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The Nets of Style: Shaping Modernist Literary Narrative

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The Nets of Style:
Shaping Modernist Literary Narrative

by

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Just as style is not born in isolation, this dissertation bears strong traces of my academic community.

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Washington University in St. Louis
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Introduction:

"I cover you with my net": Stylized Metaphors

In May of 2017, Harold Evans's encomium and guide to concision, *Do I Make Myself Clear?: Why Writing Well Matters*, was released to great acclaim, quickly becoming a best seller. Evans, "one of the greatest and most garlanded editors alive," laments the bloating of the English language in the digital world, particularly online where concealed agendas abound (Holt). He goes so far as to blame labyrinthine language for climate change skepticism, the housing bubble that lead to the great recession, and the evasions of responsibility for the Flint, Michigan water crisis. These timely political matters give a sense of urgency to his call for clarity, but, as he admits in his opening sentence, this is a long-fought battle: "the year 2016 was the seventieth anniversary of George Orwell's classic polemic *Politics and the English Language* (1946) indicting bad English for corrupting thought and slovenly thought for corrupting language" (1). Both Evans and Orwell suggest there is an ethics to writing clearly (which is, here, to write "well") that is essential to the healthy functioning of a society. Language usage, especially the use or abuse of stylistic adornments, is inextricably bound to the socio-political.

Indeed, that Evans wrote with such a sense of urgency is surprising given the familiarity of his demand for clarity to anyone who has ever leafed through a writing "style" guide. Put in context of this steadily-growing genre, Evans's guide is more of an echo than a call to arms. Strunk and White's reverberating declaration from 1959 that the best "approach to style is by

way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity" itself echoes Ezra Pound's 1913 bid to "use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something" (Strunk 69, Pound 5). This enduring value of clarity in style is one that gets at the heart of debates around what style really is—what we mean when we refer to style is imperative to understanding what exactly a clear style reveals and what clarity looks like (if we can see it at all). Evans's argument feels too familiar because theorists of style have long attempted to get at style's essential meaning by isolating its objective indicators, with the implication that style has a physical reality and that the best style avoids excess.[1] Written style is almost exclusively theorized in visual terms, and in this theory ornamentation of any kind—any decal on the window—is anathema to seeing things as they really are.

Style is often described metaphorically as something visual, which suggests that this abstract concept has a tangible reality. Theories that figure style in this way—as the objective trace of the personality of the writer (more able to shine through simplicity here) or as purely mechanical effect (proper usage of language to offer transparency of message), for example— suggest that style is some*thing* an artist uses to have some effect on an audience.[2] In this dissertation I show, however, that such a top-down, temporally linear transmission of meaning overlooks the fact that style is born out of a set of relationships, of grammatical features within a text but also of the social context of both production and reception. What is clear for one audience may be obscure for another, and in that way style's actual meaning is determined by its lived context. While it is questionable whether perfect clarity of meaning from simple use of style should be the goal of a writer who wishes to be an ethical member of society, as a social

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[1] For a more in depth discussion of the values of clarity and ornamentation, especially regarding the differences between Anglo-American and French cultures, see Marjorie Garber's *Quotation Marks*.
[2] Evans's own title, *Do I Make Myself Clear?*, suggests he falls in line with the likes of Montaigne and Buffon that the style reveals the author's self, which I'll expand on in section two.

construct the ideas of "good style" and "writing well" are dependent on the social context of the writing. I don't mean to suggest that writing with the goal of clarity is a bad thing, but that ultimately the enduring stylistic clarity/obscurity binary overlooks the potential to imagine other value systems for style's apparent role of affecting social relationships. We need to explore what alternate metaphors can offer us.

Nowhere is this socio-political relativity of style starker than in times of great social change, and nowhere is stylistic upheaval more overtly played out than in early twentieth century art and literature, in which different styles proliferated. The tendency of artists to form schools bound together by stylistic ideology is one well-known symptom of the changing landscape of style in the time of modernism. Along with the concision of Pound's Imagism, we see the paratactic, impressionistic interiority of Woolf, the elliptical verbosity of Stein, and the comprehensive mastery of Joyce. The forming of artistic schools and the development of distinctive styles were not new trends in the twentieth century, but the aggressiveness with which artists asserted the importance of their aesthetic within quickly proliferating styles is at least one important characteristic of what we tend to lump under the umbrella of modernism. What makes modernist style different from style previously, according to Ben Hutchinson and others, is that style itself becomes the subject matter of modernism (Hutchinson 1).[3] Clear or not, modernism sets style on display.

While the styles of modernism are wide ranging and distinct, modernist writers and literary critics in the time since still offer rules and theories for understanding these styles.

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[3] Jonathan Goldman, for one, writes, "What makes modernism modernism is style" in his consideration of "why the way the modernists wrote is what we think of when we think of modernism" (6). Goldman very much follows the lead of Aaron Jaffe, who wrote that "even as literary *self*-fashioning became increasingly inscrutable, figures like Lewis, Eliot, and Pound mobilized their textual signatures—their authorial imprimaturs—into durable promotional vehicles for their careers, hybridizing bodily agency and textual form" (3).

Critics, for example, generally figure modernist style as either an effect of purpose-driven experimentation or as a trace of the artist's singular personality.[4] Style in modernist texts is both asserted and read, in other words, as a noun; a thing that comes into existence as a result of the creative action of the artist. In setting the terms of "new modernism" in *Bad Modernisms*, for example, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz characterize style in more traditional readings of modernism ("old" modernism, you could say) to be "dependent upon a refractory relation between itself and dominant aesthetic values, between itself and its audience, between itself and the bourgeoisie, … between itself and society in general" (2).[5] Other studies, too, refer to style as an effect of the artist's relation to her cultural context. In *Modernism and the Aesthetics of Violence*, Paul Sheehan gives this effect a purpose: "modernism seeks to transform the world through sheer style, to awaken consciousness to itself through a violent renovation of language and literary form" (6). The modernist artist (or modernism as a concept, for Sheehan) is the singular antagonistic actor using style as a tool to disrupt the status quo. The views of these critics, while more nuanced than my sketch here, are based on the stylistic pose assumed and asserted by modernists themselves—aggressively and purposefully counter-conventional. I argue, on the other hand, that to view style as the tool with which the artist acts to disrupt, or as the effect of disrupted conventions, places too much emphasis on the stated intentions of the

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[4] One notable instance of the former approach to modernist style occurs in a recent issue of *Modernism/Modernity* (April 2017). In "Is the Trans in Transnational the Trans in Transgender?" Jessica Berman offers the idea of style as an effect of the artist's response to modernity in her very definition of modernism (as many do): "Modernism, understood as a dynamic set of aesthetic responses to and engagements with the problems of modernity, arises globally in many different guises and a variety of time frames" (219) It includes, but is not limited to "texts that display aesthetic styles common to Euro-American modernism, such as narrative fragmentation or stream of consciousness narration." Later, as she develops her reading of "the trans position often challenges the power of social and juridical hierarchies," Berman discusses a character who "must style herself as a 'female man'" to gain access to a certain type of power. Notably, this trans styling is "tied to a disruptive narrative structure" (231).
[5] I use Mao and Walkowitz's quote here as representative of a former, but influential, critical consensus, even though their volume itself challenges that consensus.

modernist artist and obscures the *inter*active, social nature of style. What if we view style not as the conduit of the artist's voice but as a vehicle of exchange—not working against the status quo but with it and for it by virtue of it being a product (existing in the first place because) of our socially-located perceptions? What I question here is whether understanding the location of style in the modernist text as central, foregrounded, and a definite act of artistic creation doesn't conceal or draw attention away from the fact that the meaning of style is externally, relationally determined.

This dissertation seeks to counter the conventional narrative of modernist style as artistic action by arguing that style as it reaches us through the experimentation of the early twentieth century, despite all the guides and rules, tenets and axioms, is not an objective entity but is rather an abstract concept-tool with shifting significance and a boundary-defining socio-relational purpose. Style is a tool, but, like language itself, it is shared by a community. Its meaning is generated out of a set of social relations—"good" and "bad" style is not ultimately determined by pure aesthetics but by a structure of cultural power. Style's relational quality is an underlying assumption we make but don't state when we discuss style as an interpretive factor in a text. *Of course* people or texts only exhibit certain characteristics in relation to other persons or texts— the relational universe is all we have to determine our descriptions. I argue that by not stating these underlying assumptions about style's interactive nature when we proffer an interpretation of that style, by situating style as only a set of relations in a single text or something determined by a single author, we lose the network that shapes that style, the historical and trans-historical aspects that determine style's functional meaning. Who are we relationally if we can use style to conceal or generate our place in that relation? And, likewise, if we can be stylistically made and unmade in every encounter? Style, as I will show, is not merely the aesthetic surface of a text,

person, or work of art, but is rather defined and determined by its use as a concept to position that text, person, or work of art in a specific and ever-changing social context.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

In this dissertation, I uncover the relationally-determined and relation-determining significance of modernist style. When I refer to "modernist style" I don't mean a single style that can be described by its attributes, but rather a certain *use* of textual style—while it is often asserted as a thing, it is actually a concept to be exploited or mobilized.[6] Readings of modernist style as, for example, "essentially performative, in the sense that it enacts its own concerns with the possibilities—but also with the limits—of aesthetic expression" suggest that the meaning of style (what it is and what it signifies) is intentioned and exists prior to the reader's experience of it (Hutchinson 10). An understanding of the socially-determined nature of style, on the other hand, allows the reader of the text (whether individual or a collective) to be more than just a passive receiver. For example, style in *Ulysses* reveals Joyce's voice as distinctive and unsettling, but the voice's capacity to unsettle is generated from our acceptance that style is an indication of the writer in the text (the voice's stability) and our recognition of Joyce the unsettler (the intention in the stylistics); theories of the social nature of style allow the social to resist that unsettling by, at least in some small way, setting the terms of what style means, is, or does.

I see style as something not supplemental to a text (merely in service of form or content) or an extension of the artist (the artist's voice or essence), but rather as a perceptible net-like force that entangles text and context and allows them to act on one another. It is the visual cues to relational identity both artist and audience rely on to establish, reposition, or uphold those relations—if style is the meaningful relation of the parts of something, and if we're committed to

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[6] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane suggest that modernism is "less a style than a search for style" (29).

a visual metaphor for understanding style, it is less a pane of glass through which we see an author and more a tapestry of social relationships. Style, to some extent a producer of social situation and identity, becomes the medium in which both writer and reader engage and resist one another to give shape to a network of relations governed by the authority of the visual (or metaphorically visual, in the case of literary style). As an abstraction, style gains its meaning from the use to which it is being put in a social, relational context. I consider, above all, the authority of the visual in the time of modernism in our understanding and placement of social relationships.

Style, like taste, is believed to be personal: perhaps conditioned by one's background and experiences, but ultimately the product of choices made in a free culturally-plural society. It is this erroneous belief that allows the work of style to progress unchecked, to masquerade as mere taste but act, finally, as standards that reinforce social hierarchies. My understanding of style as a primary element in the institution and maintenance of social hierarchy is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of aesthetic taste in *Distinction*—not only because taste and style are so closely related as to be, in some cases, metonymic (someone with "good taste" "has style"), but also because Bourdieu complains that taste is an "indefinable essence" that is constantly being defined by those who study it; the same goes for style (11). Nor is that tendency benign: the definition gives power to the definer in the "game of culture" (12). Evans, the "garlanded" editor, defines good style as sparse, with the implication that what is said simply is said without deception, with the further implication that what strays from that norm is bad. One need only look to gender studies for an explanation of how this value of straightforward unornamented prose comes from a patriarchal heteronormative value system. The emphasis on personal, subjective choice as the main actor in setting the terms of style obscures the implications of those

choices within a larger structure. It is those structural implications with regard to social authority that we miss when we talk about literary style as an autonomous creation of the individual artist, a set of choices within a range of compositional options to be used poorly or well, rather than as a product of ever-shifting relational boundaries.

Certain early twentieth century works champion an understanding of their style as a noun capable of definition to obscure their use of that style to position themselves within and gain a measure of authority in a social milieu, "for artists, who as the inventors and professionals of the 'stylization of life' are alone able to make their art of living one of the fine arts" (Bourdieu 57). My referents in the previous sentence are intentionally vague: where the sentence begins with "early twentieth century works" as the subject, through the syntactical logic it soon becomes unclear if the works themselves assert a style, or if the creator of that work asserts a style to affect the positioning and authority mentioned later in the sentence. While technically "incorrect" and initially possibly unclear, that lack of clarity serves an important communicative purpose. The referents in the sentence are vague just as style itself is a vague referent—it points to whatever we say it does. A style can exist, but it doesn't take on meaning until we describe it in terms of and in relation to something else it purportedly signifies—a personality, a genre, etc. In this way, an understanding of modernist style necessitates an understanding of modernist critical narrative weaving. It is the work of this project to show how modernist literature generates critical responses with conflicting notions of how the style of these texts is working. My starting point is the question of why the style of modernist works is treated as at once aggressively singular (the distinctiveness of a painting by Picasso, for example) and slavishly devoted to the establishment and perfection of rules (the adherence of certain styles to Bergsonian theories of

space and time, the characteristics a painting must have to be considered cubist), and to what effect.

In place of more concrete visual metaphors, the metaphor I suggest for style is that of the net—as I've already suggested, this too can be thought of concretely as tapestry, but its three- or even four-dimensional nature allows a more complex set of relations than the flat, clear or cloudy windowpane, mirror, or portrait metaphors. I take this metaphor, and my title, from Maud Ellmann's influential book, *The Nets of Modernism*, which uncovers modernism's preoccupation with relational entanglement. What I add to this important work is the idea that visual (or metaphorically visual) cues, the stuff of style, play a primary role in giving shape and meaning to those entanglements, and the power that exists in reifying those relationships through describing them. When we offer a description of a style, we do not merely observe and report—as nodes in the network, we use our socially-located perspectives to generate, break, or reinforce the relationships of the whole. This introduction thus has three main aims: to understand the changes in definitions of "style" in literary criticism leading into the period of modernism, to suggest "modernist style" as an unrelenting paradox that demands flexible definition, and to demonstrate the ethical implications of this paradox for modern criticism's attempts to define that style. I consider how, in other words, both style and criticism determine and are determined by character, social position, and reputation.

I. Defining Style

In 1922, J. Middleton Murry considers three ways in which the concept of style is commonly understood: 1) as reference to the "personal idiosyncrasy of expression by which we recognize a writer," 2) as a rhetorical aid to argument and 3) with a more vague and complex

meaning, a "quality which transcends all personal idiosyncrasy, yet needs—or seems to need—personal idiosyncrasy in order to be manifested" (4-7). This latter understanding "is a complete fusion of the personal and the universal" (7). Murry is referring to those passages of a text in particular which are intensely "personal and particular" in expression, yet have "universal significance." This fusion of the individual and the universal through style, for Murry, is "the highest achievement of literature," though it is not quite clear what this means or looks like. That abstractness seems to be a distinct quality of style—or, to put it another way, style is at once distinct and abstract. But, again, what does that look like?

Like Murry, whose observations are tellingly titled *The Problem of Style*, many theorists of style refer to the subject as a problem or a question—so many that it seems like style's whole existence is *as* problem or question, and for good reason.[7] As the critical language of the subject of style is built around hypotheses and attempts to describe the ethereal, even our critical tools are insufficient to the task of simply saying what style *is*. Style is referred to in many different ways: form, manner, mode, method, treatment, viewpoint, "way of telling," technique, design, and "patterned integrity," to name just a few.[8] Each of style's OED definitions rely on synonymous terms like "manner," "features," "form," or "tone" to get at a sense of what the concept means, rather than the definition. While many critics imply that modernist style is evocative rather than definitive, it is unclear if that is a new thing in the time of modernism—

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[7] For instance, Georg Simmel, "The Problem of Style" (1908); Remy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du Style* (1907); J.V. Cunningham, *The Problem of Style* (1966); Bennison Gray, *Style: The Problem and Its Solution* (1969); Heinrich Wolfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art* (1950); Teresa Kennedy, *Elyot, Castiglione, and the Problem of Style* (1996).
[8] "Patterned integrity" is Hugh Kenner's term for a knot in *The Pound Era*—it is a pattern made visible by the rope which constitutes it. I read this as related to style, because style, too, is understood as a patterning made visible by some material. Some other notable definitions are: Georg Simmel, "type of artistic arrangement" (64); Stendhal, "Style consists in adding to a given thought all the circumstances calculated to produce the whole effect that the thought ought to produce;" Adorno, "conventions that are in a state of equilibrium, however tentative, with the subject we call 'styles'" (*Aesthetic Theory* 293).

what seems to have changed is not style itself (if such a thing exists) but the meanings we attribute to style.

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Literary style has been defined in many ways, depending on a seemingly infinite number of variables (context, time period, audience, etc). While there is no consensus as to what parts of a text constitute its style, it is generally agreed that style is the somehow meaningful relation of these parts. The systematic constructions that physically make up those intratextual relations, which we study as grammar and rhetoric, are not in themselves style. Rather, things like syntax and word choice serve to convey a distinct tone that itself can be called a style. Style is the voice revealed by the pattern, it is the "mode of *expression*," "*tone* of speaking," "*manner* of executing a task or performing an action or operation" (OED, 13, 15, 23a, emphases mine). All of these definitions suggest a particularity in the patterning, the subjective hand behind the construction.

While any operational understanding of style as it is generally defined will be necessarily broad, its essence is commonly agreed to be palpable, distinctive, and revelatory. These three aspects of style—what it is, how it works, and what it does—will form the basis of my tentative definition. It is important that this definition be tentative, as I will demonstrate that the true value of style, at least in the twentieth century, is that its borders are always provisional. What style is, how it is generated, what it does—all of these are temporary or multiple, having the potential for difference from reader to reader, between generations of readers. To provision is also to provide, which we must keep in mind as we consider what it is that style and definitions of style supply to the reader and the use of that supply. Thinking of style in these terms is indispensable for rethinking how style works in modernism.

While critics may not agree on what style is, most agree that it is indeed an identifiable thing with describable attributes (though we delimit those attributes differently according to what *thing* we identify style as). The body of style is most commonly considered as either separable from the text itself (something added to the text, like a spice added to a recipe), as the effect of relationships of language within a text (the texture, smell, etc. of the dish created by the recipe), or some combination of the two. In most cases, however, style is studied as limitable, because it is by nature a pattern, design, or mode of presentation. It is most often treated as palpable— easily perceived and something that, if not visible, is at least *sensed*. It is patterned, delimited sense material.

Whether this patterning of the text be intentional or not, style can be read as in some way distinctive. J.V. Cunningham boils the question of style down to the simple "premise that something may be said in different ways and that the ways may be compared" (9). These "ways" are usually understood to be the conscious or unconscious choices made by the author which are generally read as identifying something about that author. Style, as way, mode, or manner, is the particularities of a text that "result from a series of choices made within some set of constraints" (L. Meyer 3). Both the choices and the constraints point to the conditions of the text's production, identifying a writer, group, or time period.

While there may be no more agreed upon sense of what style is than that it *is*, most accept that style has a function within the text. The revelatory capacity of style is almost unquestioned in literary history. Beyond merely serving to identify the writer, time period, etc., style is studied or interpreted in order to uncover or reveal the non-explicit content of the text, which is often associated with the psychological or ideological background of the identified source, and is often unacknowledged, unintended, or unknown to the author herself. Particularly

important for this uncovering function of style is the belief that style resides in the sensible verbal surface and that it signifies something unseen. Even supposed aesthetic autonomy, the explicit foregrounding of stylistics for their own sake, can be read as a symptom of a desire for asociality, or as a surface distraction from some contextual meaning. Style is read as the container in which the writer places meaning, and opening that container is a matter of hermeneutics—the job of the reader. As complicated a matter as literary interpretation is, it is based on the agreement that the writer has something to communicate, consciously or unconsciously, and the reader will find something through the act of reading.

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While this three-fold definition of style serves as the usual foundation for many different theories of style which occasionally conflict, it is of course not without its complications, which serve as the developing points in successive theories of style. I will now walk through some of the most important of these developing points as they roughly correspond to the three pieces of this standard understanding of style, in order—its palpable identity, its distinctive significance, and its revelatory function. Briefly, the main complication is that these standard approaches to style focus on creation and reception as two discrete processes, overlooking or underappreciating their concurrence—overlooking the basic fact that language is a communicative medium, and communication is an act between two or more parties in which the reader is just as much responsible for what is communicated as the writer. Oscar Wilde comes to this notion in his reading of Pater's criticism: "the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it, as it was in his soul who wrought it. Nay, it is rather the beholder who lends to the beautiful thing its myriad meanings, and makes it marvelous for us, and sets it in some new relation to the age" (*Critic* 367-8). I suggest that style, as the crucial location of this

communicative act or the aestheticized meeting ground between personal and public, is the thing

that shapes and is shaped by each new relation-setting encounter. Style bares the traces of both

the writer's attempts to signify and the reader's attempts to determine meaning.

Tracing the word back to its etymological origins helps to clarify this liminal position of

style. As a noun, "style" originally referred to the stylus, the apparatus with a pointed end used to

create the physical mark of the signifier. It is the tool used to render the private thought social—

the idea becomes reified in the social medium of language and some physical conduit (wax or

clay or what have you). By the time the word was adopted in the English language from Latin,

however, the wax tablet on which the stylus is used was an obsolete technology, so style began

its life in English as an abstract, metonymical reference to the writing of the work itself, a

manner of writing, or the mannerisms of the writer—style is thus always standing in for

something other than itself (Lawler). What that something is depends on the critical context of

interpretation. This suggests that style is not, in fact, identifiable in itself, but that its identity is

dependent on its lived context. Meyer Schapiro points to the multitude of ways in which style is

used by different disciplines—the archeologist sees style as symptomatic, revealing clues to the

origins of the created object; the art historian studies the relationships of different styles to track

"the development of forms;" the philosopher of history is concerned with the undercurrent of

shared stylistic techniques that serve as a clue to the "collective thinking and feeling" of an

epoch; and the critic tends to see style as a value term—a quality an artist has—a writer *is* a

stylist (20). Style according to any discipline exists not as a real entity, but rather as an indicator

of something outside of itself.

What, exactly, does literary style indicate? Even if style is difficult to pin down as

distinct, it is still read as distinct*ive*—that is, it can be identified as characteristic of a person,

group, or time period. This is illustrated most memorably in Buffon's 1753 maxim "*le style, c'est l'homme même*" ("style is the man himself"), which takes both the writing instrument and the written word out of the definition completely (178). For Buffon and many others, style is generated by the artist, and finds its expression through a physical medium. Reading this famous claim in the context of the rest of Buffon's text, however, that medium is of course still necessary for rendering the man visible—"style ought to mean an engraving of thoughts"—but for Buffon the genesis of style is still in the body of the man, prefiguring the text (175). The meaning of style, or the content of style, is both generated by and pointing back to the writer. While this use of style has been contested time and again, it persists: Schopenhauer one hundred years later would agree with Buffon, "Style is the physiognomy of the mind, and a safer index to character than the face" (11).[9] Nearly one hundred years after that, J. Middleton Murry reiterates that "style is organic—not the clothes a man wears, but the flesh, bone, and blood of his body" (122). Style is the man, insofar as the very shape of the man, his mannerisms, and his creations are determined by every part of him, seen and unseen, physical and mental.

But to what extent is the writer able to control her ways of thinking and feeling, mask features of her physiognomy, or hide flesh and bone? The answers to these questions have been sought in the revelatory function of style. If the writer can control the effects of style, or somehow dissemble her own presence in the text, the content of the text becomes questionable and largely unimportant. In response to this destabilized authorial integrity, critics turned from writer-centric models of interpretation to reader-centric models—what the writer intended is not as important as what the reader finds. The problem with this use of style becomes most obvious when you consider the reasonable possibility that a writer might be aware of the ways texts may

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[9] Marjorie Garber, when interpreting Lacan's claim that "style is… the man we are addressing," claims that "style, in other words, comes from outside, from the other, not (as Buffon implied) from within" (37).

be read symptomatically. In the mid-nineteenth century, uses of style responded to these challenges by developing in two directions. The writer turns style into a hard aesthetic surface that refuses to reveal. It becomes something that diverts a reader's attention, subverts a content, or converts the very idea of content into something irrelevant to the work itself. The aesthetic function of style is instead foregrounded while the idea of an overt textual message is undermined or challenged. At the same time, the reader responds to this by using style not to interpret the work but to interpret his or her own experience of the work. The tide shifts to a reader-centric interpretive model most famously in Pater's impressionistic criticism and culminates in the mid-twentieth century with the text-centric New Criticism, emphasizing the text as stylized surface without context.

What these methods of reading ignore is the fact that style is, first and foremost, since the invention of the stylus, a tool of purposeful expression and communication between two or more parties—it is not just aesthetics; it is, as I have said, the aestheticized meeting ground between private and public, assuming such realms exist. In other words, the body of the text in its wholeness is dependent on the occasion of reading, which is preconditioned by the writer but is brought to fruition by the reader. To overlook that dynamic is, in a sense, to kill and fix the object of study—like trying to learn how a body functions from a cadaver, a non-functioning body. Rather, I would suggest we consider style as the living dynamic in the relationship between writer, reader, and context, which is ongoing and ever shifting. Characterized by a body of stylistic techniques (the formal elements of the text that interact with the reader to give off the sense of style) which assert or challenge ideas of immediate and subjective perception, modernist texts enact the impetus behind the emergence of a style that seeks to simultaneously divert the reader yet provoke response.

II. Stylizing Modernism's Duality: Autonomy in Relationality

If the blending of the universal and personal is for Murry the height of stylistic achievement, in the style of modernism that duality is much thornier. The personal dimension of the equation has long been considered in modernism to be not just the artist's presence in the text, but also an individuating impulse against the social or universal. Modernist autonomy is the name we give to that individuation—the turn away from or devaluing of the social. Though the concept of modernist autonomy has been challenged and, by now, set aside for the more interesting and fruitful study of the social contexts of early twentieth-century texts, the concept as artistic desire has lately come back around as a productive area of inquiry.[10] For this study, autonomy represents a stance or pose taken by modernist writers that is impossible without the styled pose of the body taking that stance, so to speak. Style is the socially visible cue that tells us the styled body exists (or desires to exist) in opposition to the social. Whether or not the modernist desire for autonomy is as sincere as previously believed, it has a strong influence on how the style of modernism is read. I propose that style, the point of contact between the singular and the social, mediates or troubles the binary of individual and social (here referred to as the "autonomy-relationality" binary)[11] in modernist literature and art in a way that holds them together as paradox. These separate realms are both asserted and questioned at once.

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[10] See especially Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy* (2013); Emmett Stinson, *Satirizing Modernism: Aesthetic Autonomy, Romanticism, and the Avant-Garde* (2017); Charles Altieri, "Why Modernist Claims for Autonomy Matter" (2009).

[11] I owe my use of this term to Elise Archias and Becky Bivens, who used it as the title and driving concept for an invaluable seminar at the annual meeting of the Modernist Studies Association in Pittsburg in 2014.

In his essay "Style and Its Image," Roland Barthes explains that "style… has always been part of a binary system, or if one prefers, of a mythological paradigm of two terms," content and form (90). Whether we understand style as a part of this binary as in some way suggestive of content (the particularity of the artist, for example) or as synonymous with form (the vehicle of that message), critics nevertheless generally read style as being inherent to a text, already there before the reader reaches it. The authoritative narrative of experimental modernism, in which artists assert the fundamental disconnect between word and thing by either divesting their art of any allegiances to the real world or filtering that connection through the single perceiving consciousness, likewise relies on form and content as a conflicting binary that gives primacy to the text. In this narrative, either form depicts content or form *is* content, is autonomous—in either case, the text is whole and fixed prior to its release into the reading public. But while aesthetic theory sees style as inherent to the text, what we specifically identify as style changes. What an observer identifies as style is a matter of the relation between the social position of the observer and that of the thing observed—a matter of perspective.[12] By thinking of style's meaning not as something fixed but as the product of shifts and gaps in viewpoints, we can gain a more interactive sense of the role of art in the world and the role of the world in art.

For the works of high modernism in particular, the suggestion of the individual's detachment from the collective is stark and the stylistic boundary between autonomous text and that which exists outside of the text is one that indicates opposition to that outside. Many modernists asserted a "doctrine of autonomy" in "an effort to free literature as a practice from a

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[12] Philip Sohm reminds us of the baggage accompanying definitions of style: "Because style is explained with language, it absorbs with that explanation characteristics that are peculiarly linguistic. Because style is explained in texts, and because 'every text is the absorption and transformation of other texts,' it is also bound to reflect the structures of those discourses. Art critics, theorists, and historians observe paintings visually, but what they see and how they explain it are constrained by conceptual and linguistic structures that they have acquired through years of reading." (43)

particular form of constraint" (Goldstone xi). While this assertion has dominated the literary critical narrative of the time period, as Dennis Brown is careful to point out in his *Study in Self-Fragmentation*, modernist writers were very skeptical of the possibility or ideal of *personal* autonomy. "But," he says, "such skepticism should not blind us to the severity of the task that lay ahead for modernist writers. The self as integral 'ego' was far easier to mock than to dethrone" (6). The attempts proved to be more of a "continuing struggle rather than a complete revolution." Andrew Goldstone, taking this rewriting of the narrative a step further, has recently laid bare the socio-economic apparatus that makes the autonomous modernist artist's work possible. He gives the lie to the idea of the modernist's complete withdrawal from the social world. While his and other studies rightly penetrate through long unquestioned myths of modernism, I differ from Goldstone on the use of the concept of style. Goldstone "argues that the practices of autonomy can be found… at many levels of the individual work, from thematic motifs to rhetorical figures, from sentence style to plot mechanisms" (10). Because it is (justifiably) not his focal point, nor a term to be challenged in his study, style is instead a throwaway term, as it is for many critics, referring to one small way in which his key term of autonomy is manifested. I argue that style, on any level, is much more central to the "relations constituting [the writer's] social-cultural world" than we tend to let on, especially in modernist works.

My theory of style as something ineluctably social falls close to Jacques Rancière's recent thoughts on the concept in *Aisthesis*. His title term is the "sensible fabric" of the production of art as opposed to its reception, which is the realm of aesthetics (x). However, production for Rancière is not altogether separate from the idea of reception. This sensible fabric is both the material conditions of art's production and the "modes of perception and regimes of emotion" which surround the work of art. The fabric is, first and foremost, social and

perceptible: "this fabric of institutions, practices, affective modes and thought patterns … allow for a form, a burst of color, an acceleration of rhythm, a pause between words, a movement, or a glimmering surface." That this social materiality and perceptivity is put into stylistic terms is telling. Rancière's formulation is a model for how I propose to define and implement the idea of the "social" life of literature. I, too, consider the social as separate from reception—where I refer to "the reader" or the reader's "reactions" in this dissertation I mean not actual ways in which actual readers interpreted a text, as in reader response theory, but the "modes of perception and regimes of emotion," that make up the "interpretive network" of art (x, xi).

Rancière's primary consideration of style happens in a chapter on "Social Art." For, he says, "Style is not the manner that signals art or the artist. It is not the artificial form of individualization that fashion offers to those who want to affirm their singularity, or that of their class;" rather, "common culture is based on style" (148). This impulse toward "the artificial form of individualization," however, is exactly what drives the supposed proliferation of styles in modernism. Individual writers do have distinct styles; those styles are, in practice, often marks of singularity. Rancière quotes Georg Simmel to position this practicality of style in tension with actuality: "style is the aesthetic attempt to solve the great problem of life: how an individual work or behavior, which is closed, a whole, can simultaneously belong to something higher, a unifying encompassing context" (149). Here Simmel echoes Murry in positioning style as the somewhat magical element of art that brings the personal into the realm of the universal. For Simmel style is exactly the element of the work of art that allows it to transcend the individual: "by virtue of style, the particularity of the individual work is subjugated to a general law of form that also applies to other works; it is, so to speak, relieved of its absolute autonomy" ("Problem" 64). While my understanding of style is closely aligned with this, my work questions the

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seeming stability of the general law governing all works and allows the assertion of autonomy to have its effect.

Like Rancière, Sara Ahmed explores the idea of "sociality of emotion" (9). What links emotion and style is this idea that how we feel toward others "shape[s] the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies" (1). Those surfaces "take shape … through orientations towards and away from others" (4). While she doesn't use the term style in her study, these surfaces that are shaped by the social regimes of emotion (to blend her terminology with Rancière's) are suggestive of style. Because my work attempts to make sense of the style of a text through references to the styles of bodies (the visible or otherwise palpable aspects through which we make sense of an other), the affective attachments we form or fail to form for these physical entities, based on that style, is inseparable from any consideration of what exactly that style is in the first place. Unlike Simmel, who suggests that the stylistic surface collapses boundaries between self and other, Ahmed argues that "emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. … It is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made" (10). What is graspable in conceiving of some separation of self and other, in other words, is only the affective boundaries that make up the stuff of those social relationships.

My study also builds on Rancière's claims of the relation between visuals and social authority. He writes particularly of the relation between the turn toward aesthetics in the *fin de siecle* and the collapse of social hierarchy to show how authority is now something constructed or styled—style here becomes no longer a signal of power relations but foundational to those relations. It is not merely an ornament or a trace of the writer's hand in the text—style is rather the point of engagement between art object and the world. It is because of this social location

that both actual styles and definitions of style change. Joyce, for example, grounds the mutable nature of style in its own history in the highly experimental "Oxen of the Sun" chapter of *Ulysses*, in which the content of the plot is filtered through the history of literary styles to challenge the reader to make sense of the text.[13] Joyce's style of styles at once reveals a self-referential literary-historical metanarrative and conceals the plot that readers seek to draw them through the text—style, the reader's interaction with the text, comes forward to frustrate stable meaning while enticing the reader in the search for meaning. Joyce constructs his own authority by claiming an inheritance of the genealogy of English literature through his mastery of it and orchestrating the reader's failed inquiry. However, if we consider style not as the passive surface of the text but as the active meeting ground of writer and reader, creation and tradition, autonomy and relationality, style is able to both separate and hold together these disparate elements.

While certain modernist works of art restrict their borders in the name of autonomy, and stand in putative opposition to the world beyond those borders, as the visible surface of the text style acts as an intermediary between work and world, the boundary itself a site of reciprocity and communicative interchange. As meeting ground of singular (form, writer, creation) and social (content, reader, tradition), style in the early twentieth century aligns itself with both while necessarily failing to identify with one or the other completely—in this dual partial identification it contradicts itself. This discord forms the basis of my inquiry into what I call the paradox of modernist style—that is, style functions to reveal and conceal, proclaim and withhold at once. This paradoxical style of revelation and concealment develops in literature in the form of both

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[13] While it would be equally appropriate to call this parade of styles a history of *form*, I want to suggest that the concrete details of the way in which the text is written is form, while the effect of the specific perspective the reader has of that form is the style.

the aesthetics of impression, immersion, and fragmentation and an obsession with textual and subjective integrity. The paradox, in other words, is that style in modernism renders the work both autonomous and relational—a contradiction that is yet true.

