits of physical space, it provides an escape from linear time. Lily's painting, at least under the idealization of "what it attempted," detaches itself from the contingent fate of the canvas and persists as a kind of Platonic form, permanent and indestructible. There is a suggestion, too, that something of Mrs. Ramsay, whom

Lily briefly seems to see before her, might be rescued from oblivion. Lily's closing affirmation, "I have had my vision" (209), uses the present perfect to grasp both evanescence and eternity; the moment of vision is past, but that it *has* happened is a permanent fact.

Woolf thus ends her novel with a gesture toward the same lyric timelessness that was attempted in *The Golden Bowl*; and on her own terms Lily appears to succeed. But naturally the terms of Lily's painting are not those of Woolf's novel. The visual arts may provide a natural counterpart to the timeless lyric, but Lily the painter can serve only as a partial surrogate for Woolf the novelist, and to some degree her vision skirts rather than answering *Mrs. Dalloway*'s questions about language and knowledge. At any rate Woolf seems to have felt there was more to be done, for *The Waves* raises the stakes by including in her cast of six three artists in language, Bernard the novelist and Louis and Neville the would-be poets. Their concerns—especially those of Bernard, who gradually rises from the chorus of narrators to become the dominant voice—reprise the questions of *Mrs. Dalloway*: how to communicate experience in a way that does not fall victim to the falsities of public language, and how to escape the limits of linguistic perspective without falling into Septimus's inarticulacy or horror.

At the midpoint of *The Waves*, a farewell dinner for Percival reunites the book's six narrators, no longer as children but as adults with defined personalities. As Bernard begins to assume the role of primary narrator, he discovers in himself both an innate eloquence and the uneasy desire to wring its neck: "I am embarrassed by my own fertility. I could describe every chair, table, luncheon here copiously, freely. My mind hums hither and thither with its veil of words for everything."<sup>34</sup> Later he exchanges the veil metaphor for "the smoke of my phrase," beautiful but obfuscatory, "meretricious" and made of "evasions and old lies" (*W* 133). The occasion for this complaint is a comparison between himself and the poet Louis, who in solitude "sees with astonishing intensity, and will write some words that may outlast us all." As a novelist Bernard is confined to public manners and cannot take advantage of such inner vision: "I only come into existence when the plumber, or the horse-dealers, or whoever it may be, says something which sets me alight... Thus my character is in part made of the stimulus which other people provide, and is not mine" (133).

This is the old Victorian complaint about the novel's restriction to social surfaces, mixed with the Jamesian worry about differentiating the self from its surroundings, and the search for an alternative medium draws Bernard away from words and toward vision. Toying with the word "love" for the sense of communion at the meal, he decides that he "cannot attach the width and spread of our feelings to so small a mark," and chooses instead a visual figure: "There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves—a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution" (127). The seven-sided flower, like Lily's post-impressionist painting, sums up and unites multiple perspectives, but for Bernard it represents an aspiration rather than an achievement. He does not know how to create any such object in language, and toward the end of the meal he begins to wonder if language is not the only distorting medium at work. Narrative form might be the real culprit; for if language on its own inevitably distorts the reality given by the senses, surely these distortions become even more serious when assembled into the larger structures of story.

But what are stories? Toys I twist, bubbles I blow, one ring passing through  
another. And sometimes I begin to doubt if there are stories. What is my story?

<sup>34</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (New York: Harvest, 1978) 117. From here cited as *W*.

What is Rhoda's? What is Neville's? There are facts, as, for example, 'The handsome young man in the grey suit, whose reserve contrasted so strangely with the loquacity of the others, now brushed the crumbs from his waistcoat and, with a characteristic gesture at once commanding and benign, made a sign to the waiter, who came instantly and returned a moment later with the bill discreetly folded upon a plate.' That is the truth; that is the fact, but beyond it all is darkness and conjecture. (144-145)

This sentiment too has antecedents in Woolf's work, especially in Lily Briscoe's wariness of conjecture in understanding others: "this making up scenes about them, is what we call 'knowing' people, 'thinking' of them, 'being fond' of them! Not a word of it was true; she had made it up; but it was what she knew them by all the same" (*TL* 173). "Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" also described literature as beginning with, and then betraying, the work of observation; paired with Mrs. Brown in a railway carriage, H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett each commence a narrative around her and immediately lose sight of the woman herself. Recognizing this danger, Bernard draws a limit around the observed fact. The sentence representing this fact sounds, admittedly, much more like an Edwardian novel than Woolf's own fiction; Bernard is only beginning his attempt to throw off convention. But he does take the question seriously enough to phrase it in ontological terms—*are* there stories?—recalling Russell's rejection of those pseudo-entities of language, like Picadilly, which cannot be brought into correspondence with immediate experience. And while Bernard's sentence would not survive Russellian analysis any more than Picadilly does, it does share with Russell an empiricist fidelity to the observed fact and a suspicion of those farther inferences which convention and habit would have us make.

By introducing narrative form into the empiricist schema and placing it, like language, as a distorting veil over sensory experience, Woolf anticipates by several decades a conception of narrative that has become popular in a number of academic disciplines. Its introduction to the modern academy came in the 1970s with Hayden White's work on historical writing, which made the forceful claim that

historical writing is not a selection but a distortion... No given set of events figures forth apodictically the kind of meanings with which stories provide them. This is as true of sets of events on the scale of an individual life as it is of those spanning a century in a nation's evolution. No one and nothing lives a story. And sequences of events can take on the aspects of a Romance, a Tragedy, or a Comedy indifferently, depending on the point of view from which they are apprehended.<sup>35</sup>

In likening meaning-making structures to apprehension under a particular point of view, and in his belief that such apprehension carries inevitable distortions, White extends Humboldt's theory of language onto narrative structure as a whole. His kinship to Woolf becomes still clearer in a later formulation, where he asks rhetorically, "Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning? Or does it present itself... as

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<sup>35</sup> Hayden White, "Historicism, Historicity and the Figurative Imagination," *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 111.

mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude?"<sup>36</sup> For Woolf too, "perception" is the natural term for human experience prior to the narrativizing impulse. And for Woolf and White both, identifying narrative as the particular agent of distortion opens the way to a partial rehabilitation of language, since it seems to present the possibility that non-narrative forms might give a more accurate description of the world. White uses the fragmentary medieval annal form, which gives "no suggestion of any necessary connection between one event and another,"<sup>37</sup> as one example of non-narrative history; and Woolf too is drawn to the idea that incoherence might be the price of evading the natural distortions of language.

Just before the famous Paterian description in "Modern Fiction" of life as "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope," Woolf claims that

if the writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, and not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it.<sup>38</sup>

The tailoring metaphor, with its echo of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and Isabel's figurative clothing in *Portrait of a Lady*, once again links the mechanism of plot to social convention; and coming after Woolf's list of negatives, it once again raises the question of what naked form might lie beneath. The alternative Woolf proposes, to "record the atoms as they fall upon in the mind in the order in which they fall," and to "trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness,"<sup>39</sup> continues the empiricist call for fidelity to the momentary sensation. But as with Russell's hypothetical perfect language, it assumes that such fidelity will carry a cost in intelligibility. Underlying this assumption is something like the Kantian idea that things as grasped by the mind are essentially divorced from things as they are, the idea that Roland Barthes once called, polemically, "the great mythic opposition of the *true-to-life* (the lifelike) and the intelligible."<sup>40</sup> But if this is another myth to place beside Sellars's Myth of the Given, it is nonetheless a productive myth for Woolf's art; for it holds out the possibility of an alternative language that would not be written under the bondage of convention. In *The Waves*, Woolf extends her earlier practice by attempting to write an entire novel in such an alternative language. Abandoning the technique of free indirect discourse, which mimics a character's perspective by casting itself in the language available to that character, she instead employs an unvarying diction with no connection to any character's speech patterns: that is to say, a language written as if from no viewpoint at all. The "as if" is important since, as in Faulkner, such a language can function only by analogy, using linguistic effects to suggest a nonlinguistic world. And just as Faulkner's language operates at a remove from his characters, giving them no help in making sense of their

<sup>36</sup> Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 24-25.

<sup>37</sup> White, "Value of Narrativity" 7.

<sup>38</sup> Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," *The Common Reader: First Series*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harvest, 1984) 150.

<sup>39</sup> Woolf, "Modern Fiction" 150.

<sup>40</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) 146.

experience, the characters of *The Waves* are permitted only fleeting and uncertain insights into the novel's nonperspectival world. Where *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* both conclude with affirmative visions, luminously merging the minds of character and author, Bernard's "summing-up" at the end of *The Waves* is primarily a confession of ignorance. Despite its tour-de-force form, the novel's content suggests a new and more doubtful phase in Woolf, something like Edward Said's description of artistic lateness: "not harmony and resolution... but intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction."<sup>41</sup> Rarely have these sentiments been expressed with such formal force.

Commentary on *The Waves* often proceeds from the assumption that it is not, properly speaking, a novel at all; Ralph Freedman takes it as paradigmatic of a hybrid "lyrical novel," and Hermione Lee prefers to call it as an "extended prose-poem."<sup>42</sup> These intuitions are confirmed by standard accounts of the genres. If novels are inherently dialogic, as Bakhtin thought, then *The Waves* does not number among them; rather it employs the "single-language and single-styled" technique of poetry,<sup>43</sup> which does not contain "world views (except for the unitary and singular world view of the poet himself), nor individual and typical images of speaking persons, their speech mannerisms or typical intonations."<sup>44</sup> Here is how *The Waves* introduces its characters:

"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." (*W* 9)

We begin, of course, at the level of something like Moore's sense-data: bare presentations of color, shape and sound with no objects attached. The infant narrators possess only the sensory foundations of knowledge, the "*pure sensations*," as William James described them, that "*can only be realized in the earliest days of life*. They are all but impossible to adults with memories and stores of association acquired."<sup>45</sup> James may not list language among the acquisitions that obscure the senses, but as always it is Woolf's prime concern. The prelinguistic state of the narrators is meant to telegraph from the beginning that language in *The Waves*, as in Faulkner, must work analogically, using first-person sentences for experiences that in themselves have no sentences attached. But where *As I Lay Dying* is structured around changes in register, interspersing analogic narration with spoken diction, *The Waves* never abandons its position on the far side of language. Even once the characters have grown articulate, their narration cannot be

<sup>41</sup> Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Random House, 2006) 7.

<sup>42</sup> Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel*; and Hermione Lee, "The Waves," *Modern Critical Views: Virginia Woolf*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 105-106.

<sup>43</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 266.

<sup>44</sup> Bakhtin 297.

<sup>45</sup> James, *The Principles of Psychology* 2:7.

naturalized as any kind of “interior monologue” quoting their thought, not unless we are prepared to accept Jinny as a toddler desiring a “fulvous dress” to wear in the evening (21). The language of narration belongs only to the author, and so far as the characters are concerned everything issues from a realm behind or beneath words.

Bakhtin takes the ultimate aim of poetry to be a “unitary speech, one co-extensive with its object, as if it were speech about an ‘Edenic’ world... a purely poetic, extrahistorical language, a language far removed from the petty rounds of everyday life, a language of the gods.”<sup>46</sup> Though he does not use the word, he clearly has in mind the nineteenth century’s version of Cratylishm, its longing for a language that would break the barriers of perspective. As the unitary speech of *The Waves* circumvents its characters’ diction, the petty rounds of everyday life are held at bay by screening out the public world past even the point of *The Golden Bowl*. We scarcely possess basic biographical information about the characters, and what we do know comes tangentially, in parenthetical asides: in Susan’s voice, “I think sometimes (I am not twenty yet) I am not a woman, but the light that falls on this gate, on the ground” (98), or in Bernard’s, “I feel strangely, persuasively, that because of my great happiness (being engaged to be married), I am become part of this speed” (111). Rhoda in particular uses the parenthetical technique to contrast the inner and outer worlds: “A wind ruffles the topmost leaves of primeval trees. (Yet here we sit at Hampton Court.) Parrots shrieking break the intense stillness of the jungle. (Here the trams start.) The swallow dips her wings in midnight pools. (Here we talk.)” (223). As in James and Faulkner, this inner world possess a poetic logic, governed by metaphor; the beast that the infant Louis hears on the shore is only the first of many images which, in a Jamesian way, will extend over large stretches of text, migrating between different characters and even providing material for shared deliberation. Louis and Rhoda, “withdrawn together to lean over some cold urn,” behold the others tossing violets interwoven with death (140-141); and they repeat this withdrawal when the urn reappears decades later. The second time, surprisingly, the urn may be an actual material object (229), but there is no way to know this for certain, since the text itself has no need to settle the question; the urn’s material existence counts for nothing against its symbolic valence. *The Waves* reduces the prosaic world to an adjunct, a mere occasional reminder of what the novel’s narration is not.

History is an adjunct as well. Woolf’s novels from *Jacob’s Room* through *To the Lighthouse* were conceived in some sense as responses to the historical pressures of the Great War, but the cosmos of *The Waves* is deliberately, in Bakhtin’s term, extrahistorical. We do have a faint reverberation of history in Percival’s offstage death in India, but Froula seems correct in saying that attempts to read this as a sustained engagement with colonialism or empire misrepresent the novel’s nature.<sup>47</sup> Percival’s status as a historical player goes hand in hand with his absence from the book’s list of narrators. He is admired because his essence is to act without reflecting; “he sees nothing; he hears nothing”; he “flicks his hand to the back of his neck” in a manner that thwarts conscious imitation (36); the book makes him an object of contemplation rather than a historically situated subject. Only once, in Neville’s mind, does the novel flirt with any such situation: “I am beginning to be convinced, as we walk, that the fate of Europe is of

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<sup>46</sup> Bakhtin 331.

<sup>47</sup> One attempt to read *The Waves* as an engagement with the “submerged mind of empire” appears in Jane Marcus, “Britannia Rules *The Waves*,” *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth-Century ‘British’ Literary Canons*, ed. Karen Lawrence (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992) 136-162. Froula questions such “attempts to assimilate this ‘eyeless, mystical’ book to political concerns, which tend to reify what its abstract form strips bare of substance” (177).

immense importance, and, ridiculous as it still seems, that all depends on the battle of Blenheim. Yes; I declare, as we pass through this gateway, it is the present moment; I am become a subject of King George” (228). But this mood, transient as any other, never quite sheds its sense of the ridiculous—and in any case, what *is* the present moment? Has George V ascended the throne, and does the fate of Europe hang on the Great War? The novel gives no certain answer. The battle of Blenheim took place during the War of the Spanish Succession, in 1704.

In an early diary entry on the project that would become *The Waves*, Woolf writes: “I am now & then haunted by some semi mystic very profound life of a woman, which shall all be told on one occasion; & time shall be utterly obliterated; future shall somehow blossom out of the past. One incident – say the fall of a flower – might contain it.”<sup>48</sup> This sounds like Blake, and makes clear how much *The Waves* was conceived from the beginning under the Romantic rubric of stilling time. At times, as in *The Golden Bowl*, it adapts this project to narrative form by layering multiple temporal sequences over one another, most strikingly in the sun’s passing through the sky as an allegory of human life. But where James seems to have decided that the private self, once wholly abstracted from public life, is a cipher, Woolf takes it as a more coherent entity, and this belief gives *The Waves* an added dimension of stillness; for nothing, it seems, can exercise causal force on these essential selves. *The Waves* does admit a kind of local causality, as in the childhood scene that forms the book’s first extended episode: Jinny’s kissing Louis causes Susan to flee, which causes Bernard in turn to follow and divert her with storytelling. For the rest of their lives, the characters will return in thought to these primal events. But the distinctiveness of *The Waves* is that it suggests nothing like the Freudian narrative under which these events would play a causal role in shaping the characters’ later personalities; rather, they only show forth the essential personalities that the characters already possess and will retain to the ends of their lives. Even the death of Percival, the novel’s weightiest event, registers in its structure only by casting a new and more melancholy light on its narrating minds.

Louis, who is one of the novel’s asocial “authentic” (116), has the clearest sense of a private self transcending historical time:

My roots go down to the depths of the world.... Up here my eyes are green leaves, unseeing. I am a boy in gray flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake up here. Down there my eyes are the lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile. I see women passing with red pitchers to the river; I see camels swaying and men in turbans. (12)

It is true that Louis cannot always sense these roots, and that the mere presence of another being is enough to collapse him into his outer appearance: “Now an eyebeam is slid through the chink. Its beam strikes me. I am a boy in a gray flannel suit.... All is shattered” (12-13). But the Nile image returns unaltered at intervals throughout his life; and he comes to believe that his task is to properly recognize “the meeting place of past and present,” to understand how he can behold himself on the shore of the Nile at the same time that “I sit in a third-class railway carriage full of boys going home for the holidays” (66). Rhoda, the other authentic, confronts the same paradox of identity: “I am the foam that sweeps and fills the uttermost rims of the rocks with whiteness; I am also a girl, here in this room” (107). Indeed this is the basic puzzle of *The Waves*’s form: what counts as a self in this book, and what relation the six names on the page bear to the people whose lives are narrated through them. At times it seems that the idea of a defined, separate self

<sup>48</sup> *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Three* 118.

is one of the fictions that the novel wants to unmask.<sup>49</sup> Neville pegs the statements “I am this; I am that” as one of the falsehoods of speech (138), and Bernard too suffers a persistent sense of lacking an essential self: “For I changed and was changed; was Hamlet, was Shelley, was the hero, whose name I now forget, of a novel by Dostoevsky” (249); “There are many rooms—many Bernards” (260); “I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am” (276). Elsewhere he imagines the childhood growth into “separate bodies” as suffering, a fall from the Edenic “virginal wax that coats the spine” (241), and finally that an encounter with wordless truth, with “things in themselves,” is only possible when the world is “seen without a self” (287). But his final brush with selflessness is very brief, and in general these protestations against identity seem belied by the consistency and continuity of the novel’s six selves. One purpose of the kissing episode is to introduce and contrast the character traits we will recognize henceforth: Jinny the coquette against Louis the shy contemplative, Susan’s wounded pride against Rhoda’s solitary imagination, Neville’s reserve against Bernard’s sociable empathy. Recalling this episode late in life, Bernard thinks, “I felt my indifference melt. Neville did not melt. ‘Therefore,’ I said, ‘I am myself, not Neville,’ a wonderful discovery” (240). Here the differentiation of personality is neither an invention nor a creation, but a discovery of what was always latent. Meeting Neville decades later, Bernard declares, “Nobody, I thought, ever changes the attitude in which we saw them first, or the clothes. Here he has sat in this chair, in these clothes, ever since we first met” (272). The petals that Rhoda floats as a child follow her into middle life in Spain (206), and the chained beast that stamps for Louis on the shore will continue stamping all his life.

It is these static, unchangeable selves who seem to speak in *The Waves*, or whose experience the authorial voice renders into language. Though the novel’s events occur within specifiable time, stretching from youth to old age, the narrative recounting issues from the same timeless realm as Louis’s ahistorical self. Removed as they are from the public world, the novel’s voices can give the sense of reading commentary without a text, or of hearing a Greek chorus while the action occurs offstage: perhaps of hearing the dead speak in Hades. Their tone is so purely reactive and contemplative, so far removed from any course of action, that despite being case in the present tense they give the effect of recounting events that have already occurred, or that somehow exist elsewhere. As their diction gives the effect of a standpoint outside language, their grammar gives the effect of a standpoint outside time, of the Augustinian eternal present which stands and does not pass. The yearning Bakhtin finds in poetry for a language of the gods becomes in *The Waves* a desire to write as if from Augustine’s heaven, or—perhaps a better analogy—from the realm of Kant’s noumenal self. For Kant the nature of the self behind its appearances, as it exists outside time and causality, was as much a mystery as the outer world; and in keeping with this tenet, it seems that the narrators of *The Waves* are in a fundamental sense barred from knowing themselves.<sup>50</sup> Only the author occupies the vantage to see them as they are.

<sup>49</sup> Banfield suggests that *The Waves* dissolves “the unity of the mind” into “a series of states, only one knowable by acquaintance at a time,” and that to speak of persisting, distinct characters involves doing violence to the text by “reinterpreting it as a traditional novel” (351-352).

<sup>50</sup> The relevant passages in the first *Critique* are difficult and debated. For the extension of the appearance/object dichotomy from the external world onto the self, see B155 and B156 in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 258-259: “I am also given to myself in intuition, only, like other phenomena, not as I am for the understanding but rather as I appear to myself... hence we must order the determinations of inner sense as appearances in time in just the same way as we order those of outer sense in space.” See A278/B334 for the claim that we “know even ourselves only through inner sense, thus as appearance” (376). A good discussion of the difficulties in this doctrine appears in P.F. Strawson, *The*

Thus two replies might be given to Bernard's protestations of lacking a personal identity. The first is that, as seen in Bernard's unfavorable comparison of himself to Louis, this mutability is to some degree Bernard's particular malady as a novelist. The second is that while the characters in *The Waves* may have unstable public personae, these personae are not the subject matter of the novel; we are told about them but never encounter them on the page. Only once, in a late musing of Bernard's, do we get a picture of what a novel about such personae might have looked like: "About this time Bernard married and bought a house.... His friends observed in him a growing tendency to domesticity.... The birth of children made it highly desirable that he should augment his income." Presumably this is *The Waves* as Arnold Bennett would have written it. Bernard calls it the "biographer's method," necessary to introduce a measure of social uniformity, "though one may be humming any nonsense under one's breath at the same time" (*W* 259). He then presents three examples of nonsense: a nursery rhyme and two passages from Shakespeare, including the line "Let me not to the marriage of true minds."

This is, of course, just the language to which *The Waves* is committed: though it appears as nonsense to the biographer, it will render true minds. But will these minds have any marriage? For all that their lives are joined, the narrators seem condemned to an essential separateness. "Our friends," laments Bernard, "how distant, how mute, how seldom visited and little known. And I, too, am dim to my friends and unknown" (*W* 275). Louis and Rhoda become lovers for a time, but this connection is fleeting as any other, and their last meeting allows them only to acknowledge their separateness:

"If we could mount together, if we could perceive from a sufficient height," said Rhoda, "...but you, disturbed by faint clapping sounds of praise and laughter, and I, resenting compromise and right and wrong on human lips, trust only in solitude and the violence of death and thus are divided."  
"For ever," said Louis, "divided." (*W* 231)

Like Septimus, Rhoda will kill herself, having failed to find any social form commensurate with her self. The other narrators must accept varying degrees of compromise; for the alchemy of the novel's language, making articulate the secret self, is not a resource they possess. *The Waves* includes no character like Clarissa Dalloway or Lily Briscoe, whose insights are meant to reproduce the author's vision within the novel's world. Bernard is often taken as an authorial delegate, or as becoming an authorial delegate over the course of the novel; but to the extent that his insights do coincide with Woolf's, they are purely negative.<sup>51</sup> At the end of his life of storytelling, he is brought at last to reject story entirely:

But in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story—and there are so many, and so many—stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death, and so on; and none of them are true. Yet like

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*Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 38-39 and 247-249. It may be that in the end, Kant's noumenal self is more of a logical postulate than a mind or soul, but his phrasing does leave the door open for something like the mystical interpretation of *The Waves*.

<sup>51</sup> More positive views about Bernard's relation to Woolf include J.W. Graham, "Point of View in *The Waves*: Some Services of the Style," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 39 (1970) 193-211, who emphasizes Bernard's "summing-up" role at the end of the book; and Mary Steussy Shanahan, "The Artist and the Resolution of *The Waves*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1975) 54-74, who also finds Bernard moving "from storyteller to writer" (56) and thus concluding the book in a position comparable to Woolf's.

children we tell each other stories, and to decorate them we make up these ridiculous, flamboyant, beautiful phrases. How tired I am of stories, how tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground! Also, how I distrust neat designs of life that are drawn upon half sheets of notepaper. I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. (*W* 238)

It would be attractive to suggest that Bernard's "little language" is the language of *The Waves* itself.<sup>52</sup> But while Woolf may share Bernard's frustrations, his longing, expressed so late in life, cannot amount to an aesthetic program. "Should this be the end of the story?" he asks, and seems truly not to know the answer: "a kind of sigh? a last ripple of the wave? A trickle of water in some gutter where, burbling, it dies away?" (*W* 267). Even the phrase "little language such as lovers use" repeats an earlier thought of Louis's as he listens, disapprovingly, to the others talking at Percival's farewell dinner; and in that context it suggests no kind of solution. Likewise, Louis never answers his own question of how to "put it together, the confused and composite message" (*W* 230). Life is imperfect, an "unfinished phrase" (*W* 283), and against such conclusions this formally perfect novel seems more than ever to place itself altogether outside the world, in some heaven not of our attainment.

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<sup>52</sup> For one implication that the "little language" forms part of Woolf's aesthetic, see Banfield 298, 301, 303, 305.

## Four

### James Joyce: Word and Flesh

So far I have taken James, Faulkner and Woolf as examples of a particular impulse in modernist fiction, attempting to preserve the autonomy of the private self against the encroachments of the physical and social world; that is, against those forces which are broadly described as “modernity.” For all three authors, this entails alterations to novelistic form, in particular the development of an idiosyncratic language to separate the realm of consciousness from the social world in which the English novel had previously transacted most of its business. The mind is liberated from temporal sequence, from externally imposed causality, from the limits of public language; but these freedoms have their price. We have seen that consciousness becomes dissociated from the novelistic work of plot, so that characters, in proportion to the sensitivity of their minds, lose the ability to alter their worldly fates. The forms of these novels thus displace, in various complex moves, the aesthetic problem that had already become explicit in the Victorian era: how to reconcile a lyric aesthetic with a narrative genre, how to do justice both to mimesis of the world and to the Romantic philosophy which regarded the material world as a kind of enemy. In this concluding chapter I will take up Joyce and argue that his work addresses the same problems but attempts a different sort of solution. This is not because Joyce’s characters are any less victimized by modernity or any better suited to escape it, but because his work, unusually, is not built around a tension between the autonomous private self and the pressures of the outer world. While his characters do not lack interiority, their minds are not rigidly separated from the world; indeed their minds are best described as reconfigurations of the world.

Since Joyce in his maturity wrote essentially no criticism, preferring to assign to others the task of explaining his work, the search for an explicit Joycean aesthetic is thrown back on those fragments of criticism that he first put forth in notebooks and lectures and later reworked for incorporation into *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man*. But the common practice of discussing Joyce’s aesthetic in terms of statements made by Stephen Dedalus is risky because, among other reasons, Stephen is more obviously invested than Joyce in Romantic ideas of art.<sup>1</sup> Frank Kermode, for instance, begins *Romantic Image* by taking Stephen as a privileged example. Stephen’s professed belief in visionary aesthetics, as well as his haughty wariness of human relations, perfectly demonstrate for Kermode the modern persistence of the Romantic belief that art and artist alike must be separated from the world, a belief in “the Image as a radiant truth out of space and time, and in the necessary isolation or estrangement of men who can perceive it.”<sup>2</sup> Critics after Kermode have enthusiastically traced a Romantic genealogy for Stephen’s aesthetics, primarily by way of what has come to be called the “epiphany tradition,” which backforms a term of Joyce’s onto a visionary tradition starting with Wordsworth. While the Joycean and Wordsworthian vision clearly share some history, it is not obvious either that Stephen’s epiphany is the same thing as Wordsworth’s moment of insight, or that Joyce’s fiction works to produce anything much like the epiphany Stephen describes.

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<sup>1</sup> Weldon Thornton makes this argument at length in *The Anti-Modernism of A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994). Thornton takes emphasis on the autonomous self to be a fundamentally modernist trait, which is true; but naturally it has a genealogy.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge, 2002) 4.

Joyce differs from the Romantics and from other modernist authors in being more at home in the material world, and far more skeptical about attempts to escape it. His symbolic networks may outstrip any of his predecessors (except perhaps Blake) in their ambition and scope, but their humble materials—kidney, soap, potato—are wholly of the temporal world, and those of his characters who are estranged enough from society to experience something like Kermodé's Image cannot be said to profit by it. *Dubliners* gives us a few bookish characters—James Duffy, Gabriel Conroy—who are granted moments of lyric insight into their own isolation, but these are far degraded from the Romantic artist-hero. Stephen too is brought down to earth after each of his visionary flights in *A Portrait*, and by *Ulysses* his artistic vocation appears in serious danger of remaining unfulfilled. Concurrent with Stephen's declining fortunes in *Ulysses* comes a diminishment of Joyce's own interest in the figure; the abstract idealist, with his "shape that can't be changed,"<sup>3</sup> cedes his fictional place to Mr. Bloom, citizen of the material world. In considering what Stephen and the biographical young Joyce had to say about aesthetics, I will try to demonstrate two points: that Stephen's visionary doctrine, if it is a version of the Romantic image, is a rather strange one; and that applying this doctrine to Joyce's fiction will have results even stranger.

### Species of Vision

The question of whether Stephen (or Joyce) is at heart a Romantic runs parallel to the question of whether Stephen's doctrine can truly be attributed, as he claims, to the premodern sources of Aristotle and Aquinas. His claim in *Stephen Hero* to be developing an aesthetic that is "in the main 'applied Aquinas'"<sup>4</sup> is made with such bravado that one can forget how unlikely such an aesthetic is, though even within Joyce's fiction there is no shortage of skepticism. *Stephen Hero*'s Father Butt tells Stephen that "it was a new sensation for him to hear Thomas Aquinas quoted as an authority on esthetic philosophy" (*SH* 109), while in *A Portrait* it is Lynch who says, "It amuses me vastly... to hear you quoting [Aquinas] time after time like a jolly round friar. Are you laughing in your sleeve?"<sup>5</sup>

Father Butt's point is that a Thomist aesthetic is a simple anachronism: "Esthetic philosophy was a modern branch and if it was anything at all, it was practical. Aquinas had treated slightly of the beautiful but always from a theoretical standpoint" (*SH* 109). As a matter of scholarship the father is quite correct; it was five centuries after Aquinas that Alexander Baumgarten first coined the term *Aesthetica* for a theory of artistic taste. Where Aquinas does discuss beauty [*pulchra*], he takes as an ontological category allied to goodness and unrelated to *ars*, which for him broadly designates any skillful human activity—not excluding, as Father Butt reminds Stephen elsewhere, the art of lighting a fire (*SH* 34). Lynch's skepticism is less scholarly and has more to do with simple matters of temperament; it is peculiar, to say the least, that an ostentatious freethinker like Stephen, contemptuous of the institutional church and given to Byronic flouting of moral codes, should choose the philosopher of Catholic orthodoxy as a ground for his speculations. Over the decades Joyce studies has folded these two objections into a more general observation on the history of ideas: that modern philosophies of art, in particular the visionary, perceptually based aesthetics that Stephen subscribes to, are inextricably tied to an

<sup>3</sup> Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960) 105.

<sup>4</sup> James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer, (London: Paladin, 1991) 81. From here cited as *SH*.

<sup>5</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Modern Library, 1996) 206. From here cited as *PA*.

idealist philosophy of mental faculties and have nothing to do with Aristotle and Aquinas, who describe beauty as located in objects themselves.<sup>6</sup> As a matter of biography, Joyce seems not to have received a rigorous education in Thomist philosophy, and what knowledge he had would have come from independent reading, most likely not the *Summa Theologica* itself but Bernard Bosanquet's broadly Hegelian *A History of Aesthetic* (1892), slightly supplemented by the *Synopsis Philosophiae ad Mentem Divi Thomae*, a "mechanical digest for seminary students."<sup>7</sup> Given Joyce's notorious fondness for indirection, it is tempting to think that Lynch might be right, and to suggest, as F.C. McGrath does, that not just Stephen but Joyce himself is "laughing in his sleeve" at his readers, having "perpetrated an intellectual practical joke by drawing the red herrings of Aristotle and Aquinas across the path of scholarly inquiry, a joke that has successfully diverted his critics for the past seven decades."<sup>8</sup>

This is not the first time Joyce has been accused of jokes at his readers' expense. But a blanket rejection of Stephen's claims, as much as their blind acceptance, is likely to obscure their implications. In the sixty-five years since Harry Levin first noted the word "epiphany" in the *Stephen Hero* manuscript, the term has undergone a marked extension of usage, coming to broadly designate any moment of recognition or discovery in Joyce's fiction, or indeed in twentieth-century fiction generally. It has also been extended backward in time, becoming the usual shorthand for a tradition of visionary moments starting with Wordsworth and traceable through the Victorians, especially Pater, into the twentieth century. The construction of this tradition has somewhat detached the word from its original sense in *Stephen Hero*, and it has obscured the fact that Stephen does not really speak as Wordsworth and Pater do. A brief review of these predecessors will help to clarify Stephen's points of departure.

In the realist epistemology of Aristotle and Aquinas, the senses take in the form of perceived objects without their matter, and the intellect abstracts its ideas from those forms. Thus ideas and sensations are not barriers between mind and world but faculties enabling knowledge of the world as it is.<sup>9</sup> In keeping with this model, the Thomist texts that fascinate Stephen locate the component qualities of beauty—*integritas*, *consonantia*, *claritas*—in the beautiful object rather than the beholder.<sup>10</sup> For the Romantics, coming after Descartes and Kant, matters are quite different; in a universe that depends on the knowing subject rather than vice versa, aesthetic experience comes to be located within the perceiver. "Who would want to call sublime," asks Kant, "such things as shapeless mountain masses piled on one another in wild disarray, with their pyramids of ice, or the gloomy raging sea?" Sublimity resides not in the natural world itself but in the mind of the observer, which "feels itself elevated in its own judging" by the realization that its faculty of reason surpasses the formless might of nature.<sup>11</sup> Wordsworth repeats this move in less violent geographical circumstances by evoking "spots of time" in lived experience, whose "vivifying Virtue"

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<sup>6</sup> The most extensive discussions of the differences between Stephen and his supposed sources appear in William T. Noon, *Joyce and Aquinas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) and Jacques Aubert, *The Aesthetics of James Joyce* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). For the distinction between *pulchra* and *ars*, see Noon 19.

<sup>7</sup> Aubert 101.

<sup>8</sup> F.C. McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1986) 205.

<sup>9</sup> See Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 35-36, 92-93, 104-105.

<sup>10</sup> See Noon 21-23. Comparing Aquinas to his teacher Albertus Magnus, Noon finds a new interest in the psychological aspects of beauty, but this is a relative distinction and still a far cry from Kant.

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 139.

...chiefly lurks  
 Among those passages of life in which  
 We have had deepest feeling that the mind  
 Is lord and master, and that outward sense  
 Is but the obedient servant of her will.<sup>12</sup>

A brief list of critics who have taken this as the start of an epiphanic tradition in English, continuing through Joyce and beyond, would include M.H. Abrams, Morris Beja, Robert Langbaum, Ashton Nichols and Martin Bidney.<sup>13</sup> Wordsworth's spot of time, it is generally agreed, differs from earlier types of mystical vision in being an epiphany rather than a theophany; it does not manifest God in the physical world but arises subjectively in the mind, and the knowledge it yields is not a divine communication but a type of self-awareness: the "mystery of man" (11.272), or, as more technically put in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, "the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement."<sup>14</sup> The psychological locus of the epiphany renders outer circumstances irrelevant except as causative agents; the trivial thing perceived is incommensurable with the deep emotion or insight it yields. *The Prelude*'s privileged example is not the moldering execution ground that Wordsworth's speaker encounters, but rather what comes afterward; once the speaker's mind is rendered receptive by the disturbing vision, he chances on the "ordinary sight" of a girl carrying a pitcher in strong wind. This sight triggers a mental moment of inexpressible quality: "I should need / Colours and words that are unknown to man / To paint" the scene thus transformed (11.308-311). Wordsworth's usual method is not even to attempt such a description; *Lyrical Ballads* in particular follows a subtractive aesthetic, presenting unadorned "incidents and situations from common life" in order to evoke, rather than describe, that "certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect." The poet may be privileged in his epiphanic tendency, but his work should permit readers to experience some echoing epiphany themselves, "transmitted and made visible / To other eyes" (12.371-372). Or as one of the speakers in *Lyrical Ballads* puts it; "it is no tale, but should you think, / Perhaps a tale you'll make it."<sup>15</sup> The newness of this approach may be marked by the number of readers who failed to make anything of it, understanding the triviality of the poems' subjects but not their imaginative coloring.

Visionary moments of this sort, explicable as psychological processes yet transformative in nature, are standard throughout the nineteenth century and seem to find their culmination in Proust, who discovers spots of time from earlier life to be not simply efficacious but actually imperishable and recoverable at will, a discovery momentous enough to redeem his narrator's

<sup>12</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979) 11.203-233. From here cited by line number.

<sup>13</sup> For early descriptions of this lineage, see Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* 418-427; Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel*; and Robert Langbaum, "The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature," *New Literary History* 14 (1983) 335-58. Ashton Nichols, *The Poetics of Epiphany: Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Modern Literary Moment* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), chapter 1, usefully stresses the distinction between epiphany and theophany. A good recent summary appears in Wim Tigges, "The Significance of Trivial Things: Toward A Typology of Literary Epiphanies" in *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany*, ed. Wim Tigges (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999) 11-36.

<sup>14</sup> *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London: Routledge, 1991) 244-245.