III. To Style: An Example of Autonomous Relationality in H.D.'s Imagism

I opened this introduction by alluding to Pound's affinity with the clarity-obsession of writers of style guides because his rules for Imagist poetry typify aversions to stylistic ornamentation and powerfully assert standardizing principles for poetic writing—standards that paradoxically assert the mastery of the individual writer through the clarity of the text by imposing criteria for identifying with the imagist group. A brief look at the imagist poems of H.D. will demonstrate the sociality of style in practice and its paradoxically concomitant loyalty to individual personality.

H.D.'s work itself is frequently noted for its insistence on duality: hard/soft, masculine/feminine, land/sea, etc.[14] These binaries often devolve into an image of self versus other in which the self conflicts with the world outside, while its identity is determined by that relation. Doubleness in these poems is not, however, simply a matter of dialectic. Through a multifunctional relationality, difference in these poems is both upheld and collapsed at once. When, for instance, the speaker of "Oread" bids the sea to "Splash your great pines/On our rocks,/Hurl your green over us—/Cover us with your pools of fir"—sea and land, speaker and spoken to, and speaker and reader come together in a moment of metaphorical collapse intensified by the ambiguous "us" (*CP* 55). The violence of the language indicates the difficulty of physically bringing together sea and land (a collapse that can only be temporary and futile)

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[14] For more on this, see Susan Stanford Friedman's entry on H.D. in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Poets, 1880-1945*.

while also forcing togetherness through the plural pronoun—a social relationship dependent on acceptance and alliance. We feel unity and the impossibility of unity at once.

Take H.D.'s poem "The Pool": first published in *Poetry* magazine in 1915 and then later appearing in Amy Lowell's anthology of Imagist poems, this brief lyric exhibits the "I/you relationship" identified by Rachel Blau DuPlessis as the "erotic plot" that commonly occurs in H.D.'s poetry (13).[15] This relationship is one of desire and withholding. If relational tension is what characterizes eroticism in these poems, style, as the palpable materiality of self and other, is the mediating force in that relationship. As the point of contact between the singular and social, style makes each vulnerable to the other, while also serving as a mode of self-protection (as Derrida says, style is "a means of protection against the terrifying, blinding, mortal threat [of that] which *presents* itself, which obstinately thrusts itself into view" [*Spurs* 39]). Consider "The Pool," quoted here in full:

> Are you alive?
> I touch you.
> You quiver like a sea-fish.
> I cover you with my net.
> What are you—banded one?

This brief interrogative poem serves almost as an allegory of style's role as a mediator in interaction. The poem stages the meeting of two entities, one of which is unable to discern the ontological status of the second. To investigate, the speaker physically engages the other, though the unknown entity remains passive: "I touch you."[16] We still don't know whether the thing is

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[15] In its original publication in *Poetry*, "The Pool" was the third of five poems by H.D. The other poems are, in order, "The Wind Sleepers," "Storm," "The Garden," and "Moonrise." All of these poems use the first person and refer to a "you" (with the exception of "The Wind Sleepers," which refers to "we"). This and the thematic link between these poems suggests we read them as a unit. Later the same year, Lowell's anonymously edited collection *Some Imagist Poets* contained seven of H.D.'s poems, "The Pool" appearing first, again followed by "The Garden."

[16] In the original publication in *Poetry*, this line is "I touch you with my thumb." In its publication later the same year in *Some Imagist Poets*, this line appeared "I touch you." A small change, indeed, but

alive; can feel the touch or touch back in turn. As in much modernist literature involved in the representation of a single perceiving consciousness, we are completely blind to the perspective of the object. The next line gives us a clue to the effect the speaker has on the object through her contact: "you quiver like a sea-fish"—the speaker grapples with identification but falls back on simile. It seems that the result of the investigation is a scientific failure but a literary triumph. We are in this space of the relativity of knowledge when we reach the next question, "What are you?"; only now the question has gone from the object's life to the object's identity, and this, too, is left out of reach by the end of the poem. It is only when the speaker binds the thing in her net that it is directly identifiable in some form, but now and forever only as the "banded one."[17]

In H.D.'s poem, the speaker's attempt to make sense of the world, covering it with her net, is an act of styling—the speaker permanently changes and brands the object through her interaction with it. When the object becomes the "banded one," it is granted an identity based on its social relationship. This act of creation is the effect of the contact, yet it erects a barrier between self and world as the investigating autonomous "I" changes the object through her investigation. The stylistic surface, as the meeting place of a supposed subjectivity and the subject's social context, holds the capacity to radically question the relation between the private and the social. Throughout the poem, the speaker desires engagement with the world outside of herself, but that encounter can only exist in poking and binding, changes to the visible surface through their interaction. While style, as it is created in the narrative of this poem, is the product

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significant in a poem of only 23 (originally 26) words. Most importantly for my purposes, this change takes the body out of the poem altogether. Yes, the speaker touches the object, but we don't know with what. The only sure thing contacting the object is, significantly, another object—what we might conceptualized as a stylus.

[17] This line is particularly interesting considered alongside Lowell's preface to her second volume of imagist poems, in which she justifies her opening remarks by claiming "we have thought it wise to tell the public what our aims are, and why we are banded together between one set of covers."

of the singular, autonomous "I", it is yet rendered in the material world outside of that consciousness—the material of the net, the binding of the creature, or, in the case of the poem itself, the words of the poem.

As the poem's content speaks of interaction, the style of the poem acts similarly in the way in which it interacts with the reader. The poem unfolds in a way that involves the reader in the questioning and the ignorance just as it involves us in the touching and the covering. We want to know just as much as the speaker does, and feel somewhat betrayed by our continuing ignorance. Knowing that the speaker has utterly changed the thing in the pool through her encounter with it and her desire to know it, we are uncomfortably aware of our own culpability in our attempts to know and understand the poem itself—to interpret the poem is to style it, perhaps falsely as a sort of "banded one." Critical narrative, in other words, is a significant stylizing force. The poet at once draws us in with the allure of interpretation and pushes us back with its ethical dangers, leaving us in a confrontational space between intimacy and alienation where we are forced to make some meaning of what little we are given. We poke and interrogate the words, ask them to speak, and style them according to the perspective from which we read, intentional or not.

While this reading of H.D.'s poem helps demonstrate the social aspect of style, it also has telling implications for critical narrative. A critical reading of the poem as allegory might be cast in temporal terms like this: the artist (speaker) acts on the object and thus creates style. Take, for example, Jayne Marek's claim that H.D.'s style is a result of her "concern with the artist's power to create brilliant surfaces that conceal meaning as well as reveal excellent technique" (111). Logic carried to excess might suggest that these critical readings, too, are in effect the creation of the artist, as for the critic to tell a tale of how that style came to be they need to tell a tale of the

artist acting. In other words, by positioning the artist as the primary creator (in a much more basic and less formulated way than readings which suggest an author's "intentions") the critic's very definition of style is tied up in their implicit temporal and social relation to that act of creation. It supposes a style that comes to exist in the moment of creation, prior to and separate from the moment of critical experience, which the critic then seeks out and describes. I suggest, on the other hand, that style has a more amorphous existence. In this dissertation, I re-conceive both the genealogy and aesthetic experience of modernist style as not a narrative of authorial creation and subsequent reception but a network, a net-like structure which itself shapes texts and their inescapable relationality. I look at literary critical history alongside aesthetic creation and experience in each chapter because, as I will show, style is what makes creation and response inextricable from one another.

IV. Critical Styling—"A Version of Fiction"

In the preceding paragraphs, I presupposed on the part of the reader a strong desire to plumb the depths of "The Pool's" mystery, but now I am forced to acknowledge that this experience is not universal. Proponents of surface reading, for example, might criticize the perspicacious critic for conflating the reader's motive with that of the poem's investigative speaker. In surface reading, the text is simply a tale of failed inquiry that allows us to dwell in the feeling of uncertainty of the object under investigation. To return to the assertions of Imagism, we may even take this poem on its own terms and see it as a clear and distinct picture, saying exactly what it means to say as briefly as possible. Some readers indeed resist the urge to read imagism's "hardness" as a protective enclosure and its "sharpness" as a protective assault—there is no unseen interior under protection. Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique* questions the

"pervasive … mood and method" of a hermeneutics of suspicion in the current culture of literary criticism that would seek out the hidden depths that style's surface indicates (1). She considers critique, or "expos[ing] hidden truths and draw[ing] out unflattering and counterintuitive meanings that others fail to see," an outdated mode of reading that we should now begin to see beyond. Her proposed critical method of relationality would seem to mesh well with a social theory of style; Felski develops Susan Sontag's championing of experience over interpretation back into a critical mode that acknowledges "bonds and attachments" between reader and text (179). While I agree with Felski that "works of art cannot help being social, sociable, connected, worldly, immanent," I disagree with her premise that critique forecloses connection, that "the barbed wire of suspicion holds us back and hems us in, as we guard against the risk of being contaminated and animated by the words we encounter" (11). The point I make here (and which makes up a component of each chapter) is that modernist studies in particular faces an interesting challenge in any non-critique criticism—how to respond to texts that beg, and in some instances require, to be interrogated.

Reading style for indications of the author is to enact a hermeneutics of suspicion. My project engages in relatively recent theoretical attempts to envision interpretive alternatives to this "hermeneutics of suspicion" or "critique" while remaining skeptical of the assertion of the difference these alternative critical models make. "Hermeneutics of suspicion" and "critique" are Paul Ricœur and Felski's respective critical terms, against which Eve Sedgwick proposes "reparative reading" and Felski proposes what she calls "attunement" or "attachment theory." Both offer a more positive stance towards the text through a focus on relational entanglements— positive in terms of mending or building connections and meanings rather than cutting through the text with an "incisiveness" which our current critical climate lauds. This relational positivity

posited against a critical negativity, however, relies on a false value binary that queer theory and disability studies have suggested we rethink, reminding us that to give relations a temporal significance is to make assumptions about the utility of community-building that necessarily assigns use-value to its members.[18] In critical description of any kind we seek always to rewrite, to describe relations and create narratives to impose meaning on our object of study. For example, Felski's attunement, however much it impels us to understand the relational, attached condition of our perspective of our object of study as opposed to some objective privileged individual critical stance, yet retains the assumption that the critic is a privileged individual by virtue of their relationship with the object of study. Even after post-modernism, the privileged viewpoint of the individual critic is a legacy of modernism; one, I argue, that lingers through style, is enacted by and relies on the notion or use of style as the manifestations and foundation of individuality and visual or aural signs as an organizing force in social relations. As style becomes more and more a concern of literary critics in their own writing (with the publication of multiple academic style guides with the intention of the production of more accessible scholarship), we must ask how the concept of style functions in the written work that, after all, sets the terms of that concept in the first place.[19]

Finding alternatives to critique requires reimagining the culture of academe; a shift in how we envision, enact, and justify the work that we do. Felski claims that critique, the interrogation of a text to make it reveal, has become such a "charismatic mode of thought" in part because of its own *self*-critical tendencies, which give weight to its claims of rigor and a degree of incisiveness that other modes of reading cannot obtain (3). Critique gives us a model of

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[18] See in particular Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*.
[19] For example, Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing* and *The Writer's Diet: A Guide to Fit Prose*; Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*; and even Wendy Belcher's *Writing your Journal Article in 12 Weeks*.

a heroic, solitary critic struggling against the text, endeavoring to notice something new or hidden, striving to reveal and in that way justifying his strenuous efforts to reveal. The critic revels in the intellectual play of critique and encounters texts as enigmas to be solved. This mode of reading, being a suspicious and canny observer like Sherlock Holmes, values the solitary critic whose self-reflexivity and self-questioning is the same as their reading practices—inward looking in an attempt to uncover some hidden truth. This heroic singular struggling is of course not that different from the mode of the modernist, overwhelmed with a self-reflexive interest in perspective and interiority. That Felski proposes a model of relationality to replace critique affirms and upholds the autonomy-relationality binary by disallowing their co-existence. It forecloses a true ambivalence of critical mind (what Marianne DeKoven calls *sous-rature*) that some texts beg for.

I wish to suggest that relational reading *is* suspicious reading in the modernist text and, if style is an effect of one's relation to their network, even critique is a relational stance. How we read and understand style is inseparable from how we relate to it, by virtue of style's existence as a tool for establishing and giving meaning to relationships. In fact, for Felski, any mode of response to a text is a "style of thought" (176). These "styles of thought" bleed into and out of a "stylistics of existence." The latter is "not just a cognitive activity but an embodied mode of attentiveness that involves us in acts of sensing, perceiving, feeling, registering, and engaging." If we consider the necessary "embodiment" of all our activities, we do those activities, no matter how passive, with a certain style. In this formulation, style is the effect and fact of our bodies. But it isn't merely our singular bodies—literature affords us the opportunity to experience and, to the extent that we can, try on different styles of thought, different styles of existence. Style, our own and that of the object we confront, in Felski's theory, is the foremost condition of

interpretation. I want to suggest that in both relational and symptomatic reading, the critic is involved in a practice of hermeneutic narrative-making. If the work of analysis is in creating a critical narrative by establishing and describing the relationships of parts within a whole, even establishing the relationship between the critical self to that object of study is to tell a story of its meaning to us. Is all setting up of relations, all relationality, a narrative, then? I argue that if style itself is the meaningful relation of parts within a whole, style is really a concept tool used to create a meaningful narrative of the relations between these parts, what Berel Lang calls "a version of fiction," which is the construct of the describer.

The responsible critic acknowledges their complicity in that process, the credentialing role they have in describing relations and putting those relations into effect. My readings here will demonstrate how we tend to naturalize style as something that signals something definite and pre-existing, which obscures the fact that critical descriptions of style, the meanings we give to style as a concept-tool, create and fix a narrative of the relations between text, author, and reader that is only one of any number of different potential narratives.

In speaking of relationships in a project that transgresses period boundaries, I am all too aware of the problem of creating a critical narrative across such discrete historical events— constructing them as nodes not in a three-dimensional network, but in my own linear timeline. But what I am trying to say is more important than the means by which I say it (means which, due to my training, the critical tools at hand, and the dissertation format, I find impossible to avoid): if to speak of the relationship between things is to create a narrative involving those things, what we do when we style something—ourselves or our art or our words—is to prepare the way for certain possibilities of relation between that thing and the world. The moment of contact is the reification of one or more of those possibilities. Style is the way in which we seek

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some control over how things relate and the type of narrative we use to understand this matrix of convergence. The least I can do is acknowledge the role I play and suggest the provisional nature of the narrative I've constructed.

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This dissertation is primarily about the legacy of modernist fiction and criticism in granting power to literary critics to style a critical narrative (styling here as a verb) and to confer value to style as a noun by defining or describing it. By "defining style" I meant to refer to the power of critical narrative to shape the canon, but also its power in shaping the network of relations between texts that not only determines (and predetermines) the meaning of the style of those texts, but determines a secondary meaning of style which gives us a language in which that power is articulated. Given that my primary term is dual, modernist style, I consider two things in every chapter: modernism and style. I take canonical texts of early and high modernism as my subject not to engage in any debate about what can or should be considered "modernism"— rather I use established critical narratives of what constitutes modernism as my foundation for assessing the style-based methods of establishing that critical narrative. A much larger and denser project would consider the stylistic behavior of the many texts now being studied under our (rightly) wider definition of the modernist period. This kind of study would fill out and enrich our view of the stylistic network of which the modernism I look at here is only a small cluster of nodes. My own thesis, however, I believe would still hold.

To more deeply consider the second half of our dual term, style, in each chapter I look at various personae that represent (and are *represented in*) modernist concerns with style, as a way of putting pressure on how we read this style in relation to how we read the style-makers. I operate under Stephen Greenblatt's assertion that "language, like other sign systems, is a

collective construction; our interpretive task must be to grasp more sensitively the consequences

of this fact by investigating both the social presence to the world of the literary text and the

social presence of the world in the literary text" (5). Therefore, I examine not only the style *of*

texts but representatives of what might be called a stylistic theory *in* the representation of a social

world within those very same texts. The dandy's social interactions, for example, become a

cypher for understanding the use to which Oscar Wilde is putting style in his writing. Primarily,

these are all figures who style themselves in a way that gives them a certain power in social

relationships while also hiding that role through the idea that this style is merely an inherent

essence on display, rather than a construct. The spy, for example, styles himself to read as one

inherent identity while operating secretly as an opposing identity. In the same way, Conrad's *The*

Secret Agent is spy or detective fiction at the same time as it repudiates the conventions of genre

fiction. The Brummellian dandy stylist, the self-styling spy, the modernist artist as master stylist

(especially in the example of Joyce), and the critic as a stylist of critical narrative all effect a

stylistic solidity and ambiguity at once.

Chapter one begins with Beau Brummell, the first dandy of Regency England, as he

performs a proto-modernist autonomy in style and attitude. Much different from the dandies of

Wilde's age, the Regency dandy's meticulous costume renders him an object of intrigue,

provokes questions while withholding answers. In addition to briefly retracing the shifts in dandy

symbology, I here argue that Beau Brummell's early tactics of sartorial hyper-stylization were

transformed into what would become an early modernist literary style through Wilde's own

aesthetic theories. Since to stylize is "to conform (an artistic representation) to the rules of a

conventional style," hyper-stylization entails an excess of convention, which Wilde uses in *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray to pose a challenge to the conventions of identity and genre (OED). For

instance, Wilde begins his novel with the conventions of realist description, but with details heightened to the extent that you can hear the bees buzzing, a vividly stylized emphasis on a minor sound. Brummell's sartorial and Wilde's literary hyper-stylization is an early form of modernist aesthetic autonomy—this style evokes and perfects pre-existing conventions while exceeding and breaking the social expectations of those conventions, a move that allows aesthetics to stand within yet apart from or against context. In evoking, exceeding, and thus breaking convention, hyper-style involves the reader in a game of intrigue, expectation, and speculation. Style is at the center of the modernist crisis of representation for the way it uses expectations of the stability of aesthetics and meaning in order to rupture that stability.

I then consider the reverse effect of hyper-stylization in early twentieth-century tales of espionage, by nature heavily invested in intrigue. These novels grapple with questions of subjectivity and modes of perception as problems active within their plots: John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* both depict variations of undercover agents reflecting on the complicated nature of disguise and the impressions they give and receive. As an identity that relies on secrecy through the constant maintenance of a hyper-stylized exterior, I find the spy-as-stylist (and stylist-as-spy) a character significantly involved in the politics of self-representation and subversions of impressionism. While in chapter one I focus on the impression's capacity to affect figurative violence in breaking conventions, here I explore the codependence of these aesthetic implications and the representation of actual or threatened violence against individuals and the nation to reveal the role of style as at once a tool of and threat to communal identity.

In the third chapter, I turn to high modernist depictions of the social role of artists, which demonstrate the social, communicative nature of style. Wyndham Lewis and James Joyce are

well known for their distinct writing styles, Lewis being a stylistic aggressor and Joyce demonstrating his mastery over a comprehensive range of styles. However, I look to their representations of artists in *Tarr* and *Ulysses* to show how the densely affective social worlds of their characters challenge the notion of self-styled originality. How do we understand an author's mastery of style in texts that demonstrate everyday hindrances to that mastery? In this chapter, I push back on formulations that have these individual styles arising out of the aggressive or masterly activity of the artist and consider style as the tool with which these writers aggress against and seek to master the larger critical narrative of their work. By figuring style as an instrument of rather than the effect of action, we allow room to re-conceive literary effects in a social context.

This dissertation ends with a consideration of the essay form in modernism's critical legacy. I begin this dissertation with the story of the dandy, for whom an absolute interest in style was indeed his sole claim to a certain kind of social power, but who also lost that power through a system of regulatory public response. I end by arguing that modernist writers learned from this example by taking control of their own critical narrative. I also end where I began in a more direct way—discussion of the modernist critical essay is impossible without reference to the work of Wilde. John Paul Riquelme reminds us, "with the combined force of Ruskin and Pater as precursors to aid him, Wilde is able to create a crucial, liberating turning point in late nineteenth-century English letters. Wilde heralds the essay's importance as a literary form" equal to that of modernist poetry or prose, but which gets short shrift by academic criticism ("Modernist Essay" 160). He then goes on to note the crucial differences between the modernist critical essay and the writing of "an academic writer interested in adhering to the conventions of argumentation and decorum practiced by a community of established literary critics." A similar point made by

Graham Good adds that while Eliot's individual essayistic style granted him an academic authority, "in general the academic system does not use the essay as a form of writing any more than it attends to the essay as an object of study" (177). If the essay form grants the author freedom from convention, the critical essay upholds convention. Since I'm arguing that modernist style masquerades as individual and operates socially, it makes sense to end with the figure of the critic, whose criticism styles our perceptions and our relations to its object of scrutiny. My subject in this conclusion is the essay form in modernism, particularly critical essays written by literary writers, or T.S. Eliot's "critic whose criticism may be said to be a by-product of his creative activity. Particularly, the critic who is also a poet" (*To Criticize the Critic* 13). I question overlaps of art and criticism, showing the way in which the critical theories of modernist writers attempt to formulate our experience of their literary works. This allows me to argue that these theories become figured into the text itself and, in turn, prompt certain ways of reading and critically responding to modernism. Modernist style is not a noun, then, but a verb.

Though the final chapter is the only one in which the writing of Virginia Woolf is a direct subject, I begin each chapter by close reading excerpts from Woolf's essays to get us into a distinctly modernist critical mindset. She has written so prolifically about all facets of literary history that I was not left wanting for relevant material—from Montaigne and the essay form to contemporary critical responses to Conrad's fiction, Woolf allows us a glimpse at how modernist creative writers gave voice to and shaped their own place in the literary world, which I take up more directly when I discuss her work in the final chapter. She is a framing voice to this dissertation just as modernist writer-critics serve as guides to how modernist texts should be experienced.

Chapter 1:

The Dandy's Interactive Style: Beau Brummell to Oscar Wilde

> Handsome, heartless, and cynical, the Beau seemed invulnerable. His taste was impeccable, his health admirable, and his figure as fine as ever. His rule had lasted many years and survived many vicissitudes. The French Revolution had passed over his head without disordering a single hair. Empires had risen and fallen while he experimented with the crease of a neck-cloth and criticised the cut of a coat.
>
> Virginia Woolf, "Beau Brummell"
> (*The Second Common Reader* 151-2)

In her 1929 essay on George "Beau" Brummell, Virginia Woolf situates the famous

Regency dandy beyond the confines of history.[1] Living in a time of great political turmoil, when

"the French Revolution had passed over his head," Brummell turned away from the surrounding

din to experiment with and critique aesthetics. Whether she meant it or not, Woolf's

characterization locates Brummell as a modernist *avant la lettre*: he valued his appearance as an

autonomous artwork in the same way modernist writers and artists have championed their own

aesthetic autonomy. Studies of modernism over the past decade or so have been interrogating

these self-mythologizing narratives to demonstrate the "fiction" of this autonomy; for example,

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[1] Woolf's essay on Beau Brummell was first published in September of 1929 in *Nation & Athenaeum* before being revised and broadcast as a radio talk on the BBC a few months later. The original essay was republished in book form in 1930 before finally reappearing in *The Second Common Reader* in 1932 (I will be referencing the latter throughout this chapter). Woolf's account is based on Captain William Jesse's biography of Brummell (published 1844), and it appears in the Second Common Reader as a sub-essay under the heading "Four Figures" (*The Second Common Reader*, Annotated Edition, and the Virginia Woolf Society of Great Britain's *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, no. 4 [May 2000])

according to Andrew Goldstone, the idea of a completely independent art is dependent on the

artist's financial means, which is itself dependent on larger economic, political, cultural value

systems.[2] Anticipating this critique, rather than dwelling on the Beau's self-styled

invulnerability, Woolf spends much of her essay recounting his late-life downfall. Having fled

his creditors in London for France in 1816 at the age of 37, Brummell lived the rest of his years

facing the financial and physical consequences of his carefree independent youth.[3] The story

Woolf fashions, then, is of the coexistence of aesthetic autonomy and the ineluctable demands of

time and history. In other words, hers is a New Modernist narrative that considers autonomy in

context.[4] This context is, significantly, characterized by the instability of social roles.

Much work has been done recently to recover the entanglements of modernist form and

its historical context (two realms which had been purportedly separated by modernists, and

continued to be held apart by literary criticism through much of the twentieth century), but by

and large these studies either leave style out of the equation, or consider style an element of

form. These and other studies refer to style as the effects of certain formal innovations that run

contrary to aesthetic expectations and values of the cultural context in which they appear; style is

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[2] I borrow this phrase from Andrew Goldstone's 2013 monograph *Fictions of Autonomy*, the most recent of these studies which consider the dependence of purported artistic "autonomy" on socio-economic structures. My work is closely related to Goldstone's literary-historical approach to aesthetic autonomy, but where he discusses style as a subsidiary of autonomous form, I consider style as a separate, and just as important, entity.

[3] These consequences included syphilis (attended by depression, physical pain, and neurological symptoms), financial ruin (caused, at least in part, by what seems to have been a gambling addiction), and prison.

[4] Any attempt to list studies that exemplify the practices of New Modernist Studies will necessarily be incomplete. See Mao and Walkowitz's "The New Modernist Studies" for an expansive list of monographs published before 2008 (*PMLA* 123: 3 [May 2008]). Examples of more recent works include: Rachel Potter's *Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment, 1900-1940* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013); Hannah Sullivan's *The Work of Revision* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013); etc. Other examples include any number of essays published in *Modernism/Modernity*, and comprehensive digital humanities projects such a The Modernist Versions Project (http://web.uvic.ca/~mvp1922/), The Modernist Journals Project (http://modjourn.org), and The Modernism Lab (http://modernism.research.yale.edu)

apparently the creation of the singular antagonistic artist disrupting the status quo—handsome,

heartless, and cynical like the Beau. Essentially these studies position modernist style as that

which an artist uses to disrupt aesthetic expectations. Likewise, one sociologist reminds us,

"styles serve as codes through which groups display their boundaries and individuals symbolize

what they regard as worthy of deference" (Thomas Spence Smith 725). Style is chosen by the

person or group to display the values of that person or group. I argue, on the contrary, that

style—which has to do in part with our association of manner with meaning—is social in a

different sense than just as an "indicator of social positions." As social code, style's meaning

(what, exactly, it indicates) is just as much a matter of reception as it is of intention. Rather than

attempting to define a specifically modernist style, as this positions style as subsidiary to the

active creative subject, I demonstrate the way in which modernists will come to use the notion of

style as a tool for engagement and disruption, a method inherited from the Brummellian dandy

and developed into literary and critical terms by Oscar Wilde, and the way this style gains

meaning in an ever-fluctuating social context.[5] In this chapter, I argue that style is the site of

interaction between the work and its social context, the point at which the theoretically

autonomous (Brummell's ahistorical experimental wardrobe; Wilde's aesthetic "useless" text)

becomes social (Brummell's public self-display; Wilde's novel situated for the literary

marketplace).[6] Style is not something supplemental to a text, extraneous to form or content, or

merely an extension of the artist, but rather style is itself what entangles text and context—what

makes each vulnerable to the other. I will here read the dandy's style not as a marker of who he

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[5] Stephen Calloway reminds us of another notorious regency personality as Wilde's forefather, painter
and "dandy-critic" Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, born sixteen years after Brummell, who was much
closer in spirit to the decadent dandy in his commitment to the life of the senses; his "self-consciously
precious and highly fastidious discrimination brought to bear on both art and life" (34).
[6] For more on Wilde's work in the literary marketplace, see Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace:
Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*.

is, what he represents, or what message he's trying to convey with his clothing; rather, I will read his style as an incentive to ask who he is in context.

The counterintuitive position of Brummell, as a representative of the democratic ideals of social mobility and individuality within a social group characterized by privilege and wealth, allowed in him a "subversive and sardonic manner" of "satirical contempt"—a pose that would become the signal trait of the dandy throughout the nineteenth century (Kelly 133).[7] Brummell's mastery of clothing served to demonstrate his place within aristocratic society, but his pose of superiority to anything and everything positioned him outside of that (and any) society. "To be turned out in proper attire," Jamie Hovey reminds us, "is to uphold the strictest kind of social convention; to be so well turned out as to become a kind of individual spectacle without drawing down reproach is one of the most extraordinary kinds of social and artistic balancing acts" (25). Of Brummell in particular, Hovey claims his "courtly style both affirmed and undercut the aristocracy he seemed to emulate by emphasizing his individual transcendence of convention" (26). Brummell's perfection of and influence in the world of fashion positions him ambiguously with regards to the social world he mastered—he is both superior to it and an integral part of it. He affects this ambiguity by means of a hyper-stylized exterior.

Brummell's clothing in great measure conformed to classical principles of ideal bodily proportions and military precision, though in his time he was "the maverick who created rules" about how to dress (Kelly 6). His newness, in other words, was in how extremely he styled himself according to these principles. If to stylize is "to conform… to the rules of a conventional style; to conventionalize," hyper-stylization is an excess of convention (OED). Simply being in

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[7] For much of Brummell's biographical information and characterizations in this chapter I am indebted to Ian Kelly's recent biography, *Beau Brummell: The Ultimate Man of Style*, which itself relies on various historical texts and letters, most notably Jesse's biography.

excess of convention makes the dandy's style contra-conventional—he flaunts "the rules" by following them strictly but without conviction, brings them to their breaking point. To put it in literary terms, in determining form by conventions rather than content, stylization intervenes in the relation between form and content, releasing the one from its service to the other. Hyper-stylization, on the other hand, reads ironically, so that the content is always an open question—a question that begs answering. The dandy's style and manner are meant to intrigue us, to make us want to know more while asserting that we can never know. But, while provoking interest, the dandy's hyper-stylized exterior forms protective walls to conceal his presumed interior; it makes him, in Woolf's words, "[seem] invulnerable."

Inheriting Brummell's legacy, Wilde translates the dandy's lived visual style into literary style.[8] He combines the dandy's hyper-stylization with the decadent aesthete's absorption in sense perception to create the hyper-ornamented text of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The resulting style inveigles buts withholds; it dazzles with a wink, hinting that the dazzle is a diversion. The reader is compelled to guess what lies underneath the hyper-stylized, hyper-conventionalized exterior, filling in the gaps with the expectations generated by conventions of the sensationalist genre. Wilde tantalizes the desire for sensation, but keeps his distance. Like Brummell, like high modernism, the text thus maintains the integrity of the autonomous as it interacts with its social world. Wilde's style implicates, it involves and entangles his reader. In this chapter, I uncover the implications of the emergence of autonomy as a standard of artistic integrity alongside a subjectively ambiguous aesthetics in the late nineteenth century —

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[8] While not an unusual move, there is some discomfort in saddling Wilde with the label of modernist or even proto-modernist. Ann Ardis reminds us of the "aggressively hostile denunciation of all things 'effeminate' that figure so prominently in literary modernism's efforts to create chasms between the art it values and the Victorian *fin de siècle*" (47). This opposition was often rendered in stylistic terms, especially in dichotomy between "hard" and "soft" styles.

commonly associated with Walter Pater and, later, Impressionism—to demonstrate the simultaneously restricted and porous boundaries of style which modernists like Woolf adapt. By putting my aim in terms of implications rather than causes, I mean to avoid the cause-and-effect teleology that this style itself avoids—implication suggests both what is implied and also an entangled involvement.

I position my argument within the large body of work done in the past couple of decades to recover the contexts of modernism. Jonathan Goldman claims that much of this work overlooks aesthetics, as a reaction against the previous generation's tendency to take modernist claims of aesthetic autonomy too seriously (4-5). I agree with Goldman, as, indeed, we seem to be in a dialectical moment in which critics are beginning to look more carefully at entanglements of the socio-historical and the aesthetic. Goldstone, to take another recent example, adds an important social dimension to how we talk about modernist autonomy, and I am indebted to his consideration of "relative autonomy as a *mode of relation*" in helping me conceive of an aesthetic principle (style) as a manner or quality of interaction (Goldstone 5, emphasis original). But while Goldstone limits his considerations to the relation between autonomous form and realist content, giving style no role independent from form, I consider the social character of style as distinct from form. While form is made up of the basic structural components of the text, existing prior to and separate from the experience of it, style is always an intermediary between creation and response. In addition to raising questions of the relation between form and content, by considering style as the active intermediary between form and content I hope to get beyond an oppositional understanding of the work of realism versus formalism in Wilde's fiction and modernism more generally. Ultimately, I want to suggest that by reexamining our own assumptions of what the stylistic surface signifies and our role in conferring that meaning, we

can gain access to a new facet of a text; one that goes beyond binaries of content and context, social and individual, to see that the mediation of style between these oppositions binds them and muddies distinctions.

I. The Dandy's Autonomous Interactions

Coming of age in England during the French Revolution, Beau Brummell exemplifies the glimmerings of a new social order signaled by the revolution.[9] [10] He was the prince regent's favorite and ruled the highly exclusive London social scene, but as the untitled son of a valet-turned-private secretary to the prime minister, he was self-styled and self-promoting in a way that was only possible once style was liberated from the traditional tyrannies of form, content, and pre-revolutionary social order.[11] On a typical morning in early nineteenth-century Regency London, one could find Brummell in his dressing room at 4 Chesterfield Street surrounded by his fans and imitators. The first dandy, and in many accounts the first celebrity, Brummell would spend hours here each day bathing and perfecting his suit of clothes for his daily social appearances.[12] Men would come to Brummell's Mayfair townhouse for a firsthand look at the execution of what was then (and in many respects still is) considered the gentleman's standard of

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[9] In the words of Baudelaire, "Dandyism appears especially in the transitory periods when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and when aristocracy is only partially unsettled and depreciated."

[10] Sociologist Thomas Spence Smith calls Regency dandyism "a symptom of important underlying changes in European social structure—changes related to disruptions in the traditional means by which individuals sought to symbolize worth" (726).

[11] According to James Laver, "the revolution [Brummell] symbolized was essentially a *conspiracy against aristocracy*. Brummell saw instinctively that the day of aristocracy was over and that the day of gentility had arrived. There were to be no more peers wearing their Orders proudly on their embroidered coats, but only gentlemen in plain cloth and immaculate linen" (34 emphasis original).