<sup>15</sup> "Simon Lee, the Huntsman," *Lyrical Ballads* 62.

life. But while this kind of idealism may make possible such extremes of liberation, it also introduces familiar modern fears; that of a solipsist self cordoned off behind its own impressions, or the complete dissolution of the self into those impressions. In the early eighteenth century Samuel Johnson could quell Boswell's doubts by kicking a stone, but Wordsworth's prose introduction to "Intimations of Immortality" gives testimony of a more persistent skepticism: "I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence.... Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality."<sup>16</sup> And while Wordsworth's project is to domesticate this fear and turn it back against the encroachments of outer sense, enabling "A balance, an ennobling interchange / Of action from within and from without" (12.375-376), his successors find the possibility of such balance foreclosed. Walter Pater's *Studies in the Renaissance*—an early and not wholly representative text, but by far his most influential—closes with a meditation on "the tendency of modern thought" to dissolve the outer world and inner self alike into "a group of impressions... unstable, flickering, inconsistent," and to find that "the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind... that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without."<sup>17</sup> With "each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world,"<sup>18</sup> sensations are all we have to go by.

In this universe the epiphanic moment can no longer play the role it played for Wordsworth. With mind and world alike dissolved into impressions, the struggle between the two ceases to obtain, and the project of confirming the mind's autonomy loses its purpose. The Paterian moment, famously, has no purpose at all: "Art comes to you," Pater writes, "professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake."<sup>19</sup> (In Oscar Wilde's pithier version: "All art is quite useless."<sup>20</sup>) This markedly breaks from the Romantics, who could certainly be vague about the connection between aesthetic experience and other spheres of life but never denied such connections entirely. Nor were they willing to separate art from knowledge. Certain kinds of systematic thought—what Keats called "irritable reaching after fact & reason"<sup>21</sup>—might be incompatible with aesthetic experience, but that is precisely because art provides a surer and deeper knowledge than logical inference; it is just this that the Grecian urn, equating truth and beauty, is tasked to tell us. But when Pater writes that "some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us, —for that moment only,"<sup>22</sup> he denies the

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<sup>16</sup> F.W. Bateson, *Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954), joins this to a Wordsworth anecdote: "Towards the end of his life, he told Bonamy Price, the Oxford economist, that there had been a time when he had to push against something that resisted to be sure that there was anything outside himself. When making these avowals to Price, he suited the action to the word by clenching the top of a five-barred gate that they happened to be passing, and pushing against it with all his strength" (60).

<sup>17</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 150-151. Carolyn Williams, *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 21, suggests that this absolute Humean skepticism may not be quite Pater's own; he would never again write anything so extreme, and in presenting this sentiment as the spirit of the age he seems to hold it at a slight distance. Still, his voice does seem audible in both the skeptical complaint and the aesthetic response. For a comparison between Hume and Pater on epistemological skepticism, see McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit*, chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> Pater 151.

<sup>19</sup> Pater 153.

<sup>20</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Modern Library, 1998) xii.

<sup>21</sup> Keats, *The Complete Poems* 539.

<sup>22</sup> Pater 152.

experience any cognitive content. No knowledge is gained; nothing persists once the moment is past.

Stephen's epiphanies are not like this. Nor are they much like Wordsworth's. Joyce's early admiration for Pater and Wordsworth is documented,<sup>23</sup> and his visions clearly borrow some of their rhetorical structure, but they end up doing a different kind of work. Like Pater, Stephen rejects didacticism in art; but he also wants to reassert the claim for aesthetic experience as a kind of knowledge. This is the motivation for his most idiosyncratic move, in which he reaches backward past the aesthetes and Romantics alike toward medieval theology. In life Joyce may not have given serious thought to Thomist aesthetics before leaving Ireland in 1904; in fiction he backdated these investigations somewhat, presenting them as part of Stephen's University College years.<sup>24</sup> *Stephen Hero* modifies an actual college paper of Joyce's to show Stephen turning to Aquinas as part of a polemic against the "antique principle that the end of art is to instruct, to elevate, and to amuse." Since Aquinas's writing on art contains not "even a trace of this Puritanic conception," Stephen claims that it forces a rethinking of beauty "in virtue of the most abstract relations"; indeed it demands "the taking-off of all interdictions from the artist" (*SH* 84). The college President reasonably enough takes this as some kind of amoral Paterian position, but when he tells this to Stephen, he receives a startling reply:

—I suppose you mean Art for Art's sake.

—I have only pushed to its logical conclusion the definition Aquinas has given of the beautiful.

—Aquinas?

—*Pulchra sunt quae visa placent*. He seems to regard the beautiful as that which satisfies the aesthetic appetite and nothing more—that the mere apprehension of which pleases...

—But he means the sublime—that which leads man upwards.

—His remark would apply to a Dutch painter's representation of a plate of onions.

—No, no; that which pleases the soul in a state of sanctification, the soul seeking its spiritual good.

—Aquinas' definition of the good is an unsafe base of operations: it is very wide. He seems to me almost ironical in his treatment of the 'appetites.' (*SH* 100)

As so often with Stephen, we receive few fictional cues on how seriously these pronouncements should be taken. Certainly it seems odd to be hunting for irony in the *Summa Theologica*, and some of the passage's irony must fall on Stephen himself, who after all is trying to refute Horace's antique *dulce et utile* by flashing a Latin maxim of his own. Yet Stephen's use of Aquinas is more complicated than it seems, since, bizarrely, he seems to find a source of strength in his theory's most apparent weakness—that St. Thomas in all his voluminous writings says almost nothing about matters artistic. *Pulchra sunt quae visa placent* [those things are beautiful which please when apprehended] is neither an especially controversial definition nor an especially informative one, and Stephen seems to be employing it not as positive doctrine but for all it doesn't say: nothing about art as the handmaiden of morality, nothing about propriety of subject matter, nothing of the separation between appearances and things. Joyce's real-life

<sup>23</sup> Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 95, 205.

<sup>24</sup> References to Aquinas in Joyce's notebooks begin in November 1904. Ellmann, 60 and 71, misleadingly cites *Stephen Hero* as evidence that Joyce seriously studied Aquinas while at University College.

college paper expresses a sweeping dissatisfaction with all the prevailing doctrines of his time; he rejects both the “stagnant quietism” of the moralists and the “anemic spirituality” of the aesthetes, instead making a case for the “more ascertainable and more real dominion” of truth.<sup>25</sup> Just what the eighteen-year-old Joyce might have meant by “truth” is hard to know. But its attainment for him clearly involved a clearing of theoretical ground, and the *Stephen Hero* version of his address uses Aquinas for just this purpose. Its very paucity of content sweeps aside old dogmas.

Such a deployment of medieval thought does require some sleight of hand, in particular one move so subtle that Joyce may well have committed it unawares. Both Stephen in conversation and Joyce in his 1904 aesthetic notes slightly misquote Part 1, Question 5, Article 4 of the *Summa Theologica*. Here St. Thomas seeks to fix a distinction between goodness and beauty; these qualities, he claims, are identical in essence but differ in logical form. While goodness relates to an end and therefore to a final cause, beauty relates only to a formal cause; it consists of formal qualities of proportion and similarity apprehensible by the senses, for those things *are called* beautiful which please when apprehended [*pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent*]. The *dicuntur*, like Aristotle’s *legetai*, is a philosophical move which does not put forth an original proposition but brings in evidence from ordinary language; it is an assertion, but not an outright definition. Replacing *dicuntur* with *sunt* turns a passing remark on linguistic usage into an ontological definition of beauty—and a rather vacuous one at that, since it was never intended as a standalone proposition. But it provides Joyce the room he needs to go farther.

Once Joyce’s notebooks move from opposing prevailing doctrine to putting forward original theories, he does indeed sound more like a man of his time. In particular the entries on *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas*, which were reworked for both *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, seem to give the Scholastic concepts a fairly modern interpretation. The terms are taken from Part 1, Question 39, Article 8 of the *Summa Theologica*, which is concerned with relationships between the persons of the Trinity. Working in a realm of extremely high abstraction, Aquinas considers three distinct attributes of the Son in relation to the Father, and draws an analogy to three component qualities of beauty:

For three things are needed for beauty. First integrity or perfection [*integritas sive perfectio*], since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; next due proportion or harmony [*proportio sive consonantia*]; and lastly brightness [*claritas*], so that things are called beautiful which have a bright color.

This text, like the former, is something of an excursus, meant to illustrate a theological concept unrelated to beauty as such; and once again, in discussing those things which are *called* beautiful [*pulchra esse dicuntur*], Aquinas seems to be citing general opinion rather than introducing a definition of his own. Still the passage does give a substantive, if brief, enumeration of the necessary conditions for beauty; and for someone seriously interested in formulating a Thomist aesthetic, it seems at least a plausible starting point.

What Stephen actually make of the passage is unrecognizable as Scholastic philosophy. For Aquinas *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas* are qualities that exist in objects; Stephen makes them into “phases of artistic apprehension” (*PA* 289) within the beholder’s mind. *Integritas* is not the quality of wholeness but the moment in which that wholeness is recognized: “You apprehend it as one thing. You see it as one whole. You apprehend its wholeness” (*PA*

<sup>25</sup> James Joyce, *Critical Writings*, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1964) 43.

290). Likewise *consonantia* becomes the recognition of proportion: “You apprehend it as complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts, the result of its parts and their sum, harmonious” (PA 290). *Claritas* undergoes the strongest shift of all; Stephen admits that “for a long time I couldn’t make out what Aquinas meant,” and, in the *Stephen Hero* version, is able to fit the term into his theory only by concluding that Aquinas is using “a figurative word—a very unusual thing for him” (SH 218); so unusual, in fact, that Joyce may be cueing his reader to treat what follows with some skepticism. *Claritas*, which the source text seems to use in the quite limited sense of coloration, becomes a figure for *quidditas*, or being; the moment of deep recognition in which “you make the only synthesis which is logically and esthetically permissible. You see that it is that thing which it is and no other thing” (PA 291). As these qualities are radically psychologized, they take on a temporal dimension; instead of simultaneous attributes, they become successive visionary moments that culminate, in the *Stephen Hero* version, with the epiphanic moment. Stephen has abandoned the Scholastic analysis of attributes and is solidly back inside nineteenth-century idealism, with its view of the senses as a barrier between mind and world. In *A Portrait* he describes art as working through “sound and shape and colour which are the prison gates of our soul” (PA 282), surely recalling Pater’s radical view of the mind as solitary prisoner. This fundamental discord with medieval thought, and its clear affinity with the Romantics and *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes, is responsible for the critical consensus that Aquinas and Aristotle furnish Stephen only a smattering of terminology, and that in substance he is a late Romantic through and through.

Yet this cannot be wholly true. There is no question that Stephen misapplies Aquinas, and that in many ways he belongs to Pater’s milieu. Yet we have seen above that Joyce broke early with Pater in considering art to provide a kind of knowledge, and in delimiting the nature of this knowledge he breaks with Wordsworth as well. Here is the complete exposition from *Stephen Hero*:

*Claritas* is *quidditas*. After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is *one* integral thing, then we recognise that it is an organised composite structure, a *thing* in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany. (SH 218)

Under the nineteenth-century aesthetics considered earlier, such a moment of recognition should not be possible. Pater’s visionary moments have nothing to do with recognizing things beneath appearances; how could they, when appearances locked within the individual mind are all we can know? In the original Wordsworthian moment, the mind is less drastically sealed off, but even so the moment is entirely a matter of the mind coming to realize its own capabilities. The external world is uncertain, changeable of aspect, at best a distant cause; it never irrupts into consciousness with the solidity that Stephen describes. There may be some equivocation in saying that the object’s soul “seems to us radiant,” but the very fact that Stephen can speak so naturally of an object’s soul, that it is the object and not the observer that achieves epiphany, should make clear the singularity of his position.

This becomes still clearer by contrast with other modernists who more closely follow the Wordsworth-Pater line. Wallace Stevens, for instance, devotes a large body of poetry to restaging the Wordsworthian question of whether the mind can move past its own constructions to encounter the unadorned world—"Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is"—or whether, on the contrary, the world simply provides the mind the opportunity to encounter itself "more truly and more strange."<sup>26</sup> The question is posed and reposed over Stevens's career without being capable of resolution. In his final collection of poems, he seems to treat knowledge as something that can be expressed only in analogies. "The Plain Sense of Things" stages an encounter with the unadorned world "as if / We had come to an end of the imagination," and the last poem, grandly titled "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself," ends with the equivocal "It was like / a new knowledge of reality."<sup>27</sup> But Stephen, for all his psychological talk elsewhere, manifests no such anxiety about things: at the moment of epiphany we recognize an object as *that* object, we encounter its soul.

If the epiphany is not a Wordsworthian moment, then what sort of moment is it? The language of vestments dropping away, of appearance giving way to soul, might suggest the older Platonist-Christian tradition of a spiritual world lying behind material appearances, which likewise comes to the twentieth century via Romanticism. Stephen's talk of vestments sounds something like Shelley's Neoplatonist figures for the world of appearance: the painted veil, the many-colored dome. And while his description of the senses as the soul's prison gates may borrow Paterian language, it is not really compatible with Pater's view of the mind, since Pater's prison has no gates at all. Much closer is Blake's view of the senses as "the chief inlets of Soul in this age," in which "man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern," a confinement which yet holds out hope of enlightenment from the commonest sources, for "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, closed by your senses five?"<sup>28</sup> Yet despite these similarities, a Blakean transcendence of the material world is not really what Stephen's epiphany proposes. In *Stephen Hero* the proposed object of aesthetic contemplation is a clock, in *A Portrait* it is a basket; in both cases the object revealed by epiphany appears to remain the clock or basket itself. There is no equivalent to the theophany of Kermode's Romantic Image, nothing like Augustine's irruption of eternity into time; nor is there any trace of the negative theophany, the abyss behind Shelley's painted veil, which finds modern echoes in Baudelaire and Conrad. Heaven and hell do not enter here; one sees only an object, revealed under the aspect of its soul.

What is the soul of an object? The phrase is a strange one. Aristotle assigned a kind of soul to animals and plants, but not to inanimate objects; after Descartes such an idea becomes still less thinkable. Aristotle did, however, attribute form as well as matter to objects, and he did take the human soul to be the form of the living human body. If Stephen has the Aristotelian categories in mind, as seems likely, then by "soul" he may mean something like Aristotle's intelligible form; and in that case he may be a better classical scholar than he has so far seemed. For Aristotle and Aquinas both it is the form of an object, without its matter, that the senses take in; and this connects mind and world much more closely than later philosophies which place intermediaries—ideas or sense impressions—between the two. St. Thomas may not have intended *claritas* as a metaphorical expression, but Stephen himself makes it into a highly

<sup>26</sup> The phrases appear in "The Snow Man" and "Tea At the Palaz of Hoon." Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997) 8, 51.

<sup>27</sup> Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose* 428, 452.

<sup>28</sup> William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (New York: Dover, 1994) 31, 36.

effective metaphor; in effect, it becomes a shorthand for premodern philosophy of mind in general. Stephen speaks as if the epiphanic moment makes possible, if only for an instant, a break through the prison gates of the Cartesian mind and a recovery of the old Aristotelian rootedness in the world, the formal identity of the knowing mind with the thing it knows. Thus his epiphany is neither a Wordsworthian turning of the mind upon itself nor a Blakean opening of infinite vistas, but rather a claim for authentic, unmediated perceptual contact with the world. That this claim—humble and commonsensical in its way, like much in Aristotle—can appear positively mystical might show just how estranged mind and world had become in Joyce's day; and the corresponding literary record of doubt and isolation, from Wordsworth to Pater to Stevens, might show the pain that such estrangement can inflict.

Stephen's use of Aquinas could thus be characterized as a version of modernist nostalgia, the general turn toward older models as an alternative to the modern era, as Dante and the Elizabethans provided T.S. Eliot a model for poetry prior to the modern dissociation of sensibility; as Ezra Pound turned in succession to the classical world, Old English, the T'ang Dynasty; or as Henry Adams took Aquinas himself as a model of medieval unity in contrast to modern fragmentation. Modernist nostalgia, however, takes the form of a lament for ways of living and thinking that are no longer possible, and it tends to accompany expressions of despair for the degraded present age, sometimes accompanied by a reactionary call to remake the present on the model of the past. Neither Stephen nor the young Joyce display any such impulse. In his college address on aesthetics, Joyce already had the confidence to say that "it may be a vulgarism, but it is literal truth to say that Greek drama is played out. For good or for bad it has done its work, which, if wrought in gold, was not upon lasting pillars."<sup>29</sup> With similar confidence he began very early to assert that those aspects of premodern thought which he found valuable remained alive and accessible in the modern era. In a 1903 review he wrote of the heretical, anti-Cartesian mystic Giordano Bruno that "more than Bacon or Descartes must he be considered the father of what is called modern philosophy."<sup>30</sup> This statement is shocking, all the more because Joyce goes on to emphasize Bruno's least modern quality—his monism, his refusal to make that distinction between spirit and matter which, as we have seen, becomes a central question from Romanticism forward:

In his attempts to reconcile the matter and form of the Scholastics—formidable names, which in his system as spirit and body retain little of their metaphysical character—Bruno has hardly put forward an hypothesis, which is a curious anticipation of Spinoza. It is not strange, then, that Coleridge should have set him down a dualist, a later Heraclitus...? ...That idea of an ultimate principle, spiritual, indifferent, universal, related to any soul or to any material thing, as the *Materia Prima* of Aquinas is related to any material thing, unwarranted as it may seem in the view of critical philosophy, has yet a distinct value for the historian of religious ecstasies. It is not Spinoza, it is Bruno, that is the god-intoxicated man. Inwards from the material universe, which, however, did not seem to him, as to the Neoplatonists the kingdom of the soul's malady, or as to the Christians a place of probation, but rather his opportunity for spiritual activity, he passes, and from heroic enthusiasm to enthusiasm to unite himself with God.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Joyce, *Critical Writings* 39.

<sup>30</sup> Joyce, *Critical Writings* 133.

<sup>31</sup> Joyce, *Critical Writings* 134.

Leaving aside whether this is a good portrait of Bruno, or whether it furnishes much ground for “what is called modern philosophy,” this passage does present a good summary of those traits that distinguish Stephen’s epiphany from other Romantic visions. Joyce’s Bruno takes the material world as neither hostile nor incomprehensible, but rather as the natural medium in which the mind works; since objects and souls are logically related via an ultimate principle, the material universe affords a conduit for spiritual revelation. Stephen’s description of epiphany suggests the conditions for one such revelation. Joyce’s fiction has similar aims, but it works by other means.

### ***Dubliners* and the World of Words**

When the surviving portion of *Stephen Hero* first became available in the 1940s, its discussion of epiphanies was widely taken as a programmatic statement of Joyce’s artistic intent. Later criticism, however, has tended to suggest that Joyce’s fiction employs Stephen’s theories in modified form if at all, and that these statements made by a fictional character in an unfinished work may not be easily applicable to the medium of prose fiction. The revision in *A Portrait of Stephen*’s aesthetic lecture further clouds matters; all occurrences of the word “epiphany” are removed, and the claim for unmediated perception is softened, so that it is no longer the object’s soul which is apprehended, but a more ambiguous “esthetic image.” Stephen in the later manuscript is harder to trust, more clearly presented as immature, and there is danger in taking a fictional character’s pronouncements as a program for fiction which that character, as he stands, is not capable of writing. The examples of the clock and basket suggest that epiphany is a perceptual experience available to anyone, artist or not, faced with any object, artistic or not; and the actual relation of epiphany to the creation or reception of any artwork—let alone fiction, which Stephen himself never attempts—is left unspecified.