[12] Among those who refer to Brummell as the first celebrity in the sense that we know the word today is Ian Kelly (1). Of course, there is some dispute on this issue—Jonathan Goldman suggests Wilde "inaugurates modern celebrity" (12), and still others suggest Byron plays that role.

dress.[13] They would witness the meticulous attention Brummell gave to the tying of his

neckcloth, a fashion that "became the badge of dandyism and evolved slowly into the starched

collar and tie that descended to the modern day" (Kelly 98). His clothing was perfectly tailored,

each bespoke piece made by the foremost specialist in the craft. Brummell is known to have

commissioned a single pair of gloves from two different glove makers, "one being charged

exclusively with the making of the thumbs, the other, the fingers and the rest of the hand" (*Revue*

de Paris qtd. in Jesse 37). Yet despite the care he took in his clothing, and unlike the elaborate

dress later dandies would adopt, "there was in fact nothing extreme about Brummell's personal

appearance" (Jesse 47). Brummell "was always carefully dressed, but never the slave of fashion"

(42). It was rather Brummell who set the fashion—clean lines and understated elegance typified

his dress, a style that allowed his followers to demonstrate their carefully studied sartorial

knowledge. That Brummell, untitled and with relatively modest wealth, set the rules by which

London aristocratic society would dress was unusual, but it is indicative of the new role style

played in these rapidly changing times.

In the late eighteenth-century, trends in aristocratic fashion were extravagant; clothing

was arranged and ornamented to display the wearer's wealth. "Sir Walter Raleigh wore a fortune

on his back," historian James Laver tells us, "and, in the next generation, the first Duke of

Buckingham is reported to have worn a suit of white velvet embellished with precious stones ….

The courtiers of Charles II … dripped with costly lace" (9). This ostentation stopped "half way

through the reign of George III" in England with Brummell and the dandies. The regency

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[13] This ritual was intensely homosocial, but never explicitly (or implicitly) homosexual. It wasn't until
shortly after Brummell's death, with the beginning of the Victorian period, that conceptions of the dandy
would take on an effeminate character, coded with the very likely possibility of homosexuality (cf. Kelly,
Moers, Fillin-Yeh). Brummell's bathing routine in itself was something of interest to those in his social
circle. His habits of both bathing in hot water and bathing every day were highly unusual at the time
(Kelly 95).

gentleman's dress developed in opposition to this status quo—his clothing was "restrained, muscular, unfoppish" (Kelly 101).[14] For Brummell, "wealth and style was no longer to be flaunted with lace and spangles but in a perfection of line that the cognoscenti would recognize" (97-8). Regency dandyism was the explicit "*repudiation* of fine feathers" (Laver 10, emphasis original). Being free of the ornaments that traditionally signal wealth, this manner of dress had the illusion of cross-class attainability. However, class distinctions still had to be maintained in this time of burgeoning democracy, but it was no longer a matter of having access to the latest fashions; rather, this fashion is a matter of knowledge. While Ian Kelly places a lot of emphasis on Brummell's role in setting these basic fashions, Laver points out that simplicity was a great trend at the time. What Brummell did was perfect the fashion and set standards for it. This knowledge (of cut and tailoring and the fold of the neckcloth) was carefully determined and policed within Brummell's exclusive social group.[15]

Brummell's style signals a desire for aesthetic perfection more or less divorced from the utilitarian function of signifying occupation or lineage, yet it is paradoxically intimately tied to his personal history. Biographers trace his rigid aesthetics to his early years at Eton and in the military. His style operates much like a uniform; it does not permit any flaw or deviation from the ideal. While his ideal was a standard he was the first to perfect (leading the style to be termed

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[14] Issues of the dandy, gender performativity, and homosexuality have been widely discussed. I am working adjacent to this topic, but I will not dwell on it here, as these important conversations would distract from my more general argument about style. For more on this topic, see Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, Jessica R. Feldman's *Gender on the Divide*, Rhonda K. Garelick's *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siecle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998), Elisa Glick's *Materializing Queer Desire* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), Moe Meyer's *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (New York: Routledge, 1994), and Jamie Hovey's *A Thousand Words*.
[15] Critics have traced the lineage of the modern men's suit to Brummell's innovations. The term "dandy" is largely applied today to men (and occasionally women) who take great care to effect refinement and elegance in dress. Brummell's specific concerns with simplicity and line are said to have influenced the fashion of designers such as Coco Chanel.

the "Brummellian manner") it was still an ideal imposed from without—tailors designed every piece of his clothing to give the impression of perfect bodily proportions, masking his true natural proportions. His clothing suggests the physical body underneath but is not actually dictated by that body. These rigid external standards cause us to lose any sense of the physical man concealed by the clothes—aesthetics here become completely abstracted from the subject.

So what exactly is the self that is being concealed by Brummell's elaborately simple costume? His personality, too, represents something new for an occupant of his social position. As Captain William Jesse points out in his 1844 biography of Brummell, the nickname "Beau" (meaning "a man who gives particular, or excessive, attention to dress, mien, and social etiquette" [OED]) has a rich history, from the court of Queen Elizabeth through the Restoration. But these Beaux, however much they bequeathed to Brummell in their care for clothing, were yet merely fops—men "of small understanding and much ostentation" (Roscommon qtd. in Jesse 8). They fashioned their dress to please the monarch, and their comical manner rendered them objects of entertainment. Brummell, on the other hand, "was a beau in the literal sense of the word,—'fine, handsome'…. He exercised the most correct taste in the selection of each article of apparel, of form and colour harmonious with all the rest, for the purpose of producing a perfectly elegant general effect" (40-1). The dandy, as Brummell established it, was provocatively new in high society. Rather than being laughed at, the Brummellian dandy did the laughing. Brummell's fame was as equally based on his detached biting repartee as it was on his clothing—he proved himself a master of a range of verbal styles and dazzled with his wit. In both his written works (mostly letters) and third-party accounts of his social interactions, Brummell is noted for "the move from sentiment to satire and [an] ability to encompass every tone" (Kelly 202). While his dress style intrigued through its formidable and unchanging perfection of basic principles, his

way with words would intrigue through its fluctuation "from absurdity to seriousness." Pliancy

of wit remained an attribute of the dandy, with which he beguiled and entertained. For

Brummell, this was indicative of his disinterest in self-expression—just as his clothing masked

his natural bodily proportions, his appearance was orchestrated to conceal the self and his

behavior was designed to make that self an open question. In *The Wits and Beaux of Society*, he

is referred to as "the greatest professor of two of the most popular sciences—Dress and

Affectation" (Wharton 235).

Brummell was charming, yet he also had an "arrogant superiority" borne from his prime

place among the highly exclusive aristocracy in Regency London (Moers 17). He enacted his

social exclusivity both by the places he frequented—the theater, Hyde Park, and London's elite

social clubs—and by his behavior toward others. Woolf called him "handsome, heartless, and

cynical;" Kelly calls him "the disengaged, witty amateur," "waggish and indifferent" (3, 68). Of

the multiple social clubs of which Brummell was a member, his activities at White's are the most

famous. Kelly claims "The world of White's was tight, exclusive and, some claimed, bitchy"

(152). It had a front bay window on the second floor overlooking the street—a place club

members knew was reserved for Brummell and his crew of dandy followers. Here they would sit

and pass judgment on the fashions of passersby. This window "serves as the perfect image for

the *haut ton*, the society Brummell conquered: insular, exclusive, indolent, looking out on the

world and down on it." He set the fashion and also policed it by guarding the gates of high

society, admitting only those who played by Brummell's style rules, not unlike the rule-setting

stylists of the many artistic movements of the early twentieth century.

If Brummell's style is deceptively simple, it relies on an audience to deceive. For Max

Beerbohm, dandyism is "the least selfish of all the arts": "the dandy presents himself to the

nation whenever he sallies from his front door. Princes and peasants alike may gaze upon his masterpieces" (17).[16] Both his intriguingly simple attire and the curiosity of Brummell's unprecedented rise inspired public interest. Jessica Feldman proclaims that the dandy figure in general "is the riddle, the ever-expanding set of questions which forms about the changing answer of human identity itself…. [T]he urge to delimit dandyism by time, place, or coterie is both irresistible and contrary to dandyism's spirit, that of displacement" (1). To evoke and unsettle definitions, by means of style, is the dandy's occupation—forever raising questions and, in the asking, setting the answer just out of reach. In upsetting the relation between form and content through his hyper-stylized appearance, the dandy sets up the terms by which the stylistics of literary modernism will further this bifurcation.

The dandy's style of dress and manner of being are constructed so as to have a certain effect on his audience—he leaves an impression. Ellen Moers points out that "the dandy does not preserve his integrity by living in retirement, but goes purposefully among the romantics, pedants, athletes, bailiffs and other bores of this world to remind them of his superiority" (19). The dandy's integrity, his wholeness of self is based on a superior stance, is created and maintained through interaction with those who are subsequently rendered inferior to him. Of the role the dandy occupies in public, Feldman says the dandy "requires an audience in order to

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[16] While Beerbohm and many others acknowledge the historical implications of Brummell's "art," as problematic as his aspirations may be from a modern point of view, at least one person reads his influence as regretfully ineffective in the trajectory of history. In the introduction to his biography, *Beau Brummell*, Carlo Maria Franzero writes: "Never has society been in greater need of a new Brummell! Brummell would have saved our world form that sheer vulgarity which is called Democracy. I have, indeed, written this life of Beau Brummell as a counterpoise to a surfeit of Democracy. When the shabby coat with leathern patches at the elbows and borders at the cuffs came to be worn as a kind of political badge, English elegance was laid in the grave for ever, and I felt that England should have done something for the man who invented the starched cravat, an event that was, in itself, devoid of social results, but left nevertheless an impact upon the social history of England as great and immortal as the advent of the Welfare State" (8).

display his hauteur, his very distance from that audience. Aloof, impassive, vain, the dandy has a defensive air of superiority" (3). Perhaps this pose derives from the dandy's shaky position within an elite crowd for which his membership was not granted by birth—he must act superior to be recognized as such. To seek explanation as I do here, however, is to respond to the intrigue of his hyper-style in exactly the way it wants—much like the impenetrable borders of his perfectly proportioned clothing, we are moved to wonder what his "defensive air" is defending. As Susan Fillin-Yeh says in her study of the dandy persona, "dandies, though looked at (for, of course, it is being looked at that activates the private show and public spectacle of dandyism), look right back. They are looking subjects whose performative impact surrounds them like an aura; sartorial projection is protection" (*Dandies* 20). Again, the dandy's clothing is conflated with his behavior in the name of performance, and again that performance is said to be a defense. Through his look and manner, his self-asserted style is a buffer against identification with his audience. In effect, he uses his society to enact his positioning as both within and at odds with that society.

But the dandy is not as impenetrable as his style makes him seem. Moers claims that "in the social sphere the dandy's refinement is exclusivism; in the purely physical it is hypersensitivity" (20-1). The impression he leaves is equal to his susceptibility to impressions. The dandy's "hypersensitivity" to details of the material world is in part what impels him to take such care in the details of his own dress, but it is also what allows him to discern and judge the perfections and flaws in others—what inspires his critical spirit—serving as a basis for the constriction of his exclusivism. The dandy's exclusivism is two-fold—he is not only a figure who is inaccessible through appearance (his clothing does not bely any aspect of his interiority), that appearance also signals a social world that is defined by its inaccessibility. This suggests

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there is some connection between the way one (consciously or unconsciously) positions him or herself in society stylistically and the role various degrees of receptivity to social class structures plays in that style. But even while they rule the roost and have strongly protected borders, Brummell's exclusive social circle operates within a curiously unbounded circle of social influence. Through his celebrity status, Brummell wielded an influence from his elite position of authority that reached far and wide.

The dandy's persona, in a self-aware fashion, uses aesthetics to intrigue. His style is a kind of game—suggestive of but withholding a persona behind the performance. It ultimately has no signifying use: "The dandy… plays at being what he is not but he leaves open both what he is and what he is pretending not to be" (Botz-Bornstein 286). To incite interest, to be intriguing, however, is an active function—it is a mode (method) of mode (style). This activity is more accurately an *inter*activity, as the act of being intriguing relies on there being a person to intrigue. More than anything the dandy's power is to compel. In *Pursuits of Fashion,* a "privately-printed verse satire" from 1810, a dandy character refers to himself as a "man of intrigue," suggesting seduction, artifice, and plotted deception (qtd. in Moers 87). Indeed, Brummell's capacity to draw public interest and speculation is based around the ability of his radically simple appearance to arouse attention. As Fillin-Yeh puts it, "dandies' clothing is a 'social hieroglyphic' that hides, even as it reveals, class and social status and our expectations about them" (*Dandies* 2). Thorsten Botz-Bornstein approaches the essence of dandyism through the dandy's relation to the rules associated with specific identities (his standard example for this latter is a monk as someone who adheres to the rules of monasticism). The main characteristic of a dandy, he claims, is a certain artistic quality, a way of clothing. His identity is not based on following the rules of dandyism, for "one of the first rules of dandyism is to follow no rules at

all" (285). His role in the social milieu is thus akin to the anarchist, but, unlike early twentieth century avant garde artists, the dandy is "an anarchist without enthusiasm. He respects the rules of aristocratic society and at the same time he does not respect them" (286). Here again we see hyper-stylization—excess of convention—as a radical challenge to convention. For the dandy, Fillin-Yeh writes, "style is a mode of confrontation"; "predictive of the alluring, risking behavior of dandies; Brummell's 'terrible independence proclaimed a subversive disregard' for class privileges…. Dandies quickly took on identities as challengers to convention" (3, 9). Even in Brummell's own life he began to register as a threat to convention, but it was through the literature of the Victorian period that this threat became a concern and took center stage in the dandy's narrative.

II. Critical Narration and the Dandy's Legacy

While Brummell enacted his elite status through a haughty manner, it was propelled by the public's active fascination with him—his fame was wholly created and maintained by public discourse. This being the case, it was difficult even for his contemporaries to separate fact from fiction, and, for that matter, Brummell himself from his coterie of dandy followers: "The dandy-gent was a trope in fiction even before Brummell's death. The manner—the poise, deft wit and an air of languorous indifference—became a signifier of the gentleman, just as clearly as his clothes" (Kelly 7). If Brummell's social world was designed to be inaccessible, fiction reacted by creating an imagined accessibility. The stories about him became their own sort of fact in the cultural imagination. Feldman says of her research on dandies, "If I try to capture dandies by studying pictures and accounts of actual, historical dandies, I am struck by these dandies' inevitable slide into fiction, for the 'realer' the dandy, the more a product of (his own) make-

believe he is. If a dandy is a person who plays the part of himself, how can the real be neatly culled from such fiction?" (2). A better question is what do these distinctions mean? I argue that by conferring meaning on style we create stories that become their own kind of truth.

While Brummell's authority was disseminated through popular media, as a celebrity his legacy was also shaped by that media—he presents himself as an impenetrable figure, but the public is able to penetrate him by crafting and controlling his narrative, circulating stories about his life and granting meaning to his style. It is in this struggle for narrative control that the interactive mode of the dandy's style takes effect; perhaps for Brummell his style was his own, but once it enters into public discourse it becomes pulled and torn by many perspectives, interpretations, and mutations. Moers traces the history of the dandy persona through the figure's near-constant presence in literature. At the height of his popularity, Brummell's image was both replicated by his dandy cohort and fictionalized by and for the delight of those dandies and the Regency in-group.[17] By 1828 Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novel *Pelham* took what Brummell had created, opened up its mysteries, and set it on the path of development that would lead to the decadent dandy. *Pelham* "taught the rules of the game to many an aspiring dandy…. It titillated Exclusive society and—greatest proof of coterie success—actually set a new fashion in gentlemen's dress" (Moers 68). Bulwer-Lytton's novel was beloved by Regency Exclusives, but it would also serve as "a warning beacon" to those outside that in-group: the early Victorian gentleman. In the transition from Regency to Victorian London the two facets of the dandy-gent began to diverge; Pelham the dandy character represented all that the dandy was (an ungentlemanly figure of aristocratic excess), and all that the Victorian gentleman should not be.

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[17] The dandy was featured not only in popular genre fiction and mass-produced magazines such as *Fraser's*, but also in the more self-consciously high-brow fiction of writers like Dickens and Thackeray.

According to Moers, eventually "the dandies were an old and notorious story in England, and 1830 was the year to renounce the Regency and vilify the dandy class. It was the year George IV died and *Fraser's Magazine* was born" (167). *Fraser's* would be instrumental in both registering and guiding public opinion of the dandy, most notably in its views on literature; for *Fraser's,* "of all classes of society… the aristocracy is least worthy of curiosity" (172). But any press is good press, as it turns out, for the dandy retained the spotlight in *Fraser's* and elsewhere, negative though it was. Public opinion may have shifted during this time, but public interest surely did not.

All of this—the dandy's place in literature, the dandy's disparagement in literature, the turn away from an interest in the aristocracy in literature—stems in large part from "the problem of the literary man's social status," which troubled many of the authors Moers writes about (198). At first, authors writing about dandies were dandies themselves. Feldman writes, "In a dizzying reflexivity, the dandy created within the work of art—Pelham or Onegin or Don Juan— is actualized, rendered 'real' in print by the living, breathing dandy-writer who chooses to make of himself and his daily life a fiction" (3). But by the mid-nineteenth century, non-dandy authors seeking to shake the dandy's elite status capitalized on the widely held suspicion that novels about the dandy-aristocrat were often anonymously written by servants who had unparalleled access to the life of the aristocracy without being part of it. Thackeray, most interestingly, puts the opinions on class and style previously dictated by the elite dandy into the mouth of his fictional Yellowplush, a semi-illiterate dandy servant who "parodies the language of his betters in society" poorly and comically (Moers 200). The power to shape the text is still in the hands of the observing dandy, but the location of that power is no longer within the aristocracy—rather it is comically displaced in ambiguity.

While the dandy is defined by his outward appearance, visibility, and positioning to observe, the elements of exclusivity (exclusion) and tantalizing mystery suggest a flip side—secrecy and hiding. Perhaps due to the dandy's discourse being taken over by the public pen, or perhaps by his very nature all along, what began as intrigue as to the secret of this powerful figure's concealed self became a nervous distrust of his nature, his motives, and his sexuality. Important discussions of the dandy's sexuality abound, focusing on his appropriation of a traditionally feminine concern with fashion and personal appearance. Rather than delving into what life the dandy keeps secret, or who was drawn to the dandy lifestyle for its emphasis on an open secrecy, I will instead call our attention to the dominant discourse from which contemporaneous criticisms of the dandy as "effeminate" result—the complicated and fluctuating relation between social standards of masculinity and what it means to be a "gentleman." Moers writes, "A hearty distrust of a degenerate and effeminate aristocracy was the Regency's legacy to the men of William IV's day, who came to believe that England's salvation lay in a return to old-fashioned English manliness" (176-7). This is the new Victorian gentleman versus Thackeray's mock-Regency dandy *genlmn*, the name the Regency dandy's servant lovingly gives him throughout *Yellowplush* (215).

Though begun by Brummell as the utter perfection of the simple dress of the Regency's country gentleman in reaction to aristocratic excess, by mid-century the dandy would come to represent the opposite of a gentleman. What the Victorians have in the dandy is a disdained other—it is no longer an original type of dandy they revile and ridicule, but representations of him through the eyes of those who are opposed to him. In other words, the exclusive Brummellian dandy has been replaced by the echoes and reverberations of his influence, filtered through the perspectives of those excluded from his elite circle and transformed through

literature, literary discourse, and literary criticism. But Brummell and his dandy legacy continue

to tantalize and charm, even to this day.[18] He represents an individual focal point within the

collective focal point of the elite—a being both within and separate from his social group. What

he represents is not just an inaccessible in-group, but also the more modern inaccessibility of

self. Thus when the dandy loses his elite status in the Victorian era's shifting social boundaries,

he is still intriguing precisely because the hyper-stylized surface reflects the concerns of its

audience. After all, "it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (*Dorian Gray* 3). As a

public figure, the dandy's identity morphed from stylized persona to object of written

representation and finally, in Wilde's fiction, to stylized text itself. The figure becomes,

ultimately, a parody of itself—but a parody with telling implications for the relation between

style and an ever more unstable social world.

III. Wilde's Implications in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

> Fashion, by which what is really fantastic becomes for a moment
> universal, and Dandyism, which, in its own way, is an attempt to assert the
> absolute modernity of beauty, had, of course, their fascinations for him.
> His mode of dress, and the particular styles that from time to time he
> affected, had their marked influence on the young exquisites of the
> Mayfair balls and Pall Mall club windows, who copied him in everything
> that he did, and tried to reproduce the accidental charm of his graceful,
> though to him only half-serious, fopperies. (*Dorian Gray* 107)

Halfway through *Dorian Gray,* Oscar Wilde portrays Dorian at the apex of an almost

Brummellian social reign. He wields a remarkable influence over the appearance and manner of

others, breeding copies that can yet never have the auratic charm of the original. I say he is

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[18] Recent work on dandies tends to occupy the intersection between gender studies and the relatively new
field of fashion studies, unsurprisingly. For more on the latter, see Joanne Entwistle's *The Fashioned
Body* (2000). For more recent works on the dandy, see, for example, Kate Irvin's *Artist, Rebel, Dandy:
Men of Fashion* (2013) and Dominic Jane's *Oscar Wilde Prefigured: Queer Fashioning and British
Caricature* (2016).

almost Brummellian, however, because Dorian himself can never have the aura of his original, Brummell—"the decadent dandy is always the imitating dandy" (Botz-Bornstein 288).[19] While Dorian is explicitly setting styles in the passage above, he is typical of the decadent dandy in treating his clothing like a costume, "affect[ing]" "particular styles" rather than perfecting one ideal style as Brummell had. Indeed, the novel makes it quite clear that Dorian's power to influence is equal to his susceptibility to be influenced in return. The entanglement of influence that drives this novel is similar to that which drove the history of the dandy, and which raises the important but often overlooked or misidentified question of what style is in the aestheticist novel and how it works.

The plot of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde's only novel, forms his most intriguing challenge to conventional Victorian beliefs about the relation between appearance and identity. But to understand the way style is working alongside plot, I first want to consider briefly the preface Wilde attached to his text after publication of the first edition in 1890, about a month before publication of the revised 1891 version. This preface is often held as a sort of aestheticist manifesto and key to the text of *Dorian Gray* itself. In it Wilde claims, "*All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril*" (3). These last two sentences are in effect the same perilous adventure— reading beyond the surface. But who among us are content with the mere delight of the surface?[20] What is the nature of the peril risked by a deeper reading? Or, a related question, what is it that we might find?

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[19] Dorian lacks the charm, too, of his dandy elder, Lord Henry Wotton. I focus on Dorian as the dandy figure here instead of the more obvious dandy Wotton because Dorian is more directly influenced as much as he *has* influence on others.

[20] Issues of symptomatic and surface reading are interesting to consider here. See primarily Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *Representations*. 108.1 (Fall 2009) 1-21.

Wilde's claim that "*To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim*" suggests that there is in fact some correlative to the artist's self hiding below the surface, which one could then presumably find (3). To the extent that it is possible (or desirable) to logically analyze an aphorism of Wilde's, this one is particularly telling in its roundabout logic (here I am well aware that I am going beneath the surface at my own peril). Temporarily overlooking the second clause (and secondary function of art), we read that "to reveal art… is art's aim." An act of revelation is involved in the concealment. But is it the case that the artist is concealed because "art" is revealed, or, alternately, is the concealment what in turn produces the art? The cause and effect logic I employ here is, of course, misleading, as the real logic of the sentence suggests that both happen simultaneously. Art exists, Wilde suggests, to be an absorptive experience—the viewing of a painting serves to draw attention away from other stuff blurred on the periphery, whether that stuff be the hand of the artist, the artist's intentions or identity, or merely what exists beyond the frame. But if "*it is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors,*" is the spectator, then, complicit in the concealment of the artist?

The preface, of course, is meant to be provocative. Indeed, "*Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital. When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself.*" For Wilde art is meant to delight and provoke, to create discord. The creation of discord helps the artist maintain his integral self, which is yet concealed. Wilde sets up a relation between surface and depth, mirrored yet searching spectator, that causes the concealment and accord of the artist. Insofar as surface and superficiality are most commonly associated with style, this would seem to suggest that style is involved in keeping the artist's integrity intact. But how?

The style of this novel is often read through the terms of the preface, as an absorptive but ultimately (and importantly) useless aesthetic. But rather than positioning style as something that lingers on the surface of *Dorian Gray*, calling attention to itself, we must consider how style interacts with the reader. Style mimics conventions in order to dislocate conventional modes of relation between content and form, and reader and text.[21] What style is intended to do here is not as important as the fact of its interaction with the reader in a sort of power struggle that plays out by the rules the style sets. In other words, through an aesthetic of secrecy and suggestion, Wilde implicates readers in the failure of their own search.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

The Picture of Dorian Gray begins in a place of creative labor. But rather than describing Basil Hallward's art studio in concrete visual details, Wilde begins with Paterian aesthetic ephemera: the movement of scents and air, the "honey-sweet and honey-colored blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs" (5). Beauty flames up, hanging suspended in a moment on the cusp of being gone, flickering with a capacity to cause great harm.[22] We don't see exactly what this looks like, but gain a sense of how it feels. The air of these opening paragraphs is dense with ambiguous sense perception, made more ambiguous when through whose senses we are experiencing this beauty never becomes clear. Next, we read that the sounds of bees "seemed to make the stillness more oppressive." The word "seemed" gives us the sense of the storyteller's presence, but no proof. The narrator then introduces us to "the artist himself, Basil Hallward, whose sudden

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[21] Patrick M. Horan, for one, reads this complex relation to convention biographically: Wilde "inherited his mother's at once conventional and Bohemian personality" (13).

[22] While I gently imply here that the relation between Wilde and Pater is a positive transference of theories and values, I acknowledge that their relation is far more complicated. For an interesting reading of the negative, deconstructive use of Pater's flame imagery elsewhere in Wilde's writings, see Joseph Pearce, *The Unmasking of Oscar Wilde* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), 37.

disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public excitement, and gave rise to so many strange conjectures." Basil is introduced in the text by way of his absence from some time after the story took place but several years before the narration. The language here has erected multiple barriers between the reader on the one hand, and the storyteller and the occasion of storytelling on the other. What we get is the impressions of the novel's events as experienced by an unreachable source. We get a mere suggestion of an unknowable perspective.

Ambiguity is maintained by the characters, as well. When he sees the picture of Dorian Gray painted by Basil, quintessential *fin de siecle* dandy Lord Henry asks the painter for the sitter's name. Basil refuses, claiming, "I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvelous to us. The commonest thing is delightful if one only hides it" (8). A thing must be hidden to intrigue, and since Basil has shown us this man artistically rendered yet withheld his name, we, along with Lord Henry, are intensely curious. While we are not left waiting long to learn Dorian's name, Wilde's novel plunges us into even stranger questions that the text's hyper-stylized surface works hard to keep unanswered. That both of these points of intrigue (the source of the styled description and the name of the figure in the painting) are based in identity suggests that the relation between identity and the visible is at issue here.

Readings of Wilde's style as a distraction from the text are often the most convincing, but (or because) they often fail to reach beyond Wilde's own ideas about how his style works. In one study of Wilde's style, John G. Peters observes that every crisis point in the narrative of *Dorian Gray* is undermined by stylistically overwrought passages that divert attention away from the heavy moral content associated with realist narrative. Peters claims that this style, along with but more so than character and plot, enacts Wilde's rejection of realism and positions form as the

content of the novel. But although style is his main term, it remains unclear exactly what Peters is referring to with the word. In one paragraph, he refers to "Wilde's style," "the novel's style," "styles," "narrative styles," "intrusive style," absent styles, and "stylistically intrusive passages" (7). In this one paragraph he seems, indeed, to be conflating the author, the narrative, and the narrator through the concept of style—in this case, a style that intrudes. Peters identifies this invasive style as intermittent, only occurring at "crisis points in the narrative," points where "the novel's plot either threatens to become realistic or to draw significant attention to itself" (8). At these points, style draws attention away from the narrative, undermining the seeming moral aspects of the realist narrative: "Dorian's rejection of Sibyl Vane, his confrontation with her brother, and his murder of Basil are among the novel's most important events, and yet in each case, a crucial event is subordinated to a stylistically self-conscious, descriptive passage" in order to "[deflect] attention away from the plot and onto the style itself" (9). Peters uses this evidence to argue that *Dorian Gray* is an aestheticist novel in which "form … becomes the content." I argue, however, that these "stylistically self-concious" passages don't simply divert the reader away from the narrative, they engage the reader with the narrative indirectly.

Rather than reading style as an intruder, I propose we read it as an interlocutor. Not as a sensual fantasy, meant to "[remind] the reader that nowhere in the natural world does such a scene exist," but as a hyper-stylized, excessive reality—reality dialed in such that you can hear "the sullen murmur of the bees" amplified just as Brummell's dress brought simplicity to excess (Peters 10; Wilde 5). One of Peters's undermined crisis points, for example, Dorian's murder of Basil, is actually dealt with in great and vivid detail. Of Basil's lifeless body we read:

> The thing was still seated in the chair…. Had it not been for the red jagged tear in the neck, and the clotted black pool that was slowly widening on the table, one would have said that the man was simply asleep.

> How quickly it had all been done! He felt strangely calm, and, walking over to the window, opened it, and stepped out on the balcony. The wind had blown the fog away, and the sky was like a monstrous peacock's tail, starred with myriads of golden eyes. (123)

This passage in which Dorian looks on Basil's dead, seemingly asleep body and then walks outside and witnesses an aestheticized sky Peters claims "reveals a moment of violence but then shifts the emphasis away from the event;" these things "blunt the scene's emotional effect and make it difficult for this incident to evoke a significant pathetic response" (9). I would argue, however, that this passage actually aligns us with the hyper-stylistic perspective of Dorian, showing us the impressions he receives but forbidding us access to his emotional response, allowing us to generate our own. Any stylistic self-consciousness serves to draw the reader in even closer to the scene without forcing empathy.

Helen Davis approaches these diversionary passages in *Dorian Gray* from a different angle. To make sense of these moments, Davis proposes the term "circumnarration," or narration that "evades the report of what actually happened/is happening through various means— substitute narratives, metalepses, misdirection, etc.—or only obliquely or indirectly reports it" (199). The narrative evades what contemporary social norms deem untellable, such as "non-normative behaviors" or shocking events. While Davis focuses on the circumnarration of homosexual desire in *Dorian Gray*, it is a useful concept for considering the textual evasions of Dorian's transgressions more broadly. Like Peters, Davis sees the narrative as diversionary, but by locating that diversion in narrative itself, rather than style, I argue that the latter is freed up not only to draw readers in, but to engage them in a game which plays with expectations and agreements about what is socially acceptable, in order to challenge those agreements.

We can better see the relation between diversion, circumnarration, and style through the example Wolfgang Iser recounts with regard to the "extraordinary manner" in which Pater

narrates the life of his fictional "Emerald Uthwart" (20). In this story, not only is narrative

intrigue given away completely from the start, but important narrative turning points are

delivered to the reader through diaries written by people uninvolved in those crucial events, so

that, says Iser, "attention is never allowed to stray from the all-important question of 'how'" an

event happened rather than "whether" it will happen, which plot-driven narratives ask. Likewise,

in *Dorian Gray* many major turning points—Dorian's proposal to Sybil, Sybil's suicide,

Dorian's death—happen offstage and are learned of by means other than direct narration of the

event. However, taking Dorian's death as an example, for Wilde this technique is not meant to

highlight "how" it happened, but rather is used to elide that question. We never learn how it is

that by stabbing the painting Dorian has stabbed himself. It is not important. For Wilde to have

narrated the means by which the painting gained the power to change would have been to

explicitly place the novel in a romantic sensationalist genre, constraining the narrative to the

conventions and expectations that go along with that genre. By talking around that important

point, Wilde leaves the details open to the reader's speculations while retaining authority to form

his novel according to standards independent of the marketplace. Successful circumnarration,

Davis says, is "accomplished if the desire is sufficiently present to be decodable without losing

narrative authority" (213). Wilde's authority comes from a Brummellian position within yet

above the literary marketplace, just as his novel is at once an autonomous art object and a

commodity—it succeeds at giving people the intrigue they want, but by its own rules. Style, as

we've seen in Brummell, affects this dislocation. It is the instrument with which the writer

touches the world so as to keep his own hands clean.

  The novel ends with that pivotal moment of Dorian's suicide (if it can rightly be termed a

suicide—another brilliant ambiguity that forces us to confront the inadequacy of conventional

terminology). Dorian has locked himself in his attic room and reflects on the portrait as source of

all his troubles. He resolves to destroy it:

> He looked round, and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward…. As it had
> killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that that meant. It
> would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free…. He seized the
> thing, and stabbed the picture with it.
> There was a cry heard, and a crash. (183)

We then read of the various people the cry reached—servants in the house and gentlemen on the

street. However, the passive voice in "there was a cry heard" still leaves the cry unlocalized. We

are diverted suddenly from a specific scene and a clear intention to the resulting indefinite noise

heard by indeterminate ears. The narrative shifts from the locked room's private space to the

public space of the street and the crash's passive, unidentified auditor—this is a stylistic move

that distances readers, places us in the street just at the most crucial moment when we crave to be

inside that room to finally figure out how this stabbing would play out. Peters claims that this

ending lacks "stylistically self-conscious" language because Wilde is shifting us out of the text's

unreal world back into the real, or "realist" world (10). This claim gives us a useful way to frame

the novel and understand the variances in tone, but I find that asking style to be self-aware

requires there to be either no narrative consciousness or a very specific narrative consciousness,

neither of which is the case, as we've seen with the ambiguously definite narrative voice.

Likewise, while we are in effect forced out of the text's fantasy world, we are positioned

as curious bystanders. If we are unable to gain access to what happens after Dorian stabs his

portrait, we can guess, and this is how style implicates us in the story. Style here, like the style of

Brummell, tantalizes us with a glimpse of an extremely exclusive private space which

paradoxically positions us even more staunchly outside of that space by means of our desire to

penetrate the seemingly hidden. Style, as barrier between form and content, positions us as the

observers of the forbidden "Picture" of Dorian Gray—forever outside but intrigued by that picture.

IV. The Wildean Impression and Critical Response

> It is style that makes us believe in a thing—nothing but style.
> ("The Decay of Lying" 191)

Brummell's style does not signal his upbringing, his trade, or his desire to please a superior class—it signals nothing more than his perfection of the art of dress. In this way, he claims for himself aesthetic autonomy, aligning him with the aesthetic experimentation of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But though the dandy makes of himself a work of art, he is not in fact as autonomous as he would like us to believe. For while he eschews the influence of his social world, his identity is yet based on his presence in it—he turns away from public influence but is still involved with it. As we've already seen, public opinion swayed the way dandyism was both understood and enacted.

By mid-century the dandy and the ideal Victorian gentleman had become adversaries. This was still very much true by Wilde's time: as Regenia Gagnier tells us, "the press's vicious attacks on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in many ways duplicated *Fraser's Magazine*'s attacks on dandiacal literature a half-century earlier, but by 1891 the periodical arena was even more brutal in its competition to construct and undo public identities" (57). Gagnier suggests the uproar over *Dorian Gray* was the end result of "social tensions that had been brewing for decades" between dandies and gentlemen; it "exploded the conflicts of roles that Brummell had generated, that public schools had fostered, and that the press had popularized" (51, 98). The issues the press had with the book were not strictly moral in nature, but had to do with the unstable matrices of class and masculinity—in the case of the dandy this had to do particularly with the visual

markers of these identities. Gagnier claims that "the meaning of decadence in British literature of the 1890s is revealed in these tensions, rather than in any particular literary style," but I argue that, on the contrary, these social roles are primarily enacted and the tensions generated *through* style (literary or otherwise)—in other words, the tension is a matter of who has the power to confer value to style and determine what it signifies. It is the purpose of this final section to show how styled pose becomes a tool in the tension-fueled critical narrative of Wilde's novel. In short, just as the Brummellian dandy represents a cultural authority created not through birth or political or economic power, but through style, Wilde seeks this authority-through-style for himself in a social world that has grown skeptical of that pose in favor of authenticity. The very impersonal quality of the dandy's pose undermines this social value in order to achieve, paradoxically, authenticity and social authority. The story of the dandy and Wilde's style, in other words, is the story of a struggle over who, ultimately, has the authority to determine what the dandy's style means.

We have only to look at Wilde's own "Decay of Lying" to see how he felt about the sincerity that had become a token value in Victorian culture. In this dialogue, Wilde's Vivian calls the "lost leader" of society a liar who is both "cultured" and "fascinating" (*Artist* 305).[23] The creative impulse, "lying for its own sake," is naturally counter-conventional (or anti-mimetic), and yet it is deeply informed by cultural history and grabs the attention of the public (318). The liar's opposite, Life, is "poor, probable, uninteresting" (305). Life, or "society," replicates the creation of the liar, or artist. This viewpoint is premised on the idea that, except for

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[23] With regard to Wilde himself, Arthur Ransome admits that his own project, two years after Wilde's death, of writing a critical study of Wilde's work without considering the ill-fated biography of the artist was impossible. Ransome instead considers Wilde's biographies and the testimonies of his friends so that he "might be so far from forgetting the spectacle of the man, vividly living his life and filling it as completely as he filled his works with his strange and brilliant personality" (17).

style, people are all fundamentally alike: "Where we differ from each other is purely in accidentals: in dress, manner, tone of voice, religious opinions, personal appearance, tricks of habit and the like" (297). Five out of six of these "accidentals" are synonymous with style.[24] Artists create styles that the public absorbs, as we've seen with Brummell and the art of dress. The effect of the decline of lying as a practice and value in Victorian culture (which is, at least in part, a reaction to the excess represented by the dandy) is dullness—there is nothing to fascinate, to draw and hold attention. This suggests that there's something in the (literal or metaphoric) visually attention-grabbing that holds a great deal of power for creating and maintaining relative social identity.

If generating relationships through artistic creation is the proper role of the artist, what exactly is the role of the critic? He is an "interpreter" of art, but he is also, as the title of another famous dialogue from *Intentions* declares, an artist. "The Critic as Artist" is "he who exhibits to us a work of art in a form different from that of the work itself" (*Artist* 374). This exhibition is effected by a re-creation of the original in a different medium: "the employment of a new material is a critical as well as a creative element." The follower of Brummell is not a critic of Brummell precisely because he is simply recreating in imitation, but Pater is a true critic of Leonardo da Vinci in his translation of the Mona Lisa into words in *The Renaissance*. Creative description, with a purpose, is the work of the critic.

Furthermore, the critic is credentialed. "The Critic as Artist" begins with a pronouncement on the causal relation between memory loss, popularity, and boringness: modern memoirs are "generally written by people who have either entirely lost their memories, or have never done anything worth remembering; which, however, is, no doubt, the true explanation of

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[24] The implications for the only non-stylistic accidental, religious opinion, do not escape notice. Wilde discusses this point later in "The Decay of Lying" (317).

their popularity, as the English public always feels perfectly at ease when a mediocrity is talking to it" (*Artist* 341). For Wilde, there is something about the myopic focus on the present time that not only eases the public but is dreadfully boring. On the other hand, the liar-Artist is "cultured," just as the "true critic" is someone "who bears within himself the dreams and ideas and feelings of myriad generations" (230). In his reading of "The Critic as Artist," Lawrence Danson calls Wilde's many allusions to other writers and texts his "literary bricolage," out of which Wilde "creates a world and then takes personal possession of it" (129). Wilde does this to "[harness] the prestige of culturally remarkable individuals … in order to empower the self-credentialled aesthetic critic" (130). Wilde's contra-public pose in this essay is established through both his provocative remarks on the public's interests and his studied knowledge of literary history. It is also established by his strong assertion of individuality. Norbert Kohl recalls the growing attention paid to Wilde's criticism over the second half of the twentieth century, beginning with Richard Ellmann's *The Artist as Critic* and Stanley Weintraub's *Literary Criticism of Oscar Wilde* in 1969. Contrary to Danson, these and the new editions that followed were justified, according to Kohl, because the essays themselves were "astonishingly varied" (68). This "independence and originality" is, for Kohl, what "entitles [Wilde] to pre-eminence amongst late-nineteenth-century critics." Already we see here how Wilde's own characterization of the similarities between criticism as art—as generated by the tension between deep knowledge of literary tradition and the value of newness and originality—lend themselves to readings of his own qualifications as a critic and literary writer.

 Intentions, the collection in which "The Decay of Lying" and "The Critic as Artist" appear, came out a year after the serialization of *Dorian Gray* and the same year as the novelization of that story (1891), though the individual essays were first published a few years

prior. The four essays that make up *Intentions* are said to elucidate both the aesthetic views asserted by Wilde's only novel—the supremacy of the surface and the autonomy of art—and his ideas regarding the practice and purpose of criticism.[25] That these both happen in the same body of work is telling—his aesthetic and critical practices are so closely aligned as to be almost indistinguishable. In "The Decay of Lying," the liar and Art are equated, as are society and Life, and "life imitates art"—this is similar to the autonomous Brummell and the public he eschewed but sought to lead (307). But Wilde here only considers the artistic event and its effect in the subsequent mimicry, not public reaction or interpretation as an artistic, stylistic act in its own right that is outside the artist's control. If, for Wilde, the critic is he who is credentialed through internalized cultural history, whose criticism involves the interpretation and translation of a work of art into another form, the power of the bastardized response of an uncultured public, or, at least, the popular press that is in some respects its mouthpiece, must be alarming. Important to remember is that the nature of Wilde's incitement of the popular press's negative response was not (or not exclusively) his oppositional stance. The public reacted so strongly to *Dorian Gray* because, according to Jamie Hovey, the novel "emphasized the perversity of looking," and "gestur[ed] to this perversity as a shared social practice" (20). In "The Decay of Lying" and *Dorian Gray*, Wilde suggested that the public creates truth out of the "lie" of art, and he depicted a practice against which the public is putatively opposed. The public is fascinated by that which condemns them for being fascinated. Through intrigue, they are implicated in the challenge to their own conventions, morals, and norms.

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[25] Wilde was a prolific critic prior to *Intentions*. Stanley Weintraub claims that "Wilde's major critical works, 'The Decay of Lying' and 'The Critic as Artist,' were in part spill-overs from his book-reviewing phase, then in its waning months. Their perspectives parallel the earlier reviews, while also reinforcing earlier judgments about particular authors" (xxii).

In thinking of the entanglement of influence between art work, critical work, and public, we can't forget that Wilde of course is writing under the strong influence of and in direct response to Walter Pater. Just as Brummell's influence on his admirers immediately caused his autonomous ethos to become affectively entangled in a public world, so Pater "is ultimately inseparable from and even dependent on his disciples, partly because their responses to his teaching inevitably erode divisions between public and private worlds" (Parkes 47). John Paul Riquelme suggests that Dorian's murder of Basil mirrors the way in which Wilde critiques Pater by having his corrupt Lord Henry Wotton recite sentences written by Pater, often poorly ("Oscar Wilde" 613). Both Wilde and Dorian (symbolically or actually) "murder[] the man who, like a father or mentor, has contributed in a significant way to making him what he is." The representation of Pater is split between Basil, author of the painted ideal Dorian, and Lord Henry, spouter of bastardized Paterisms and author of the degenerate Dorian who will eventually kill the painter. This reading of split selves is nothing new in this novel, but I'm interested here in the way this demonstrates the complicated development of critical response from teacher to student and into modernism. The heart of both Wilde and Pater's aesthetic philosophies is the power of making and receiving impressions. I will here end by taking a closer look at this inextricability of the significance or meaning of an impression from style's role in implicating and entangling a variety of actors in a struggle for the authority to confer that meaning.

Baudelaire described dandyism as "a modern thing, springing from causes completely new" (qtd. in Moers 274). The dandy artist of whom Baudelaire writes in *The Painter of Modern Life* was a man always "looking for that indefinable something we may be allowed to call 'modernity'" (Baudelaire 215). Pater also focuses on the modern, but he characterizes "modern thought" as the "cultivation of the 'relative' spirit in place of the 'absolute'…. To the modern

spirit nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions" (*Appreciations* 65). For Pater, impressionism is an investigation of the world by turning inward. This theory of the impression challenges the easy correspondence between modes of representation and physical reality in realist art and literature by intervening with the subjective experiencing consciousness. His criticism is wholly determined by this—he seeks to judge an artwork, for example, by investigating his own sensations of it, an effect of reception. Pater's impressionism points us forward to modernism's use of style to engage through confrontation. But why did this "yearning for something new" take shape in such a way that the relation between autonomous individual—this personal voice or perspective conflicting with convention—and style become so emphasized?

The intermingling of contradictory interpretations of the visual was always a part of Impressionism. The movement got its name in 1872 from a disapproving reviewer, Louis Leroy, who borrowed it from the title of a painting by Monet. The satiric suggestion quickly became a sincere moniker. Jesse Matz explains that Leroy counted on his public's ability to recognize the term's absurdity: "'Impression' would connote transient, insubstantial, passive sensation; 'ism' would imply some systematic, doctrinal, activist idea" (12). Leroy did not anticipate that in visual art sense perception was becoming doctrine, an aestheticized idea—style, that formal element most associated with both the "insubstantial, passive sensation" and with the impression of the visual left on the viewer, was becoming a more self-consciously active entity. From the beginning this was a movement defined by conflicting aesthetic perspectives.

Impressionism's treatment of the impression stems in part from the skeptical philosophies of Hume, in which perception is divided into two parts, impression and idea—the idea arises out of the experience of the impression. While this translation of the visible into the ideational made

sense in visual art (you see an artwork and have a thought about it), Matz goes on to explain that this contradiction between sensation and idea was never so easily resolved in literary impressionism—"Literature, it seems, means ideas, reflection, and judgment, and so it has no place for the merely perceptual impression" (12). Rather, for the early twentieth century's key literary writers, "like aesthetic experience, [the impression] pitches consciousness between sense and reason" (13). The impression points to the machinery involved in the translation of outward to inward, and back out again—the individual consciousness which we are tempted to identify as the origin of a style ("Wilde's style," the trace of his particular perspective).

In one definition listed by the OED, impression is "the effective action of one thing upon another; influence; the effect of such action." Adam Parkes points to a reactionary reception of impressionist paintings in nineteenth-century France to demonstrate that the resulting "effect of such action" is not mere passive shock: "Frequently seen as an assault on the audience, impressionist art itself was the target of stinging attacks. But the painters themselves deliberately contributed to this contentious atmosphere" (10). The move from visual to literary impressionism decades later in England carried with it this association with conflict: "To link the terms 'literary' and 'impressionism' was to revive precisely those anxieties … about porous borders and defiance of 'rule and culture' that had been aroused by impressionist painting in the 1860s and 1870s" (11). From the beginning, impressionist aesthetics were shaped by a conflict between the artist and his social context in which both sides play the role of aggressor: if the impressionist artwork, like the Brummellian wardrobe, was designed to incite or intrigue, it carries with it the mark of the culture it seeks to attack, and public opinion does a lot to sway how, exactly, a work leaves its impression. Consider, again, the Victorian appropriation of the dandy's narrative and the carefully documented ignominies of Brummell's later life.

I wish to extend these theories of impressionism to modern stylistics more generally—the destabilization of form and content through a style of aggression and implication emerged with the dandy's hyper-stylization and is compounded by Wilde's resistance and engagement of the reader. Wilde ran with the lessons of Pater to clear the way for the rooting of literary critical authority in the practice of art itself. His critical views were not only explicitly at odds with the mainstream press, his critical authority was generated out of that opposition. Like Brummell, and unlike the sincere Victorian gentleman, he fascinated.

To return to my question of why a particularly confrontational style (rather than a style generated by confrontation) takes the stage in the transition to modernity: it is as the meeting place of the subject's indeterminate inner life or meaning and the subject's social context—its public face—that the stylistic surface *plays a crucial role* in radically questioning the relation and redrawing the boundaries between the private and the social. Social structures retain a dependence on visual cues to identity, but as the nature of identity itself becomes more ambiguous, style becomes a tool used to effect or explain social relations; it is not an essence displayed. As we have seen, the Regency dandy, a hyper-stylist, occupies a curious place in the transition of style from essence to tool—he famously does not *do* anything, does not have any use for his style—he is the art that is quite useless. But far from being the detached autonomous artwork aesthetes would strive for, his identity depends on his being on display and the authority of his critical judgments come from that identity. The dandy enacts the foray of a subjective ambiguity into a social world in which that ambiguity cannot ultimately abide—the public which experiences the work of art will always be compelled by possibility, will code meaning into the work as potentially hidden, will thrill to seek it out. Herein lies the influential power, the implication of the modernist's style—he incites his audience.

Chapter 2:

Duplicitous Style in Early Modernist Spy Fiction

> For it is clear that to admire and celebrate such men and such deeds, romantically, whole-heartedly and with the fervour of a lover, one must be possessed of the double vision; one must be at once inside and out. To praise their silence one must possess a voice. To appreciate their endurance one must be sensitive to fatigue. One must be able to live on equal terms with the Whalleys and the Singletons and yet hide from their suspicious eyes the very qualities which enable one to understand them. Conrad alone was able to live that double life, for Conrad was compound of two men; together with the sea captain dwelt that subtle, refined, and fastidious analyst whom he called Marlow.
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> Virginia Woolf, "Joseph Conrad"
> (*The Common Reader: First Series* 226)

Virginia Woolf praises Conrad's early fiction in her 1924 eulogistic essay, "Joseph Conrad," quoted above.[1] Conrad's early tales of the sea, Woolf reminds us, are not "simple [stories] of adventure." They are rather tales of simple men that gain complexity through the "double life" of the author. Through Conrad's storytelling stand-in, the "fastidious analyst" Marlow, we see the adventures of the "gnarled and tested" heroes: the life of the body is celebrated by the mind of the storyteller in a privileged, authoritative, and dual perspective. Conrad as author, as Woolf tells us, is a composite of both his heroes and his storyteller, is "at

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[1] In a survey of contemporary critical responses to Conrad's work, Allan H. Simmons points to the role of "reprints of Conrad's work" in renewing critical interest: "Thus, in her *Times Literary Supplement* review on the reissue of *Lord Jim*, Virginia Woolf could argue, 'It is not a question of luxury, but of necessity: we have to buy Mr Conrad; all our friends have to buy Mr Conrad'" (65).

once inside and out." But this duality is not ambiguous in Conrad's early works: there are clear borders between story and teller, narrative and analyst. When Conrad's subject matter moves from the sea to the land in his later fiction, however, and when we lose the authenticating viewpoint of Marlow, Woolf laments that "there are no masts in drawing-rooms; the typhoon does not test the worth of politicians and business men. Seeking and not finding such supports, the world of Conrad's later period has about it an involuntary obscurity, an inconclusiveness, almost a disillusionment which baffles and fatigues." To Woolf, Conrad's earlier double vision becomes no longer simply dual, but cross-eyed; the harmonious opposition between action and reflection is muddied so that inside and out have become perniciously indeterminate.

Nowhere is this late-stage indeterminacy more striking than in *The Secret Agent*. While Woolf praises the authorial voice in early Conrad for being at once "inside and out," we might understand this to be describing this novel's main figure, the spy. Spies, too, must "live on equal terms" with and yet "hide from [the] suspicious eyes" of someone they seek to understand. Woolf makes no mention of *The Secret Agent* in her essay, but if her criticisms of Conrad's later fiction can be read as encompassing all of that fiction, we clearly have here an example of early-Conradian duality told through the late-Conradian style of "obscurity," "inconclusiveness," and "disillusionment." I here examine this indeterminacy in relation to the development of critical interpretations of style in the early twentieth century. In *The Secret Agent,* Conrad explicitly engages a topic that demonstrates the power of a deceptively stylized exterior (espionage) and a genre that raises questions around the relation between costumed identity and intrinsic identity (spy fiction). The spy genre trains us to be suspicious of style and to seek clues to both expose a style as a costume and see the truth beneath it. Conrad frustrates this training by making his own style difficult to grasp and by suggesting an ultimate emptiness behind the stylized façade. His

depiction of the spy genre in a notably mercurial style serves as a point of development in style's use as a tool to engage and disrupt the reader's desire to make meaning out of style.

Though *The Secret Agent* is sometimes considered to have inaugurated the spy genre, I begin with a more typical example of the genre with John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, published about eight years after *The Secret Agent*. Using this novel, I demonstrate why, exactly, this subject's reliance on slippery style proved useful to Conrad and the significance of his stylistic deviations. The spy genre itself finds its popularity in its ability to thrill readers with fear of the unknown and style-based riddles. It presents the reader with stylistic problems to solve, in which the reader must discern with a suspicious eye the clues to a character's identity for the goal of placing him or her in relation to the social body—friend or foe? Hero or enemy? Answers to these questions are largely based on making sense of the relation between looks, actions, and character, to which style is fundamental. The multiplicity that the body of the spy holds— containing conflicting identities each dependent on the social position of the viewer—signals a shift in how we treat style. Rather than serving as unproblematic clues to identity, here style develops into one of the most important tools with which modernist literature engages and challenges our reliance on sense perception and socially-located perspectives in order to unsettle them. Style, I argue, the positioning of a text or author in a wider socio-cultural context, is the means by which Conrad and the popular spy novelist seek to undermine a cultural authority in order to, paradoxically, claim authority within that culture.

It makes sense that this stylistic shift would be registered by the spy genre. This particular genre develops in response to new experiences of modernity much the same way as modernism does. The subject of espionage in fiction is nothing new in the early twentieth century, but many have suggested that, as a genre, the spy novel emerges out of the specific conditions of

modernity, particularly the European political landscape. James Purdon, for example, claims that the genre "can be dated to war-fearing turn-of-the-century England, with its invasion scares, its competition with the military-industrial power of Germany, and its overmastering terror of social, physical and imperial decline" ("Spy Fiction" 537).[2] History, however, was tempered by the pace of literary trends, resulting in a particular and unsurprising blend of existing literary conventions in portraying new concerns: "Fiction was slow to adapt to this new world of official secret agents, resisting the portrayal of British spies as institutionally sanctioned professionals. Its preference was for the amateur: the accidental hero who in the performance of his civic duty foils the enemy's plots" (538). *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is John Buchan's depiction of the endangered notion of heroic agency on the eve of the modern disaster of the Great War. Buchan's novel thus occupies a point of transition between old world and new in both subject matter and form. His hero is very much accidental, and the novel ends with the amateur becoming an "institutionally sanctioned professional" by serving as a Captain in that inevitable war. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* exemplifies the hybridity of the early spy genre by portraying its primary subject matter with elements of adventure and thriller genres: "While spy novels remain distinct from other popular genres in that they deal with international intrigue, they often slide over into the territory of the detective story, or the love romance, or the gangster book, or the treasure hunt tale" (Panek 2).

Where Buchan blends elements of more established popular genres with the newer spy

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[2] Lars Ole Sauerberg is also among those who link the birth of the spy novel to disrupted models of national and international boundaries: "After the turn of the century it became clear to many people in England and outside that its world power was in the process of becoming a thing of the past. Under pressure from changing international political and commercial relations the nineteenth-century English attitude of 'splendid isolation' was beginning to give way to a more modest assessment of the nation's influence. The fictional secret-agent probably owes some of his appeal to the way he provided, and still provides, an imaginative compensation for a feeling of nationalistic frustration." (5)

genre, in *The Secret Agent* these multiple genres dwell curiously opposed within the single body of the text, much like the various identities of the spy himself: it is at once spy thriller, detective novel, historical fiction, realist domestic drama, and a beguiling modernist work. This multiplicity seems to arise out of the new instability of modes of representation, a problem often said to be at the heart of modernist experimentation—as Jon Thompson puts it, "when contrasted to the realism of the nineteenth-century novel, one of the chief characteristics of modernism … is the explosion of new or hybrid forms, techniques, styles, and modes of representation" (15). The spy novel in general "is a phenomenon of modernity, intimately connected with war and the fear of war" (Purdon 536).[3] This genre is particularly suited to the depiction of a society in the midst of modernization because the public's national pride and fear of invasion meet in the mysterious figure of the secret agent: in whose interest is the agent working? And what is his style keeping secret?[4]

I. Dual Perspectives in Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*

While written about eight years after *The Secret Agent* (1907), I begin with Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) to set the scene in which the spy genre emerges, a similar scene to that

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[3] Woolf's praise of Conrad's early stories for "their air of telling us something very old and perfectly true" carries with it the implicit criticism that *The Secret Agent* has no ballast in tradition—despite being set in the 1890s, its subject and perspective of that subject are distinctly modern (230).

[4] Growing porousness of borders compounds this anxiety. Rebecca Walkowitz, for one, considers the nature of the anxiety which British culture has toward the shifting idea of national identity: "That one might belong to a culture by choice rather than by nature was commonly vilified, in the early twentieth century, as a principle of cosmopolitan 'adaptability' …. It described… a characteristic of unmarked 'invaders,' whose versatility with language and manners helped them to live abroad without detection" (35). As a Polish émigré, Conrad would have felt this shift keenly. Perhaps this is what drew him to the subject in *The Secret Agent*—he engages the nation-conserving thrill of the genre while maintaining a modernist, modernizing perspective.

of Conrad but amplified and thrown into relief by the Great War.[5] In many respects, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is a standard adventure narrative, what Buchan himself called a "shocker," an entertaining popular novel. Written and published in the second year of the war, "*The Thirty-Nine Steps* represents the first-person narrative of a now extinct species of gentleman-adventurer tale that would soon disappear after the First World War" (Williams 208). In his subject matter and mode, Buchan presents two incompatible perspectives on the conditions of modernity—anxiety and change on the one hand, and comforting entertainment on the other. Its style is characteristic of genre fiction, though the novel takes as its subject the difficulty of making sense of style.

While Buchan's narrative seems a traditional adventure, it has many tropes of the emergent spy thriller—disguise, subterfuge, international intrigue, etc. His hero, Richard Hannay, isn't an official state spy, but he is at least an amateur in that he spends the whole novel assuming various disguises in protection of the state. Buchan infuses the dying adventure genre with an all too modern subject: the story is a reimagining of the events leading up to the war as if they had happened on British soil with a fictional cast of characters. Insofar as the Great War made more visible the transition between traditional and modern values, Buchan blends genres to turn what is likely a negative perspective of this transition into a gratifying entertainment. [6][7]

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[5] Buchan in fact was middle-aged when he wrote *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, and had by this time written plenty of novels in a more directly Victorian realist tradition (Gifford 17).

[6] For more on this shift, see Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*.

[7] Hannay enacts the "characteristics and beliefs of the gentleman adventurers who peopled and administered the British Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," and yet "Buchan's heroes are not quite what they seem" (Glassock 33, 34). While the rest of my section here explores this problem of seeming, for Glassock's purposes he sums: "Far from being casually arrogant, Buchan's characters are as often engaged in introspection and self-doubt as they are in crossing a mountain pass in winter or leading a cavalry charge"—they are not simply English public schoolboys (34).

While this transition into modernity is a concern for many modernist texts, the easy pleasure of Buchan's entertainment is only one of a few important differences between the popular text Buchan represents and modernist literature. The primary difference is that Buchan blends genres so that his novel is at once adventure and spy genre with no ambiguity, while Conrad's world is one of rampant ambiguity. Style in Buchan is dual—dependent on tropes of both adventure and spy genres, just as Hannay can occupy many identities based on his experience and still be fundamentally readable as "Hannay." Style for Conrad is also dual, but those styles conflict: the two styles it draws from (modernism and popular genre fiction) are at odds with each other. The novel can be read as either one or the other, but cannot achieve both at the same time. To adequately represent the modern experience, the text must allow the discordant simultaneity of these perspectives, which read style in discordant simultaneous ways. Here I begin with Buchan to demonstrate style as a modern, not just modernist, problem so we can get a better sense later of what exactly becomes of this greater problem in the specific case of modernism.

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The plot of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* itself shows the importance of styling a text to attract an audience in a way that is different from a more "difficult" modernist style. In other words, it is interpretable precisely because it is familiar: like many heroes of late Victorian adventure novels, Hannay, our accidental hero, feels an intense sense of ennui in the city's routine. He is a native Scotsman who moves to London a few months before the time of the plot after spending most of his life in South Africa.[8] The novel begins in this affectively dense place, the narrative filtered impressionistically through Hannay's emotional reaction to his "return" to the "Old County"

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[8] Buchan himself is Scottish. For more on the relation between his nationality and his "development as a twentieth-century modern," see Douglas Gifford (quoted here, 17).

from Rhodesia (9). All typical experiences of everyday English life—"the weather," "the talk of the ordinary Englishman," the confined spaces and "amusements of London"—left him feeling "liverish," "sick," and "disappointed," not unlike the urban dwellers of Baudelaire and other Decadents (9,10).[9] The comfort of normal habits and mundane upper-middle-class British life are quite literally unhealthy to Buchan's hero. The reader experiences the familiar through the eyes of the semi-outsider. As luck would have it, Hannay soon meets Franklin P. Scudder, an (apparently) American man deeply embroiled in the adventure plot Hannay (and the reader holding this adventure novel) craves.

Hannay's reaction to Scudder is instructive to the reader. When he first approaches Hannay, Scudder tells him, "I need help worse than any man ever needed it, and I want to know if I can count on you" (15). Hannay responds, "Get on with your yarn … and I'll tell you." Like any discerning reader, Hannay's willingness to participate in Scudder's intrigue is conditional on the narrative Scudder crafts for him. The story is one that Scudder knows Hannay, a bored former colonial likely familiar with the tropes of adventure fiction, would find entertaining. Hannay himself confirms this for the reader: "By this time I was pretty well convinced that he was going straight with me. It was the wildest sort of narrative, but I had heard in my time many steep tales which had turned out to be true" (27). Scudder styles his story in a genre familiar to Hannay by referring to "big subterranean movements" of "educated anarchists that make revolutions," the precarious world economy, and international conspiracies (17). Scudder's American identity is eventually revealed to be a disguise, just as his narrative is styled to conceal the real story with which he's involved. The tale eventually proves to be untrue, but Hannay hardly cares—he's already hooked on the intrigue, just as the reader will be. When Scudder dies

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[9] Who, significantly, respond to their discontent by worshipping artifice and placing value in surfaces.

under mysterious circumstances, Hannay inherits his adventure. Later in the novel, to procure a

bed for the night, Hannay retells this inherited story to a "literary innkeeper," a man fond of

"Kipling and Conrad." The innkeeper responds to the story similarly: "By God! … it is all pure

Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle. … I believe everything out of the common. The only thing I

distrust is the normal" (68, 70). The fantastical adventure narrative has a currency in the novel

that binds strangers together as allies—they are a community of readers constituted by

familiarity with a certain type of plot and narrative style, which the reader herself identifies with.

While the fabulous story is a ruse, it is a useful one—it is a veiling of the truth with a

false story in the interest of the real story. We might say the real story is styled as adventure

fiction to have a calculated effect on the listener. There is safety in recognizing the fiction of the

intrigue and thrill in seeking out the truth. Hannay's own identity seems to operate similarly: he

repeatedly styles himself to pass as other people or types of people, in order to "vanish

somehow" to avoid his enemies (39).[10] The adventure plot demands that he save his nation from

impending world war, but when Scudder dies Hannay knows he cannot turn to the police for

help, as there is no one in England who can vouch for his character. All signs point to his

culpability in Scudder's murder—he is, as far as authorities can verify, a foreign criminal (38).

This plot point portrays the anxiety of foreign invasion with mitigated risk by putting a British

national in the position of imagined invader. His life is complicated by this anxiety, but that

complication entertains readers and eases their real-life fear. Hannay's intrinsic identity tells

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[10] As Erin G. Carlston explains, "In the case of spies, who by definition pass as something other than what they are, questions about loyalty become especially fraught with anxiety. Naturally, not all spies are traitors to their own nations, but in one sense all are treacherous; they are supposed to lie and deceive, to perform loyalties that they do not actually feel. So a spy's capacity for dissimulation, which makes him useful, also makes him irremediably dangerous, since his employer—his country, usually—can never be sure that even the most apparently patriotic and dependable spy is not really a double agent, working in the interests of a foreign power" (4).

readers what their average British counterpart in the text cannot know—how to place the hero socially without having to rely on the stylistic cues of his dress and manner.

This titillation and reduction of the reader's anxiety over how to read stylistic clues to social identity, however, is not uncomplicated. Hannay's allegiances are more ambiguous than those of his "gentleman adventurer" predecessors because of his split sense of national belonging. When he becomes a suspect in Scudder's murder, Hannay's first instinct is to seek a place in which his unique experience in Rhodesia can help him vanish: "My notion was to get off to some wild district, where my veld craft would be of some use to me, for I would be like a trapped rat in a city" (42). He thus decides to flee to Scotland, for, he tells us, "my people were Scotch and I could pass anywhere as an ordinary Scotsman." Importantly, his ancestral identity itself is put into the language of passing—he is not in fact an "ordinary Scotsman," but he could be read as one if he styled himself as such. Through dress and manner Hannay styles identities that shift depending on perspective and context. In his costume play, the novel demonstrates the nature of style as social construction, or rather of identity as the relation between the social and the visual, and confirms the reader's role in discerning and upholding that social structure.

Hannay's varied experiences help him not only inhabit multiple national identities, but also teach him how to perform various class identities. To escape his London flat undetected, Hannay puts on a milkman's hat and simply "crossed the street, whistling gaily and imitating the jaunty swing" of a milkman he had witnessed once (48). He knows his costume is successful by another person's reaction to it: "The porter at the foot told me to shut my jaw, which sounded as if my make-up was quite adequate." The porter's reprimand of Hannay demonstrates that not only does Hannay successfully dissemble his identity, he also dissembles his social class. The signifying meaning of his re-styled physical appearance here is determined by the reaction of the

viewer—a reaction that, significantly, helps create his perceived identity by functionally

positioning him within the social hierarchy. Through costume play in the world of the spy novel,

style is fundamental to identity, and identity is always socially-constructed—that is to say,

relational. Hannay's style, and that of the spy more generally, is recognizable as subterfuge in the

service of law and order when viewed from the perspective of the reader and the spy himself, but

as something different, in many cases opposite, when viewed from the perspective of those he

seeks to deceive. Social identity in this novel, as relation, is easily manipulated.

The Thirty-Nine Steps, as I've suggested, displays not a blurring of genres, identities, etc,

but rather a distinct multiplicity, the holding together of multiple separate genres or identities to

suggest that identity is contextual—where you fit in is fundamental to how you fit in, and style is

key to that how. Throughout the novel, Hannay's costume play is informed by his old friend from

Rhodesia, Peter Pienaar, whom he quotes several times to explain his theory of disguise. Hannay

reflects on Pienaar's advice:

> barring absolute certainties like finger-prints, mere physical traits were very little
> use for identification if the fugitive really knew his business. … The only thing
> that mattered was what Peter called 'ammosphere.' If a man could get into
> perfectly different surroundings from those in which he had been first observed,
> and … really play up to these surroundings and behave as if he had never been out
> of them, he would puzzle the cleverest detectives on earth. (232-3)

While this seems like a standard acting method appropriated to escape enemy detection, two

other pieces of advice given by Pienaar make this theory of disguise more of a theory of identity

itself: "A fool tries to look different: a clever man looks the same and *is* different" and, earlier,

"the secret of playing a part was to think yourself into it. You could never keep it up, he said,

unless you manage to convince yourself that you were *it*" (233-4, 115 emphases original). This

suggests a "style is the man" theory of identity, insofar as thought gives rise to visible surface

clues to identity. Wherever these surface clues come from, the spy's body, the surface he styles,

is instrumental in his duplicity. The spy operates with an inescapable embodiment: "What invisibility a spy may have or may desire, he can never disappear entirely" (Hepburn xvi). Characterization in the spy novel, too, "gets inflected … through social interaction and specific circumstances" (xiii). In this way espionage, through the stylized body's placement in a specific socially interactive setting, "creates identities," identities which are completely contextual. By recalling the conventions of the gentleman adventurer genre, which developed in a time more assured of identity essentialism, Buchan places more restrictions on this identity creation while troubling those restrictions with problems of the body and perspective. The continual reference to Hannay's early life and experience suggests that the successful spy will himself be essentially multiple rather than endlessly mutable (he enacts identities based on his past experiences as opposed to creating new identities). While Hannay may be essentially multiple, which allows him to inhabit various identities fully and without ironic subtext, I want to suggest that Buchan's early spy-adventure hybrid yet limits the spy's subjectivity to a simple duality—in terms of his relation to the nation, the spy can only either be working for or working against that nation. In Hannay's case, he is both, depending on one's perspective.

The perspective of the reader of this novel and genre fiction in general is that of the mass audience. Buchan's primary readership is figured in the novel as the "great, comfortable, satisfied middle-class" (237). As we saw with his own dissatisfaction with everyday city life in London, Hannay feels a deep discomfort with the middle class. While his grasp of the contextual basis of identity not only eases his way through the plot as Scudder's adventure story does, it also hinders him when he encounters his enemies hiding in plain sight in a quiet middle-class suburb toward the end of the novel. They, as he, "were quietly absorbed into the landscape" by inhabiting the identity most compatible with their surroundings (236). This presents a challenge

to Hannay, as he explains: "A man of my sort, who has travelled about the world in rough places, gets on perfectly well with two classes, what you may call the upper and the lower …. But what fellows like me don't understand is … the folk that live in villas and suburbs" (237). The bold-faced comfort and honesty of this world causes him to doubt himself: "It couldn't be acting, it was too confoundedly genuine …. They seemed exactly what they professed to be" (243-4). What we have here is a class system based around the idea of sincerity—the "comfort" of the middle class in their social position frees them from the necessity of styling themselves into a role as Hannay must do. But, after all, the middle class is exactly the audience for whom Buchan writes.