The stories of *Dubliners* are most often taken as the logical link between Stephen’s theory and Joyce’s practice. Their descriptions of urban hardship would seem to provide any number of common objects for artistic transformation, and the shorter pieces in particular, with their economy of style and abrupt conclusions, do seem designed to produce moments of reflective insight. There is also Joyce’s letter to Constance Curran, referring to the stories by a word usually transcribed “epicleti” and taken as an erroneous plural of “epiclesis,” the priestly invocation which in certain liturgies effects the moment of transubstantiation (although the modern Catholic rite substitutes the words of Jesus at the Last Supper). The similarity of sound and subject between “epicleti” and “epiphany” have made it natural for critics to associate the terms in talking of *Dubliners*, sometimes far more systematically than Joyce himself is likely to have done, as in Florence Walzl’s 1965 account:

Though *epicleti* and *epiphanies* are related words, they are not synonyms. The epicleti are the creative processes; the epiphanies, the resulting manifestations. Such a distinction had its probable origin in the Mass: just as the priest first effects the transubstantiation, uniting himself in communion with Divinity, and only later in distributing communion affords the laity a similar experience, so in Joyce’s view the writer transforms real experience into art, having in the process

godlike insights into the nature of things, as a result of which his work of art later offers a like experience to the reader.<sup>32</sup>

This attractive formulation accords well with Joyce's letter to Stanislaus on transubstantiation and with Stephen's various pronouncements on the priestly role of the artist. However, proponents of the epiphany in *Dubliners* have historically found it difficult to specify what godlike insights are actually conveyed in the stories. The stories are so ambiguous and spare, so scrupulously free of authorial comment, that it is often not clear how much any one character is expected to understand by the story's end, nor how much the reader may legitimately infer beyond the character's comprehension. Zack Bowen's attempt to rework the epiphany concept made this point forcefully in the case of "The Sisters," with its cryptic account of a priest who may or may not be mad, and a series of witnesses (including the reader) who may or may not be able to draw wider conclusions from the priest's condition. Bowen sees the epiphany, for characters and readers alike, not as an Aristotelian recognition of objective fact but as a purely subjective experience implying a wholly relativist theory of knowledge:

The question is really whether the priest, the boy, or both have an epiphany. Does Flynn at long last realize in the confessional that the clerical things to which he has devoted his life are ludicrous? Are his instructions to the boy ironical, and does the priest alone know the inherent folly of the ritual and what it represents? If not, is the epiphany the boy's recognition of what he has already subconsciously perceived in his dream, that his mentor was trying to confess his role in the religious-social oppression of Irish life? ... At any rate, for the purpose of the present discussion, we have at once to ask ourselves where the eternal verities might lie in the case. The answer is that they depend upon the beholder: the sisters' perception is different from Father Flynn's, the boy's, or the readers', who may in themselves differ. Each of us fashions his own truth and sees it as the unalterable law of God.<sup>33</sup>

Bowen's reading appeared just as Joyce studies entered the poststructuralist era, which, as one might expect, did not place much confidence in epiphanies. Their emphasis on the oscillating perspectives of *Ulysses*, *A Portrait*, and even *Dubliners*, which seemed to permit any viewpoint to be ironized and undercut from a different vantage, fits badly with Stephen's grandiose claim of disclosing a reality behind appearances; and the readiest way to neutralize that claim is to treat it, as Bowen does, as illusion. The point-of-view metaphor for language, which analogizes a linguistic description of a thing to that thing's appearance from a certain angle, would suggest that to get at a thing independently of its appearance would be, in effect, to grasp with language some irreducibly non-linguistic aspect of reality; and for the poststructuralists Joyce is thoroughly committed to the belief that *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, that no such non-linguistic aspect exists.

But once again the wholesale repudiation of Stephen's claim, no less than its wholesale acceptance, may be too easy a move. Leo Bersani's "Against *Ulysses*" is couched as a polemic against Joyce but is many other things as well; in particular it argues against certain

<sup>32</sup> Florence L. Walzl, "The Liturgy of the Epiphany Season and the Epiphanies of Joyce," *PMLA* 53 (1965) 437.

<sup>33</sup> Zack Bowen, "Joyce and the Epiphany Concept: A New Approach," *Journal of Modern Literature* 1 (1981) 106-107.

poststructuralist readings of Joyce. For Bersani, Joyce does not share the “authentic avant-gardism” of a writer like Beckett, who ceaselessly posits “the implausibility *and* the necessity of forging a correspondence between language and being.”<sup>34</sup> Bersani’s Joyce may enjoy the game of shifting signifiers, but he comfortably combines this game with an untroubled confidence in the ability of literary language to grasp essential being. In the course of this description, Bersani turns back to Stephen’s aesthetic exposition and revives the possibility that Stephen’s beliefs might be relevant to Joyce’s own:

In trying to understand what Aquinas means by “radiance” (or *claritas*) in his enumeration of the “three things needed for beauty” (*integritas, consonantia, claritas*), Stephen comes to the following solution: “The radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing.” It is as if literature could quote being independently of any particular being’s point of view. We would, that is, have the point of view of neither a narrator nor a character; instead we would have the quidditas of Buck Mulligan, and even of Dublin. The individual’s or the city’s point of view has been purified to its essence, to a whatness ontologically distinct from the phenomenality of having a point of view.<sup>35</sup>

This brief, provocative formulation is of great importance for thinking about Joyce. As a description of the temperamental confidence shared by Joyce and Stephen, as distinct from someone like Beckett, it seems correct; indeed it fits well with Beckett’s own statement that “Joyce believed in words. All you had to do was rearrange them and they would express what you wanted.”<sup>36</sup> But Bersani’s suggestion that Joyce seeks to incorporate in language the very essence of things, independent of any viewpoint, runs counter to many standard readings. *Ulysses* in particular has generally been taken as a virtuoso study in shifting perspectives, which ultimately tends to undermine the idea that people or things possess any unchanging essence beneath their appearance. Postponing for the moment the consequences of this reading for *Ulysses*, what might it tell us about *Dubliners*?

*Claritas* for Bersani is “an effect of quotation, although... the quote is at the level of essence and not of existence.”<sup>37</sup> One example of Joyce quoting, or attempting to quote, the essence of things, is the paragraph from “A Little Cloud” where Ignatius Gallaher, returned from travels abroad, shocks his Dublin-bound companion with scandals from the farther world:

Ignatius Gallaher puffed thoughtfully at his cigar and then, in a calm historian’s tone, he proceeded to sketch for his friend some pictures of the corruption which was rife abroad. He summarised the vices of many capitals and seemed inclined to award the palm to Berlin. Some things he could not vouch for (his friends had told him), but of others he had had personal experience. He spared neither rank nor caste. He revealed many of the secrets of religious houses on the Continent and described some of the practices which were fashionable in high society and ended

<sup>34</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 169, 171.

<sup>35</sup> Bersani, *Culture of Redemption* 162.

<sup>36</sup> James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996) 439.

<sup>37</sup> Bersani, *Culture of Redemption* 163.

by telling, with details, a story about an English duchess—a story which he knew to be true. Little Chandler was astonished.<sup>38</sup>

Bersani's analysis of this passage usefully upends several commonplaces about *Dubliners*. By choosing a representative piece of description from the middle of the story, he avoids the common focus on the stories' endings, and suggests that *claritas* is not a concluding moment of insight but rather an aesthetic effect at work throughout Joyce's language from beginning to end. Further, he insists that the passage is *not* an example of free indirect discourse, the style usually associated with *Dubliners*. As free indirect discourse, the passage's language would create a perspective effect taking one of the story's characters as its center; in effect it would be explicable either as an oblique quotation of Gallaher's speech (with the appropriate shift of grammatical markers) or as an oblique quotation of Chandler's thoughts on Gallaher (with a different grammatical shift). But Bersani notes that, while some phrases might be quotes or near-quotes of Gallaher's speech, the passage as a whole does not reproduce his language so much as describe it from an external standpoint. The phrase "award the palm" does not seem to originate with Gallaher; rather it is introduced to peg Gallaher's talk as "the kind of talk that would distribute first, second and third prizes in corruption." Similarly the dry note that Gallaher "spared neither rank nor caste" in his stories, as well as the omission of all detail from those stories, exposes them as a "naive and self-serving repetition" of material garnered elsewhere. We sense that "someone is paying even more attention to Gallaher than Little Chandler is," but that someone is not speaking from a well-defined narratorial standpoint; the descriptive touches are so scrupulously limited that their effect is to produce "a point of view that seeks ultimately not to be a point of view, to be instead the exact verbal translation of the essential Gallaher."<sup>39</sup>

Bersani is suspicious of this technique in *Dubliners*, and indeed the technique as he describes it would seem to posit an unattainable goal. The idea that a person could be quoted in language or translated into language seems to involve a category mistake, confusing a description with the thing it describes, and the general unclarity of the proposition might make us ask why Bersani insists that *Dubliners* attempts to quote or translate its subject matter, rather than simply describing it. The reasoning behind this account becomes clearer, I think, once Bersani moves to the more complex linguistic effects of *Ulysses*. He reads the sexual farce of the "Circe" chapter, for example, as another attempt to grasp in language something which is fundamentally non-linguistic in nature: in this case, the basic drives of the unconscious. His passing animadversion against the Lacanian theory of "the unconscious as a structure 'in some way' analogous to... language" suggests a version of Freudianism where the unconscious remains wholly outside language, and where the structure of language itself may be nothing more than a "primary displacement" from the "untranslatable terms" of unconscious drives.<sup>40</sup> Since the unconscious is fundamentally alien to language, attempts to represent it in language are bound to fail, and Bersani takes the satirical and farcical nature of the chapter as Joyce's deliberate attempt to foreground this failure. The chapter parodically presents various kinds of language—medical, psychoanalytic, pornographic—which claim to give accurate descriptions of desire; "but, Joyce suggests, the reality those claims disguise is nothing more than the arbitrary

<sup>38</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners*, ed. Margot Norris (New York: Norton, 2006) 63-64. From here cited as *D*.

<sup>39</sup> Bersani, *Culture of Redemption* 228.

<sup>40</sup> Bersani, *Culture of Redemption* 166.

play and productiveness of the signifier. The virtuosity of desire as linguistic effects is, I think, meant to lead us to conclude that *language cannot represent desire*.”<sup>41</sup>

This is a surprising thing to say about Joyce, and it makes sense only under a view of language as essentially representational: on one side a non-linguistic reality—the outer world of mute material objects, or the inner world of mute unconscious drives—and on the other words, which may succeed or fail at representing that reality. The problem is that such a contest is rigged against language from the start: since words are not things, the argument goes, in some sense they must always fail to truly represent them. This skeptical attitude runs deep in modernism—in previous chapters we have seen Faulkner’s Addie and Woolf’s Bernard take it up—and it remains a driving force for those avant-garde writers whom Bersani admires. Beckett, for example, works from such an attitude in describing his career as an imperative to continue an unfulfillable task: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”<sup>42</sup> If one subscribes to this kind of skepticism, Joyce’s confidence in words may indeed seem like an attempt to extend language beyond its permissible domain; and this, I think, is why Bersani insists that *Dubliners* attempts to quote in language a non-linguistic outer world, just as “Circe” attempts to quote a non-linguistic inner world. In either case the upshot is that such a thing can’t be done.

Yet there are reasons to question whether the representational model of language, as wrestled with by Faulkner, Woolf and Beckett, provides a good analysis of what Joyce is doing. Language and desire are closely connected in Joyce, but their relation is not one of representation or description; rather language seems to be an active *component* of desire. Words for Joyce behave with the force of physical objects, and nowhere is this more apparent than in their effect on the erotic imaginations of his characters. One of the earliest indications in *A Portrait* of Stephen’s sexual development appears in the second chapter, when he discovers the word *fetus* carved repeatedly into the surface of a desk.

It shocked him to find in the outer world a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady of his own mind. His monstrous reveries came thronging into his memory. They too had sprung up before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words. (*PA* 120)

Nor is sexual sensitivity to language a particular trait of the artist. Several times in *Ulysses* Joyce bestows such linguistically inspired reveries on Bloom, presented rather more explicitly than in *A Portrait*’s summary treatment. One notable example, well before the farce of “Circe,” appears in the “Wandering Rocks” chapter as Bloom browses pornographic literature to bring home to his wife:

He read the other title: *Sweets of Sin*. More in her line. Let us see.  
He read where his finger opened.  
—All the dollarbills her husband gave her were spent in the stores on wondrous gowns and costliest frillies. For him! For Raoul!  
Yes. This. Here. Try.  
—Her mouth glued on his in a luscious voluptuous kiss while his hands felt for the opulent curves inside her deshabelle.

<sup>41</sup> Bersani, *Culture of Redemption* 166.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On: Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho* (New York: Grove Press, 1996) 89.

Yes. Take this. The end.

—*You are late, he spoke hoarsely, eyeing her with a suspicious glare.*

*The beautiful woman threw off her sabletrimmed wrap, displaying her queenly shoulders and heaving embonpoint. An imperceptible smile played round her perfect lips as she turned to him calmly.*

Mr Bloom read again: *The beautiful woman....*

Warmth showered gently over him, cowing his flesh. Flesh yielded amply amid rumpled clothes: whites of eyes swooning up. His nostrils arched themselves for prey. Melting breast ointments (*for him! for Raoul!*). Armpits' oniony sweat. Fishgluey slime (*her heaving embonpoint!*). Feel! Press! Chrished! Sulphur dung of lions!

Young! Young!<sup>43</sup>

The quoted prose from *Sweets of Sin* is bad on several counts; relevant here is the way that its badness verges on meaninglessness. The passage's adjectives carry rhetorical power in direct proportion to their lack of descriptive information (how might we determine whether a gown is wondrous, whether shoulders are queenly?); the syntax tends toward empty echoes (why eye someone with a glare, what does "luscious" add to "voluptuous"?); and nouns like "deshabille" and "embonpoint" convey little beyond an effect of Frenchness. Further, we have at least one count of outright nonsense; for while an "imperceptible smile" may recall familiar descriptions of a barely perceptible or almost imperceptible smile, it seems doubtful that an imperceptible smile, strictly speaking, could be a smile at all, much less play round someone's lips as if it were an effect of light.

Yet the insufficiency of this language as denotation is obviously no barrier to its effect on Bloom. Indeed it seems to be the least precise phrases that most readily capture his imagination; the vague "the beautiful woman" causes him to do a double-take, as if he were actually looking at a beautiful woman, and the nebulous "heaving embonpoint" works its way into his sudden fantasy. His reaction nicely confirms William James's research into bad prose, which provided James a demonstration of how often nonsense can do the work of sense:

Conversely, if words do belong to the same vocabulary, and if the grammatical structure is correct, sentences with absolutely no meaning may be uttered in good faith and pass unchallenged... "The birds filled the tree-tops with their morning song, making the air moist, cool and pleasant," is a sentence I remember reading once in a report of some athletic exercises... Take the obscurer passages in Hegel: it is a fair question whether the rationality included in them be anything more than the fact that the words all belong to a common vocabulary... Yet there seems no reason to doubt that the subjective feeling of the rationality of these sentences was strong in the writer as he penned them, or even that some reader by straining may have reproduced it in themselves.<sup>44</sup>

For James the consequence is to show that much of the effect of language has to do with habitual association rather than logical analysis. Donald Davidson's more recent study of malapropisms

<sup>43</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986), chapter 10, lines 606 to 624. From here cited by Gabler's chapter and line numbers.

<sup>44</sup> James, *The Principles of Psychology* 1:254.

takes a similar tack, extending the Wittgensteinian metaphor of words as tools to suggest that using the wrong word in a conversation is like using the wrong fork at a dinner party: awkward, perhaps, but not actually detrimental to communication<sup>45</sup>. For both philosophers the effect is to move away from a representational view of language and toward something like an instrumental view, under which words do not stand apart from the world in a mirroring relation but instead are part of how we navigate the world. The words that Bloom reads may fail to some extent as representation, but they bring about a great deal. Likewise the exclamations of his reverie (“Feel! Press! Chrished! Sulphur dung of lions!”) do not *represent* his desire; they *are* his desire, or at any rate they are integral components of his desire, without which that desire could not manifest. This is true regardless of the narratological question of whether Bloom actually thinks these words, or whether they are standing in for nonverbal mental states (“sulphur dung of lions,” at least, seems like the latter). The point is that language prompts his fantasy and continues to sustain it, as emphasized by the repeated phrases in parentheses; and that this picture of desire is not, therefore, the psychoanalytic picture which treats language as a displacement of untranslatable drives. For Joyce words are the channel through which desire flows; desire exists in language as much as it exists in the body, and for us linguistic creatures the two things are not really thinkable separately.

Bersani treats the representation in *Dubliners* of Ignatius Gallaher as a suspicious puzzle. But if words neither mirror nor veil the world, but are simply a part of it, then Gallaher too is to some extent a verbal being, and it is to this extent that the story’s language may grasp him. Its mixture of description, paraphrase and parody is both pure language and an account of a human being; this doubleness seems peculiar only if one grants Bersani’s implicit premise, that people and things possess essences wholly alien to language. Against Bersani’s account Kevin Attell has offered the response that Joyce’s working methods changed over his career; he concedes that *Dubliners* may traffic in essentialism but finds *Ulysses* abandoning any such idea.<sup>46</sup> I think this distinction is misleading, in part because the stories of *Dubliners* readily yield examples of words behaving as in Bloom’s reverie, not as representations of the world but as active components within it. Fritz Senn’s extremely close reading of “The Sisters,” designed to show that Joyce’s early style differs “in degree only” from the later style of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, offers several such instances.<sup>47</sup> The beginning of the story finds the boy narrator fascinated by language as he contemplates the paralyzed old priest:

Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word *paralysis*.  
It had always sounded strangely in my ears.... It filled me with fear, and yet I  
longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work. (D 3)

As Senn points out, the boy makes a mistake in attributing “deadly work” to the word rather than the thing it denotes; but this mistake, like the famous “word”/“world” typo in *Ulysses* (63.246), serves to present language itself as an active force. Likewise the child’s reaction to Old Cotter: “When we knew him first he used to be rather interesting, talking of faints and worms: but I soon

<sup>45</sup> See Donald Davidson, “The Social Aspect of Language,” *Truth, Language, and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 117, which follows up Davidson’s original study of malapropisms in “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” *Truth, Language and History* 89-107. Davidson finds these considerations to “have erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world generally” (107).