A feeling of incompatibility with the status quo of the homeland they dissemble to protect is a common trait among spy characters and is reflected in the innovations of the spy genre. We can see the change registered here through a comparison between spy fiction and the Victorian detective novel, another of the spy novel's thematic predecessors. Both genres, for example, engage the absorptive excitement of genre fiction, or a popular "palatable fiction," on one hand, and its purported higher intellectual opposite, the "modern literature that evinces all the drudgery of intelligence work," on the other—they are at once entertaining and concerned with "high" serious questions of epistemology (Winthrop-Young 20). In a conversation on the role of mass culture in relation to literary modernism, it must not pass unnoticed that the detective and the spy, major figures in popular culture even today, play the role of the high intellectual opposite of the popular culture in which they operate. But spy fiction diverges from the detective novel in the way the primary figure enacts his role—the detective is not necessarily under stylistic cover, while the spy's work relies on it. The question, then, is why must the spy dissemble to do his

work, and how exactly is this a response to the conditions of modernity which, I will ultimately suggest, figure into the style of modernism itself?

Buchan puts his plot and his main character under stylistic cover to toe the line between fantasy and reality—not just to delight and entertain, but to represent a new reality ushered in by the Great War, "in these days when the wildest fictions are so much less improbable than the facts" (5).[11] It is precisely Buchan's use of the conventions of both the older adventure genre and the newer spy genre that makes his fiction speak to his time and lends a complexity to his work—it engages with a transition between genres in subtle and significant ways. On the one hand, the fictionalization and importation of the events of the war onto British soil allows the protagonist to play by the rules established by adventure fiction. Readers of this genre are familiar with these rules and open themselves to the sporting aspects of war. On the other hand, Buchan's evocation of contemporary world historical events and his setting of international intrigue on the home front mobilizes the fear of foreign invasion and espionage in the popular imagination—relies, that is, on the anxieties attendant with a new and unfamiliar experience. The fun and familiarity of the adventure genre mitigates the threat of the unfamiliar or stylistically unreadable—narrative conventions are ultimately in place to render that threat predictable and neutral. Buchan's engagement with modern anxieties to safely unsettle the complicit reader is not, however, a modernist unsettling of conventions. His novel unsettles but ultimately upholds

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[11] Of Conrad's novel, too, Jon Thompson claims, "the importance of *The Secret Agent*… is that is marks the transformation of the traditional adventure into a new popular genre, the genre of espionage fiction" (*Fiction* 106). Aaron Matz reads The Secret Agent as "the Edwardian apotheosis of the satirical realism that characterized the late Victorian era" (142-3). This hybrid genre of "satirical realism" blends satire's "directive to identify shared and common folly" with "the realist project of examining small and unheroic detail" of "individual people" to "[pose] a fundamental question about the relation of individual persons to a larger category called mankind" (155). This "fundamental question" is take up by Conrad: "In The Secret Agent Conrad often obscures the very distinction, such that individual human action cannot be very easily distilled from the novel's essentializing pronouncements on human nature."

the status quo of the middle-class reader, just as it play-acts multiple genres to register a

disruption in literary tradition while remaining popular.[12] [13]

When Hannay initially flees London, he finds himself in a third-class train carriage with a

sailor and a lower-class woman who are complaining about a train guard. Hannay reflects: "I

started my new life in an atmosphere of protest against authority" (50). Authority, in this case

and in most spy fiction, is the middle class and all the apparatuses designed to protect the status

quo. Hannay here seems to inhabit the Romantic ideal of the individual in contest with the

bourgeois middle class and the authority of social power structures, and yet we must remember

that he is in "protest against authority" ultimately for the sake of serving that authority.[14] He is,

in other words, styled as an individual outsider type, but for the purposes of the social

collective—a duplicity to be effected only by means of style-based social positioning. If we

consider the middle-class readership here as the purveyor of literary convention, the spy

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[12] Gifford suggests that Buchan engages with a tradition inherited from Sir Walter Scott, but with the modern addition of "a new scepticism … that would be echoed in [Buchan's] later fictions now recognized as expressing a completely modern refusal to offer contented closure in the novel" (17).

[13] Perhaps indicative of an early critical tendency to simplify spy thrillers as mere ideological entertainments, in 1987 Anthony Masters saw in Buchan the formulae of the established adventure genre: "Buchan, like Kipling, saw his fictitious spies as playing the Great Game, overcoming evil with good and routing power-crazed fanatics and international villains .… His heroes play the game with all the frantic freedom of schoolboys on the loose. His spies never question the morality of British Intelligence—to them it is a noble organization" (34). More recent criticism, however, has begun to take genre fiction, and Buchan's genre fiction in particular, more seriously as itself critical and developmental in nature—it is not merely the product of popular culture, it also critically engaged that culture. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is, according to Buchan himself, "that elementary type of tale which Americans call the 'dime novel,' and which we know as the 'shocker'—the romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible" (xv).

[14] A more thorough examination of this novel's response to authority would include a consideration of the role of gender and gender surveillance. Joseph Kestner suggests that Buchan's engagement with adventure fiction as a masculine script for young readers is a response to a crisis of masculinity in turn of the century British culture: "Buchan's response is to present a spectrum of men subjected to the policing of masculinities in modernity by the characters' surveillance. Hence, while espionage marks all [the] plots [of Buchan's adventure novels], it is not only the Germans or the Islamists who are under surveillance. Rather, it is masculinity itself which is monitored, policed, interrogated, tortured, abused, disguised, and adjudicated" (82).

narrative is located between these settled genre conventions and the modern unfamiliar anxieties

that threaten to unsettle those established conventions.

II. Dueling Perspectives in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

While Buchan's fiction portrays the commingling of dual perspectives on modernity

through a compound genre, I want now to turn to a text that engages a more negative,

antagonistic duality, and more explicitly through style. Where Buchan challenged genre fiction

only to reestablish its validity, in *The Secret Agent* Conrad crafts a narrative of espionage and

intrigue—firmly the stuff of spy fiction—in a counter-conventional style more in line with what

could be called a modernist intent.[15] I focus in this novel on Verloc, a secret agent of an

unidentified state who styles himself to read as an anarchist, that purveyor of chaos and disrupter

of order. He heavily styles himself, in other words, as anti-style. Verloc is externally harmonious

with his surroundings (he has styled himself to fit in) yet he is internally fractured. The spy, as

we have seen, is a character who has styled his life to appear naturally opposite of who we are to

believe he really is. While this was an uncomplicated duality in Hannay (appearance and

intention simply at odds with one another), Verloc's fundamentally opposed identities are more

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[15] While not the origin of modern spy literature, *The Secret Agent* is widely regarded as the first of an importance not strictly generic. *The Secret Agent* brings issues of surveillance and xenophobia onto British soil, treating them as more than just adventure and intrigue abroad, as Buchan would do a few years later. Jon Thompson: "crime fiction's intrinsic interest in society—in the law and in the violation of the law—inevitably involves an exploration of the experience of modernity, of what it means to be caught up in this 'maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish'" (8). Many critics point to Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) as the first spy thriller, while yet others look even further back to *The Spy* (1821) by J.F. Cooper, and even as far back as the Old Testament (though the latter likely suggested mockingly) (Sauerberg, 3). Sauerberg emphasizes the difficulty of dating the secret agent story, as it is closely related to the detective story, which itself is composed of "puzzle"-like plot elements that are "common to many literary works." In any case, the advent of the spy genre in its modern form can safely be placed "between 1850 and 1920" (4). There are varying views on whether *The Secret Agent* can rightly be considered in the genre of spy fiction. Sauerberg claims that this novel and *Under Western Eyes* "are only secret-agent stories in a very liberal view of the genre based solely on subject-matter" (9).

difficult to pick apart. Where the challenge of reading style is ultimately gratified in Buchan, here it is continually frustrated.

This novel itself occupies a somewhat duplicitous role in terms of its own stylistic identity—while, as we've seen, typical detective and spy novels exhibit a high intellectual character in a middle-brow genre style, Conrad's text attempts to hold together the opposing realms of popular mass fiction and high "serious" literature through a style that is less easy to place. The two modes of fiction, sensational and serious, both exist in the single body of the text and retain their opposition through a style that can be read in either way—as the spy, the style of this novel is dual and duplicitous but bound by conventions. That isn't to say the reader can choose whether to read the novel as popular fiction or as challenging modernist work—rather, through a constantly shifting narrative viewpoint and a free indirect discourse that is murky at best, we are continually reminded of the failures and frustrations in making those determinations. So far in this chapter I have been discussing style somewhat tangentially, in reference to the duplicitous spy's social placement and the significance of the spy novel's inherent positional duplicity as a genre in and of transition. Now I turn my attention more directly to how this transition looks in the style itself of the modern(ist) spy novel par excellence: the distinction between what a style signifies and that which it opposes has an "involuntary obscurity" in *The Secret Agent*. Style, from the perspective of the modernist, is part of a set of literary conventions to be disrupted only through use of those conventions.[16]

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[16] Of Conrad's place between genre fiction and modernism, Linda Dryden writes, "Rather than emulate fiction like Haggard's, Conrad was writing anti-romance that leaned towards Modernism, thus alienating those readers hungry for traditional imperial adventure stories. There was also an established readership for sensation fiction …. Conrad could appeal to this audience by implying the supernatural in [his] tales … but he was more concerned with form and artistic intent. However, as Mary Hammond argues, like other literary genres, Modernism 'had very ill-defined and permeable boundaries', and 'the art/market opposition was less a divide than a negotiation table'. In such a competitive market-place, modernists like Conrad, Joyce and Woolf were obliged, in each case unsuccessfully, to attempt to publish in the mass-

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Fundamental to *The Secret Agent*'s style is its notable indeterminacy. Where Buchan's style was legible to the reader as both adventure and spy thriller, Conrad's espionage plot confronts its reader with illegibility.[17] Much like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, from the beginning of the novel we are plunged into the world of seeming. At the opening, we are introduced to Verloc's "ostensible business," a pornographic shop that serves as his cover and gateway into the anarchist's world (3). The opening paragraphs are dense with the language of potentially false appearances—the shop is filled with "nondescript packages," "closed yellow paper envelopes," comics hanging from a string "as if to dry," and "apparently old" newspapers. These things are identifiable to those in the know as concealed lascivious objects, but we read these objects as signifying both a deliberate evasion of a prevailing social moral code, and potential further duplicities—the reader is set on guard. This air of things not being what they seem is to be expected in a shop that deals in contraband, and it reads here with a feeling of familiarity to a reader expecting the conventions of crime drama. But while this description suggests a seedy underground world obscured from the eyes of the law, these attempts at inconspicuousness are somewhat unconvincing: the door to the shop is left "suspiciously ajar," and the atmosphere of things not being what they seem is a bit too dense. Things are styled to be obscure, but we know how to read that obscurity.

As the description moves on, however, the language itself invites scrutiny and doubt in a much subtler way:

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circulation publication *Tit-Bits*, where writers like Haggard found favour, and which launched Bennett's career" (224).

[17] In a recent article in Journal of Modern Literature, Michaela Bronstein reminds us of the unrepeatable experience of reading *The Secret Agent* for the first time. She argues in part that "novelists … develop styles designed to keep first-time readers in the flow of the temporal experience of reading" (76).

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> And the two gas-jets inside the panes were always turned low, either for economy's sake or for the sake of the customers.
> These customers were either very young men, who hung about the window for a time before slipping in suddenly; or men of a more mature age, but looking generally as if they were not in funds. (3)

The first sentence presents two possibilities, the determination of which is impossible—for some reason the narrator does not know or does not disclose why the gas jets are kept low, and it is up to the reader to either decide or move on in a state of uncertainty. It is in this place of having to choose either interpretive agency or ignorance that the reader comes to the next sentence, in which we are told that there are generally two types of customers, young men or older men. However, the either/or construction here indicates the general possibility of any random customer being either young or old, rather than the indeterminacy of a single customer, as the construction had indicated regarding the gas jets.[18] The sheer proximity of these two different types of either/or sentence construction, while differentiated by the addition of the semicolon in the second sentence, yet invites our doubt as to the truth of these customers. While the gas jets had us questioning cause and effect reasoning, the customers have us questioning the very basis of our reliance on empirical data to determine identities, a reliance which is fundamental to how we understand the perceptible phenomenon of style.[19]

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[18] This seems to be a matter, as Alex Segal suggests, of the Derridean "secret without secret," or the "'undetectable, unbreakable' absolute secret" (190).

[19] Descriptions of style in the London of *The Secret Agent*, how appearance is interpreted in this world, continually recall conventions that generate and maintain socio-economic order. The description, for example, of the style of men "looking generally as if they were not in funds" is based in the language of that order. Ludwig Schnauder confirms the power of socio-economic structure here: "In *The Secret Agent* economic forces determine individual lives and society as a whole to an astonishing degree" (228).[19] Yet in this world of order, in fact *concealed* by that order, there is still anarchy: Schnauder traces the relation in the novel between the "economic perspective" from which "the position of each individual [is] fixed in the social hierarchy by materialist determinants" on one hand, and the novel's depictions of "everyone's decisions and actions [as] motivated by self-interest" on the other: "concealed beneath a deceptive surface there is an ongoing anarchic struggle for individual advantage" (236-237). Of this tension between sociality and individuality in the novel, Mark Wollaeger adds, "The closer one looks 'into' things in *The Secret Agent* …, the more one finds that 'inside' the shell of social, political, and familial conventions lurks one horror after another. … the inside is less a sanctum than an emptiness guarded by repression, a

The style of the previous excerpts invite us to certain interpretations while challenging our interpretive tools, just as the style of Verloc himself does. In *The Secret Agent*, Verloc is a spy for a foreign embassy, under the command of Mr. Vladimir, to report on the activity of anarchists in London for the prevention of political terrorism.[20] To do this, Verloc has built a life for himself within this criminal underground—his entire life, as far as the reader knows, is constructed to give the impression that he is an anarchist.[21] To expose those invisible to the law, Verloc must himself be invisible and occupy the anarchic inside; yet, as we quickly learn, he is legible to authority as an agent of the state. In the novel that state is never identified, so when the reader confronts Verloc's duality, it is not simply a matter of who he is and who he pretends to be, but the much more challenging question of what those distinctions mean.

Take, for example, the description of Verloc's costume when he first makes his way to the embassy to get instruction from his superiors: "His general get-up was that of a well-to-do mechanic in business for himself. He might have been anything from a picture-frame maker to a locksmith; an employer of labour in a small way. But there was also about him an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired in the practice of his handicraft however dishonestly exercised" (11). The narrator (and the reader) sees Verloc and draws an open set of conclusions

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kind of fold or pocket in the social fabric" (144). Schnauder and Wollaeger's language of concealment, inside/outside, "deceptive surface," and "shell" provide tellingly visual metaphors that help us understand the use of style in the novel as an extension and tool of "social, political, and familial conventions." Style itself, then, these conventions of the visible material world and the identity supposedly signaled by that style, suppresses the individual, which, in the world of the novel, is always in anarchic revolt against those conventions.

[20] Verloc's employer is never revealed, but Niland identifies this as the Russian government and reads the social "instability" through the "Anglo-Russian rapprochement in the early years of the century" (131).

[21] Significantly, as in Buchan, not even the police know his true allegiances, as, indeed, Verloc is, early on, instructed to bomb the Greenwich Observatory as a provocative measure meant to overcome the complacency of the police, spurring them to ferret out anarchy at its roots rather than merely preventing anarchic actions already in progress. Verloc is disturbed by this new duty, as it tests the limits of his loyalties to his job, his family, and his country (a loyalty which is complicated by his obscure nationality).

about his character as if he were a random person on the street. But rather than the crucial connection between style in dress and style in manner as we saw in Buchan, here we have a crucial, and unreadable, disconnect. The passage connects indescribability to dishonesty but does not state from where that dishonest air derives—he is obviously in costume, but his mystery seems to run deeper. Verloc's style is supposedly motivated by the same goal as Buchan's Hannay: to protect the social conventions a true anarchist hopes to disrupt, but the fact of his being indescribable gives the reader nothing to hang on to when trying to determine what is costume and what is not. Verloc is neither simply criminal nor simply government agent, but both; he appears to be one thing, but maintains the air of the other thing, the thing he "lives on," the social disruptions to which he seeks to bring order.

To better understand the ambiguous duality of Verloc, consider Chief Inspector Heat, the novel's primary police figure whose character is much more readable in the terms of literary convention, like Hannay. Heat is a familiar police detective character; though himself frustrated in this novel by deep bureaucratic hierarchy, he succeeds in finding the key clue to the mystery of who is responsible for the Greenwich bombing, providing the reader with much needed respite in the taxing intellectual effort of finding a foothold in the plot. Heat, too, assumes disguises, but his air is acutely describable. For example, he is referred to in the space of one paragraph as both "Chief Inspector Heat" and "Private Citizen Heat," a change effected by his "walking out privately" "in the character of a private citizen" to visit Verloc's shop (160). Indeed, he comports himself as a criminal, "maneuvering in a way which in a member of the criminal classes would have been stigmatized as slinking." Heat's identity here is based on the relation he enacts toward authority. But whereas Heat can slink about and pass for a criminal, it is first and foremost in service of his primary identity as police officer—he merely assumes a disguise to investigate

Verloc's shop, but his authority is not ultimately dependent on that dissemblance. Verloc, on the other hand, lives his cover, so that he is fundamentally both a porn-peddling anarchist and the authority to which he betrays that underworld. In the same manner effected by Hannay's milkman disguise, the spy's social positioning, his relation to the law, can be read any number of ways, depending on the position of the character trying to identify and place him—foreign government official, police officer, or criminal—but the reader maintains all views, and cannot finally settle them.

This fractured identity, a multiplicity based on perspective, is at work in the plot itself. In his important reading of some of Conrad's other novels, Frederic Jameson points to certain "discontinuities" in Conrad's narratives as "[projecting] a bewildering variety of competing and incommensurable interpretive options" (*Political* 208). When the narrative of *The Secret Agent* shifts from political spy drama to domestic drama in chapter eleven, we feel this bewilderment firsthand in the exchange between the characters themselves. This long chapter is the scene between Verloc and Winnie as she discovers that her brother Stevie was killed when he followed Verloc's orders to deliver a bomb to the Greenwich Observatory. The scene is composed of the subtle back and forth of the perspectives of husband and wife, both of whom are blind to the perspective of the other. The pathos in this scene consists of Verloc's and Winnie's repeated misreadings of each other. Being based in perspective, I argue, these communicative failures are the result of Verloc's dual style. The scene between them begins: "Mrs. Verloc shuddered at the sound of her husband's voice …. The trusted secret agent of the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim looked at her for a time with a heavy, persistent, undiscerning glance" (183). The entire ensuing exchange is presented to us from two perspectives—Winnie's, which sees Verloc as "husband," and Verloc's, which sees himself as "trusted secret agent." Winnie cannot understand the full

truth of his actions because he has visually constructed his life to conceal that truth. The reader, however, having access to Verloc's duality, must read the scene with both perspectives in mind, though the text itself may or may not acknowledge them.

The scene culminates in Winnie's denouncement of her marriage and her murder of Verloc, a sequence which begins with Verloc calling her over to the couch:

> 'Winnie.'
> 'Yes,' answered obediently Mrs Verloc the free woman. (207)

Mrs Verloc, identified only by her married name, is at once obedient and free. This combination of seemingly contradictory terms in one short sentence collapses the double-view of the scene, makes the dual perspectives clash. In stylistic terms, the back and forth of perspectives that makes up this scene is an irresolvable conflict in the text that has been held together by the reader throughout the chapter and is now in this quote forced together in the language itself, within the bounds of this single sentence. Verloc's identity, as I've suggested, works similarly—the spy's identity is based on the simultaneity of two conflicting perspectives held together by the single styled body. While the style of the domestic scene forces the reader to hold together two conflicting perspectives without resolving them into a rational coherent understanding of the narrative, to make sense of Verloc we must always be conscious of his dual and dueling identities without necessarily resolving them into one coherent identity. In other words, we must accept the either/or construction of Verloc's self—a being composed of two competing options, the determination of which is impossible. This requirement of the reader is at the heart of modernist style's paradox—style in these works begs to be interpreted, invoking the reader's desire to extract meaning while making that desire's fulfillment impossible. It captures us in its nets and binds us fast.

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This novel's paradoxical style stems, in part, from genre confusion. Just as we saw in Buchan's novel, chapter eleven of *The Secret Agent* asks the reader to hold on to multiple perspectives that arise out of certain genre-based expectations. Winnie interprets the scene through domestic drama, while Verloc sees it through spy thriller. Unlike *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, however, any sense of harmony between these interpretive modes is ultimately frustrated. Conrad here uses the crime thriller's conventions to break those conventions. In his study of thriller genres, Bruce Merry explains that this dependence on the reader to hold together various pieces of the text is integral to the gripping aspect of thrill: "Complex intrigue is both entertaining and glamorous, so the reader of spy thrillers is quite prepared to carry in his memory several different sub-plots operating in global simultaneity. But this complexity must not be allowed to frustrate the reader" (176). The exposition to the reader and repetition of the spy's secret information to other characters allows for Merry's formulation that "in spy fiction, an intrigue does not work if only one of the parties involved in it ever becomes aware of its implications" (168). This information exchange is a harmony or dissonance rendered in social terms, a matter of style: "The spy thriller finds its own aesthetic filter between facts and their creative reformulation in the device of suspended narrative and messenger retelling of events to secondary members of its cast of characters" (166). Merry compares this trope to Odysseus sharing his identity with a swineherd to ensure his story's continuation in the event of his death. In the spy thriller, it is a matter of opening up the secret intrigue beyond the "author/reader/hero triangle" to give the reader respite upon the dissemination of responsibility for holding the complex pieces of the narrative together (167). While this explanation applies to the reader's experience of the more strictly genre-following *Thirty-Nine Steps*, and applies when Heat finds the address label from Stevie's coat in his remains, *The Secret Agent* does not ultimately uphold

the rules of the spy genre. It uses them in conjunction with experimental modernist techniques to frustrate plot-based harmony.

This frustration of the thrill-pleasure model is most apparent in the scene in which we learn of the bombing incident (itself a pivotal plot point which we are told of often but never directly see). Chapter four begins with two anarchists in a restaurant. One, Ossipon, asks the other if he'd heard of some event that recently occurred. When it quickly becomes clear that the unidentified other man has no idea to what Ossipon refers, Ossipon plays coy and withholds news of the event to ferret out more information from his reticent interlocutor about the latter's possible unwitting involvement in the event. This is a "messenger retelling of events" of sorts, in which we are eventually told the information we seek, but two frustrating complications alienate the reader: the reader is temporally displaced (the scene seems temporally continuous with the previous chapter and evidence of the narrative time jumping past the bombing event is kept from the reader for most of the chapter) and the identity of Ossipon's interlocutor is withheld for most of the dialogue. We read the exchange for clues, searching for signposts to orient us, but, in a first reading of this novel, those attempts fail.

Ossipon's withholding of information quickly intrigues the engaged reader, but we have no character who asks the questions we want asked—Ossipon's companion is clearly uninterested. When Ossipon attempts to draw out his fellow's curiosity, the other refuses: "Unless I am very much mistaken, you are the man who would know the inside of this confounded affair," Ossipon tells him eagerly, to which the other flatly replies, "In principle what one of us may or may not know as to any given fact can't be a matter for inquiry to the others" (49). He refuses to play the conversation by the rules Ossipon tries to impose, which puts both Ossipon and the reader at his mercy. He "gave no indication of curiousity," and, indeed, he

retains some power in the scene by rejecting curiosity outright, by means of his "provoking coolness of demeanour" (51). We are, instead, alone in our curiosity and likewise drawn into a scene which the unnamed man seeks to control. Seven pages into the chapter (according to the most recent Penguin Edition of the novel) Ossipon finally reveals his news: "There's a man blown up in Greenwich Park this morning" (56). Only now do we know for sure that we've missed some crucial part of the narrative. This complete disruption of the reader's relation to the text (not knowing where we are or when or why) is not only a disruption of narrative, it is a stylistic disruption. If style is born out of the relation of parts within a whole, we do not have access to any criteria that can tell us how the parts relate and how to read the style of the scene—or, to put it differently, the style of mystery or frustration is generated by our difficulty. By not knowing for many pages what is the place of the scene in the story, what is its role, we fail in fitting the pieces together.

III. Failures to Communicate in Structures of Authority

> Of humble origin, and with an appearance really so mean as to stand in the way of his considerable natural abilities, his imagination had been fired early by tales of men rising from the depths of poverty to positions of authority and affluence. The extreme, almost ascetic purity of his thought, combined with an astounding ignorance of worldly conditions, had set before him a goal of power and prestige to be attained without the medium of arts, graces, tact, wealth—by sheer weight of merit alone. (*The Secret Agent* 64)

In Ossipon's tavern conversation in chapter four, the continuity of the plot, its stylistic harmony and coherence as a narrative, is disrupted by the one character who rejects the role style plays in social advancement. After eleven pages of their dialogue together, "the man who would know the inside" of the bombing event, is finally revealed to be the minor character of the Professor (49). The Professor, eventually described in detail in the quote above, represents anti-

style in how adamantly he eschews the physical world—"worldly conditions" and "arts, graces, tact, wealth," are all the stuff of style. The long-standing resentment at the root of his political and social rebellion is based in his "puritanism of ambition" frustrated by the real world; the language of purity in the "extreme, almost ascetic purity of his thought" suggests that the Professor has an integrity that manifests itself in his unformed, unrefined exterior (64). Rather than model himself for the public gaze, he seeks to conquer his social world purely by means of his own will. In other words, his is a stylistic rebellion through an aesthetic detachment. He refuses to style himself in accord with the terms set by the social body, just as he refuses to play by the rules of the "messenger retelling of events" scene with Ossipon—he disrupts the novel's genre style just as his appearance is socially disruptive.

While the Professor is not a central figure in *The Secret Agent*, and while the novel's power structures are not so transparently effected, the realities of the Professor's aesthetic detachment shed light on the challenges to a modernist desire for a similar kind of detachment: where the Professor puts social hierarchy in terms of character (power conferred by attitude, rather than politically or economically), modernists tend to position themselves and their work as the Professor: autonomous, celebrating the individual outside and against society, and ultimately with the "goal of power and prestige." But, as my fourth section will demonstrate, the surreptitious means of "arts, graces, tact, wealth"—that is, the stuff of style—are firmly within the modernist's arsenal. The author is much more of a spy-as-anarchist, inescapably social. Indeed, the Professor is a caricature of what could become of the modernist value of autonomy without its complementary trait of social savvy. As he walks among the London crowds, the Professor is rendered "miserable and undersized" because of his naïve inability to recognize that "arts, graces, tact, wealth" are necessary to achieve any sort of meaningful place within that

world (65). It is that realization I want to suggest gives modernist style its uneasy duality. Where the Professor does not care how he is read and so doesn't style himself to have a definite social meaning, the spy (and modernist style) is both heavily styled and anti-style at once. I will here argue that, contrary to assertions of the ideal of autonomy in modernism, as represented by the Professor, stylistic dissemblance in hostility to interpretability is fundamental to modernist structures of authority, and to consider why.

The power of the spy's style (and that of Conrad's text itself) is in its indeterminacy, and the stylistic indeterminacy between characters in *The Secret Agent* evinces far more than just a formal intrigue. It implicates the reader in the failures of communication running rampant throughout the narrative.[22] This is especially apparent between Verloc and Winnie, as we have already seen, but it is in the thinly veiled self-interests of the authority figures in the novel that we see a more sinister failure of communication—sinister because the refusal to communicate is intentional rather than effected by ignorance or some fundamental inability to see another person's perspective, for whatever reason. The social customs that make communication possible, such as the stabilized meaning of style, are an inescapable determinate in the communication itself, and it is in part the job of social authority in this novel, police and government officials, to maintain custom and order by intervening in and regulating communication.[23] Purdon, for example, emphasizes the power the government has over private

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[22] For all the "social, political, and familial conventions" binding characters, as Wollaeger had it, Schnauder emphasizes the artificiality of those bonds: "Although all of the characters in the novel are shown to be connected with each other in one way or another, these connections are only superficial and fleeting. Surrounded by what Hugh Epstein has called 'deadening self-enclosure,' genuine communication between the figures seems impossible" (227).

[23] In a book chapter exploring the relation of London to secrecy and espionage from 1650-1800, James Cruise gives us the word for this interception of written correspondence: "Perlustration means to go through and examine thoroughly, though not with the neutrality or objectivity we typically associate with a survey; this word was also employed to describe the governmental practice of intercepting and opening any mail in the Post Office that officials thought suspicious" (91).

correspondence in *The Secret Agent*: "control, in this novel, does not mean censorship or control of content, but rather control of the *conditions* of communication" (303-4).[24] Scholars generally agree that the primary means by which the police in *The Secret Agent* implement their social control is surveillance, primarily to gather information. Visual evidence is key to maintaining social order. As Schnauder writes, "the police's aim in *The Secret Agent* is … not just omnipresence but also omniscience, which they attempt to achieve by means of a sophisticated and comprehensive system of surveillance. The initial phase of the investigation into the failed bombing illustrates how the whole populace comes under the police's panoptic gaze" (212). The first step in the investigation is to corral witnesses, information gatherers who act as the eyes of the state: "The system of surveillance is so pervasive that members of the public automatically continue it" (213). *The Secret Agent* is riddled with surveillance: figures walk through London, watch carefully, and gather information with more than a mere objective interest. The effect of their subjective presence and watchfulness is social policing—the watched city shaped by the presence of the watcher.

But probably the most telling example of the role of state intervention in shaping or giving style to communication is in the scenes between two primary government officials; Chief

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[24] In a book chapter exploring the relation of London to secrecy from 1650-1800, James Cruise looks at two early modern surveys of the city by John Stow and James Howell—Howell borrows heavily from Stow, but while Stow's narrative provides an impersonal birds-eye-view of London, in *Londinopolis* Howell gives the same narrative a personal pronoun to position himself and his reader as viewers. Cruise explains: "In *Londinopolis* seeing is akin to what Mary Poovey identifies as the 'authority of eyewitnessing' and for which Howell assigns a specific word in his subtitle: a '*Perlustration of the City of London.*' Perlustration means to go through and examine thoroughly, though not with the neutrality or objectivity we typically associate with a survey; this word was also employed to describe the governmental practice of intercepting and opening any mail in the Post Office that officials thought suspicious" (91). Many have read *The Secret Agent* itself as a kind of 'Perlustration of the City of London. Verloc, the Professor, Heat and others are all twentieth-century versions of the flaneur. If the novel engages this long tradition of perambulating watcher, where is locus of authority in this "eyewitnessing"?

Inspector Heat and his superior, the Assistant Commissioner, act out an elaborate conversational

dance to avoid revealing too much of the truth. Indeed, this elaborate stylization in the interest

of communicative failure is figured as an art. The scenes between Heat and the Assistant

Commissioner are strategic fictions built upon bureaucratic role-playing and cards played close

to the vest. In one exchange, both men try to feel out the true intentions of the other while

concealing their own hand. Heat goes to the Commissioner to gain approval to pursue Michaelis,

an anarchist recently released from prison, in connection with the bombing. Heat's concealed

motive is to make an arrest without provoking the Commissioner's interest in the Professor as

subject, as Heat knows the arrest of the Professor is a much more delicate affair involving a

longer game. On the other hand, the Commissioner's concealed motive in refusing Heat the

authority to pursue Michaelis is the dissatisfaction of the public if this arrest occurs—Michaelis

is a popular subject of sentimental newspaper stories. We see here a power struggle in how the

narrative of the bombing proceeds, a struggle involving who has the power to shape and style

that narrative. In this instance, Heat feels "like a tight-rope artist might feel if suddenly, in the

middle of the performance, the manager of the Music Hall were to rush out of the proper

managerial seclusion and begin to shake the rope" (93). This metaphor captures the tricky

balancing act this situation demands, but also sets up the interaction in terms of the often-fraught

relation between art and industry. In this case, if the policeman is an artist, he faces the same

dilemma as the modernist—maintaining a role of authority within a larger market structure ruled

by conventions and, importantly, public perception that demands at least a show of compliance.

Heat's real art is in the way he variously styles himself for his dual roles as authority and public

employee.

Both constable and criminal, ultimately, are subject to prevailing social conditions, including styled look and manner, gaining or losing authority in relation to their use of those conditions. Rishona Zimring suggests that at the end of *The Secret Agent*, the anarchist and the policeman are not in fact different: "The anarchists, like their counterparts in the police and the embassies, are ready to go underground, infiltrate, assume disguise, destroy—not, Conrad makes clear, in the name of chaos, but of order" (339). Schnauder also claims that "the policeman and the criminal exist in a symbiotic relationship so that we can no longer distinguish between them" in the novel (219-20).

In the governmental authority figures and the Professor, Conrad portrays conflicting perspectives on social structure—an external economic and political hierarchy versus social relations based on individual character. Both systems of relation are based on style as cue to identity and place in the system, but in the case of the anarchic Professor, style signals one's integrity or allegiance to self in opposition to the social body. The actions of the authority figures are also intensely self-interested and suggest that communicative frustration and secret plotting are the primary means of obtaining and holding a position of power in this world. Style is a tool in communicating and withholding information here, and having (or refusing) information is the basis of power. What I want to suggest is that this failure is strangely akin to the way modernist style is beginning to develop at the time. Its indeterminacy, its failure to communicate, undermines expectations for literary meaning-making in order to activate a desire for meaning.

IV. Authorizing Failure

Woolf's language in characterizing the change between Conrad's sea-faring fiction and his later work, a "disillusionment which baffles and fatigues," is curious: how is baffling dullness

an effect of a word that means, after all, "[freedom] from illusion" (OED)? Perhaps this change is tonal, as Michael Fried finds in Conrad's "adoption of an unremittingly 'ironic method' or 'treatment'" in *The Secret Agent* (1043). Perhaps the confusion lies in style, as when Norman N. Holland "puzzled about" the style of this novel, which "seems sharply marked off from the rest of Conrad's work, and yet, in some half-understood way, deeply Conradian" (221). The two, bafflement and clarity, I want to suggest, go together to give off the effect Woolf recognizes—there is something about style's reliance on readers' expectations of literary conventions and our notion of the author in this novel that clears away the comfortable illusions we attach to those features of the text. Baffling, yes—and perhaps our fatigue comes from our continually frustrated desire (whether from habit or dogma) to fall back on predetermined notions of stylistic conventions and authorship.

Michael Fried and other critics name this counter-conventional move in Conrad irony, yet another literary convention. Irony is an effect of style—it is an interpretation of materially embodied language that is dependent on context and the perspective of the viewer or reader. What is ironic is so only because of shared cultural language and values. Irony erupts here when the conventional meaning of the mode of communication and the meaning of the scene are explicitly at odds; it communicates to us by running counter to our expectations. Conrad himself suggests that this communication through dissemblance, the obscuring or denial of any truth behind the conventions of language, "alone … [enables him] to say all [he] felt [he] would have to say in scorn as well as pity" (251). I end by showing how Conrad's own claims to sincerity in his ironic treatment alongside his authorial self-construction in his Author's Note, written and appended to *The Secret Agent* in 1920, even further dislocates the reader's ability to settle on a

meaning or origin of his indeterminate style while yet compelling us to try.[25] Modernists create cultural authority for their art by challenging the very conventions that dominate that culture, but we must more closely attend to the way an author creates this oppositional stance. I consider the way Conrad constitutes himself as author in his Author's Note to understand this act of distancing rather as a stylistic conflict, and how style is at work in the creation of a modernist cultural authority. Paratextual authorial self-fashioning is in no way new or unusual—it is, in fact, yet another familiar literary device that Conrad uses to fracture the locus of narrative authority and further frustrate any attempt at an easy interpretation of his work.

Fried continues his reading of the Author's Note by clarifying that "much more was at stake in what Conrad meant by 'irony' and 'detachment' than considerations of literary style, as the latter are usually understood" (1043). It would be unfair to read Fried here as referring to *mere* "literary style," to understand his own tone as dismissive, but he does assert the relatively low stakes of style. Fried continues: "Of all Conrad's novels and stories, *The Secret Agent* goes farthest towards imagining the workings of a strictly materialist universe, in the face of which the novelist's traditional tools (also traditional tasks) of imaginative projection and sympathetic evocation are not only useless but inappropriate." We cannot sympathize or relate to characters because they are all determined by this materialist universe: "insofar as they may seem to have 'inner' lives at all, those lives are entirely determined either by external factors … or by internal drives, call them instincts, which are as good as mechanical in their mode of operation."[26] But given the materiality of this "materialist universe" and the major theme of material dissemblance, I don't see how we can dismiss style so easily.

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[25] In his introduction to the penguin edition of The Secret Agent, Martin Seymour-Smith calls Conrad's author's note "disingenuous," but concedes that "there are passages in it that are truthful" (10).
[26] Note here how external factors and instinct recall Conrad's language in his Author's Note.

If all style is made meaningful, as the texts I examine here suggest, by conventions, themselves the product of socially-based relations and predetermined perspectives, style is the means by which any challenges to convention must be launched. A standard reading of modernism sees it responding to a "world [that] has become too chaotic, and issues too complex, for any moral pontificating" by dissociating from that world with a "restriction of attention to art, and a release from extra-artistic responsibilities," but I argue, as many have over the past ten to twenty years, that detachment is only one (limited and limiting) way of interpreting modernism's textual clues (Levenson, *Genealogy* 54). Particularly in the case of style, this "restriction of attention" often results in the association of style with the author—"modernist style," in Jonathan Goldman's words, "serves to identify the authorial subject with the text" (11). Rather than serving to identify the nature of the text itself (its "identity" through genre, subject, purpose, audience), style becomes a trademark of the author. But while it "serves to identify" the author, it is also the tool by means of which the author fashions himself as anti-authorial. It points to the authorial subject of the text but dissociates that subject from the text.

In conversation with Goldman's theory of modernist style—that its role as a trademark of the author aids in the creation of the author as celebrity by making him distinct—I point to Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of the pseudo-individual, which posits the illusion of individuality in a culture industry in which real individuality is impossible. This operates by setting personal identity apart from the crowd by means of a telling detail in order to set the authority of the crowd in a more noticeable relief. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that in the culture industry "pseudoindividuality reigns": "from the standardized improvisation in jazz to the original film personality who must have a lock of hair straying over her eyes so that she can be recognized as such …. The individual trait is reduced to the ability of the universal so completely

to mold the accidental that it can be recognized as accidental" (124-5). The important thing to note here is the "pseudo" in pseudo-individuality—this operates as the dissembler of Socratic irony, a deliberate creation of a persona to somehow function in relation to truth. Furthermore, Horkheimer and Adorno claim that, rather than being an individual aesthetic construction or the distinctive voice of the individual, style itself is a set of "prohibitions applied [by the culture industry] to its syntax and vocabulary" (101). Style is the record of tradition that the artist must confront: "the permanent compulsion to produce new effects which yet remain bound to the old schema, becoming additional rules, merely increases the power of the tradition which the individual effect seeks to escape." Yet it is important that the relation of style to tradition is one of "struggle":

> The moment in the work of art by which it transcends reality cannot, indeed, be severed from style; that moment, however, does not consist in achieved harmony, in the questionable unity of form and content, inner and outer, individual and society, but in those traits in which the discrepancy emerges, in the *necessary failure* of the passionate striving for identity. (103; emphasis mine)

I see this productive failure as another way of describing the paradox of Conrad's style—he at once uses the conventions of the literary marketplace and subverts those conventions. This is a stylistic failure only from the perspective of a reader expecting the conventions of genre fiction. But is it a failure on the part of the work or the reader?

As it is impossible to tell whether the style of the work fails the reader's expectations or the reader fails to interpret the style on its own terms, since this would require a stability in style that is fundamentally impossible, what is important here is that the indeterminacy of Conrad's style creates conflict between text and context. Peter Nicholls reminds us of the theory of Marx and Engels that "the process of modernization actually entailed the continuous reproduction of the same relations, the relations which govern capitalist production" to suggest that modernism

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finds its refuge in the doctrine of "art for art's sake" to avoid reproducing the dominant socio-economic version of truth (6, 9). Art is to be in no way useful. Early on, this doctrine takes on a negative relation to the idea of the public and the art market through the figure of the dandy, which "aligned 'style' with the refusal to compromise" (12). Of the idea of Baudelaire's "new aristocracy" based on the gifts of the intellect and the creative mind rather than on money or political power, Nicholls tells us that the concept "was actually rooted in contradiction, since the whole thrust of its artistic endeavour was to be directed against the very class to which its members themselves belonged—the class which, to twist the paradox a little more, provided the only real audience it could expect to have" (14). The artist responds to this problem by violently rejecting identification with others, creating identity through the "assertion of difference"—the very condition of being a modern subject is created out of the act of confrontation with modernity (15). This is the basis of aesthetic autonomy, but, as I mentioned earlier, when we reach the period of modernism autonomy is not a pure refusal of the social realm as it is for the Professor. Where the Professor's social reputation is based on force of character alone, modernist autonomy is a professorial pose combined with the surreptitious means of "arts, graces, tact, wealth" for the "goal of power and prestige" in the literary world.

Not surprising, then, is that irony, "a state of affairs or an event that seems deliberately contrary to what was or might be expected; an outcome cruelly, humorously, or strangely at odds with assumptions or expectations," is the chief literary tool in this contradiction (OED). Conrad himself addresses his use of irony to defend it against those who would see it as a purely detached critical mode:

> I really think that "The Secret Agent" is a perfectly genuine piece of work. Even the purely artistic purpose, that of applying an ironic method to a subject of that kind, was formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that ironic

treatment alone would enable me to say all I felt I would have to say in scorn as well as pity. (251)

It is both ironic and sincere, and perhaps that duality is the basis of a more important irony.

In his Author's Note, Conrad goes to great, if subtle, lengths to fracture his role as creator and source of the tale. For example, he laments the reaction some critics had to the novel: "severe … sorrowful" (247).[27] These responses of reproof, he claims, made up a small portion of what he found to be an overall generous reception, but he was moved to address those rare concerns nevertheless: "I have always had a propensity to justify my own action." He then goes on to do just that. Conrad defends his novel against "criticisms … based on the ground of sordid surroundings and the moral squalor of the tale," claiming that he had "no perverse intention, no secret scorn for the natural sensibilities of mankind at the bottom of [his] impulses." The language of impulse here echoes the Note's beginning, where he tells us that the "origin" of the text can be "traced to a period of mental and emotional reaction." Rather than respond to accusations of his "perverse intention" by clarifying his real intentions, Conrad frames his writing of the novel as "reaction" and, later, "impulse," to undermine the idea of intentionality at all. In this Note, Conrad constructs multiple barriers between his authorial voice and the ostensibly true but nevertheless dramatic content of his novel—being based in the relation of the voice telling the story to the story being told, these are barriers specifically of style, as aestheticized pose that conveys an attitude toward the story that affects our interpretation of that

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[27] Simmons writes, "Even where critics respond positively to these works, which stand at the heart of Conrad's achievement, he is repeatedly cast as a 'difficult' author, one who eschews the conventions of plot construction, chronology and narration—'a law unto himself' as the *Athenaeum* had pronounced in its review of *Lord Jim*. The *Times Literary Supplement* declared *Nostromo* (1904) a 'critical mistake'; the *Morning Post* found *The Secret Agent* (1907) 'too sordid to be tragic and too repulsive to be pathetic'" (63).

story. These barriers, I argue, these refracted voices, give the artist authority by, paradoxically, dissociating him from responsibility for the telling.

Conrad's main anti-authorial tactic is to deny any specific intention in his writing. He engages various rhetorical strategies to explain how the story came to him, and how his emotional state just happened to have prepared him to receive it.[28] We can easily see similarities between Conrad's description of his inspiration to write this novel and the affective position of Buchan's Hannay at the start of his own adventure. In the Author's Note, Conrad tells us that his period of "very intense and emotional readiness" in writing *Nostromo* left him feeling "as if [he] were left behind, aimless amongst mere husks of sensation and lost in a world of other, of inferior, values" (248). He may not be bored in the way Hannay was, but the author was dulled to sensations, failed to be moved by impressions. Then, as if without warning, "while I was yet standing still, as it were, and certainly not thinking of going out of my way to look for anything ugly," the incredible story of the bombing of the Greenwich Observatory came to him in a conversation with a friend (believed to have been Ford Madox Ford), in a way remarkably similar to how Hannay came upon his adventure—devoid of intentionality so that the call to action is figured as pure happenstance, and the response pure impulse. The history of Conrad's coming to the topic of the story is framed as justification enough for his participation in it.

More than just a true story, however, it is also an "already old story" (249). Conrad is not being merely opportunistic in his use of a shocking current event; the turn back to something that happened years earlier suggests deliberation and the event's significance. Lest we construe this deliberation on the part of the author as an active authorial decision, Conrad emphasizes his

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[28] Here I specifically use the active verb "engages" to emphasize the action involved in written communication, no matter what passivity the author claims in his reception of the subject matter, a point I will elaborate further on.

passivity in the way in which the story reached him. The more salacious elements of the story,

especially—those potentially most open to criticism—were delivered to him by his friend "in his

characteristically casual and omniscient manner: 'Oh, that fellow was half an idiot. His sister

committed suicide afterwards.'" The truth of the story, that is, cannot be ascertained by a

newspaper or police report, but rather gains its credibility through its exchange as gossip. Conrad

reflects that his friend "may have gathered those illuminating facts at second or third hand, from

a crossing-sweeper, from a retired police officer, from some vague man in his club, or even

perhaps from a Minister of State met at some public or private reception." He pairs "fact" with

speculation here to push any desire for verification to the side—ultimately sources cannot be

traced, but the "facts" are widely known. To evade the criticisms of those who focus on

the shocking and sensationalist contents of the novel (and who would perhaps likewise criticize

Buchan's story for "defy[ing] the probabilities"), the sensational is veiled in both the germ of

real events, on the one hand, and a storytelling framework that diffuses or multiplies

the authorial voice, on the other.

Conrad's explanation of how he further developed the fictional world of *The Secret Agent*

is likewise veiled in this passivity. When he finds a simple unremarkable book written by "an

Assistant Commissioner of Police," a single phrase in this book regarding governmental

bureaucracy and secrecy is enough of a catalyst to seemingly cause the story to arise in his mind

as a sort of divine inspiration: "It was at first for me a mental change, disturbing a quieted-down

imagination, in which strange forms, sharp in outline but imperfectly apprehended, appeared and

claimed attention as crystals will do by their bizarre and unexpected shapes" (249, 250). His

mind is fired impressionistically by haphazard bits and pieces he encounters in daily life. We

might detect in this "mental change" something of T.S. Eliot's "impersonal theory of poetry" in

"Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919): "the mind of the mature poet differs from that of the immature one not precisely in any valuation of 'personality,' not being necessarily more interesting, or having 'more to say,' but rather by being a more finely perfected medium in which special, or very varied, feelings are at liberty to enter into new combinations" (30). The artist's mind is merely the primed conduit through which these "feelings" are filtered and refined into art. Much like Hannay's experiences readied him for his adventure, shaped his story, and aided his success, Conrad's mind is the passive vehicle through which his story passes and takes form. Eliot's theory accounts, then, for story (content) and form (aesthetics), but it does not account for style—the idea of a person behind the impersonal. By divesting himself of responsibility for the sensational narrative, Conrad suggests his "art" lies in the manner of telling—the style.

Conrad curiously distances himself from his story in a document titled, after all, "Author's Note." What he claims authorship of, then, is not the tale but his own role of author and the socially sanctioned act of telling—the voice which communicates; the "Conradian" perspective; the style. Likewise, that the author's reception of the material of the story is passive does not exclude the retelling from being purposeful. On the contrary, I suggest that the purpose of the telling is the creation of the teller in the social role of author or narrative authority. Consider, again, the spy—styling himself to pass passively, suppressing his subjectivity to receive information he wouldn't otherwise have been able to receive, his identity as spy necessitates a retelling of that information to some authority. Consider, too, the authority figures in this novel—their authority is conferred by their possession and strategic use of information. The audience of that retelling, faithful and unbiased as the telling may be, determines the purpose of the information in relation to the social structures being upheld or betrayed.

Conrad sought to achieve both critical acclaim and marketplace success with this novel but, at the time, won neither. Woolf, in "Joseph Conrad," suggests that this failure was ultimately a stylistic one: "it is arguable that Conrad would have gained both in credit and in popularity if he had written what he had to write without this incessant care for appearances. They block and impede and distract, his critics say …. He was self-conscious and stiff and ornate, they complain" (224). His "incessant care for appearances" (in other words, his style) is seen to be incommensurate with the content of the text; it is extraneous or excessive precisely because the reader fails to find it useful in answering the multiple intrigues of the text. This failure to meet the standards of the popular contemporary marketplace, and also the failure to completely dissociate from those standards, is the source of the authority Conrad would gain in later critical conceptions of early modernism. Woolf goes on to bemoan the difficulty of convincing contemporary critics that the beauty of Conrad's style itself holds value apart from the content it communicates. By positioning the common critic of Conrad as a champion of realism, Woolf implicitly sets content and aesthetics in opposition, yet she avers that the two are inseparable. Rather than undermining the cultural authority that demands realism from Conrad, merely to replace it with a modernist authority based on aesthetic autonomy, Woolf suggests that each camp, mimesis and aesthetics, is incomplete without the other, though the two retain their disconnection—she hints at a case to be made for a cultural authority with a double view. Modernist style, that is, is *either* a distinct expression of the author *or* a set of limitations placed on the author's work by its social context—we cannot finally determine which and so much hold both as mutually exclusive but simultaneous possibilities.

Chapter 3:

Styling Authenticity in the Modernist Novel

> Face, voice, and accent eke out our words and impress their
> feebleness with character in speech. But the pen is a rigid
> instrument; it can say very little; it has all kinds of habits and
> ceremonies of its own. It is dictatorial too: it is always making
> ordinary men into prophets, and changing the natural stumbling of
> human speech into the solemn and stately march of pens.
>
> Virginia Woolf, "Montaigne"
> (*The Common Reader: First Series* 59)

To represent oneself faithfully, Woolf writes in response to Montaigne's *Essais*, is not

easy. But far more difficult than communicating oneself in speech or action is to do so in writing,

through the instrument of the pen. As either impediment or assistance, the stylus enters a

relationship with the writer and intervenes in communication. Indeed, for Woolf, it often

intervenes as an active agent, "making" the writer, "changing" her by its "habits and

ceremonies." But if these ceremonies derive from the same place as all ceremony—from an

emphasis on *form*ality, per*form*ance, common rituals—Woolf means that it is these social

structures that in fact act on the writer. Communication, even in writing, is a two-way street, and

the meaning of the styles of the figures walking down that street is wholly determined by social,

relational context. The stylus, which may here be more appropriately read as metonymy for the

style it writes, is a tool to determine those social relationships. But it is, importantly, a communal

tool—a means of communication that is bound by or carries the traces of the rules and history of

communication within a society. Style is the external customs with which, or by which, the writer's creation is necessarily bound.

But even if the pen were an unceremonious assistant to communicating the self, "beyond the difficulty of communicating oneself," Woolf proclaims "the supreme difficulty of being oneself. This soul, or life within us, by no means agrees with the life outside us" (59). Throughout this dissertation, I have been demonstrating the way in which style exists in this space between the life within and the life outside of the writer. It exists not as the concrete aesthetic effects of the text or as a marker of the hand of the author, but as an intermediary between the two—it is the author's ethos (as that word carries with it both individual character and the use of that character in appeal to an audience) transmuted to concrete materiality, with which the reader or viewer interacts to determine meaning.

My focus in this chapter is depictions of artists in Wyndham Lewis' *Tarr* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Tarr and Kreisler the painters, Stephen the poet, and Bloom the adman, a modern kind of artist: in Lewis and Joyce's novels these figures struggle to identify or assert their creative individuality in densely intertwined social worlds. In their depictions of the everyday lives of these artists, Lewis and Joyce portray the social, economic, and cultural impediments to artistic creation in an art that mostly values autonomy from those influences— they portray the conflict between the authenticity of the life inside fighting interference from the life outside.[1] Jonathan Goldman puts this self-referential subject in developmental terms:

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[1] While *Ulysses* seems an obvious choice for a chapter on high modernist style, *Tarr* seems less so. Scholars have paired the two before, comparing their temporal proximity in their publication dates in *The Egoist*, and simply because they are two novels about artists by "Men of 1914." Scott Klein goes the farthest in linking the works of Joyce and Lewis in *The Fictions of James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis*, but he treats their uses of style as mere opposition in their theories of style rather than their uses of it in practice. Lewis himself writes extensively of *Ulysses* in *Time and Western Man*, forming the basis for many comparisons. In his biography of Lewis, Jeffrey Meyers tells us of the first time Lewis and Joyce met: "Lewis had read only a few pages of *A Portrait of the Artist* when it appeared in *The Egoist* and

Joyce imagines himself as origin and referent of the text, subjugating all possible readings of the novel to the author .... Through Joyce we can see modernist style taking over the role played in the nineteenth century by the *Bildungsroman*: authorial self-fashioning supplants the coming-of-age character as fiction's chief way of understanding the creation of the individual. By establishing the author as both a function of the text and the means of decoding it, Joyce enacts the fantasy of a complete, bounded subjectivity, uncontaminated by culture. (13)

Style, here and for many critics, is the location of the creative hand in representation and the clues we seek to identify that creator. These artist figures are often read as pseudo-autobiography, the style associated with them pointing to the masterful author himself—but what if, as Wilde reminds us, this is merely "art" working to "conceal the artist"? What we find in style might end up being more a product of what we come to the text expecting to find. Instead, I push back against Goldman's formulation not by seeking to prove him wrong, but to show that reading style as the author's self-aware self-construction is to focus on only one half of what style is.

In this chapter, I look at two types of modernist styles that engage the reader in different ways. I contrast the heavy use of visual stylistic tropes in Lewis's *Tarr* with the more sound-based, fluid style of Joyce's *Ulysses* to consider the role of style in situating these authors in their respective places in the modernist canon. Each author's style invites a different critical relationship to their text. The differences in how we interact with these two styles are significant. Lewis writes so that everything is external, surface, a "hard shell"—rather than signaling something else, like the hand of the author or genre, this style signals itself as a construct. We register what we see as a fabrication rather than a vital clue to something beyond that surface. In contrast, the ever-changing style of *Ulysses* dwells in the non-visual senses, creating more

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found that it was too mannered, too literary and too sentimental-Irish for his austere taste. But Joyce… was familiar with *Tarr* and Lewis' other works, and gave a flattering start of recognition when Eliot introduced them. Both men seemed to be aware of the momentous occasion" (121). The high modernist self-mythologizing began early.

feelings than concrete percepts. As Lewis writes, "what is thought takes the *spatial* form; what is felt takes the *time* form" (*Time and Western Man* 254, emphasis original). These feelings conjure a sense of something that needs to be uncovered, evoke interpretive longing. I'm not saying anything new by pointing to the differences in these writers' styles—indeed, my study relies heavily on evidence of critics interpreting these styles in just this way—but I cover this well-trodden ground to assert that when we, as critics, describe style we describe, in effect, a set of relations of which we are a part. We perform our own burgeoning relationship with our object of study. My larger purpose is to argue that demonstrating an awareness of style as a critical tool (something we shape to use for critical ends) is an acknowledgment of the creativity, and responsibility, of criticism itself.

This acknowledgement of the critic's role doesn't foreclose the idea of a writer's assertion of their own style. On the contrary, it is exactly the coexistence of these two elements of style—creation and reception—that generates much of the tension in a convention-challenging work of art. As a shared tool of communication, style puts limits on individual expression, even though it is commonly viewed as the expression of self. Here I study critical interpretations of the many styles of *Ulysses* as revealing Joyce the masterful, controlling author to demonstrate how reading style in this way is severely limited and limiting for our critical conceptions of modernism, as is feeling the freedom to impose new meaning on styles that resist old meaning— this creative critical tendency, as I will show in relation to the final episode of *Ulysses*, can have uncomfortable ethical implications. Modernist style, interested as it is in challenging conventions, invites these two types of reading, which create and uphold different types of textual authority: seeing the author as authoritative, or giving in to the invitation (intentional or not) to impose convention on the unconventional text through editing, criticism, and

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interrogative methods of reading. I argue that these readings give power over style's meaning to the writer's individual creativity in the former, and to the reader in the social realm of convention in the latter; both overlook the fact that style is ultimately interactive, an effect of these two together. This is not to criticize Joyce scholarship, or modernist scholarship in general, but to offer us an additional avenue of approach to what is arguably one of the most important elements of this body of literature that makes it, in fact, modernist. If to be modernist is to evince a particular stance toward modernity, that stance is registered through what we identify as style.

What would it mean to focus on the interactivity of writer and reader in the determination of what style signifies? It reveals style as the field of a power-struggle between writer and reader—the struggle the reader comes up against in every text to make sense of style through the conventions at hand to situate things relationally (to define identities and relationships), and the struggle of the convention-defying writer to maintain control of a text against that readerly instinct. Against the options in the power struggle, it would mean acknowledging struggle; dwelling in uncertainty or allowing ambiguity while admitting the necessity, purpose, implications, and tentativeness of offering a critical reading of style.

A modernist self-narrative of aesthetic autonomy can be transcended by retaining critical focus on the social aspect of style, from the creative process through publication to the reading experience. While I see mostly stark differences between the styles of *Tarr* and *Ulysses*, as a pivot between my readings of these texts I consider the stylistic implications of one similarity: their curious punctuation alongside equally curious publication histories. Hannah Sullivan argues in her thorough study of modernist revision that excessive cutting and addition by authors "actually produce some of the difficulties and stylistic patterns we recognize *as* modernist" (16). Both *Tarr* and *Ulysses* were published in several heavily revised versions; both have also been

somewhat controversially handled by third-party editors. These myriad changes significantly affect the style of the text in terms of both how it looks and its tonal quality or voice. These two connotations of style, the visual and the vocal, are conflated in these texts, as the presence of the artist characters confuse the distinction between the creator and the created, the natural and the forgery, in ways that implicate the reader.

I. Visual Style in Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*

In 1937, Wyndham Lewis coined the phrase "men of 1914" to refer to himself, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce. They were "the literary big noises of the War and the 'waste' it left in its wake" (*Blasting* 250). But despite his central role in forming a critical narrative to help establish the notion of high modernism, Lewis yet remains at the periphery of that exclusive canon. His self-proclaimed position as a "[man] of 1914" allies him strongly with that peer group, but he also went to great lengths to set himself apart—again when he names the "men of 1914" he positions himself as part-of-yet-opposed-to that group: "Mr. Joyce, Mr. Pound, Mr. Eliot—and, for I said that my piety was egoistic, the Enemy, as well" (254). The aggressive way he would later come to oppose the high modernist sensibility served to solidify his voice as integral to the high modernist conversation—no narrative is complete without a charismatic "enemy."[2] Lewis is thus important when considering modernist self-styled canonicity, but his pose of "the Enemy" precludes his literary work from occupying a central place in that canon.[3] I

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[2] As in Adorno's formulation of modernist art's sociality-in-opposition, that "by congealing into an entity until itself—rather than obeying existing social norms and thus proving itself to be 'socially useful'—art criticizes society just by being there," Lewis (though certainly critical in more ways than just being there) positions himself within-and-opposed-to modernist art (*Aesthetic Theory* 335).
[3] For more on the tension between the avant-garde and modernism in Lewis's work, see Anne Quema's *The Agon of Modernism*.

argue here that this pose, which positions him both within and against a social group, is generated and enacted by style.

Written in the years leading up to the Great War (and arguably begun around 1907), Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* depicts a similar subject matter to *Ulysses*—the everyday lives of artists in a major European city, in a style that is self-consciously inventive. But while Lewis and Joyce both write in styles that are "equally unmistakable," the effect of those styles couldn't be more different—as Fredric Jameson reminds us, the style of *Ulysses* is "composed" (*Fables* 295); that is, both written and calm, self-possessed. Jameson continues: "The style of Lewis, however, equally unmistakable, blasts through the tissues of his novels like a steam whistle, breaking them to its will." The difference between self-possession and blasting is that of inward concealment and breaking something open; a difference of depth and surface. Lewis is a stylistic counter-point to the more typical high-modernists, of whom Joyce is my primary example in this chapter. If style in the modernist text entices the reader to get to the bottom of what that style signifies, while resisting that interpretation by making the bottom difficult to reach, Lewis's style brings everything to the surface; there's no sense of something that needs figuring out.

What set Lewis apart from other high modernists, he claims in his hefty theoretical tome *Time and Western Man*, is his emphasis on the aesthetics of space over temporality—form over flux (Klein 3). This leads to a style characterized by Jameson as a "sculptural gesture," an "externalizing and mechanical" expression rather than the inward-facing impressionism that generally characterizes works Jameson lumps under the title of "Anglo-American Modernism" (2). Compare Stephen on the beach, "Open your eyes now. I will. One moment. Has all vanished since? If I open and am for ever in the black adiaphane. Basta! I will see if I can see," to "Butcher blinked. He thought of his resources. Then he recalled his inclination to tears" (*Ulysses*

31, *Tarr* [1928] 57). Both passages are made up of short, clipped sentences, but the former is self-directed, self-controlling and dwells deeply in time—Stephen views his world when he is good and ready, and we feel that force of time inevitably passing—while the source of pathos in the latter is the reader's assumption of the connections between the sentences, which themselves are declarative—the moments are still, discrete, and they have a sort of externalized logical connection that we infer and impose.

Readings of Lewis's style as hard surface are prompted both by Lewis himself ("In my purely literary voyages my eye is always my compass" [*Art* 391]) and by the fact that he was primarily a visual artist prior to the 1920s, when his writing took on a prolific pace. As the creator and champion of Vorticism, a visual arts movement that departed from realist figural representation in favor of representation based on mathematical, scientific, or other abstract principles, Lewis fell in line with the many modernist movements that spurned realism— primarily Cubism and Futurism. The abstractionist visual agenda of Vorticism purports to combine the structural elements of Cubism with the dynamism of the Futurists, resulting in an art that emphasized stasis and energy at once. According to Mark Morrisson, the movement "represent[ed] the modern artist as the point of concentrated energy at the still center of the whirling dynamism of modernity—as Lewis put it, 'The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest'" (116). *Blast*, "Vorticism's short-lived (but flamboyant) magazine" released its first of what would only be two issues in July of 1914, concurrent with the writing of *Tarr*— the style of both is heavily influenced by Lewis's visual aesthetics. The central section of the novel Lewis himself called "a grotesque tapestry" hung between the "psychological pillars" of the philosophical conversations that begin and end the book (Klein xi). The novel's style is derived both from this commitment to innovation and his early interest in visuality: Jameson, for

one, calls *Tarr* "a book in which, as in few others, the sentence is reinvented with all the force of origins, as sculptural gesture and fiat in the void" (2). Lewis "clipped the text to the bone of all fleshly verbiage" to create it as a "visual artefact," grotesque yet sparse (*Blasting* 139, Klein xi).

Indeed, the effect of the visual in this novel is the recognition of style as fabrication. Visually, the style of *Tarr* demonstrates this composed quality on first sight. In the 1918 version, Lewis peppered = marks throughout his text, seemingly at random and with maddening inconsistency. The novel begins: "Paris hints of sacrifice. = But here we deal with that large dusty facet known to indulgent and congruous kind" (21). In this opening, the = sign seems to mark an immediate divergence in story or tone, marking a step back from or complication and development of the original claim. The second = symbol comes in the next paragraph:

> Inconceivably generous and naïve faces haunt the Knackfus Quarter. = We are not however in a Selim or Vitagraph camp (though "guns" tap rhythmically the buttocks). = Art is being studied. = Art is the smell of oil paint, Henri Murger's 'Vie de Bohème,' corduroy trousers, the operatic Italian model. But the poetry, above all, of linseed oil and turpentine. (21)

Here we have four sentences each separated by the symbol, plus a fifth separated from the previous by only a period. The first four all seem to operate in the same relationship to one another as the novel's opening two sentences: each clarifies the previous. But is this not the way prose generally works, and the way in which the final sentence of the quote above operates? There are ten of these symbols on the first page alone, and it soon becomes clear that none of them is operating in the same way, if they can be said to be operating at all. Moreover, their use soon peters out to about four or five per page; some chapters have no = signs at all.[4] While this

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[4] In his editorial matter to the 1918 edition, Paul O'Keefe uses this inconsistency to date the composition of the various chapters. Hugh Kenner claims the signs serve to interrupt the flow of the prose. Andrzej Gasiorek is among others in following Kenner by suggesting Lewis used the signs "to make his prose more jagged" (327). While David Trotter claims the equal signs lend a feeling of violence to a particularly venomous speech delivered by Tarr (279). In my second section I will return to the significance of these

inconsistency can be attributed to the haste with which the novel was written and published before Lewis left to serve in World War I, we might take a different lesson from this—where the reader begins the novel yearning to make sense of this stylistic visual flourish, we are quickly trained out of it as they taper away.[5] Rather, the = signs serve to visually identify the text as written matter.[6] By not signifying any meaning in the story itself, they constantly, or rather, sporadically, call attention to the physicality of the text, to visual style as impersonal objective material, not to be looked into but to be looked at.[7]

While the visual style of *Tarr* is perceptibly fabricated, the plot is similarly constructed to bring everything to the surface. The social world of *Tarr* is a "relational universe," in which there is "no place for a thesis about human nature" (Jameson 47). Characters interact and react to each other, but there is no sense of a deeper self at work. Jameson says of the novel's main events: "If thesis there is, then we have here rather to do with a narrative presupposition about the structure of events, as moments in which subjects come into painful, fitful and undesirable contacts with one another …. In such space there is no longer any narrative perspective,"

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marks in Lewis's own treatment of the text (in the 1918 publication of the novel he insists on their inclusion, but in his 1928 revision they disappear completely).

[5] Harold Orel points out that the prologue to the story's initial publication in *The Egoist* dated the beginning of the composition at 1910, "However, the preface that Lewis contributed to the Chatto and Windus edition of 1928 (the completely revised version on which Lewis expended considerable time and energy) stated flatly that 'it was written with extreme haste, during the first year of the War, during a period of illness and restless convalescence'" (147). Significantly, as Orel points out, while there is no marker of when the novel is set, the notable absence of any mention of the war is suggestive. William H. Prichard suggests this is because the novel was written in 1914, before the war began, and was based on Lewis's time as an artist in France from 1902-1909 (19-20).

[6] Joyce does this, too—Derek Attridge points to Joyce's *lack* of punctuation (a topic I'll return to in the next section of this chapter) and use of numerals in the final chapter of *Ulysses*: "clearly a matter of the eye alone is the use throughout the chapter of numerals and graphic signs where an orthodox written text might use words" (550).

[7] Jennifer DeVere Brody's recent monograph *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* considers "the work of experimental artists… many of whom can be seen as championing the 'visual' or 'spatial' turn in cultural studies…. Such artists struggle with predominantly visual rather than strictly grammatical understandings of punctuation" (2).

everything plays a clear role in the structure of the plot, even the most insignificant details. This lack of narrative perspective makes the whole text flat surface—"background" details are represented on the same plane as "major crises." Again, the narrative flatland of the text suggests that nothing here bears looking into.

These readings of the style of the novel as flat surface fall in line with the aesthetic theories of the story's protagonist: Tarr claims that one major condition of art "is absence of *soul* …The lines and masses of the statue are its soul. It has no inside …. nothing you cannot *see*. Instead, then, of being something impelled like an independent machine by a little egoistic fire inside, it lives soullessly and deadly by its frontal lines and masses" (300). If art has no "little egoistic fire" driving it, this theory begs the question of the role of the living artist, whose ego is generally understood to be responsible for the style of the art. The surface-dwellingness of this text is a cubist aesthetic, which, as Stein so evocatively describes, is "not a composition in which there was one man at the centre surrounded by other men but a composition that had neither a beginning or an end, a composition in which one corner was as important as another corner" (qtd. in Perloff 74). We can read that "one man at the centre" as either the composer of the composition or the subject of the composition. In the case of *Tarr*, we not only have two protagonists, Tarr and Kreisler, but these two characters are commonly read as representing the one author, Lewis.[8] We lose track of the boundaries between the composer of the text and artistic creation itself so that all figural loci of the text are flattened out—the hierarchical ordering of relationships is undone. Where style is the meaningful signals to those relationships, it signals no use for the reader.

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[8] Among the people who read *Tarr* as autobiography is Jeffrey Meyers (6). Alan Starr reads Kreisler as a figure for Lewis's youth and Tarr as a figure for Lewis's adulthood and artistic growth.