<sup>46</sup> Kevin Attell, “Of Questionable Character: The Construction of the Subject in *Ulysses*,” *Joyce Studies Annual* 13 (2002) 103-128.

<sup>47</sup> Fritz Senn, “‘He Was Too Scrupulous Always’: Joyce’s ‘The Sisters,’” *James Joyce Quarterly* 2 (1965) 66-72.

grew tired of him and his endless stories about the distillery” (*D* 3). In the technical speech of the distilling trade, “faints” are impure spirits and a “worm” is the spiral tube at the head of a still, but it is not clear whether the child understands these denotations. As with the ominous “paralysis,” it is the sound of the words, connoting weakness and decay, that captures his mind. We have seen how Faulkner’s and Woolf’s children begin their lives outside language and gradually take on words as a clothing for their sensations and impressions; Joyce’s child, however, lives inside language from the beginning. The mark of his childhood is not a wordless pure perception but a half-estranged position from the words that surround him; we see him adding new words to his toolkit and only gradually coming to understand the purposes they serve.

The early pages of *A Portrait* extend this technique. The opening:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo....

His father told him that story: His father looked at him through a glass. He had a hairy face.

He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: She sold lemon platt. (*PA* 3)

initiates Stephen’s consciousness with words that turn out not to be his; they quote the father, who must himself be quoting some remembered story. The children of *The Waves* develop consciousness from within, as independent blank slates; but consciousness in *A Portrait* comes from without, concurrent with words. This is not to say either that Joyce is uninterested in the senses (“When you wet the bed, first it is warm then it gets cold” [*PA* 3]) or that Woolf ignores the process of story-making (“I will drop a twig in as a raft for a drowning sailor” [*W* 18]), but they differ starkly on which has priority. Further, if we recall that the narrative form of language was a particular object of suspicion for Woolf and others, it must be significant that Stephen’s thought begins not only within language, but within a story. He names himself “baby tuckoo” only after his father’s narrative has given sense to the term. Judith Ryan writes that his childhood differs from the purely sensory milieu of a writer like Pater in that

the life of the senses is involved from the outset with questions of ethics, as in the family debates about Parnell or his mother’s insistence that Stephen apologize for a childish misdemeanor. How things look, feel or sound is always interwoven with whether they are right or wrong, virtuous or sinful.<sup>48</sup>

In the previous chapter we noted, as a parallel to Woolf, Hayden White’s two claims about narrative: first, that we moralize within narratives, that moral judgments are built against a narrative context; and second, that narrative is a distorting category placed over the foundation of perceptual experience. Joyce’s fiction accords with the first claim but not the second. In this fiction a narrative background is a necessary component of morals, whether a sequential story such as Simon Dedalus’s or the larger cultural stories that make up the corpus of history and religion. This is one reason that Joyce moves naturally to mythic subjects in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, and a discussion of *Ulysses* will provide a better place to broach this topic,

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<sup>48</sup> Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject* 141.

particularly since *Ulysses* combines its study of narrative codes with a sustained exploration of the same perspective theory of language that led Woolf to reject narrative as untrustworthy. Joyce comes to different conclusions, and *Ulysses* provides an ample formal canvas for their portrayal.

### ***Ulysses: Whose World, Whose Words***

Let us start cautiously: *Ulysses* is a book about minds, and it is a book about the world. What do such terms mean here? Joyce's early work admits no sharp division between the material and mental; language and narrative do not screen off reality but are integral components of reality, without which neither the human mind nor the world it inhabits could be intelligibly constituted. But with *Ulysses* this thesis may be taken to enter doubtful terrain. After all, the peculiarities of the stream of consciousness would seem, as in other modernist works, to separate out consciousness from the public world; and the obfuscatory styles of the later chapters would seem to confirm the idea of language as an impediment, and not a means, to the apprehension of things. Marilyn French, among many others, describes the styles of *Ulysses* under the perspective metaphor for language: "The world lies at the center; what changes is the distance from which we readers view it and the angle from which we view it."<sup>49</sup> And as most evident in Woolf, the perspective metaphor easily shades into the idea of reality as inaccessible. Arnold Goldman, for one, borrows Kantian language to speak of *Ulysses* as positing "a *noumenal* level which does not deny the multiplicity of phenomenal interpretive ones, but which is behind and beyond them."<sup>50</sup> While a multiplicity of interpretations is certainly one of the features of *Ulysses*, I think that talk of phenomena and noumena is at philosophical odds with the novel's form, and that this form, strange as it is, stills lend itself to reconciliation with Aristotle's rootedness in the world.

Admittedly, even the phrase "the form of *Ulysses*" may be tendentious, since it is hard not to think of the book as being two books jaggedly spliced together: first the naturalistic novel of Stephen and Bloom's mental life in the metropolis, and then its unexpected successor, the gallery of parodic styles that baffles the reader and mocks all it touches. Joyce in his letters was the first to use the phrase "the initial style" to contrast the book's first half with what comes after,<sup>51</sup> and most subsequent accounts have had to deal, in one way or another, with the idea of a book split down the middle. Richard Ellmann's book-length study includes a chapter titled "The Void Opens," arguing that the second half of *Ulysses* abandons the certainty of Aristotle's material world in favor of an "uncertainty principle," a cosmos of aporia and doubt whose presiding philosopher is the skeptic Hume.<sup>52</sup> Hugh Kenner writes that "*Ulysses* the naturalistic novel ends with 'Wandering Rocks,'" to be followed by the decidedly un-naturalistic mangling of language which is "the most radical, the most disconcerting innovation in all of *Ulysses*."<sup>53</sup> More recently, Franco Moretti has divided *Ulysses* not into two physical halves but two commanding techniques—the stream of consciousness and the technique of stylistic pluralism or polyphony—so that its agon becomes "a kind of technical drama in which the novel's initial

<sup>49</sup> Marilyn French, *The Book as World: James Joyce's Ulysses* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976) 4.

<sup>50</sup> Arnold Goldman, *The Joyce Paradox: Form and Freedom in His Fiction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966) 95.

<sup>51</sup> James Joyce, *The Letters of James Joyce*, 3 vols., ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1966) 1:129.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 92.

<sup>53</sup> Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses*, rev.ed. (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 83, 64.

style (the stream of consciousness) is gradually flanked, challenged and eventually defeated by the newcomer, which ends up imposing itself as master of the Joycean universe.”<sup>54</sup>

The curious thing about these distinctions is that once made, they tend to be quickly undone, or at least blurred, by their makers. Having split *Ulysses* in half, Kenner immediately adds the qualification that “there is no sharp break,” and explains that the stylistic principles of the later book were “there all the time... potential from the start, latent.”<sup>55</sup> Moretti too, having distinguished the stream of consciousness from polyphony, presents an origin story in which the latter evolves from the former. We have seen how *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* invest words with the solidity of objects. Similarly, the city through which Bloom travels is a landscape of words as much as things, and Bloom’s own consciousness is rife with bits of “undigested language”<sup>56</sup> taken from other *Dubliners*, from newspapers, advertisements, half-remembered literary and musical scraps. Thus the linguistic variety of the later *Ulysses* is, in Moretti’s view, simply a matter of releasing this collage technique from the confines of Bloom’s mind. This is a useful insight, particularly since it implies that the later *Ulysses* might be comprehensible under the same theories of language that underlie the book’s first half. From beginning to end the book is so attuned to words, so omnivorous of every sort of phrase, that it seems to posit a world which is nothing more than the sum of its descriptions; and the difference between these descriptions, growing ever wider as the book progresses, is what seems to present reality as a matter of perspective. But while Woolf portrays linguistic perspective as a kind of prison, blinkering one’s view of the world and rendering communication all but impossible, in *Ulysses* it is far more permeable. As the infant Stephen in *A Portrait* acquires language from others and gradually makes it part of himself, and as Bloom’s walk through Dublin continually incorporates heterogeneous diction into his own thoughts, so *Ulysses* never refuses the possibility of navigating between linguistic perspectives. One entity who might be supposed to perform this navigation is of course the novel’s reader, and a considerable amount of criticism has been written on the necessarily engaged, even heroic reader called into being by the novel’s discontinuous form.<sup>57</sup> But while *Ulysses* may be a peculiar reading experience, these accounts require quite a few assumptions about how a normative reading of the text will proceed, and I think they tend to downplay (as with the original Barthesian distinction between “readerly” and “writerly” texts) the range of faculties called upon in literary reading generally. Fortunately the reader is not the only unifying principle available, since the text itself provides ample evidence of a mind capable of inhabiting and comprehending all the perspectives on offer. That mind is, I think, best described simply as the author of *Ulysses*; but since this description will be asked to do a good deal of work, some justification is required.

The question of who narrates *Ulysses* is an old one, and presumably not subject to a definitive answer. The various models proposed over the decades seem to confirm the extent to which narratology is a pragmatist science, its conclusions dependent on what works in a given

<sup>54</sup> Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London: Verso, 1996) 183.

<sup>55</sup> Kenner, *Ulysses* 71.

<sup>56</sup> Moretti 188.

<sup>57</sup> See French 3-4 for an influential assertion that the *Ulysses* of the novel’s title is in fact the reader. Michael Patrick Gillespie, *Reading the Book of Himself: Narrative Strategies in the Works of James Joyce* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1989), uses reader-response methods to argue that Joyce’s methods throughout his career require the participation of an unusually active reader.

interpretive situation.<sup>58</sup> Accounts focused on the stream of consciousness, such as Dorrit Cohn's, tend to describe interior monologues as alternating with an impersonal, colorless narrator who blandly relates actions in the third person and past tense.<sup>59</sup> A more linguistically attuned account, such as Melvin J. Friedman's analysis of "Lestrygonians," will note that the third-person narration is often anything but colorless, and will allow the narrator more flexibility, since "his narrative movement can get caught up in the syntax of Bloom's reverie"<sup>60</sup> to produce odd locutions such as "With hungered flesh obscurely, he mutely craved to adore" (8.638). For chapters in which polyphony is the dominant technique, no sort of impersonal narrator seems to offer an adequate solution; French's style-focused account, for instance, assigns a distinct narrator to each chapter, and sometimes multiple narrators, as in "Cyclops."<sup>61</sup> The alternative to this profusion of entities is to conceive a single protean entity such as the "arranger" first imagined by David Hayman—"a single impulse if not a single persona, a resourceful clown of many masks"<sup>62</sup>—who can be held responsible for the headlines of "Aeolus," the asides of "Cyclops," the pastiche of "Oxen of the Sun," and perhaps the chapter shifts themselves. Kenner's expanded account of the arranger places him or it in tension with "a colorless primary narrator who sees to the thousand little bits of novelistic housekeeping no one is meant to notice: the comes and goes, says and asks, stands and sits, without which nothing much could get done at all." As the novel progresses, the arranger takes over the text, "snatching the pen from his anonymous colleague"<sup>63</sup> to perpetrate those narrative extravagances which are anything but colorless.

These multiple-narrator accounts are vivid narratives in themselves, but they seem to involve a good deal of anthropomorphism for a written text,<sup>64</sup> and they also raise the knotty problem of distinguishing between the narrators. If the arranger is responsible for everything but the most colorless narration, what narration is to be considered wholly colorless? Kenner relies on the arranger even for those sentences in early chapters that strike his ear as odd, such as "The felly harshed against the curbstone: stopped" (6.490) and "The priest began to read out of his book with a fluent croak" (6.594). The novel's first Bloom sentence: "Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls," (4.1) is reprised in "Sirens": "As said before he ate with relish the inner organs" (11.519). Such self-referentiality is the sort of trick that seems to call for the arranger, but then the arranger must have knowledge of the colorless narrator's words; and in any case this first sentence has a distinct color of its own. It presents Bloom as an inhabitant of the physical world: solid, fleshy, starkly contrasted to the mental world of the Stephen chapters. Indeed, the more closely one examines the early sentences, the less neutral

<sup>58</sup> Margot Norris, "Narratology and *Ulysses*," *'Ulysses' in Critical Perspective*, ed. Michael Patrick Gillespie and A. Nicholas Fagnoli (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), gives a good recent summary.

<sup>59</sup> Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) 62-63.

<sup>60</sup> Melvin J. Friedman, "Lestrygonians," *James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays*, ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 132.

<sup>61</sup> French 141.

<sup>62</sup> David Hayman, "Cyclops," *James Joyce's Ulysses*, ed. Hart and Hayman, 265. The arranger was first proposed by Hayman in *Ulysses: the Mechanics of Meaning* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

<sup>63</sup> Kenner, *Ulysses* 67.

<sup>64</sup> Ann Banfield in conversation once described belief in the arranger as a kind of animism. Whether or not one is persuaded by Banfield's use of generative grammar in *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (Boston, MA: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), her arguments make many useful distinctions between writing and speech, and I accept their premise that certain kinds of tale do not benefit from explicitly positing a teller.

they appear; as Cohn notes, even the honorific “Mr” undoubtedly lends Bloom a certain shading.<sup>65</sup> It seems fair at this point to ask whether the anonymous, objective narrator is really a necessary entity in *Ulysses*, and whether the arranger, with so many masks at his disposal, could not with equal ease put on the mask of objectivity and relate the comes and goes, stands and sits, that the novel form requires. For *Ulysses* is not really as heterogeneous as it is often described. T.S. Eliot was the first to claim that Joyce had a “perhaps unique literary distinction: the distinction of having... no style at all,”<sup>66</sup> and the idea of Joyce somehow lacking a personal style has since become commonplace, despite passages like these:

Listen: a fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, oos. Vehement breath of waters amid seasnakes, rearing horses, rocks. (3.456)

Coolsoft with ointments her hand touched me, caressed: her eyes upon me did not turn away. (8.904)

He kissed the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of her rump, on each plump melonous hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow, with obscure prolonged provocative melonsmellonous osculation. (17.2241)

Stephen’s thoughts in “Proteus,” Bloom’s in “Lestrygonians,” and the mock science of “Ithaca” do in a sense employ different idioms, but they also share obvious features: compound neologisms, reliance on adjectives, heavy consonance, idiosyncratic use of the colon, syntactic inversion for effects of rhythm. Whatever the various parts of *Ulysses* are made to sound like, they always sound like *Ulysses* at the same time, and their polyphony is not simply a collage of disjoint styles. Rather they give the effect of a single entity whose presence is continually telegraphed by style, even though this style never appears, so to speak, in its pure state. It is always partially masked, always engaged in some kind of impersonation.

Should this stylistic presence be thought of as a narrator? We might call it that; but the term can mislead as to the nature of perspective in *Ulysses*, since this presence does not occupy any point of view, not even an omniscient one. Rather it is present as a substratum in whatever particular perspective the book has taken on for the moment, including those portions of *Ulysses* that obviously have narrators of their own. In the midst of Molly’s monologue in “Penelope,” some textual process is still doing work of a piece with previous chapters, conjoining words, transcribing the “Frseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeefrong” of the train, leaving off punctuation and (in the French translation) divesting vowels of their diacritical marks, “the last formality to be removed by a woman going to bed.”<sup>67</sup> In *As I Lay Dying* we encountered a similar puzzle, of first-person monologues that were not fully attributable to the characters who were supposed to speak them, and there I suggested that the best solution was to consider Faulkner as a presence within the novel, not in the role of narrator but as a kind of stylistic signature. The same is true for the author of *Ulysses*, who, as William Empson once put it, “is always present in the book—rather

<sup>65</sup> Cohn 66.

<sup>66</sup> T.S. Eliot, “Contemporary English Prose,” *Vanity Fair*, July 1923, 51. For a more recent example, see Stephen Heath’s assertion that in Joyce “instead of style we have *plagiarism*,” in “Ambiviolences: Notes for Reading Joyce,” *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*, ed. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 33.

<sup>67</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce* 562.

oppressively so, like a judge in court.”<sup>68</sup> This is not to suggest a fallback to biographical criticism, nor to assert that questions about *Ulysses* are reducible to questions about its author. It is simply to insist that the book retains a degree of continuity above and beyond its shifts in narratorial perspective, and that these perspectives are not isolated from or incommensurable with one another. The possibility this opens is a kind of multiperspectival vantage, for which, as others have noted, *Ulysses* even provides a name. The word “parallax,” which first enters the novel via Bloom’s thoughts on astronomy, subsequently becomes one of its keynotes, repeated at regular intervals.<sup>69</sup> The astronomical use of parallax involves calculating perspective shifts between multiple observations at different times, in a manner analogous to *Ulysses*’s serial shifts between styles: first we see in one way, then in another. But there is also such a thing as simultaneous parallax, as in human binocular vision, where two distinct views are superimposed to create a novel insight—the third dimension, depth of field—not available to either in isolation. The superimposition of styles, as in the passages noted above, provides a good analogy for parallax of this sort. The world of *Ulysses* is subject to changing perspectives, but it is not a world of monads; its views blend.

### Stephen’s Chapters: Narrative and Perspective

In discussing Woolf’s novels, we encountered a reigning analogy which likened not only language but narrative structure itself to a perspective position. *Ulysses* too seems to be governed by this analogy, but its formal response is antithetical to Woolf’s. Rather than undertaking a quest for an experiential truth independent of any such perspective position, *Ulysses* assumes that a clean break with perspective is not possible and that knowledge can only proceed parallaxically, by playing different perspectives against other. This position does not amount to a full-blown philosophical relativism, as is sometimes claimed,<sup>70</sup> since the possibility of communication between different perspectives belies their supposed incommensurability.<sup>71</sup> In seeking to defend a version of perspectivism, Alexander Nehamas has suggested that it is distinguished from relativism by a difference between fact and value: “Truth and falsity are not relative concepts for perspectivism, as they are for relativism: a view either is true or is not, whatever anyone thinks. What is relative—to particular people, to their abilities, needs, and desires—is value.”<sup>72</sup> *Ulysses* has its points of factual uncertainty—more or fewer, depending on the critics one follows—but the majority of Bloomsday’s facts are not in question. Rather they are evaluated against a spectrum of differing values, by reference to differing narrative

<sup>68</sup> William Empson, “The Ultimate Novel,” *Using Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) 225.

<sup>69</sup> The word “parallax” and inflected forms appear eight times in *Ulysses*: 8.110, 8.112, 8.578, 14.1089, 15.1656, 15.2334, and 17.1052. For some discussions of the motif, broadly similar in interpretation, see French 105-106 and 240-241; Kenner, *Ulysses* 73-75; and James H. Maddox, Jr., *Joyce’s Ulysses and the Assault Upon Character* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1978) 63.

<sup>70</sup> French 24 and 239 describes *Ulysses* as inhabiting a “relativistic world,” though what she says elsewhere about the text’s own values suggests that she does not really have a full-blown philosophical relativism in mind.

<sup>71</sup> This is the kernel of a famous argument by Donald Davidson: “The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability.” See “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation*, 184.