Lewis depicts himself split between Tarr and Kreisler to suggest that even traces of the author in textual style are traces of the "rigorous geometry" of the social world they exist within (Levenson, "Form's Body" 241). Tarr and Kreisler represent two opposing modes of interaction with the same tight-knit social world. Tarr positions himself apart from and above his milieu: he sees himself as a point of authenticity in an otherwise artificial world of "bourgeois bohemians," those inauthentic artists who posture against society "even as they create their own hypocritical community with its own equally predictable societal mores" (Klein xi). Here we get to the heart of Lewis's own positioning within-yet-against a community of artists who are themselves within-yet-against a larger social body. Kreisler, on the other hand, falls victim to those mores through a series of missteps derived from his economic instability—he holds this inauthentic crowd in the same contempt Tarr does, but, as Kreisler neither makes nor sells his art in the time of the novel, his identity as artist is dependent on his questionable ability to occupy a place in the art community. Both figures represent the way the modes of style available to the modern artist are affected by different degrees of dependency on the art community.[9]

The material in which we read style may be the artist's creation, but the conditions of that creation are not his own. For example, the world of *Tarr* is completely shaped by social interactions (this novel is first and foremost a comedy of manners), and the creations of the individual artists are made possible by the artist's role in that world. While Tarr resists this

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[9] As Jameson claims, "to face the sentences of Wyndham Lewis is to find oneself in the presence of a principle of immense mechanical energy" (295). Lewis's sentences are "machine-like" and "artificial" (295). This energy, Jameson tells us,

> reflect[s] the massive and wellnigh impenetrable obstacles which literary production must overcome in the consumer age; and these obstacles may be articulated in any number of different ways: in the domain of literary history, as the exhaustion of inherited form; on the social plane, as the increasingly unjustifiability of the artist himself, his loss of social status and function; on the sociological level, as the split between public institutions and private experience, and as the decay of the older forms of social life; [etc.]. (325-6)

sociality (though ultimately succumbs to it), Kreisler feels it keenly. The social life of the arts

quarter, led by the domineering Fraulein Lipmann, is self-defining, self-regulating, and self-

protecting in a way that has consequences for group insiders and outsiders alike. Kreisler, for

example, is kept careful watch of as he cavorts with the ladies of the Bonnington Club —when

he stops showing up at their gatherings, Fraulein Lipmann "put a spiteful little mark down to [his

name]" (91). This tallying of peccadillos adds up and leads to serious penalties for Kreisler. His

quest to become part of this social circle climaxes in a dance at the club, where the astringencies

of this strange social math are thrown into relief by his chaotic behavior. Before the dance, we

see Kreisler trying to get hold of enough money to get his dress clothes out of the pawn shop—

trying, as it were, to style himself according to social conventions.[10] Time and again his social

missteps come back to haunt him and prevent his success in this. He shows up at the dance ill-

suited anyway, his reasoning for this offense reached in the haste of emotion and yet again

referred to in the language of tallying—he goes to the dance to compound his humiliation:

"Kreisler did not know how he should wipe out this debt with the world, but he wanted it bigger,

more crushing" (125). His inability to factor into the mathematics of the group is demonstrated

by his disruption of the dance itself, during which he careens around the dance floor at a rate

disproportionate to the beat of the music, crashing his partner into other dancers. This disruption

of the regulated and social art of dance is brought to pass by Kreisler's deep frustration at his

economic inability to play a part in this world—his powerlessness, his fundamental incapability

to contribute in any way to others, is a direct result of the social machinery of his world and

leaves little room for him to have a mental life outside of reaction. The effect he creates, his style

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[10] In explaining Lewis's "relational universe" in *Tarr*, Jameson emphasizes "Kreisler's financial situation" as not "as static detail in his complicated life situation," but rather as "a field of force in which other events can in turn be generated" (47-8)

in relation to his surroundings, can only be that of disorder—a disruption of order rejected by both the highly-structured text and the reader seeking to make sense of style.

Lewis's use of style as surface, as well as his "blast[ing] through the tissues of his novels," is often said to be a result of his own hostile oppositional stance against his audience and the art world more generally. Lewis depicts the tension in artistic creation between art as individual expression and its physical life as material object in a distinct social context—a tension particularly bothersome for an artist like Lewis, who is committed to both aesthetic abstraction and the role he plays as antagonist to his peers. The tense relation between self and social world in *Tarr* has significant consequences for its style. Howard Orel, for one, reads style for clues to the author: Orel suggests that the "jagged, energy-nervous appearance on the printed page …. translated faithfully the workings of Lewis's mind" (149). But he also tells us this jagged style is an "attempt to verbalize Vorticist effects." Still further, Orel ties the style of the novel to Lewis's characterization, particularly the difficulty of portraying an anti-hero, Kreisler, who D.G. Bridson described as the "embodiment" and "explanation of Nazism," with traits such as "arrogance," "brutality," "callousness," and "hysteria" (Bridson 173). Orel claims:

> To sketch such a personality adequately, the style had to be adjusted; the images, as a consequence, had to become hard and external and visible. Lewis … clipped the text, 'rhetoric was under an interdict', he abstained from 'the use of any clichés (Even the inoffensive mates of more gregarious words), eschewed sentimental archaisms, and all *pretty language*'. (149)

Orel here reads Lewis's claims in his autobiography about his straightforward style and links it directly to the (at least partly) autobiographical character of Kreisler. The style, to put it simply, suits the topic in the Aristotelian tradition, and the topic is the author, theory of the artistic movement, and the character all brought to the surface. Here we see that for Orel, as for so many others, the mind of the artist and the object of representation are conflated. This reminds us, of

course, that even a movement that calls for abstraction and simplification to basic principles derives from a desiring mind with which we will ultimately associate that style of abstraction. The cubist aesthetic I elaborated earlier is also that of cubist-collage, which, Marjorie Perloff writes, "provided the artist with a chance to question the established ordering systems" (74). By flattening the perspectival space and compositional hierarchy, the artist still asserts himself through an attack on established order. But a novel that depicts artistic autonomy *and* the comedy behind the impact of the social world on artistic creation makes it impossible for the reader to play a role in that impact. There is no interpretive tension in the novel—only tightly manipulated plot. This conflation of subject and theory into the single mind of the author, he who is "the point of concentrated energy at the still center of the whirling dynamism of modernity," restricts the text by foreclosing the reader's interpretive role.

II. Silent Corrections: The Standardizing Response to Modernist Experimentation

If style, as some conventional critical narratives have it, arises from the eruption of the artist's individual expression in a social medium, publication is the catalyst—both incentive and facilitator of the communicative moment. The idea that a work will be made public is also what puts pressure on the artist's expression through the conventions of the publishing industry and the expectations of the literary marketplace. Earlier I suggested two ways that the unconventional text's style begs to be read: as demonstration of the author's artistic will or as invitation to re-impose interpretive standards. Here I look closer at how those methods of asserting and receiving style have clashed in the publication and reception of *Tarr* and *Ulysses*. These two novels were both published in some haste and were thus unsatisfactory to their authors in some way. In this section, I consider punctuation in the editorial histories of these novels insofar as they reveal the

difference in how these authors responded to an industry that prizes both typographical precision and "authoritative" texts while also struggling to maintain a sense of authenticity and autonomy.

As Adorno reminds us, "history has left its residue in punctuation marks, and it is history, far more than meaning or grammatical function, that looks out at us, rigidified and trembling slightly, from every mark of punctuation" ("Punctuation" 301). Punctuation, here, is the "[region] of cycles of generations that have lived;" and, we must not forget, "history … is the nightmare from which [Stephen is] trying to awake" (*Ulysses* 28). Not for nothing does punctuation play a large role in modernist style. Hemingway's periods, Woolf's commas—as signals to grammatical order, punctuation is both the instrument of that order and one's means of violating it.

As we saw earlier, Lewis's 1918 version of *Tarr* violates grammatical order by making liberal use of the = mark for reasons peripheral to the meaning of the text. While these marks disappear in the 1928 version when Lewis standardizes all his punctuation and grammar, these marks are interestingly missing from the even earlier 1916 publication in *The Egoist*: we read in 1918, "Paris hints of sacrifice. = But here we deal with that large dusty facet known to indulgent and congruous kind," while we read earlier in 1916, "Paris hints of sacrifice.—But here we deal with that large dusty facet known to indulgent and congruous kind" (21, 54). In its earliest iteration, the text appears very regular—curious, but not aggressively so. The long dash becomes the two parallel long dashes in 1918. Lewis addresses this inconsistency in a letter to Ezra Pound: in October 1917, shortly after receiving word that the manuscript of *Tarr* was to be published in America by Alfred A. Knopf (through John Quinn) and during the serialization of the text in *The Egoist*, Lewis writes to Pound, "Were those parallel lines = Quinn mentions kept going by The Egoist, or not? They occurred all through the book in the typewritten MSS. Could

not they be disinterred, & used by Knopf?" (Materer 107, emphasis original). Pound responds that "the whole text [of *Tarr*] went to N.Y., it is merely the '=' marks that Q[uinn] wanted put back. I should think it would have to be done from the proofs. GOD knows what the printer has done with the original typescript" (111, emphasis original). The = marks seem to have been sufficiently restored in the Knopf text, but there is some suggestion that their inconsistency is yet another failure of the editing process. In 1928, the parallel dashes disappear and the text is normalized.

It was for good reason, then, that Lewis found difficulty in entrusting his work to others while he fought in the war. He left the manuscript of *Tarr* with Pound, who initially placed it in *The Egoist* before publishing it in book form through Knopf. Scott Klein tells us that both versions had significant problems: "place-holding phrases that Lewis had intended to change made their way into the incomplete serial *Egoist* version" while "the Knopf edition was set from a mixture of the printed *Egoist* serial materials and pieces of manuscript that Pound was able to gather while Lewis was at the front, and Lewis was never presented with proofs to correct for this edition" (xxx). Lewis later acknowledged the mishandling of the Knopf version and called it "the bad American *Tarr*" (xxxi). When he got the chance in 1928 to revise the novel for a new Chatto and Windus edition, he took it with gusto. He expanded it significantly, leaving no page untouched. For Lewis, this was the authoritative text, and was the only version reprinted in his lifetime. Interestingly, in the version he edited for the Oxford World's Classics in 2010, Klein "reproduces exactly Lewis's orthography as it appears on the 1928 Chatto and Windus edition," deferring to the command of Lewis's epigraph from Montaigne that "one should 'correct the faults of inadvertence, not those of habit'," while he at the same time "silently corrects" various "obvious … errors" (xxxiii). One simply cannot help oneself.

Perhaps with this common impulse to standardize in mind, Lewis opens *Tarr* with two

epigraphs from the French Renaissance essayist Michel de Montaigne on the subject of

revision's effect on style. These quotations were not in the 1918 Knopf edition for, as Paul

O'Keefe tells us in his explanatory notes to a recent edition of the 1918 text, Lewis decided to

use them only "after Pound had dispatched the text to New York" (324). It is unclear from

O'Keefe's note when exactly Lewis decided on these passages to open his novel, but the timing

seems important, for the epigraphs concern the question of correcting imperfections or trusting

initial instinct—a question, ultimately, of whether style belongs more to design or to nature. In a

letter to Ezra Pound in January 1918, prior to the publication of the Knopf edition, Lewis

mentions the passages: "those passages from Montaigne I showed you are to be the device of the

book, & come somewhere at the beginning" (Materer 113). The responding letter from Pound

makes no mention of the passages, but Lewis's next letter is insistent: "I enclose the passages

from Montaigne I want stuck at the front of Tarr" (116). There is no indication in the letters

Timothy Materer provides in his collection of what exactly happened with Lewis's request—

whether Pound acted or whether it was simply too late. What they indicate, however, is that

Lewis's intentions with the early edition were already interrupted before it was even near

publication.

If these epigraphs on revision predate and thus don't comment on the errors in the 1918

text and Lewis's successive desire for further revision, they may suggest his discontent with the

text as printed in *The Egoist*, which Lewis read while at the front and of which he wrote to Pound

in July 1917:

> I also got the Egoist yesterday, & see that in the duel scene Soltyk, one of the two
> principals, take a pillule of <u>oxide of Bromium and Heroin</u>. Now, here we have
> another of my bloody dummies. That is to say I wanted <u>to specify </u>the sedative

tablet taken, & for the time being put down the above extraordinary concoction. It is just like the German occurring all through the book. (Materer 87)

He had written temporary German phrases in the text as placeholders until he could find the correct phrasing. Again, on this issue he is dependent on others to edit his text: "Obviously before appearing in book form these things must be dealt with. Alec Shepler would be useful for the revision of the German, & has consented to do it." The sedative tablet indeed appears as "oxide of bromium and aniseed" in both the 1918 and 1928 versions of the text. These epigraphs are curious, then, alongside Lewis's constant discontent with the text and his reliance on others to edit his words.

In the first epigraph Montaigne grapples with critics who would criticize his writing style for being at all imperfect:

> I would have done it better elsewhere, but the work would have been less my own; and its principal end and perfection is to be precisely my own. I would indeed correct an accidental error, and I am full of them, since I run on carelessly. But the imperfections that are ordinary and constant in me it would be treachery to remove.
> When I have been told, or have told myself: 'You are took thick in figures of speech. Here is a word of Gascon vintage. Here is a dangerous phrase'. (I do not avoid any of those that are used in the streets of France; those who would combat usage with grammar make fools of themselves.) 'This is ignorant reasoning. This is paradoxical reasoning. This one is too mad. You are often playful: people will think you are speaking in earnest when you are making believe.' 'Yes,' I say, 'but I correct the faults of inadvertence, not those of habit. Isn't this the way I speak everywhere? Don't I represent myself to the life? Enough, then.' (trans. Frame 667)

The passage Lewis has chosen is Montaigne's response to the criticisms of imagined readers (and, interestingly, Montaigne's self-criticisms, prompted by imagining his critics) regarding his writing style. Montaigne places value in the work being his own, rather than the work being perfect—this means, implicitly, that one's "own" exists in the imperfections. These are not accidental imperfections, those caused by carelessness or the "faults of inadvertence," but rather

habitual imperfections, that are "ordinary and constant." Montaigne contends that any imperfections in his writing are imperfections in himself, and that to remove those would be to remove himself from his text—he says of his text that "its principal end and perfection is to be precisely my own." The difference, of course, between faults of inadvertence and those of habit is more difficult for a third-party editor to determine.

What, then, does it mean for Lewis to append this idea to his heavily revised, at least somewhat autobiographical novel? Why does Lewis decide on these statements to introduce the radical rewriting and standardization of a text the first version of which he intended "to eliminate anything less essential than a noun or a verb," something "worthy of the hand of the abstract innovator" (Currie 177)? Robert Currie suggests that Lewis meant Montaigne to serve as an apologia for the failure of Lewis's grand stylistic aims in the 1918 version, and that this failure was due in part to real life encroaching on the act of creation, itself marking the art being created. Like Conrad's justification of his style and subject matter in his Author's Note, Lewis writes in his preface to the 1928 publication (yet another prefatory addition) that his early version "was written with extreme haste, during the first year of the War, during a period of illness and restless convalescence" (Currie 178). But the changes Lewis made are so substantial that we can't help but question the sincerity of this epigraph. Currie goes on to characterize the effect of the changes Lewis made to "every line of it," but important for me here is the seeming inevitability of the failure of his initial abstractionist endeavor. It is intriguing that he standardizes a text that had at one point been so heavily invested in experimentation while seeming to advocate for an author's right to stray from grammatical standards. As the author seeks to master style in a text which demonstrates the everyday hindrances to that mastery, perhaps style here is not an effect of the aggressive or masterly activity of the artist, as it is often understood, but rather is the tool

of the writer's aggression, with which he seeks to master something larger. In other words, style is not the effect of his text, but the instrument of his action, which the social context both registers and challenges.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

If unconventional stylistic practices challenge and are in turn challenged by an audience, a look at certain responses to the unconventional aspects of *Ulysses* can show us the limits and stakes of those challenges. Consider, for example, responses to the eight massively run-on sentences that make up "Penelope," the final episode of *Ulysses*. Joyce himself never standardizes the punctuation of this episode, but many critics have responded to this unconventional grammar by either imposing convention or understanding the episode's female protagonist only as she stands in opposition to that convention.

While never explicitly stated in the text itself, this episode is generally agreed to be a transcription of the thoughts of Molly Bloom at the end of the day; it is her monologue.[11] Molly's chapter is, significantly, unpunctuated (save for a few seemingly stray periods). Adorno writes that punctuation acts as "marks of oral delivery" as opposed to "marks of communication" (300). Certainly, they signal cadence and tone, but we might wonder what he sees as the difference between speech and communication. Can we consider her interiority as communication? Adorno continues:

> instead of diligently serving the interplay between language and the reader, [punctuation marks] serve, hieroglyphically, an interplay that takes place in the interior of language along its own pathways. Hence it is superfluous to omit them as being superfluous: then they simply hide. Every text, even the most densely woven, cites them of its own accord. (300)

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[11] This common reading largely supported by Joyce's only designation of the "technic" of this chapter as "monologue" in his Linati schema of the novel. As John Smurthwaite recounts, it is also commonly called an interior monologue, soliloquy (Stanley Sultan, *The Argument of* Ulysses; Suzette Henke, *Joyce's Moraculous Sindbook*), and cantata (Bernard Benstock, *Narrative Con/Texts in* Ulysses) (Smurthwaite 75). Against these terms of vocality, Smurthwaite emphasizes the visual character of Molly's interiority.

Molly's monologue, in other words, has internalized these marks of order. John Nash, for one, suggests that the responsible reader seeks out and restores that hidden punctuation: her monologue "takes shortcuts with punctuation and graphic emblems but … seems to require slow reading, reinsertion of punctuation and syntactical rules" (123-4). The reader's job, then, in "silently restor[ing] the missing punctuation" is to render Molly's private thoughts public.[12] [13]

If punctuation is the means by which we can enact or violate order in language, I argue that re-punctuation of "Penelope" is the means by which the reader violates Molly by imposing order and meaning on her style. "Penelope" is made up of the distinct language of Molly Bloom, but with no signal to the reader that this is her language—we merely assume. We have paragraph breaks, and a few periods, but otherwise there are no punctuation signals at all. Stylistically, in terms of how we understand the speaking voice and how we identify the author's originality, critics have seen this as significant. James Van Dyck Card claims "the absence of punctuation" is "the source of [the episode's] stylistic innovation" (19).[14] In exploring the "multiplicity of styles that result from different forms of the structural organization of language, and the ways in which these styles affect our understanding," James Thorpe considers "how punctuation indicates structure and guides our understanding" (3). As signals to grammatical structure and clausal

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[12] This claim, made also by Anthony Burgess in *Joysprick*, is interesting given the observation of many of my students who, when asked to punctuate a page of the text, struggled for a few minutes before claiming, despondently, "It doesn't work! It doesn't make any sense!" Attridge, along with Karen Lawrence and Burgess, points out that the style of this scene is not nearly as radical as earlier episodes, due to what they see as a syntactically conventional structure. And yet I like to believe the difficulty my students had was that of responsible readers questioning their understanding of the thoughts of the narrator, hesitating enough to question order itself before demarcating it with punctuation. And I hope the average reader wouldn't care to pause over the text long enough to mangle it with such organization.

[13] You'll note here in Nash's language a similarity to Scott Klein's claim to "silently correct" certain errors in *Tarr*.

[14] Card and others (Birmingham) note the lack of punctuation in some of Nora Barnacle Joyce's letters to her husband, claiming this to be his source of inspiration for Molly's language (19).

relationships, punctuation serves mainly to set language in a particular order, to make meaning

clear or confused, to serve a specific purpose to the reader. Punctuation gives communicative

form to private thought in the same way style does. In their *Notes on James Joyce's* Ulysses,

Gerry Carlin and Mair Evans note punctuation (along with "selection [and] comment") as

"usually associated with authorial 'control'." This lack of control (and subsequent re-imposition

of control on the part of the critic) in this episode is curious.

Though it depicts the private thoughts of one woman alone, this episode's content is

inescapably social. Its language, grammar, and lack of punctuation, on the other hand, are often

understood as opposing this sociality. Molly's thoughts are social insofar as she references other

people (Molly considers: "she was a welleducated woman certainly and her gabby talk about Mr

Riordan here and Mr Riordan there" [608]) and her appearance (when she worries about

"look[ing] ugly or those lines from the strain" in a memory of the postcoital).[15] In terms of her

narrative style, however, Molly "represent[s] the extreme of language at its loosest and most

flowing," her language is "lyrical and fluid," "natural and inevitable" (Gottfried 35, Birmingham

207). In recapping the dominant interpretation of this episode, Patrick McGee emphasizes these

terms of the "natural": "Molly comes along to bring everything back to earth," providing a

"metaphorical closure though a symbolic return to nature" (170).[16] And yet Molly is "sometimes

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[15] For more on how the body plays a role in this episode, specifically and theoretically, see Richard
Brown's collection of essay *Joyce, "Penelope" and the Body*.
[16] Harry Blamires, in *The New Bloomsday Book*, makes a similar observation: "to enter the mind of Molly
Bloom after so much time spent in the minds of Stephen and Leopold is to plunge into a flowing river. If
we have hitherto been exploring the waste land, here are the refreshing, life-giving waters that alone can
renew it. The flow is the flow of Nature" (233). At one point Fritz Senn dichotomizes intellect and
Molly's natural quality: "Joyce's humor could hardly be called 'cerebral' here; it is rather down to earth,
characteristic of both Molly Bloom and the whole Penelope chapter—it goes to the bottom of things"
(10).

irrational but most often utterly conventional and trivial" (McGee 170).[17] These readings seem at first to contradict each other—how can she be both natural and conventional?—but style itself, as I've argued, is both natural and conventional. Its nature is in this simultaneous contradictory dual state.

Critics frequently read the effect of the lack of grammatical "control" in this episode as that of "flow." For Derek Attridge, this characterization is curious because nowhere does Joyce himself (usually so quick to provide terms for understanding his innovations) suggest this stylistic metaphor—the association of woman's language with flow, Attridge claims, is rather an effect of "the critics' gender assumptions" (549).[18] One critic in particular suggests that "lack of punctuation symbolizes the lack in Molly's mind of the laws and rules of the 'built' world," while another characterizes this lack as "[transgression of] the boundaries set by syntax and decorum" (French, Boheemen qtd. in Attridge 544). Whether these readings suggest her lack of control over the rules of language or her lack of respect for the rules, they are yet centered in her individual relation to this larger heteronormative partriarchal structure of language, a social structure of which the reader is a part. Does any attempt to understand the scene amount to oppressive imposition? When we read, do we approach the text as H.D.'s speaker approaches

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[17] There are, of course, opposing views. Andrew Gibson calls Molly "radically heterodox," considering her interest in the trivial an "Irishwoman's … resistan[ce] to imperial pomp and pretension" (263)

[18] Attridge *does* attribute the style of the scene to Molly's gender, but he counters these readings of the "flow" of Molly's unimpeded natural feminine way of thinking by arguing that this "is a style not of thought but of *writing*: an unconventional orthographic practice that ignores the rules of punctuation, prefers the directness of figures to verbally-presented numerals, and suffers from errors characteristic of the transcription of speech. It is not, that is to say, the writing of someone who wields the pen with ease and confidence but rather of someone without the training and practice necessary for perfect clarity and correctness on paper" (550). Attridge suggests that Joyce himself is associating this type of writing with women, and the reader can choose to identify it as the sexism of the author or a representation of a deeper sexism in educational structures, or both.

"The Pool," inquisitive with net in hand ready to bind/shape/style the text through our interrogation of it?[19]

For a reader to approach the episode with a predetermined set of critical tools for making sense of its style necessitates certain questionable relations between reader and text. Just as we saw with Nash's earlier claim that the reader must restore the punctuation through a slow and thoughtful reading, Card believes "Molly may not know her own mind, but the reader, if he has a double sense of 'Penelope,' does" (54). The imposition of Card's "he," the male reader with a privileged view of Molly, may very well demonstrate "the social character of reading experiences," as Nash claims, but it is figured as a very uncomfortable imposition of the social on the character. Attridge is careful to characterize these readings of the chapter as failure:

> If, then, the sentences seem to run on without a pause, it is not because we have seized the qualities of Molly's thought that their unpunctuatedness represents but because we have failed to seize—thanks to Joyce's mode of visual presentation— the syntactic articulations she may be assumed to be using. In other words, this effect relies on the strategies and techniques of an activity that has nothing to do with the continuities of unexpressed thought: the activity of reading. (548)

He continues: "we take the uninterruptedness of print as a conventional sign for an uninterruptedness of thought." The reader, in other words, relies on stylistic conventions to signal meaning. But Attridge also put the style of this episode in context of the book as a whole: "by this stage in the book the reader is unlikely to assume a naturalistic connection between the technique of a chapter and the state of mind of its central character or characters: this traditional assumption has been under attack since the headlines of 'Aeolus'" (549). Molly has not punctuated her thoughts, has not ordered her ideas for communication. She has, significantly, not authorized our reading of her. We style her according to how we think she should look. Even as

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[19] I provide a reading of this poem in my introduction. Here is the full text of the poem for reference: "Are you alive?/ I touch you./You quiver like a sea-fish./I cover you with my net./ What are you—banded one?"

she worries about this very thing, we enact her total lack of control over how she appears to other people. The reader is the editor.[20] I do not point this out here to suggest that we shouldn't attempt to make sense of the non-standard style, but that we should rather recognize the imposition any reading of style entails.

It is this reader's role Philip Gaskell and Clive Hart had in mind when they published *Ulysses: A Review of Three Texts* in 1989, which is "designed to enable the reader to make alterations to three important editions of *Ulysses*" to create a text closest to what they believe Joyce intended (ix). Presumably, this allows the reader to not only style the text in reading, but to decide what it literally looks like by picking and choosing from these various editions. But we should not feel enabled to take liberties with the meaning of the text and certain of its oddities. Gaskell and Hart, like Lewis and Montaigne before them, are careful to point out that the author must be allowed to be imperfect: "an artist whose whole personality, whose whole being, including his potential fallibility in self-correction, is the generating force behind the book" (x). Fallibility, for them, is a sort of authorial intent.[21] Even though Joyce himself is quick to declare the murky waters of identifying intent and authorial mistake, the abundant critical discourse around the various edits made to *Ulysses* alone attests to the overwhelming significance of the reader's role in shaping and reshaping the novel.[22] If, as Vicki Mahaffey convincingly argues,

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[20] See Card, James Van Dyck, *An Anatomy of "Penelope"* for a brief overview of the interesting compositional history of the episode.

[21] But we mustn't forget that Joyce himself made many changes to the text after initial publication in *The Little Review*. Hannah Sullivan reminds us "the general tendency of his revisions in *Ulysses* [is] to extend" (15). Indeed, he not only revised his text after initial completion, but "he markedly altered many of his artistic goals while he was writing *Ulysses*, to such an extent that he wrote later episodes in a method vastly different from that of earlier ones (and different from the way he originally intended to write them) and reworked earlier episodes to conform more closely with later ones" (Groden 18).

[22] In a letter to his publisher at Random House, Joyce writes, "Publishers and printers alike seemed to agree among themselves, no matter how divergent their points of view were in other matters, not to publish anything of mine as I wrote it" ("Letter" ix).

Joyce's language grants his reader an active role, so much depends on the reader's willingness to and means of rising to that task. But style's work does not end simply with the imposition of standards by the reader who yearns for those familiar clues to understanding. That yearning itself is an important effect of a text that lives in tension with its social, conventional world.

III. The Authority of Style in *Ulysses*

While we talked of style as hard visual surface in *Tarr*, the style of *Ulysses* is fluid in nature. If style is always standing in for something else, is always a clue to something deeper in the text, in *Ulysses* style's protean nature makes it at once far more intriguing than Lewis's constructed surface and far more beguiling. In the previous section, we saw that the overwhelming response to the non-standard punctuation in the "Penelope" episode was to re-impose stylistic norms to make it understandable in conventional terms. Though some people attempt to read the rest of Joyce's novel in similar ways, his mercurial style evokes the opposite reading, too—where no conventions of style hold firm, style becomes instead a tool to reveal the convention-breaking author. Because we can't make sense of these fluctuations based on stylistic conventions, we see it rather as an indication of the author's mastery over the text. Robert Janusko agrees with Harry Levin, for example, that in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode Joyce's many stylistic "parodies reveal himself—Joyce the Jacobean divine, Joyce the Restoration diarist, Joyce the Augustine essayist, Joyce the Gothic novelist" (Levin qtd. in Janusko 55).

In "Oxen," style is an exercise—it is so far abstracted from the action of the plot that, as John Gordon points out, "talk of 'action' is almost always bound to be quaint, beside the point" (147). The point of this episode is to highlight style as a set of ever-changing conventions. This emphasis on style as literary convention raises a problem for those who would seek to characterize the novel's style as a whole—where style has nothing, apparently, to do with the plot, the whole of the work, or a

given genre, critics read style as pointing instead to Joyce the innovative creative artist. Where the readings we looked at in the previous section met the unconventional by re-imposing convention, these readings of Joyce as the source of his style seek to bypass convention altogether, but this creates an unacknowledged paradox: modernist style reveals the artist's "authentic" voice, yes, but we hear that voice more loudly because it calls attention to its own artificiality as object of representation. This paradox is in large part produced by the conflation of style and voice that readers and critics make and, as I'm arguing, Joyce and other modernist writers manipulate.

Style's purpose is not always understood to be the communication of a self, but this common way of reading it derives from the development of the usage of the word itself—we see in the etymological development of stylus to style, from tool to manner the origins of a tendency to rely on style to signal the author's ethos. Eloise Knowlton, for one, demonstrates this in her work on citation in Joyce by showing that the etymologies of style and quotation develop along parallel lines. Both are "caught up in the apparatus of the written"—style in its beginning as stylus, and quotation beginning in medieval typology as a physical tear in the page to mark a halt.[23] As these terms develop, "by way of an associative transformation, both come to indicate the language of a distinct personality" (52)—the words being quoted and the style in which they are spoken both point to the distinct ethos of an original speaker. Style and quotation both retain something of their origins even after this transformation from apparatus or object to indication or subject, so that through use of the passive object (something with which one acts) the active artist becomes himself an object (the extension of his ethos in the material of the art).[24] This

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[23] Ben Hutchinson likewise compares something to style via their similar etymologies—while style refers to "instruments wielded by the hand," manifesto "refers explicitly to the hand… and to offence" (198). The fifth chapter of his *Modernism and Style* explores the character of the manifesto as the "characteristically modernist genre."

[24] Knowlton points out that at a time when New Criticism in the academy "was committed to the excision of the author *of* the text," Joyce "satisfyingly offered an author *in* the text" (53).

alignment of the etymologies of style and quotation is telling when we consider the subject-object duality of style as both the voice of the speaking subject (one's tone, expression, impression) and visual material (in terms of aesthetics, manner, and appearance). When we refer to style in literature and art we generally mean some conflation of the two—or rather, the stylus, style-as-tool, conflates subject and object. Style has thus, in part, developed into a revelatory tool, revealing the voice of the writer in the writing. But, given that language is an external communicative medium, how does the writer who would seek authenticity, such as the modernist convention-challenging writer, accomplish the inner life's expression? In part, by making the subject of expression the artist's very comprisal by and mastery of the medium itself. In a trajectory of the translation from viewing to retelling that moves, in large part, through the Impressionist theories of Pater, high modernist writers now seek to close the circle of influence, as it were, by making the artist himself both what is viewed and what is expressed—both subject and, through style, object.

Even where critics use visual metaphors to understand Joyce's style, the visual is less substantive than it was for Lewis. Richard Ellmann, for example, begins his preface to the Gabler edition of *Ulysses* by noting the strange absence of a narrator in the novel; the expected single unified narrative voice is instead replaced by multiple "undependable" and elusive guides (ix). While Ellmann's observation of this perspectival splitting reflects a standard reading of Joyce's innovations and the newness of modernism more generally, re-reading his preface with an eye for style one is struck by Ellmann's use of visual language to identify what is more typically conjured by an oral or aural language, like tone or voice. While for some these multiple voices blend to create a Bakhtinian polyphony, for Ellmann Joyce's narrator "disappears" to be replaced by multiple narrators "who emerge and disappear without being identified." At one point

Ellmann describes the narrator as an "impersonal," "camera-like eye." What happens in Ellmann's introduction is similar to what happens in the novel itself with the representation of artists as at least partial representations of the author—the audible voice becomes visual (or in the case of a character in the text, visualizable). The effect of this is that in the moment when style itself—style as voice, tone, perspective—becomes transposed into the visual or ideational field, it can hide, appear, and disappear, slipping beyond the reader's grasp, so that not only is it figureable, it invites interpretation. For Ellmann this metaphor is so powerful that he even uses the language of the physical to remark on absence. By figuring the physical, habitable, observing body as fundamentally fluid, Joyce in a sense turns voice into visual glimmer.

Consider, for example, the "Proteus" episode of *Ulysses*, in which Joyce challenges convention by taking free indirect discourse to a new, more ambiguous level. Throughout that episode, the narrative voice describes Stephen in the third person but then moves so seamlessly into his consciousness that the third person begins to bleed into the first. It is unclear which voice is directing the scene. When we read, "His pace slackened. Here. Am I going to aunt Sara's or not?" it is unclear whether the first sentence is the narrator and the third is Stephen's thoughts, or whether Stephen in fact is thinking his own narrative—is it all in his head (32)? We then see Stephen narrating, without quotation marks, what would happen if he were to go to his aunt Sara's: "My consubstantial father's voice. Did you see anything of your artist brother Stephen lately? …. I pull the wheezy bell of their shuttered cottage: and wait." We could attempt to normalize this divergence by reading this whole episode in Stephen's voice: Joseph Bentley says episodes like this "[remind] us of the constant narratization people use to construct conscious identities for themselves" (33). As a writer himself, it is not a stretch to suppose that Stephen might possibly go through his day telling his own story in third person. Some even go so far as to

suggest that Stephen Dedalus is the author of *Ulysses*.[25] Despite all theories of the origins of the

voice, all we can be certain of is that the voice, or our understanding of those origins, intrigues as

it shape-shifts.

Here the visual glimmer takes form in this flickering between perspectives, inside and

outside the body of the artist-subject. How do we read this style that slips beyond our grasp so

effortlessly? If the style of the telling is not associated with the narrative voice, but with a

physical embodiment that is granted the ability to appear and disappear, is our only option for

understanding the style of the text found by looking to the hand of Joyce himself? Many believe

so, while still others seek to resist this reading. In *Mechanics of Meaning*, David Hayman seeks

to get away from the problem of the "creative persona" by suggesting the term "arranger" for the

creative hand: "I use the term 'arranger' to designate a figure or a presence that can be identified

neither with the author nor with his narrators, but that exercises an increasing degree of overt

control over increasingly challenging materials" (84). Yet he still relies on references to Joyce's

creative activity—a few sentences later he tells us "Joyce systematically introduced ironic echoes

and imposed through style and structure formal tensions which reflect back on the action,

regulating its flux, broadening and illuminating its significance." Style is the author's imposition.

Derrida, John Paul Riquelme, and Karen Lawrence all make a similar point by noting that with

the absence of Joyce's signature style in the text, a narrative focal point, he in effect makes all

style his own: "the absence of a signature style allows Joyce to sign his name more ubiquitously

than he could in any single mode of writing. Joyce the master stylist achieves apotheosis through

his very disappearance" (Armstrong 147).[26] While the voice of the text is multiple, Joyce himself

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[25] For a thorough discussion of these theories, see Margaret McBride's first chapter to Ulysses *and the Metamorphosis of Stephen Dedalus*.
[26] Patrick McGee takes a poststructuralist approach to Joyce's relation to language, diminishing the "authority of a personal style" by suggesting that "the author is constituted as author by words, which he

is multiple, and is, paradoxically, singular in his multiplicity: "the author's persona makes itself felt through its apparent invisibility" (Riquelme, *Teller* 132). This can only be possible by a reader's obstinate insistence that traces of the author exist in style.