<sup>72</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 148.

antecedents. For *Ulysses* does not newly coin the language of its perspective shifts; it is, as every reader knows, relentlessly allusive, from the register of its parodies (since pastiche, like allusion, relies on a reader's existing knowledge) to the roles in which it casts its characters, of which the title is only one example. To give the book's perspectivism and allusiveness due regard, one might say that the narrative itself is made to play a series of roles. It can move very close to character consciousness, suggesting the verbatim transcription of thought; it can draw back and restrict itself to description, giving the effect of austere impersonality; or it can assume any number of poses (a romance novel, a scientific catechism, the English canon in chronological order) producing those effects suggesting an arranger. It is a mongrel construction woven from a set of subsidiary narrative threads, each relying on distinct values and tied to a distinct linguistic viewpoint.

It is useful to speak of a multiplicity of narrative threads, rather than a multiplicity of viewpoints or (as the translations of Bakhtin have it) discourses, because of their uniquely allusive nature. Considered in isolation, the shifts in diction do seem to bear out Bakhtin's ideas of hybrid utterance, and might be taken as simple amplifications of the hybridity that Bakhtin found in Dickens and Dostoevsky. But the narrative threads of *Ulysses* are not only exercises in linguistic mimicry; they also employ casts of characters, drawn from cultural banks of myth or (what *Ulysses* suggests is the same thing) cliché. The book's title and customary chapter names direct us to find the persons of the *Odyssey* among its characters—Ulysses, Telemachus, Antinous, Penelope—but we have also Hamlet and Don Giovanni, Sinbad the Sailor and the Wandering Jew; the nameless but instantly recognizable stock figures of jester, poet, exile, cuckold, seducer, virgin, whore; and, as the book moves forward, unexpected interlopers such as meek Sir Leopold or the distinguished scientist Herr Professor Luitpold Blumenduft. This repertory functions as a kind of shorthand for the culture at large—its roles are allegories, one might say, for forms of life—and it gives the effect not of one many-voiced narrative, but of many different narratives layered over one another.

This effect is the more striking for taking place in the near absence of plot. The events of Bloomsday are not as ordinary as they are sometimes said to be, but the novel does derive its strong sense of the everyday from the amassing of momentary details, most of which have no causal connection to anything that comes before or after. As in James and Woolf, the sort of causality that usually drives novelistic plot is largely refused, though *Ulysses* is far less vehement about keeping its mental world unconditioned by the material. While *The Golden Bowl* and *The Waves* avoid the oppressiveness of physical objects by excluding them from the narrative, *Ulysses* takes the opposite tack of making them interpretable. A tray of Stuart-era coins resting on a sideboard might be a typical piece of novelistic bric-à-brac, like the scraper that drove Robert Louis Stevenson to distraction in his letter to James, or the barometer in Flaubert which, in Barthes' structuralist analysis, is shown to be a real object precisely because it has no intelligible function<sup>73</sup>; but *Ulysses* is sure to render the object intelligible by allusion. Speaking in Stephen's voice, it marks the coins as "base treasure of a bog: and ever shall be" (2.201-202). The reference is to the "gunmoney" coins issued by James II of England after he fled to Ireland following his 1688 deposition in the Glorious Revolution; short on silver, he was forced to melt down cannons and other scrap metal for debased coins that were to be later redeemed in silver. Though as historical artifacts the coins possess value in the present day of *Ulysses*, the allusion passes the judgment that they shall be forever base. It supports this judgment by placing the coinage incident within a larger narrative of English and Irish history: the bog of Ireland, poor in

<sup>73</sup> Barthes, "The Reality Effect" 141-142.

natural resources, can produce only cheap mockeries of English treasure, as James II's reign in Ireland was a cheap mockery of his English reign, never to be redeemed by his restoration. Following William III's 1690 victory in the Battle of the Boyne, James fled again to France (earning the name *Séamus an Chaca*, "Shitty James," from his deserted Irish supporters), and the gunmoney was demonetized.

Thus the allusion yields a story, shading into other stories, but there is no progressively unfolded plot. Rather the narrative structure is suggested synchronically, at a single blow, and the only function it retains is that of metaphorical perspective, placing people and objects in particular roles and introducing particular values by which to judge them. This accretive process, constantly introducing new roles and values, appears from the first sentences:

Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and razor lay crossed. A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him on the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:

—*Introibo ad altare Dei.*

Halted, he peered down the dark winding stairs and called up coarsely:

—Come up, Kinch! Come up, you fearful jesuit!

Solemnly he came forward and mounted the round gunrest. He faced about and blessed gravely thrice the tower, the surrounding land and the awakening mountains. Then, catching sight of Stephen Dedalus, he bent towards him and made rapid crosses in the air, gurgling in his throat and shaking his head. Stephen Dedalus, displeased and sleepy, leaned his arms on the top of the staircase and looked coldly at the shaking gurgling face that blessed him, equine in its length, and at the light untousured hair, grained and hued like pale oak. (1.1)

We begin with Mulligan alone and a narrative which, as in free indirect discourse, is inflected by his consciousness—describing him, we would say, as he might describe himself. The mock Mass requires a tongue-in-cheek attitude of religious solemnity, for which the narrative obligingly provides diction: "stately," "aloft," "bearing," "intoned." Mulligan as mock priest is the first role in a book of roles, and for the moment the narrative plays along, describing his actions as if he actually were conducting a Mass. In Kenner's words, "a narrator is mimicking Mulligan,"<sup>74</sup> though here as elsewhere the mimicry is only partial; syntax like "a yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained" is not how Mulligan speaks and marks the presence of *Ulysses* itself.

Stephen's entrance prompts a shift in narrative viewpoint; we encounter first his emotional cast in "displeased and sleepy," then his view of his companion in the "shaking gurgling face." With this shift in perspective, Mulligan's role alters, turning him from a celebrant into a clown. Again, the narration approximates Stephen's view without being identical to it. The words "shaking" and "gurgling" appear in the preceding sentence, which does not seem strongly tied to anyone's viewpoint; they are not especially disparaging toward Mulligan until rearranged into "shaking gurgling face." If Stephen thinks those words, then the preceding sentence is colored to some degree by his viewpoint; if he does not, then his thoughts are described using words carried over from a previous narrative position. In either case, the shift into his viewpoint occurs by degrees, and it is a salient feature of the narrative that we cannot determine its precise distance from his consciousness.

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<sup>74</sup> Kenner, *Ulysses* 34.

Point of view will oscillate in this way throughout the chapter, though after the first page it markedly favors Stephen. There is, however, a second perspective function—one might call it moral perspective—intertwined with the first, dependent on the role casting called up by allusion; and this function divides its bias much more evenly between Mulligan and Stephen. Mulligan has cast himself as “Mercurial Malachi” (1.518), and the roles he assumes are ephemeral and mocking, made for comic effect. In the opening scene he is a mock priest; announcing that “Mulligan is stripped of his garments” (1.510), he becomes a mock Christ; pretending to discover a rib missing, he becomes a mock *Übermensch* (1.708). The language of these narrative threads stays close to the solemnity of the original mock Mass, often appearing in adverbs; when the narrative chooses to play along with Mulligan, he does things “gravely” (1.30), “seriously” (1.99), “tragically” (1.502). Context makes their joking nature clear, and also reflects poorly on Stephen, who actually is trying to be grave, serious and tragic. For such attitudes Mulligan assigns him the role of “jejune jesuit” (1.45), pretentious and humorless, for whom “Etiquette is etiquette. He kills his mother but he can’t wear grey trousers” (1.122).

Stephen, of course, has his own narrative threads to spin. He sees Mulligan with “even white teeth glistening here and there with gold points. Chrysostomos... The plump shadowed face and sullen oval jowl recalled a prelate, patron of arts in the middle ages” (1.24). The Greek epithet for Mulligan’s gold teeth recalls the church father St. John Chrysostomos and the historical position of ecclesiastics as patrons of the arts, which makes Stephen into the disenfranchised artist living at Mulligan’s sufferance—he is wearing Mulligan’s secondhand boots (1.113), and his own teeth, we later find, are decaying (3.494). Both characters play the same associational game, but Stephen’s are undertaken in a spirit very unlike Mulligan’s comedy. The final epithet of “usurper” that he flings at Mulligan (1.744) encapsulates his bitterness; Mulligan’s clowning usurps his own working methods.

“Usurper” suggests other threads as well. Stephen is aware throughout the day of playing Hamlet; in “Proteus” he refers to his “Hamlet hat” (3.390), and the Martello tower is described as a version of Elsinore (1.566). Stephen is in mourning for a dead parent; and Mulligan’s dictate that he “give up the moody brooding” (1.235) seems to recall the usurper Claudius: “We pray you throw to earth / This unprevailing woe.”<sup>75</sup> Stephen may have the Hamlet narrative in mind when he calls Mulligan a usurper, but like everyone else in the book, he is not made to consider that this thread can map onto the *Odyssey* as well. If Stephen is Hamlet, he is also Telemachus; and if Mulligan is Claudius, he is just as much Antinous, who also implores Telemachus to give up the brooding: “μή τί τοι ἄλλο ἐν στήθεσσι κακὸν μελέτω ἔργον τε ἔπος τε”—let there be no evil deed or word in your heart—“ἀλλὰ μοι ἐσθιέμεν καὶ πινέμεν, ὡς τὸ πάρος περ”—but eat and drink with me, as you once did.<sup>76</sup> We have a handful of explicit Homerisms in the chapter—Mulligan quotes “*Epi oinopa ponton*” (1.78), and the milkwoman may suggest the appearance of Athena in disguise—but the correspondences are loose. The *Odyssey* is only one of many narratives woven into the chapter’s composite, and it enjoys no special status other than its manifold nature, its ability to fold a multiplicity of other narratives into itself. Joyce once argued to Frank Budgen that Odysseus was the only “complete all-round character” in world literature; unlike Christ who never lived with a woman, Faust who had no domestic life, Hamlet who was a son but not a father, Odysseus encapsulates within himself a full range of relations, professions, temperaments, physical prowess and mental craft.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> *Hamlet* I, ii, 106-107.

<sup>76</sup> *Odyssey* 2.303-305.

<sup>77</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce* 435.

Neither the Homeric narrative nor any other in “Telemachus” will give a complete all-round picture of character on its own. To see Stephen solely in his persona of the exiled artist is to ignore the fact that his exile is largely self-imposed and that he has produced very little in the way of art. To see him only from Mulligan’s perspective is callous; it ignores the real pain in his bereavement. To see him entirely as a variation on Hamlet ignores his artistic vocation, and to assign too much weight to his Telemachus role—as Stuart Gilbert and other early commentators did, looking for something concrete to analyze—misses the deliberate looseness of the Homeric parallels. Even if the reader were inclined to choose one narrative thread as authoritative, their tendency to appear in allusive flashes, each undercutting the previous, would make that choice difficult to maintain. Perspective and judgment are constantly in flux, as apparent in the chapter’s main moral disagreement over the death of Stephen’s mother, which is complex enough to bear quoting at length:

—Do you remember the first day I went to your house after my mother’s death?

Buck Mulligan frowned quickly and said:

—What? Where? I can’t remember anything. I remember only ideas and sensations. Why? What happened in the name of God?

—You were making tea, Stephen said, and went across the landing to get more hot water. Your mother and some visitor came out of the drawingroom. She asked you who was in your room.

—Yes? Buck Mulligan said. What did I say? I forget.

—You said, Stephen answered, *O, it’s only Dedalus whose mother is beastly dead.*

A flush which made him seem younger and more engaging rose to Buck Mulligan’s cheek.

—Did I say that? he asked. Well? What harm is that?

He shook his constraint from him nervously.

—And what is death, he asked, your mother’s or yours or my own? You saw only your mother die. I see them pop off every day in the Mater and Richmond and cut up into tripes in the dissectingroom. It’s a beastly thing and nothing else. It simply doesn’t matter. You wouldn’t kneel down to pray for your mother on her deathbed when she asked you. Why? Because you have the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it’s injected the wrong way. To me it’s all a mockery and beastly. Her cerebral lobes are not functioning. She calls the doctor Sir Peter Teazle and picks buttercups off the quilt. Humour her till it’s over. You crossed her last wish in death and yet you sulk with me because I don’t whinge like some hired mute from Lalouette’s. Absurd! I suppose I did say it. I didn’t mean to offend the memory of your mother.

He had spoken himself into boldness. Stephen, shielding the gaping wounds which the words had left in his heart, said very coldly:

—I am not thinking of the offence to my mother.

—Of what, then? Buck Mulligan asked.

—Of the offence to me, Stephen answered.

Buck Mulligan swung round on his heel.

—O, an impossible person! he exclaimed. (1.188)

The heart of the question is the validity of that characterization: *is* Stephen an impossible person? Mulligan's argument is consistent with his comedic allusions; "to me it's all a mockery" is the sum of his worldview. His essential point is that it is absurd for Stephen to complain of offense when Stephen offended his mother in a far more fundamental way by refusing to pray at her bedside. Mulligan sees nothing wrong with assuming poses for the benefit of others ("Why don't you play them as I do?" [1.506]), and he interprets Stephen's refusal to feign piety as simple obstinacy, "the cursed jesuit strain."

Stephen's allusions, however, cast his refusal in a far more serious light. His habitual use of theology suggests that despite his ostensible freethinking, he would find feigned prayer as unconscionable as Mulligan's cheerful blasphemy. The "gaping wounds" that Mulligan's speech inflicts on him are also quite real. Though "Ithaca" reveals that his mother died nearly a year ago and there may be some affectation in his mourning (17.952), "Telemachus" does make a point of presenting a horrified memory:

Her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend my soul. On me alone. The ghostcandle to light her agony. Ghostly light on the tortured face. Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. Her eyes on me to strike me down. *Liliata rutilantium te confessorum turma circumdet: iubilantium te virginum chorus excipiat.*  
Ghoul! Chewer of corpses! (1.273)

Such reminiscences cloud Stephen's thoughts throughout the chapter and color his perception of the outside world, as when his view of Dublin Bay suggests the bowl into which his mother vomited on her deathbed (1.107). From such a perspective, he is hardly the impossible person that Mulligan imagines. Nonetheless Mulligan's rhetoric is not easy to refute on its own terms; he has undoubtedly brought many difficulties on himself, and in that light his insistence on obsequies from Mulligan does seem hypocritical. The question is argued in multiple contexts, but it is not adjudicated. To do so would be to privilege one perspective over others, to compromise the book's all-roundness; and at this point the scope of Joyce's ambition becomes clear, his serious construction of the Mallarméan dictum that all the world exists to be completed in a book. *Ulysses* is meant to take the logical form not of an account of the world, but of the world itself.

### **Bloom's Chapters: Mechanism and Mind**

Alongside the moral disagreement between Stephen and Mulligan runs a second, philosophical disagreement as to the nature of the mind. Mulligan's speech makes clear that as a medical student, he considers the human soul a physiological matter of cerebral lobes; the adjective "beastly," used in his offending remark and repeated twice in his justification, takes humans as animals and animals as mechanisms that may or may not function. Stephen does not dispute science as such, but is clearly suspicious of Mulligan using it to evade moral categories (a purpose that Pater's reductive impressionism also serves, when Mulligan cribs from the subtitle of *Marius the Epicurean* to protest "I remember only ideas and sensations"). One starting point of this study was the observation that a main current in English Romanticism, and a

principal difficulty in integrating it with the novel form, was its hostility to the view of the mind as a determined mechanism. Recall Coleridge's abhorrence of Hartley's associationist theory:

Yet according to this hypothesis the disquisition, to which I am at present soliciting the reader's attention, may be as truly said to be written by Saint Paul's church, as by *me*: for it is the mere motion of my muscles and nerves; and these again are set in motion from external causes equally passive... The sum total of my moral and intellectual intercourse dissolves into its elements are reduced to *extension, motion, degrees of velocity*, and those diminished *copies* of configurative motion, which form what we call notions, and notions of notions.<sup>78</sup>

and, following this, his declaration that such mechanistic theories would lead to the "equal degradation of every *fundamental* idea in ethics or theology."<sup>79</sup> When Joyce himself happens to invoke the Romantics, as in his 1912 lecture on Blake, he can sound much like this: "If we must accuse of madness every great genius who does not believe in the hurried materialism now in vogue with the happy fatuousness of a recent college graduate in the exact sciences, little remains for art and universal philosophy."<sup>80</sup> It is not hard to imagine that this college graduate, casually invoked during the first planning of *Ulysses*, would develop soon enough into a character for the novel's opening.

But among the major differences between Joyce and Coleridge, Joyce shows no interest in *refuting* the materialist theory of mind.<sup>81</sup> Rather, he denies it exclusivity as a perspective position, and insists on its compatibility with the categories of art and ethics. This position has a different kind of precedent in Romanticism, particularly in Wordsworth. For there is not only the epiphanic Wordsworth of *The Prelude*, for whom the mind is a privileged realm of incommunicable moments; there is also the Wordsworth of *Lyrical Ballads*, whose interest in the association of feelings and ideas in a state of excitement seems to concede a good deal to the materialist theory. Certainly verses like these, from "The Thorn," suggest a mind at the mercy of associative currents:

There is a thorn; it looks so old,  
In truth you'd find it hard to say,  
How it could ever have been young,  
It looks so old and grey.  
Not higher than a two-years' child,  
It stands erect this aged thorn;  
No leaves it has, no thorny points;  
It is a mass of knotted joints,

<sup>78</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 118-119.

<sup>79</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 121.

<sup>80</sup> Joyce, *Critical Writings* 220.

<sup>81</sup> Joyce himself was conscious of not meeting the *Biographia Literaria*'s prescriptions. On a passage in *Finnegans Wake*, he explained: "'Dubliners have a habit of naming their churches after the streets in which they stand... 'She has gone to confession in Wicklow Road.' One imagines her kneeling in the middle of the road.' He got up and, gazing at the sky, pretended to turn a handle. Then, bending his knees, he joined his hands, and with an air of contrition whispered, ear advanced to catch the priest's questions. 'So, I have taken you behind the scenes.' Then, suddenly grave: 'Good old Coleridge would call that fancy, not imagination.'" Mercanton, "The Hours of James Joyce" 721.

A wretched thing forlorn.  
It stands erect, and like a stone  
With lichens it is overgrown. (*LB* 70)

The brief, imagistic phrases, stacked against one another and sometimes repeated verbatim, at first acquaintance show little in the way of an ordering principle. Thus the need in the introductory “Advertisement” of *Lyrical Ballads* to include an explanation missing from the poem itself, that the verses are “not supposed to be spoken in the author’s own person: the character of the loquacious narrator will sufficiently show itself in the course of the story.”<sup>82</sup> A planned but unwritten introductory poem would have given some further description of the speaker, imagined in the prefatory material as “a Captain of a small trading vessel for example, who being past the middle age of life, had retired upon an annuity or small independent income to some village or country town of which he was not a native,” possessing a superstitious mind “not loose, but adhesive.” The purpose of transcribing such a mind is in part documentary, to demonstrate “the manner in which such men cleave to the same ideas; and to follow the turns of passion, always different, yet not palpably different, by which their conversation is swayed”; but it also serves a wider aesthetic interest, to show “why repetition and apparent tautology are frequent beauties of the highest kind.” Wordsworth’s justification for such a poetics is “the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion.”<sup>83</sup> As in Bloom’s *Sweets of Sin* reverie, banal language which fails as a representation of reality can recover aesthetic interest if taken as a material component of that reality. And as it happens, the loquacious, adhesive mind of Wordsworth’s retired captain sounds something like the Bloom we know, just as its presentation in “The Thorn,” as a transcribed associative chain without any explanatory context, is rather like the technique by which *Ulysses* introduces Bloom to us. If Wordsworth’s “spots of time” serve, in a qualified sense, as originators of the poetics of epiphany, it is no stretch to take *Lyrical Ballads* as an originator of the stream of consciousness.

For all his polemics against associationism, Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria* is silent on Wordsworth’s own associationist tendencies, preferring to concentrate on other aspects of the poetry. But any technique which takes words as material entities, and which then builds up a material mind from strings of these words, opens itself to criticism from a Coleridgean position which would insist on keeping the mental and material worlds separate. Early criticism of Joyce’s interior monologues tended to charge them with a lack of psychological verisimilitude, both in reducing the varieties of mental life entirely to words, and in arranging those words into a single orderly chain. The first criticism was made by commentators as divergent as Wyndham Lewis and Robert Musil;<sup>84</sup> on the second, Auguste Bailly’s 1928 *Candide* article, quoted at length in Stuart Gilbert’s 1930 explication of *Ulysses*, is representative:

<sup>82</sup> Wordsworth and Coleridge: *Lyrical Ballads* 287.

<sup>83</sup> Wordsworth and Coleridge: *Lyrical Ballads* 288-289.

<sup>84</sup> Lewis dismisses the “fashionable naturalist device” of “presenting the character from the inside” as a kind of “picturesque dementia.” *The Art of Being Ruled*, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1989) 402. Musil’s notebook entry on Joyce, made circa 1942, reads: “Question: how do we think? Its abbreviations are: short forms of linguistically orthodox forms. They are copied from the speech process as it extends over years. Not the thought process.... He yields to the current disintegrated situation and reproduces it through a kind of free association.” *Gesammelte Werke 2: Prosa und Stücke*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2000) 858.

The necessity of recording the flow of consciousness by means of words and phrases compels the writer to depict it as a continuous horizontal line, like a line of melody. But even a casual examination of our inner consciousness shows us that this presentation is essentially false. We do not think on one plane, but on many planes at once... At every instant of conscious life we are aware of such simultaneity and multiplicity of thought-streams.

The life of the mind is a symphony. It is a mistake or, at best, an arbitrary method, to dissect the chords and set out their components on a single line, on one plane only. Such a method gives an entirely false idea of the complexity of our mental make-up.<sup>85</sup>

Bailey's conception of a multilayered, symphonic mind probably owes something to Bergson, and I suggested in Chapter One that Bergson's psychology provides a good parallel to Henry James's portrayal of consciousness as contrasted with Joyce's. James shared the Coleridgean fear of a deterministic outer world encroaching on the mind, and responded by marking the realm of consciousness as qualitatively distinct from the outer world, using two signature techniques: a ubiquitous deployment of metaphor, and a kind of multidimensional mental time not reducible to linear succession. As a contrast to the Jamesian mind, consider the mind of Bloom:

So warm. His right hand once more slowly went over his brow and hair. Then he put on his hat again, relieved: and read again: choice blend, made of the finest Ceylon brands. The far east. Lovely spot it must be: the garden of the world, big lazy leaves to float about on, cactuses, flowery meads, snaky liana they call them. Wonder is it like that. Those Cinghalese lobbing about in the sun in *dolce far niente*, not doing a hand's turn all day. Sleep six months out of twelve. Too hot to quarrel. Influence of the climate. Lethargy. Flowers of idleness. The air feeds most. Azotes. Hothouse in Botanic gardens. Sensitive plants. Waterlilies. Petals too tired to. Sleeping sickness in the air. Walk on roseleaves. Imagine trying to eat tripe and cowheel. Where was the chap I saw in that picture somewhere? Ah yes, in the dead sea floating on his back, reading a book with a parasol open. Couldn't sink if you tried: so thick with salt. Because the weight of the water, no, the weight of the body in water is equal to the weight of the what? Or is it the volume is equal to the weight? It's a law something like that. Vance in High school cracking his fingerjoints, teaching. The college curriculum. Cracking curriculum. What is weight really when you say the weight? Thirtytwo feet per second per second. Law of falling bodies: per second per second. They all fall to the ground. The earth. It's the force of gravity of the earth is the weight. (5.27)

The associative chain has a textbook simplicity. The word "Ceylon" prompts a series of half-remembered Orientalist clichés, which then pivot by way of the Dead Sea to the half-remembered laws of density and acceleration. Not only are such sequences perfectly linear, they move in lockstep with the clock time of the outer world, as seen from their constant interruptions: any new sight or sound, an advertisement, a pedestrian or passing vehicle, will cut off the old associative chain and start another. The language is not distinguished from ordinary

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<sup>85</sup> Stuart Gilbert, *Ulysses* 15.

speech except by its staccato rhythm; its only metaphors are dead—"the garden of the world," "not doing a hand's turn"—and the nearest it comes to verbal inventiveness as such is the odd joke of "cracking curriculum." In short we have a picture of the mind that bears out Coleridge's worst fear, of an existence "divided between the despotism of outward impressions, and that of senseless and passive memory."<sup>86</sup>

Yet it would be wrong to say that these portions of *Ulysses* concede Mulligan's materialist point. Thought may be describable as a mechanical process, but it is other things as well. Against Bailly's criticism of the interior monologue, Gilbert offers the response, apparently based on Joyce's conversation, that "from the point of view of the author of *Ulysses* (*ipse dixit!*), it hardly matters whether the technique in question is 'veracious' or not; it has served him as a bridge over which to march his eighteen episodes, and, once he has got his troops across, the opposing forces can, for all he cares, blow the bridge sky-high."<sup>87</sup> Joyce apparently liked the bridge metaphor enough to repeat it to Jacques Mercanton on another occasion, though in neither case did he specify where the bridge was supposed to lead.<sup>88</sup> But if we take the assertion seriously, and imagine stripping the quoted passage of those features that pertain to the inner monologue as such—the staccato syntax, the linear associative chain—what remains is something that looks a good deal like the later sections of *Ulysses*, with their assumed voices repeating the clichés of Western culture. Bloom's vision of idle Cinghalese in a soporific climate is the same kind of imagination responsible for "Circe's" vision of Molly in a yashmak, attended by date palms and camel, and his grappling with displacement and gravity produces a stream of scientific terms, as in "Ithaca," without any reasoning to back them up. If, as I suggested earlier, all the styles of *Ulysses*, including the interior monologues, can be taken as a kind of impersonation, then it is explicable that the stream of consciousness should be method of convenience, meant only to give the appearance of thought. The associative shape of the interior monologue is in a sense incidental; what matters most is to present the mind as a recombination of linguistic and cultural patterns from the world at large.

To take the interior monologues more literally than this raises interpretive difficulties. Dorrit Cohn's meticulous narratology of *Ulysses* divides the Bloom chapters between two entities: Bloom is assigned first-person, present-tense utterances and sentence fragments, while third-person, past-tense sentences are given to a narrator. Two paragraphs from "Calypso" are distributed as follows, with Bloom's sentences italicized:

His hand took his hat from the peg over his initialled heavy overcoat, and his lost property office secondhand waterproof. *Stamps: stickyback pictures. Daresay lots of officers are in the swim too. Course they do.* The sweated legend in the crown of the hat told him mutely: Plasto's high grade ha. He peeped quickly inside the leather headband. *White slip of paper. Quite safe.*

On the doorstep he felt in his hip pocket for the latchkey. *Not there. In the trousers I left off. Must get it. Potato I have. Creaky wardrobe. No use*

<sup>86</sup> Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* 111.

<sup>87</sup> Gilbert, *Ulysses* 16.

<sup>88</sup> On the method of *Finnegans Wake*, which similarly departs from strict veracity in transposing dream imagery to sound, Joyce told Mercanton: "That kind of transposition—from sight to sound—I insist, is the very essence of art, which is concerned solely with the effect it wishes to obtain.... After all, the interior monologue in *Ulysses* is just that. I laugh at it today, now that I have had all the good of it. Let the bridge blow up, provided I have got my troops across." Jacques Mercanton, "The Hours of James Joyce, Part I," trans. Lloyd C. Parks, *Kenyon Review* 24 (Autumn 1962) 724-725.

*disturbing her. She turned over sleepily that time. He pulled the halldoor to after him very quietly, more, till the footleaf dropped gently over the threshold, a limp lid. Looked shut. All right till I come back anyhow.* (4.66)<sup>89</sup>

This distinction works only as a first pass. The sentence “White slip of paper” may be too fragmentary to assign to a third-person narrator, but who, on seeing a white slip of paper, subvocally recites “white slip of paper”? Bloom has seen the paper, and the narrative has registered that fact as efficiently as possible; nothing here, or in most of the other italicized phrases, depends on taking it as a literal utterance. Cohn’s position, that every sentence related in Bloomish language is mentally spoken by Bloom, is taken in opposition to commentators such as Erwin R. Steinberg, who postulate that the monologue is actually “a ‘simulation’ of pre- or non-verbal psychic phenomena.”<sup>90</sup> But the truth must lie midway. The technical challenge of the early Bloom chapters is to smoothly and efficiently relay a character’s thoughts and perceptions, including both unspoken language and those perceptions and emotions which are not necessarily verbalized. We do not have two entities trading sentences, but simply a prose narrative charged to impersonate Bloom’s consciousness as the moment requires. “In the trousers I left off. Must get it,” is plausible as inner speech and gives the effect of a verbatim quote. “He pulled the halldoor to after him, very quietly, more,” is still Bloom perceiving the closing door, but the narrative gives us the third person and past tense to avoid the awkwardness of a first-person narration (“I pull the halldoor after me...”); as with the slip of paper, there is no need for Bloom to describe the action as he performs it. (Whatever else Joyce borrowed from the interior monologue of Édouard Dujardin’s *Les lauriers sont coupés*, he must have noted that Dujardin’s exclusive use of the first person entails many such awkward moments.) Only sometimes does interior monologue function as any kind of direct transcription; just as often it represents Bloom’s mind with words that are not his. As in “Telemachus,” the narrative is engaged in impersonation, giving the effect of proximity to consciousness without insisting on any sort of equation. This picture of the mind requires that it be open to the world, rather than set apart as in James or Woolf; and one consequence of this openness is to give the mind a material dimension lacking in those authors. But the mind as machine cannot be an exhaustive description, simply because the linguistic and narrative threads from which it is woven rely on other kinds of description—categories of personhood, we might call them, which use distinct vocabularies from that of the mechanistic model.<sup>91</sup> Joyce’s gambit is to assume that everyone is more or less in the position of the woman from Pound’s “Portrait d’une Femme,” whose mind is a Sargasso Sea of

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Cohn 62.

<sup>90</sup> Erwin R. Steinberg, *The Stream of Consciousness and Beyond in Ulysses* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973) 251-52.

<sup>91</sup> I draw this idea of alternative descriptions from Donald Davidson’s anomalous monism, which conceives the distinction between the physical and mental as being a distinction between different vocabularies, which describe the same world although neither is reducible to the other. For Davidson, this distinction allows a Kantian reconciliation between nature and freedom: “Mental events as a class cannot be explained by physical science; particular mental events can when we know particular identities. But the explanations of mental events in which we are typically interested relate them to other mental events and conditions. We explain a man’s free actions, for example, by appeal to his desires, habits, knowledge and perceptions. Such accounts of intentional behaviour operate in a conceptual framework removed from the direct reach of physical law by describing both cause and effect, reason and action, as aspects of a portrait of a human agent.” “Mental Events,” *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 225.

“Ideas, old gossip, oddments of all things... There is nothing! In the whole and all, / Nothing that’s quite your own. / Yet this is you.”<sup>92</sup>

*Yet this is you*: an affirmation worth repeating, with somewhat more positive force than Pound gives it, so as to be clear that none of this makes the people of *Ulysses* less real than other consciousness in fiction. If personhood is not invalidated by the possibility of taking the mind as a machine, neither is it invalidated by the possibility of taking it as a recombination of discourses. *Ulysses* is often taken as a book “whose symbolic dimension (including its ‘styles’) wars with its human dimension,”<sup>93</sup> and the ascendancy of style in its second half has prompted many accounts like Karen Lawrence’s, in which *Ulysses* “begins with the implicit assumption of the primacy of character,” but then “ceases to be primarily a psychological novel and becomes an encyclopedia of narrative possibilities.”<sup>94</sup> The novel’s conception of personhood, however, falsifies this distinction. As far as *Ulysses* is concerned, character *is* a collection of narrative possibilities, and this equation provides the strongest link between the novel’s early and late sections. This link is sometimes taken as an injunction to read the later chapters into the earlier ones, conceiving *Ulysses* as a kind of early *nouveau roman* which introduces characters only to dispel them as linguistic illusions. But the point of the early chapters is that a person made of intersecting languages is still a person, and even when the later parodies gain ascendancy, their nature as parodies requires them to be recognizable versions of voices we already know. As with Stephen’s allusions and Bloom’s clichés, they say nothing that we haven’t heard before; and in this respect their grounding is not so different from that of the overtly psychological chapters.

In a moment of surprising intuition, Pound observed early on that “Bloom does all Flaubert set out to do” in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, “and does it in one tenth the space”; this even before Joyce’s turn to parody made the resemblance obvious.<sup>95</sup> Flaubert’s progressive unmasking of all human endeavors as provinces of stupidity, and the parallel project in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* of reducing all human speech to cliché, of course spring from the same ferocity as the parodies of *Ulysses*, which T.S. Eliot took to demonstrate “the futility of all the English styles,” and which Joyce described as scorched-earth tactics leaving burnt fields behind them.<sup>96</sup> What the comparison between Flaubert and Joyce misses, however, is that *Ulysses* is not only ferocity, and its parodies are not only parody. When the mock-heroic voice of “Cyclops” observes in passing that “his rocklike mountainous knees were covered, as was likewise the rest of his body wherever visible, with a strong growth of tawny prickly hair in hue and toughness similar to the mountain gorse (*Ulex Europæus*)” (12.158), the Linnean name flagrantly exceeds the supposed project of mimicking Irish epic; likewise, “Ithaca’s” “heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit” (17.1039) is no kind of science. Such moments of surplus—surprise jokes, and points of enigma and wonder—are reminders that *Ulysses* always blends its borrowed styles with its own signature presence. These are the moments in which *Ulysses* is most itself, and farthest from Flaubert’s grim satisfaction in carrying out his self-imposed tasks. Bloom’s mind too, though built from clichés, is not exhausted by them. Without any self-chosen role as rigid as Stephen’s artist role, his judgments are less rigid, more likely to oscillate. Seeing a young boy with a cigarette, he thinks, “Tell him if he smokes he won’t grow,” then promptly

<sup>92</sup> Ezra Pound, *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*, ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (New York: New Directions, 1990) 57-58.

<sup>93</sup> Goldman, *The Joyce Paradox* 95.

<sup>94</sup> Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 14.

<sup>95</sup> Ezra Pound, *Pound/Joyce*, ed. Forrest Read (New York: New Directions, 1970) 145.

<sup>96</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume Two, 1920-1924*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNallie (New York: Harvest, 1978) 203; and *Letters of James Joyce* 1:129.

changes his mind: “O let him! His life isn’t such a bed of roses!” (5.7). When it comes to allusions, the snatches of opera in his head can cast him sequentially as Massetto, Don Giovanni and the Stone Guest all in one.<sup>97</sup> To a degree Bloom contains within himself the parallax that “Telemachus” could only produce by balancing Mulligan and Stephen against each other. His range of possible roles is very wide, as befits an incarnation of the all-round character Odysseus: *polytropos*, a man of many ways.

A self that is an intersection of roles, and a mind that is an intersection of languages: this is a very different conception of personhood from those we have seen elsewhere in modernist fiction, and we might expect it to serve as a corrective to the problems of isolation and incommunicability that beset those books. But this may be asking too much. To remove certain epistemological barriers between mind and world may relieve a certain philosophical picture of isolation, but everyday human isolation of the sort that Bloom suffers in Dublin is quite another matter. The philosophers with whom I have compared Joyce are for the most part scrupulous about limiting the reach of their conclusions. Wittgenstein writes that philosophy “leaves everything as it is,” and often seems to think that the best thing philosophy could do would be to put a stop to itself.<sup>98</sup> Davidson, too, closes his arguments against the relativism of incommensurable conceptual schemes with a reminder that “it would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind—all speakers of language, at least—share a common scheme and ontology. For if we cannot say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one.”<sup>99</sup> When John McDowell describes the removal of epistemological barriers as a “partial re-enchantment of nature,” the slogan may mislead, since his project, like the project of *Ulysses*, is not to re-import myth into the world but simply to assert that the world has always been intelligible through faculties like those by which we interpret myths.<sup>100</sup> To recognize their presence will not bring about the kind of revolution implied by an avant-gardism such as Woolf’s. Modernist novels telegraph their philosophical commitments at the level of form, but the limits to these commitments always emerge at the level of plot, and this is true of *Ulysses* as well. Its allusive superstructure requires that Bloom and Stephen meet, but the need to leave everything as it is cuts short the possible consequences of this meeting. No new plot can be initiated; though readers have exercised a good deal of

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<sup>97</sup> The recurrent “*voglio e non vorrei*” in Bloom’s thoughts (4.327) is a misremembering of Zerlina’s song as Don Giovanni seduces her. Bloom’s implicit role as the cuckold Massetto is clear enough. But after picking up his letter from Martha Clifford, Bloom’s spirits lift enough for him to hum Don Giovanni’s line “*Là ci darem la mano*” (5.227), and his lunchtime Burgundy fortifies him to sing the Stone Guest’s avenging “*Don Giovanni, a cenar teco / M’invitasti*” (8.1040). Stephen will say later of Shakespeare (another cuckold) that “assumed dongiovannism will not save him” (9.458), but just this saves Bloom for the moment.

<sup>98</sup> See *Philosophical Investigations*, section 133: “The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* into question.... There is not a philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies” (51).

<sup>99</sup> Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” 198.

<sup>100</sup> See McDowell, *Mind and World* 97: “For Kant, the ordinary empirical world, which includes nature as the realm of law, is not external to the conceptual... I have suggested that defending that Kantian thought requires a partial re-enchantment of nature. But it does not require us to rehabilitate the idea that there is meaning in the fall of a sparrow or the movement of the planets, as there is meaning in a text. It is a good teaching of modernity that the realm of law is as such devoid of meaning... The understanding—the very capacity that we bring to bear on texts—must be involved in our taking in of mere meaningless happenings.”

imagination in creating day-after-Bloomsday scenarios,<sup>101</sup> the book itself provides only another instance of lyric stasis, and a variety of angles from which to regard it.

### **The Late *Ulysses* and the End of It All**

“Circe,” the key chapter in bringing Bloom and Stephen together, is also the book’s farthest point of remove from the everyday. Readers have sometimes expressed regret that the story of Bloom and Stephen gets lost in the verbal rioting of the later *Ulysses*, but “Circe” in particular marks a limit past which the story cannot be conceived separately from the verbal riot.<sup>102</sup> Previous points of extreme distortion, such as “Cyclops” and “Oxen of the Sun,” play by sufficiently recognizable rules that, under the parallax metaphor, a reader can triangulate, reading around the styles to reconstruct a naturalistic version of events in the maternity hospital or Barney Kiernan’s pub. At least in “Cyclops” such triangulation seems to be a moral imperative, since parallax is precisely what is foreclosed to the chapter’s one-eyed, purblind styles. As early as “Telemachus” we saw that no one narrative strand could be expected to give an all-round picture of character; and when “Cyclops” or “Oxen of the Sun” separates a single strand out from the others and presents it in isolation, the result is caricature.

“Circe” is less accommodating of any such reconstructive reading, since in place of miming any familiar style the prose narrative mimes complete disappearance. As portions of “Oxen of the Sun” pretend to be excerpts from Mallory or Defoe, “Circe” pretends to be a play; and in abandoning the form of fiction, it also abandons the space and time constraints inherent to narrative prose. What remains is the allusive method of *Ulysses* unfettered, recombining external material (including previous parts of the book) more densely than ever, and casting its characters with new speed into newly stagy roles. No chapter serves as a better microcosm of the book’s method, though it is also the chapter most difficult to reconcile with the material Dublin of the early episodes. Joyce’s use of the word “hallucination” in the Gilbert schema led early critics to assume that the chapter’s grotesquerie could only be naturalized by taking it as literally passing through the characters’ minds, and it took some time to piece together the textual evidence against this view: the multiple-page sequences that seem to pass in an instant of clock time, and the range of reference not available to Bloom himself.<sup>103</sup> The usual current interpretation is that

<sup>101</sup> For example Empson in “The Ultimate Novel,” 246, on the “Bloom Offer” of Molly to Stephen, which he believes Stephen is to accept.

<sup>102</sup> S.L. Goldberg registers a notable complaint against a “precarious intellectualization of structure under which some of the later writing collapses completely... the gap between the formal values implicit in the techniques and organization and the values enacted by the characters progressively widens.” *The Classical Temper: A Study of James Joyce’s Ulysses* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969) 281. Weldon Thornton writes with clear regret that Joyce “could have given much more prominence to the story of Stephen’s and Bloom’s peregrinations and their coming together, in part simply by presenting the story in some medium other than the opaque or distorting styles through which so much of their journey is described.” “The Greatness of *Ulysses*,” *New Hibernia Review* 7 (2003) 34. The unique difficulty of separating content from style in “Circe” is, I think, borne out by the 1967 film of *Ulysses*, which approximates the events of Bloomsday with no reference to style until forced by “Circe” into a low-budget attempt at phantasmagoria.

<sup>103</sup> To note a few famous examples: Bloom’s coronation and martyrdom occupies seventeen pages in the Gabler edition but apparently takes an instant by clock time, since Zoe opens and closes it with two sentences of the same speech. This sequence contains plays on foreign languages like the mock Irish proverb “*sgeul i mbarr bata coisde gan capall*,” (15.1771) detailed if garbled medical terminology (15.1775-94), and an intricate parody of the English coronation ceremony (15.1475-98), all presupposing specialized knowledge which we would not expect Bloom to have. Other Bloom sequences refer to events earlier in the novel which occurred in Bloom’s absence, such as Molly’s cry “Nebrakada! Feminimum,” (15.319) taken from a book that Stephen skims in “Wandering Rocks.”

“Circe,” like the parodic chapters, describes its characters not by transcribing their thoughts but by amplifying their personalities in distorting ways. Thus the trial scene exposes a sexual guilt that is, to some extent, pertinent to Bloom; the coronation and martyrdom scene treats his ideas of civic reform; and the Molly and Boylan sequence of course stages what has been on his mind all day. At times his attributed lines verge close to the style of his speech and thought in earlier chapters, and even the extended hallucinatory sequences seem in some way prompted by events on the naturalistic level, as when the martyrdom scene issues from Zoe’s invitation to “make a stump speech” of his aversion to tobacco (15.1353). But this surface plausibility is our only evidence for a connection with the material reality of Dublin. The skeletal format of dialogue and stage directions treats all material alike, setting limits on our ability to triangulate, and it is not surprising that there has been so much critical disagreement on what “really” happens in the chapter.

The quotes around “really” register the embarrassment that “Circe” inflicts on its commentators, the awkwardness of trying to read around its style to grasp a world that we know to be fictive. So far *Ulysses* has taken pains to show people and things persisting from perspective to perspective, obeying laws of physical motion and cause and effect; what is real, under these circumstances, is presumably whatever survives triangulation between perspectives. But one difficulty in “Circe” is that following this previously reliable process results in conferring effective reality on something that has no material form—Stephen’s vision of his dead mother. Rising from the floor in her graveclothes to chastise and urge repentance, she reprises the moral disagreement of “Telemachus” along with much of its language; Mulligan reappears in a supporting role to repeat “beastly dead” and most of his other memorable lines. This sequence, which culminates in the mother assuming the role of Christ on Calvary and the crab of cancer plunging its claws into Stephen’s heart, interacts with the naturalistic setting as most do not. Kenner has most exhaustively assembled the evidence—that Florry points to Stephen and says, “Look! He’s white” (15.4208); that Stephen’s cry of “Shite!” (15.4223) is audible to Bloom at the window; that the chandelier that Stephen smashes causes a highly material disagreement between Bella and Bloom over compensation—to argue that this sequence marks “the only genuine hallucination in the chapter.”<sup>104</sup> Yet the style of this hallucination in itself is no different from anything else in the chapter; as in previous sequences, it is not even wholly attributable to Stephen’s mind, since the mother’s phrase “my other world” (15.4202) refers back to Bloom’s day. Nor do we have any criteria by which to determine whether Stephen sees Mulligan or the crab, for instance, in any naturalistic sense. With a bit of care, the chapter will permit us to follow Kenner in reading the sequence as a stylistic distortion of something that Stephen, exhausted and absinthe-addled, does experience on the naturalistic level; but at the same time the sequence highlights the general effect of “Circe’s” indeterminacy, which is to remove any incentive in discerning a naturalistic level underneath the style. What the chapter occludes is not of interest compared to what it displays, and in this respect it is quite different from “Cyclops” or “Oxen of the Sun,” where triangulation past the distorting style seems a necessary part of one’s reading.

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Chapters 13 and 14 of John Gordon, *Joyce and Reality: The Empirical Strikes Back* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), mount an inventive argument that the hallucinations should in fact be naturalized to the characters’ psyches, but apart from questions of plausibility this scenario entails views on Joyce’s relation to language which differ from my own.

<sup>104</sup> Hugh Kenner, “Circe,” *James Joyce’s Ulysses*, ed. Hart and Hayman, 351-352.

Even when “Circe” gives us something that looks like a naturalistic Dublin, it is not quite in line with the Dublin of earlier chapters. In the dispute over the smashed chandelier, Bloom’s asserting himself against Bella with a Masonic sign (15.4298) is perhaps within the realm of possibility, since Bloom has been a Mason in the past (8.184, 8.960). But his final stratagem in rebuffing Bella:

BLOOM

(urgently) And if it were your own son in Oxford? (warningly) I know.

BELLA

(almost speechless) Who are. Incog! (15.4305)

is not only stagy but rather improbable, since it requires that Zoe’s sole offhand remark about Bella (15.1289) reveal just that piece of information which Bloom can turn to his advantage.<sup>105</sup> This exchange does not seem to follow the rules of the early *Ulysses*, and its structure is much closer to sequences like Bloom’s unmasking of the accusing nymph, which under a naturalistic reading didn’t happen at all. The style of “Circe,” it seems, temporarily gives Joyce the freedom to employ this kind of stage machinery; for surely some such machinery was needed to bring the disparate figures of Bloom and Stephen together, and to place Bloom in the unlikely but structurally required role of Stephen’s father. Nonetheless this role can be only one among many, subject to erasure by the next shift in perspective. To reprise my terms for the early chapters, there is a *narrative* in which Bloom serves as Stephen’s father, but the novel cannot develop any such *plot*. In the dismal interactions of “Eumaeus” the material world and social banality return with a vengeance, and “Ithaca” sends Stephen out the door and into the void. It is essential to the all-round structure of *Ulysses* that the bond between Bloom and Stephen be describable both as “overwhelming... a release from bondage” and as “utterly commercial and utterly imaginary”<sup>106</sup>, that it can be praised as an instance of *agape* (as interpreted by Ellmann) and mocked as a perversion of *eros* (as insinuated by lines from Samuel Lover’s “The Low-Backed Car”).<sup>107</sup> To this end the Bloom-Stephen conjunction cannot be validated by the sort of novelistic plot that would conclude, say, with Stephen spending the night and agreeing to give Molly Italian lessons. As much as *Ulysses* departs from modernism’s Romantic underpinnings, it does concur with the lyric aesthetic in refusing to underwrite any particular value by a plot mechanism. The conjunction remains polyvalent because it remains lyric, a matter of plotless perception, as when Bloom’s and Stephen’s faces merge in the mirror of Shakespeare (15.3821), and later as each contemplates the other “in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhisnothis fellowfaces” (17.1183).

In discussing James, I referred in passing to Peter Brooks’s concept of melodrama in the nineteenth-century novel, under which the surfaces of the world, properly interpreted, are discovered to open on hidden depths. The antithesis to melodrama appears in a writer like Flaubert, who denies these depths any significance:

<sup>105</sup> Of course coincidence is not foreign to the early chapters of *Ulysses*, but their naturalism seems to require that they use coincidence only maliciously, as when Bloom’s unfortunate choice of words (“throw it away” [5.534]) causes a widespread bitter belief that he is holding out on winnings from the races (12.1551).

<sup>106</sup> A. Walton Litz, “Ithaca,” in *James Joyce’s Ulysses*, ed. Hart and Hayman 400; Gerald L. Bruns, “Eumaeus,” in *James Joyce’s Ulysses*, ed. Hart and Hayman 383.

<sup>107</sup> Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* 154; on “The Low-Backed Car,” see French 216-217.

From a search for the hidden signified and its metaphorical absent presence we are led rather to the play of the signifier: the reader's engagement with the plane of representation as pure surface.... The counter-tradition of Flaubert stands in contrast to the expressionism of Balzac and James. They remain convinced that the surfaces of the world—the surfaces of manners, the signifiers of the text—are indices pointing to hidden forces and truths, latent signifieds.<sup>108</sup>

Like Flaubert and unlike James, Joyce cannot be read under a model of surface and depth. The world of *Ulysses* is interpretable, indeed endlessly so; like Stephen, we are free to follow the “signatures of all things” (3.2) as far as they will take us. But whatever is yielded by interpretation remains, so to speak, on the surface as well, since there is no moment of terminal revelation which might bring interpretation to a stop. “Circe’s” burlesque of depth psychology seemed to promise the revelation of a Freudian masterplot, but once the comedy has faded we find that very little has been explained as such; all we have is one more description of Bloom to place beside the others.<sup>109</sup> Its clichés are more vivid than the clichés of “Eumaeus,” but its mysteries do not structurally differ from the banal mystery of the following chapter, which tells us that Simon Dedalus shot eggs off bottles from fifty yards in a Stockholm circus. There is no explanation, but neither is there any hope that an explanation would make things clearer. This lack of a stopping point in our reading accords with the lack of a stopping point in Joyce’s own writing, as he crammed additional phrases into the galleys until the last possible moment and created a morass of textual problems for scholars to come. It is mirrored too in “Ithaca,” where Bloom is disheartened by an enormous power of nine whose printed digits would fill thirty-three volumes, “the nucleus of the nebula of every digit of every series containing succinctly the potentiality of being raised to the utmost kinetic elaboration of any power of any of its powers” (17.1079). The world is both inexhaustible and incapable of leading to anything other than itself.

The surfaces of the world are not made intelligible by reference to hidden depths. But neither should Bloom’s despair at the enormous number be taken to imply an inverted surface/depth model like Woolf’s or Conrad’s, where the intelligible structure of language becomes a distorting surface over an incoherent or alien reality. It is common to read the style of “Ithaca” as denying the value of human life against an indifferent universe, or to take the chapter as implicitly demanding that we read the characters’ survival in this universe as a kind of affirmation.<sup>110</sup> But after reading this much of *Ulysses*, we should be cued to recognize that the interstellar abyss as a test of faith is also one literary tradition among others, beginning with Pascal’s dual abysses of the infinitely large and infinitely small, extremities which meet in God alone, and reappearing nearer Joyce’s own time as the climax of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, where the devil reveals to St. Anthony that the sun never sets and lifts him into the horrible infinity of stars. “Ithaca’s” science plays at being a similar revelation, but in the context of

<sup>108</sup> Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* 198-199.

<sup>109</sup> See Lawrence, *Odyssey of Style* 162-163 for an argument against those accounts that take the psychoanalysis of “Circe” more literally, such as Kenner’s thesis that Bloom undergoes a psychic purgation or Maddox’s that Bloom confronts his own sense of futility. For Lawrence, “Circe” reveals only that psychological crisis, as we have seen in other chapters, is coextensive with the characters’ lives: “the whole of *Ulysses* makes us suspicious of the decisiveness of any one event, physical or psychological.... The structure of anticlimax and the painstaking detail in *Ulysses* have shown us that if people do change, it is inch by inch rather than all at once, and in the dark rather than in a flash of blinding light.”

<sup>110</sup> Goldman, *The Joyce Paradox* 113-114, notes both readings.

*Ulysses* it is only another way of speaking, which is to say, an opportunity for myth and cliché. The myth appears in “Ithaca’s” beauty, its repurposing of technical language into poetry (“the proper perpetual motion of the earth through everchanging tracks of neverchanging space” [17.2309]), and the corresponding cliché has already been given us by Bloom, several chapters earlier:

If I could get an introduction to professor Joly or learn up something about his family.... Not go in and blurt out what you know you’re not to: what’s parallax? Show this gentleman the door.  
Ah.  
His hand fell to his side again.  
Never know anything about it. Waste of time. Gasballs spinning about, crossing each other, passing. Same old dingdong always. Gas: then solid: then world: then cold: then dead shell drifting around, frozen rock, like that pineapple rock. The moon. Must be a new moon out, she said. I believe there is. (8.573)

Bloom’s vision of an indifferent universe cannot be decisive because there is always somewhere else for thought to go: the memory of rock candy, Mrs. Breen blaming her husband’s madness on the moon. The universe of “Ithaca” too trails off as Bloom falls asleep, having fixed nothing for certain. The absence of an interpretive stopping point is what permits the infinity of arguments about whether *Ulysses* is affirmative or negative, transfigurative or nihilistic. The book does not adjudicate.

What results from all this is an attitude that is difficult to characterize, since it seems to incorporate a kind of mysticism while denying the existence of any transcendent reality. As in *Dubliners*, its version of the epiphany principle involves no revelatory moment of things behind appearances, only a confidence that things can be apprehended as they are. What remains of Romanticism, hard as it is to quantify, must be a belief that such steady apprehension is in itself a kind of sacrament. James Maddox offers one account:

Whether we are speaking of the epiphany, of characterization, of the manipulation of style, or of the use of correspondences, the primary configuration within *Ulysses* is the same: a collocation of details which point toward an unnamable center. Joyce’s art is thus Catholic and sacramental in the extreme. He can list all, *all* the characteristics of accident, but he can only evoke or point toward substance.<sup>111</sup>

If this eloquent description is to be taken rightly, it must be added that the distinction between substance and accident cannot be a distinction between depth and surface. Further, if the unnamable center is truly unnamable, it can be neither any kind of God nor any noumenal realm lying behind phenomena. It cannot even be pointed to, since it must be taken to inhere indiscriminately at any point of the material world; and this indiscriminateness renders it logically indistinguishable from something that does not exist at all. The difficulty in characterizing such a thing, if it is a thing, provides a last point of concordance between Joyce and a thinker like Wittgenstein, who insisted both that philosophy was not a matter of bringing

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<sup>111</sup> Maddox, *Joyce’s Ulysses and the Assault Upon Character* 15-16.

hidden truths to light, since “nothing is hidden” (*PI* 128), and also that “there are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.”<sup>112</sup>

How seriously to take these matters of mysticism and inexpressibility has long vexed Wittgenstein’s interpreters, starting with Bertrand Russell’s introduction to the *Tractatus*: “What causes hesitation is the fact that, after all, Mr Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said.”<sup>113</sup> Of the replies that might be made to Russell, I am most interested in Cora Diamond’s, which holds that Wittgenstein is entirely serious in saying that his propositions are ladders to be climbed and then thrown away, that mystical entities like “the logical form of reality” are not ineffable truths about the world but transitional ways of speaking that in the end are shown to have no meaning. If there were ineffable truths, there would also have to be ineffable falsehoods; they would indicate a state of affairs that might be otherwise. But on Diamond’s view, “it is not that they are true because their truth conditions are met in all possible worlds, but because they have none... In so far as we grasp what Wittgenstein aims at, we see that the sentence-form he uses comes apart from his philosophical aim.”<sup>114</sup> In that it is not a truth but a piece of nonsense whose utterance is nonetheless compelled by philosophical thought, “the logical form of reality” provides a very fine summing-up for a book like *Ulysses*. Along with Wittgenstein’s other candidates for the inexpressible—aesthetics, ethics, the “problem of life”—this logical form involves no things and no states of affairs, except, perhaps, as they manifest in one’s contemplation of the world, in the mystical feeling dependent on not *how* the world is, but *that* it is.<sup>115</sup> The *claritas* that the young Joyce imagined as a moment of privileged insight becomes, in his mature work, a sustained act of factually indifferent contemplation. For if it can be said that Joyce’s works are gestures toward the unnamable, it must also be said that anything would count as such a gesture, and that there is nothing to gesture to.

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<sup>112</sup> *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 187.

<sup>113</sup> *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 22.

<sup>114</sup> Cora Diamond, “Throwing Away the Ladder,” *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991) 198.

<sup>115</sup> “6.44. Nicht *wie* die Welt ist, ist das Mystische, sondern *dass* sie ist. / 6.45. Die Anschauung der Welt sub specie aeternitatis ist ihre Anschauung als—begrenztes—Ganzes. / Das Gefühl der Welt als begrenztes Ganzes ist das mystische.” *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 186.

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