While this is a willed reading of an unconventional style, it is not completely imposed on the text by the reader. Some evade culpability by suggesting that *Ulysses* persuades us to read in this way through its stylistic siren song. In a reading of *Ulysses'* "Styles of Mythic Wandering," Riquelme notes that the book begins in the singular, depicting only Stephen, and then multiplies into "the heterogeneous variety of the book's middle," voices and styles proliferating (*Teller* 227). When the narrative finally returns to the singular driving consciousness of Molly Bloom in "Penelope," we find a singularity that is much more than it seems: "we hear within and behind the singular voice other voices, attitudes, and perspectives." Style in this final episode "will not stay still;" it wanders "because we read the final episode not in isolation but in the context of all the other styles and attitudes of the seventeen preceding episodes." The variances in style, in other words, have socialized us into the world of the text. We actively situate author, narrator, and character through what we have now come to expect of the relations between styles: "We have learned how to read this last episode in a special way, because the sequence of style has moved us to a final position enabling our active response."[27] We are not passive readers—we are positioned by style into active audience.

Approaching the final episode from another direction, Robert Boyle begins his essay on "Penelope" with a reflection on the singularity and mystery of Molly Bloom through the many

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can direct but never completely master." (113). Armstrong argues, on the other hand, that Joyce's very mastery of a vast range of styles "demonstrates his incomparable powers as a stylist and epistemologist who not only knows how to use diverse rhetorics but who also knows their limits, and in so doing rises above them" (162).

[27] Read alongside Card's earlier imposition of the inquisitive male reader, the implication that Penelope is inviting penetration by his curious gaze is uncomfortable, to say the least.

ways people interpret Shakespeare's Cleopatra, Elizabeth Taylor, and the hero of "Penelope" herself. Variance in response, according to Wayne Booth, is the result of faulty criticism or an uncertain author. Boyle counters Booth: "the uncertainty may be that of readers faced with an adequate reflection of unfathomable mystery" (408). Molly Bloom (and, interestingly, other famous literary characters Boyle lists who just happen to all be women written by men) "enjoys the mystery of autonomy," the mark of a truly successful character. But this isn't the authorial masculine autonomy of Stephen—it is again reader-dependent in that Boyle locates this mystery in the style of the episode and, more specifically, how we view and engage with that style: "there are, it would seem, as many ways of looking at [Molly] as there are onlookers" (407). In other words, Molly's uninterpretable nature is merely an invitation for the reader's speculation. Why, after being so careful to clarify that there are infinite readings of Molly's infinite mystery, does Boyle then spend the rest of his chapter offering his own individual interpretation, dwelling in relatively fixed perspective rather than dwelling in uncertainty?

To better understand the problematic nature of critical responses to Molly Bloom and *Ulysses* more generally, I want to consider how, exactly, Joyce's vocal style entices critics to these interpretations despite their admissions that such attempts may be futile. To isolate one example of this, consider J.S. Atherton's essay on "Oxen" in Hart and Hayman's influential collection of essays on *Ulysses*. In his explication of the episode, Atherton makes many suggestions regarding Joyce's authorial role: Joyce "confront[s]" readers, he "deliberately made the opening difficult to understand in order to warn his readers," he "seems to have deliberately confused his margins," and yet "Joyce's failure" in one particular imitation "arises from his reliance on" an imperfectly edited volume, Joyce's "diction is meticulously controlled," and yet "he was not particularly careful" with word choice—and later, of the word "breastbone,"

Atherton suggests it "seems to have been used deliberately…. If so it is completely out of place here" (313, 318, 321, 324, 317, 319, 318). Atherton characterizes Joyce as master and mistake-maker at once. He likewise characterizes himself as astute reader and somewhat imperceptive: "Indeed I find it impossible to reduce Joyce's details to a consistent pattern. This may, of course, be simply the result of my own lack of perception" (320). Intentions and mistakes are difficult to parse, yet we select and shape the text in our attempts anyway.

The first and most substantial enticement to critical interpretations of the style of *Ulysses*, as I've already alluded to, is the constant and many stylistic shifts that encourage the reader to find great meaning behind that style. The primary example in miniature of this odyssey of style is "Oxen," but from episode to episode throughout the book readers often grapple with stylistic shifts by seeking out relations between those episodes. Take, for example, "Ithaca," which is told from the point of view of a "cosmic intelligence," through a question and answer structure that amounts to "an accumulation of details" (Kenner, "Masterstroke" 66-7; Litz 388). Visually, the chapter is striking: questions and answers stand out as a sort of proto-FAQ page. Walton Litz tells us that Joyce "knew that the reader who had mastered the 'initial style' of the earliest episodes, that subtle blending of interior monologue and distanced description derived from *A Portrait of the Artist*, would prefer [the style of 'Ithaca'] 'much as the wanderer did who longed for the rock of Ithaca'" (385). As strange as the style looks on the page, then, it blends the objective description and subjective interiority of more traditional prose styles. Indeed, the cold scientific language ("The influence of gaslight or electric light on the growth of adjoining paraheliotropic trees" [545]) oftentimes has a strange beauty to it both when it is used to convey emotionally delicate pieces of the narrative (such as when Bloom tells the story of his father's death [560]) and where the language gives off a weird poetic feeling ("the incipient intimations

of proximate dawn" [578]). These disjuncts between form and content serve to alienate our habitual relations to both language and narrative, and it is this defamiliarization that in fact ironically creates the poetic or emotional effect. This effect is only created by the canny reader, however, the reader desiring to "get it," just as the success of Joyce's stylistic parodies in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode relies on the reader's knowledge (or ignorance) of literary history.

The many styles of literary history paraded through "Oxen" suggests to the reader that the text is most fruitful to those "in the know"—a feeling goaded by Joyce himself through his circulation (guarded though it was) of various schemata. Prior to publication, Joyce found it expedient to supply early readers of the novel with a key to the text—close acquaintances, beginning with Carlo Linati, were sworn to keep these clues private, though Joyce eventually allowed Stuart Gilbert to publish a description of one schema (Ellmann, *Liffey* 186-7). The schema allows some toehold into the text, but leaves just as many questions as it does answers. Still, many understand, for example, the fusion of voices in "Oxen" in relation to the "technic" of this episode, embryonic development: the development of styles mirrors the gestation and birth of a human person. Janusko says "none of the authors parodied in the 'Oxen' represents the fetus per se; they represent stages in the chronological development of English literary history" (4). Janusko claims, however, that no qualitative development in style is intended by this. What this correlation suggests is that the human individual is the product of all the voices from the past: blended, fused, and clouded in the same way that one is, biologically, the product of generations of other people.[28] Furthermore, Gordon states, there is a great deal happening in the action of the plot in these paragraphs that isn't addressed by the narrator, "but which can be determined by

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[28] Weldon Thornton sees the particular innovations of *Ulysses* in terms of "the subversion of various dichotomies that are endemic to the modernist worldview—'inner' and 'outer,' personal and cultural, conscious and unconscious—and the simulation of a cultural milieu that serves as the psychic medium of the characters and events of the novel" (1).

reference to other passages in the chapter and the rest of the book. In effect, there is what might as well be called a real world behind the stylized metamorphoses" of this episode, just as we saw in "Ithaca" (147). The development of style is not only the main subject of the episode, it is also the hard, objective surface covering the "real" action of the plot. Style, or the "literary history" we trace through the compendium of all styles, both communicates and distorts the narrative.

Gordon's reading of the "real world behind the stylized metamorphoses" of "Oxen' is based in a standard practice of describing style metaphorically. As abstract concept, these metaphors help concretize the intangible, but, because of this, they have their limitations. Take, for instance, the critical tendency to describe style as clothing: Janusko says that Joyce "went to his sources for a vocabulary with which to clothe a narrative and clothe it he did, being more scrupulous about the texture he wished to create than about historical accuracy" (57). Rather than speaking of narrative clothed, Riquelme speaks of the author clothed: "style is the garment the author has made for his work as song or tale, and that tale is the coat he wears" (133). Indeed, this metaphor, Riquelme is careful to point out, is Joyce's own—an anonymous man in the novel is known only by his clothing, "Macintosh," just as Joyce the polyvocal narrator of *Ulysses* is identified as an anonymity clothed in styles: "While we may not be able to see the figure *of* the writer, we have figures *for* the writer: his figurative language, the figures who speak for him as personae, and the figure woven and unwoven, Penelope-like, by styles" (Riquelme 133). Style here is the man insofar as we have no other way of seeing and knowing him except through his words, manner, and mode—these things that stand in for or represent the author's creative mind.

Seeing Joyce or his figures through stylistic clues, inconstant as they are, presents another problem when we read style metaphorically as mask—a metaphor similar to clothing but with the added implication of a hidden face. Janusko says, "Rather than assuming only one mask,

however, as would the traditional narrator, Joyce assumes a series of masks, enabling him to deliver his narrative from a variety of viewpoints, as it might have been told by Mandeville or Defoe, Swift or Pater, had they been writing this chapter" (55). For Janusko, Joyce remains the controlling consciousness behind the mask—the "egoistic fire" fueling the machine, as Lewis might describe it. For example, when "Oxen" moves into the Sheridan parody at line 880, the narrative is conveyed in first person, as if being recounted by someone who had been there when the events happened: "I bade him hold himself in readiness for that the event would burst anon. 'Slife, I'll be round with you" (334). That "I" is a character, but if we read according to Janusko, Levin, and others, this is merely Joyce playacting—there is still a Joyce on the stage speaking the "I." Given that the episode portrays the social, developmental nature of style, however, it is perhaps less appropriate to see the masks as worn by Joyce and more accurate to see them wearing him. I began this section with the proposition that seeing style here as purely an effect of Joyce's authorial will was a way of grappling with the insufficiency of using stylistic norms and conventions to understand it, but now we see that the insufficiency of this alternative method is, in fact, based in its also being conventional. Why, then, are we so committed to uncovering the meaning of something that is wholly convention in a text intent on challenging convention?

These stylistic enticements (and confusions) are so strong that style seems to be the primary object of study in this novel—an immense body of critical work exists trying to characterize this aspect of *Ulysses*. Weldon Thornton, for one, claims that the technique Joyce uses to present his characters' psyches is made up of a blend of narrative devices, such as interior monologue and free indirect discourse—this blending of devices gives us what Joyce himself calls the "initial style" of the first half of the book (2). The "later episodes" are told through "presenters," what Thornton refers to as "styles or voices": "each of these voices represents a

contemporary literary mode or theory or style that Joyce reveals as deficient or distorting…. The

deficiencies of these styles are revealed both by their inherent limitations and by our realizing

how inept each of these styles is in comparison with the initial style." Joyce is here, as in many

(if not most) critical studies, figured as the master of style and of the reader's experience—

"Joyce reveals," and he "carefully craft[s]."[29] The reader, on the other hand, can only be

passively demystified by Joyce. But for all this enlightenment-through-style, the reader still

seeks an understanding beyond the mere recognition of limitations.

Hayman's theory of the "arranger" of the text as replacement for traditional narrator

interestingly emphasizes the materiality of what is being arranged: "the term 'arranger'

[designates] a figure or a presence that can be identified neither with the author nor with his

narrators, but that exercises an increasing degree of overt control over increasingly challenging

materials" (84). If in the traditionally narrated text we associate style with the tone of the narrator

or the voice of the author, in the arranged *Ulysses* style is more explicitly the effect of the

specific arrangement of the elements of the text. Hugh Kenner quotes Joyce on his writing

practice: "I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of words in the

sentence" (31). Kenner suggests that by dealing with the book as material to be arranged, Joyce

has "broken with narrative …. Narrative implies that someone is talking …. It holds us under the

spell of a voice, or something analogous to a voice." Kenner cites Conrad's Marlow as the

epitome of our experience of "the spell of the teller of a tale" (34). *Ulysses*, on the other hand, is

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[29] For one insightful example, see Vicki Mahaffey's *Reauthorizing Joyce*, in which she writes: "However, to aggrandize Joyce by celebrating his comprehensiveness is partial in both senses of the word: it sets him up as a mastermind, a model of authority who invites and defies imitation, thus dividing him from his admirers. The author who is everybody is the authority whom nobody can be. This is an irony Joyce learned from Homer, who presents Odysseus as an everyman who also, as he tells the Cyclops, bears the name of 'Noman'" (5). While Mahaffey's study is far more influential, I focus on Thornton in the body of the chapter to represent the typicality of his language in conflating style and voice while arguing for Joyce's mastery over the text, and over the reader.

"organized and unfolded in what we may call *technological space*: on printed pages for which it was designed from the beginning." Clearly, however, the critics I've introduced already have felt some sort of enchantment from this novel's style—an enchantment not wholly divorced from voice but actually based in that voice's elusiveness. If style is made into hard objective surface in *Tarr* through the materiality of the text, in *Ulysses* it is made object more explicitly through representation of voice as constituted by a social fabric, as it were. Joyce disperses internal voice through a range of external, social sources. He depicts not only multiplicity of voices but multiplicity of sources for a single voice. If the meaning of style is determined by the context of social interaction, it stands to reason that a text's style comes to *mean* when engaged by the reader—do readers attribute it as the voice of the writer? Do they understand the tone? How do they understand it? The answers to these questions lie in the reader's relation to that social fabric—their role in the network of style. What Joyce does in dispersing voice through these various originary sources is, in a way, recover his own authority by making the condition of experiencing style the final meaning of his style(s).

Through formal experimentation, Joyce intervenes in the way the reader relates to the text: instead of being brought into a plot, "the reader explores its discontinuous surface at whatever pace he likes; he makes marginal notes; he turns back whenever he chooses… without destroying the continuity of something that does not press on" (Kenner, *Stoic* 35). The story, in other words, is less about the telling than the experiencing. The audience is no longer listener but full-on participant. But this is not to say that we align our perspective with the experiencing narrator. On the contrary, the narrator aggressively engages us, so our own experience of reading surpasses the experience of the narrative or plot. As Ellmann points out, *Ulysses* "invades our privacy"; "behind all the manifold disguises can be felt the pervasive presence of an author who

never in the book acknowledges his existence" (ix). The reading that would unify the disparate text through a reader-centric model yet logically ends by pointing back to the author. Many say we can find Joyce himself, Joyce the author, as the man behind the machine—but, I argue, their treating of style as a material to be manipulated by a single hand maintains the myth of autonomy that the author posits but which the social reality of style cannot ultimately uphold. I agree that style is the instrument that generates that disruption, but I argue that style effects this disruption by insisting on its own conventions. Style in *Ulysses* reveals Joyce's voice as distinctive and unsettling, but the voice's capacity to unsettle is generated from our reliance on style as an indication of the writer in the text, our recognition of Joyce the unsettler and our willingness or ability to be unsettled; my theory of the social nature of style allows us to bring the reader back into the experience of the modernist text as more than just a passive shock victim.

In referencing the theories seeking a unified narrative sensibility in *Ulysses*, I don't mean to prove any of these wrong or propose another theory in their places. Rather, in pointing to the way in which these theories commonly depend on the idea of the text as material—to be observed, to be arranged—they are dependent on *style*, however vaguely defined, as a key to textual coherence. What I'm suggesting is that these theories miss the forest for the trees—by seeking the individual consciousness guiding the text (whatever, whoever, or however many voices that consciousness may belong to) one reads style as a clue, a symptom, and miss style itself as active subject. This is style not as it points to one single author, guiding sensibility, or even reader, but style in its baggy, relational, social existence. How, this novel asks again and again, is material form preconditioned by modes of relation—how is style created not by individuals but by how individuals interact?

Chapter 4:

Critical Mediation and the Modernist Authority Complex

> It is arguable that Conrad would have gained both in credit and in popularity if he had written what he had to write without [his] incessant care for appearances. They block and impede and distract, his critics say, pointing to those famous passages which it is becoming the habit to lift from their context and exhibit among other cut flowers of English prose. He was self-conscious and stiff and ornate, they complain, and the sound of his own voice was dearer to him than the voice of humanity in its anguish. … That beauty teaches, that beauty is a disciplinarian, how are we to convince them, since her teaching is inseparable from the sound of her voice and to that they are deaf?
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> Virginia Woolf, "Joseph Conrad"
> (*The Common Reader: First Series* 224)

Joseph Conrad pursued both critical praise and financial success in his writing career; a lofty aspiration that ultimately failed.[1] In her eulogistic essay on Conrad, Virginia Woolf suggests that his failure to reach audiences and critics alike was based on their perception of a fatal stylistic flaw: according to his critics, his "incessant care for appearances …. block and impede and distract." These critics put Conrad's stylistic habits in familiar aestheticist terms— these too-self-conscious "appearances" are disproportionate with the content of the text. Woolf, however, laments the difficulty of convincing these critics that the beauty of Conrad's style itself holds value apart from the content it communicates, and to some extent *is* the content. By

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[1] See Wollaeger, Mark, *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Skepticism*, pg. 161 for more on Conrad's views of *The Secret Agent* as a failure.

positioning the common critic of Conrad as a champion of a realist, or natural, style, she shows the language of those critics setting aesthetics and content in opposition, yet Woolf avers that the two are inseparably joined through purpose—Conrad "is concerned merely to show us the beauty of a night at sea," but that beauty is also in some way instructive.[2] Rather than undermining the cultural authority that makes certain demands on Conrad's style, merely to replace it with a modernist aesthetic authority, Woolf suggests that each camp, social and aesthetic, is incomplete without the other.

Woolf hints at a case to be made for a cultural authority with a double view. She sees in modern fiction a writing style that commands authority by overtly privileging the realm of personal aesthetic values, a more stereotypically modernist value, while suggesting that what is socially useful in a modern world can only be gained through describing personal, perspectival experience. It is this doubleness—aesthetic and utilitarian, personal and social, private and public at once—that modernist writer-critics such as Woolf champion and enact in their critical essays and which I explore here. The two are usually positioned opposed to one another in critical narratives of modernism: the creation of the individual artist is more the point of the work than any larger social commentary. Here I show that, for these writers, the stylized, individualist pose affected in both their creative and critical writing establishes their socio-cultural authority. This is wholly a matter of harnessing the nature of style itself as both personal and social at once.

Conrad's is a mild but representative example of the structure of early twentieth century conflicts between often conservative critics and experimental writers. Many have written about the shaping force of these competing factions on the literary canon, comparing their aesthetic

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[2] For more on the instructive nature of aesthetics at the time, see Douglas Mao's *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860-1960*.

theories.[3] Here I consider the overlooked role of style in the essays of modernist writers who champion modernist values in their critical writings. I do so, however, not by focusing primarily on their theories or even their own works, but by examining the genre of the critical essay more generally through its attendant stylistic paradoxes. My subject, in other words, is T.S. Eliot's last in a series of four types of critics defined in *To Criticize the Critic*: the "critic whose criticism may be said to be a by-product of his creative activity. Particularly, the critic who is also a poet" (13). Eliot claims the best of his critical works have been about writers who have had a great influence on his own creative writing, with an implication that the best critical writing in general has some personal creative investment in the subject of the criticism; the subject is ultimately the self.[4] Eliot's other types of critics—the Professional Critic, the Critic with Gusto, the Academic/Theoretical Critic—differ from the Poet-Critic, then, in that they lack the "intensity [and] authority" of "the criticism of artists writing about their own art" (26). There is a measure of intimacy in gaining the credentials necessary to speak with authority on cultural matters.

Take Derrida's "*Ulysses* Gramophone" as an example of the self-reflexive critical work: Derrida develops his taxonomy of the word "yes" in Joyce's *Ulysses* by recounting his experience of thinking about the topic. He develops an argument through, necessarily, a narrative of how that argument reached him, various ways in which he engaged or resisted it, and how his presence, as the thinker thinking about his subject, affected both. This, though written to be

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[3] See, for just a few examples, Levenson, Michael H. *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1909-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. Strychacz, Thomas. *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. Williams, Raymond. *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. London: Verso, 1989.

[4] If the essay in general was such an important genre for modernists, as Graham Good argues, Dudley Marchi suggests Montaigne's *Essais* in particular "not only were an important source material for certain modernist and postmodernist writers to comment upon or assimilate, but also play a significant role in their own work" (Good 178; Marchi, *Montaigne* 1-2). Indeed, as we will see later with Eliot, this vested interest in influential works produces some of the most striking (or meaningful) modernist essays.

spoken and certainly densely creative, is exemplary of the essay form. Here I look at this type of overlap of aesthetic and critical creation in modernist criticism: the critical essays of modernist writers conceal the authoritative critical voice with an explorative creative style that essentializes the writerly identity (we can't possibly, for example, contend with Derrida's personal experience or suggest that his writing style is anything but a reflection of that subjectivity) which forecloses the reader's ability to use style as a tool to position the modernist work in relation to an existing canon. These theories prompt certain ways of reading and critically responding to modernism. Modernist style in these works is asserted as a noun to be described in reflection of a work or aesthetic theory, but it acts as a verb in the way it explicitly interacts with audience and literary canon, styling our expectations and reactions. It is no surprise and nothing new that modernist critics put forth judgments and theories that act in their own self-interest, but I argue that these critical narratives would not have had the efficacy they did without the poet-critic's stylized pose of an open explorative reflection that draws in and disarms the reader.

Woolf's critique of Conrad's critics above is appropriately made in essay form. But while the essay is the "handmaiden of criticism," "the medium in which other forms of literature, art, and culture are interpreted," criticism and the essay-as-such are yet distinct from one another (Klaus and Stuckey-French xi). They differ in that criticism is "mediated," as György Lukács puts it, by art or literature in a way that the essay need not be (18). Criticism is an exploration of the created object in essay form. Most discuss these two genres of writing hand in hand, as criticism is merely a type of essay, essay merely the form of criticism. But to understand the way in which the modernist critical essay works to institutionalize a modernist ethos, we must attend more closely to the nature of their differences. The two together represent competing impulses in

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modernism brought together by the challenges attending modernist style—the desire to create something new and the reality of having to work with old materials.

At its root, the essay is an experimental form that would seek to challenge convention, while criticism seems to uphold or question but ultimately enforce (or reinforce the idea of) convention by defining (or redefining) cultural norms. Both, however, rely on the authoritative voice that is free from the confines of narrative, the perspective whose existence is the occasion for writing and whose viewpoint is the organizing principle. For Montaigne, the earliest writer of the personal essay, and very much for the modernist critical essayist *par excellance* Woolf, essay writing is self-writing, self-exploration. For literary critics, it is a way of asserting an authoritative perspective, cutting through the text (as the "cut flowers of English prose" displayed by Conrad's critics) and giving shape to the literary historical and literary critical narrative. This chapter considers personal essayistic form and literary criticism as competing impulses for modernism that are joined through style, the aspect of a text most closely associated with the idiosyncratic subjectivity of the author, but which becomes a device of covert manipulation in modernism. Whether giving shape to a textual self or giving shape to our understanding of literary value, both personal essayist and critical essayist style their material (experience, text, narrative) in a way that emphasizes individual voice as styling force. In that way style in both serves as a mediator between the writing perspective and the reader's ability to see from that same viewpoint—a viewpoint that is, as modernist, purportedly new, thus requiring the reader to be trained into it.

In seeking to define paradoxical style as a tool in modernism, a tool with which the writer engages, challenges, and in some cases confounds the reader, I look to the modernist critical essay in this final chapter as that crucial step in rendering experimental works culturally

legitimate—why does a form, the essay, whose history lies in the radical experimental communication of the self or singular perspective (as begun in Montaigne) become the vehicle for establishing norms of literary critical value for modernist writers who ostensibly valued the challenging of norms? This process of the institutionalization of radical values has been well studied, as has modernism's use of the essay form.[5][6] What I am considering here is the role the idea of style plays in this matrix. Popular film critic A.O. Scott argues in his recent book in defense of criticism that criticism itself "is not an enemy from which art must be defended, but rather another name … for the defense of art itself" (17). Derrida's observation that the idea of style retains etymological traces of its origin as "some pointed object" extends this metaphor of pen-as-sword: "at times this object might be only a quill or a stylus. But it could just as easily be a stiletto, or even a rapier" (*Spurs* 37). We might consider the possibility of style as the means of the critic's defense of art—but defense against what, and how exactly does that parrying work? Whatever the predator, critics respond by styling experiences of works of art—they give shape to reception and define as if with a pen knife the contours of the art world.

Style helps us place an object, person, or text socially based on our perceptions, and criticism works to tune our perspective to social value systems. While the essay has become the primary form in which criticism is written, the form is historically involved in issues of styling,

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[5] For more on the institutionalization of modernist values, see especially Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism*, which looks at "new strategies for reputation building" in modernism, particularly "theatricality, spectacle, publicity, and novel modes of cultural marketing and media manipulation" as responses to "increasingly international culture interchanges, the growing prominence of the early mass media, rising pressure of advertising, unprecedented fusion of info and entertainment, and challenges of dense, differentiated array of institutional arenas in which to speak to increasingly fragmented public" (4).

[6] For more on modernism and the essay form, see Marchi, Dudley, *Montaigne Among the Moderns*; Rosenberg, Beth Carole and Jeanne Dubino (eds), *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*; Harrison, Thomas, *Essayism: Conrad, Musil, and Pirandello*; Atkins, G. Douglas, *On the Familiar Essay: Challenging Academic Orthodoxies*; De Obaldia, Claire, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and the Essay*.

perspective, and authority that evolve alongside style itself into the paradox of modernist criticism. This chapter begins by considering the roots of the essay in Michel de Montaigne's turn of the critical gaze inward in sixteenth century France before looking at the development of the essay form—particularly as the form becomes in Pater a point of convergence between inner and outer worlds. Finally, I look at the essay in modernism as a tool with which writers seek to shape the social world of art through stylized criticism.

I. Perspectival Experiments—Looking Inward

Before considering the centrality of the essay form to modernist posturing, we should remember the historical beginnings of the essay to illuminate those characteristics modernist writers found so attractive in the form. While the essay has been used for many different purposes and to many different ends between 1580 and the early twentieth century, I will here consider three core qualities of the essay—presentness, inwardness, and authenticity—that have, if not lasted, at least lain dormant in the form to emerge again to serve modernist needs in a drastically different context. By considering parallels between the effect of Montaigne's originary use of the form and the purposes to which modernist writers put that form, we can better understand how the shape and style of the literary landscape are deeply affected by the authorial self-styling that happens in the essay.

Woolf herself had already begun making these connections in her nonfiction work. In "The Modern Essay" Woolf characterizes the temporality of this amorphous genre: it is unnecessary to delve into the deep history of the essay, she says, "since, like all living things, its present is more important than its past" (*The Common Reader: First Series* 211). Woolf's is a typically modernist practice of evoking the past to emphasize the singularity of the present and

justify her focus on it. She does, however, "delve into the deep history" a few years later when she considers the origins of the essay in Montaigne. But even when she touches on the history of the essay there, she directs our eyes away from modernism only to hum a modernist tune in our ears: for Montaigne's writing, "laws are mere conventions, utterly unable to keep touch with the vast variety and turmoil of human impulses; habits and customs are a convenience devised for the support of timid natures who dare not allow their souls free play" (62). For Woolf, Montaigne's counter-conventionality, his "strictly experimental method," is fundamental to his innovations in the essay—to write in a new way is to break with the common forms at hand—and it is also an attitude fundamental to modernist innovation (Auerbach 292). Woolf's value judgment in the quote above is telling: the "important" singular present moment of the essay is that of the individual soul unhampered by social convention—a prized, present, *living* thing. Both original Renaissance essayist in particular and modernist sensibility in general champion presentness, inwardness, and authenticity. It is these three qualities that the essay evokes for both Montaigne in 1580 and early twentieth century essayists, and which are the core conditions of the essay's assay, or experiment.

Montaigne's essay is a living, *present* thing primarily because its object of inquiry is the self at the time of writing. The revisions Montaigne continually made to his *Essais* throughout his life, for example, were not concerned with rewriting his former self, but aimed to represent change. In agreement with Woolf's "Modern Essay," Montaigne claims, "I do not portray being:

I portray passing …. my history needs to be adapted to the moment" (qtd. in Frame 18).[7] [8] The

ever-changing history he captures of himself is a history without narrative—the self-portrait,

whether painting or written essay, differs from autobiography in that "they are not narratives and

are not written in retrospection" (Brush 23). One of the essential characteristics of the essay, at

any point in time, is this lack of temporal narrative. This form, for Montaigne, was a means of

communicating his personality rather than the story of his life.[9] His use of an experimental form

as a way of understanding and capturing the passing of time is reminiscent of the methods of

modernist psychological realism.[10] Montaigne's "venturesome concern with the rendering of

interiority" Carl H. Klaus sees "as prefiguring modernist evocations of consciousness" (7). But

Montaigne's portrayal of passing is not identical to modernist stream-of-consciousness: he

captures not just the passing of time through a perceiving consciousness, but the passing of a

time experienced by the writing body.

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[7] While many critics take Montaigne's word that he revised and republished his work so many times "so
that the buyer may not come off completely empty-handed" (i.e., to provide new material for the re-reader
of his *Essais*), George Hoffmann suggests that "buyer" here refers to the holder of the rights to publish the
work—rewriting and republishing would renew that license to print and would generate more money for
the publisher. Hoffmann claims this practice was not uncommon in 16th century France.

[8] Montaigne's commitment to this constant adaptation is evident in his three major republications of the
essays, in which he "more than doubled the size of his book" by "adding single words, whole passages,
and eventually a new volume" (Hoffmann 308).

[9] For more on the lack of narrative in Montaigne, see Craig Brush: "At the root of his rejection of a
continuous narrative lie some basic tenets of his worldview, both the conviction that human knowledge
cannot attain the degree of precision and certitude implied in a grand historical overview and the belief
that life is not an orderly purposeful succession, more a disjointed series of episodic moments" (27).

[10] Here I use the language of reminiscence rather than the more typical language of antecedence to
characterize the relation of 16th century writing to that of the 20th century. I do this to denaturalize any
sense of linear continuity that may be suggested by my use of Montaigne alongside the works of
modernism. I do not mean to suggest that Montaigne is a necessary precursor to modernism, but rather
merely that thinking of Montaigne can help us think of modernism. Therefore, I use language that mimics
my own experience of these works. Montaigne "is reminiscent" of modernism precisely because I
encountered Montaigne well after I began studying the twentieth century. My thinking about the relation
between the two is inextricable from the order in which I encountered them. This may seem needlessly
solipsistic, but to speak of Renaissance texts using the language and concepts of my twentieth century
subfield would be to project a historical inaccuracy.

A study of either Montaigne's non-narrative self-reflection or modernist stream-of-consciousness writing through their comparison may bear fruit, but attending to this shade of difference is crucial—the depiction of stream of consciousness is written, but the perception isn't presented as happening alongside the act of writing.[11] Furthermore, stream of consciousness depicts an embodied, sensorially-perceiving consciousness, but the consciousness being represented isn't expressly exploring *itself* as it is in Montaigne. Vicki Mahaffy reminds us, "some of the novels that attempt to capture individual subjective consciousness in all its idiosyncratic intensity depict characters in the act of unconsciously *denying* or defending themselves against certain kinds of awareness, and the role of the author is to dramatize that denial without editorializing about it" (36). Montaigne, on the other hand, is both subject and editorial writer. He creates a self-portrait of his consciousness in order to bring himself to an awareness of it.

The atemporal mode of self-portraiture, according to Donald Frame, has telling implications for Montaigne's place in the historical development of style's meaning: "The style of the *Essays* is part of the self-portrait. Free, oral, informal, personal, concrete, luxuriant in images, organic and spontaneous in order, ranging from the epigrammatic to the rambling and associative, it communicates the flavor of the man" (Introduction vi). Take, for example, Montaigne's tendency to comment on his writing in real time: "I will have tossed off some subtle remark as I write. I mean, of course, dull for anyone else, sharp for me. Let's leave aside all these amenities. Each man states this kind of thing according to his powers" (qtd. in Frame, *Study* 92). Elsewhere Frame summarizes, simply, "the book is the man" (v). Here Frame echoes Buffon's maxim from 1753 "*le style, c'est l'homme même*" ("style is the man himself") (178). But Buffon

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[11] I say "presented as" because Montaigne's own depiction of spontaneous thought is not, in fact, spontaneous—it is written, revised, rethought, rewritten.

is writing nearly two hundred years after Montaigne, and, in at least one recent critic's explanation, the idea of style only shifted from a mere "set of techniques" to a demonstration "of an author's distinctiveness" in the eighteenth century (Ross 748, 749)—in the Renaissance, style still retained some qualities of being a rhetorical tool rather than an expression of self. In the rules of rhetoric as Aristotle has defined them, "style … is a matter of fidelity to the referent (the 'spoken of'): the speaker is merely a conduit, a means" (Knowlton 52). But, Eloise Knowlton continues, at some point the meaning of the word style transforms from fidelity to the object to "indicate the language of a distinct personality"—fidelity to the creating subject. In Montaigne's case the object and the investigative writing subject happen to be the same thing. When the object of representation *is* the speaker, style does indeed become the man.

If for Aristotle the meaning of a good style was a language or delivery that aligned with the content of the speech, it also served a purpose. For Aristotle style serves the speaker's reputation: "If a particular speaker's *ethos* is enhanced by the skillful employment of an appropriate style, we have to remember that *ethos* is nothing like 'personality,' but rather signifies one's moral standing in a community. *Ethos* is one's credibility, not one's 'self'" (Knowlton 52). But, in any of its OED definitions, ethos could easily be mistaken for Buffonian style: "character or characterization as revealed in action or its representation," "the characteristic spirit of a people, community, culture, or era as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations," and "the character of an individual as represented by his or her values and beliefs" (OED). Moral standing and personality meet in the term character. The Buffonian view of style would have been as yet impossible in Montaigne's time—Montaigne is, rather, a crucial transition point. These readings of the *Essais*, and the style of the *Essais*, as self-portraiture, encouraged by Montaigne, rely on a view of style that negotiates the Aristotelian view of style as

a rhetorical tool with the Buffonian notion of an inherent style (generated in the body of the man, prefiguring the text).[12] Neither model can be completely mapped onto the style here, but the style retains elements of both character and purpose. Ethos, "one's moral standing in a community," and "self" or "personality" become one and the same. While rhetorically ethos is a method of establishing the speaker's character or credibility, the conflation of style and ethos in the self-centered text, for both Montaigne and modernist writers, leads logically to the conclusion that credibility—or cultural authority—is established by means of style.

If Montaigne's style represents a transition point between style as tool and style as a personal quality, it is a very early stage of that transition. Trevor Ross explains that the idea of style shifted from a "set of techniques" to a demonstration "of an author's distinctiveness" in the eighteenth century when "it had become painfully clear to authors that they were no longer writing for an audience they believed they could control. A modern public was both unquestionable in its authority and indefinite in its composition" (748, 749, 755). Because they were "faced with a reading public they could not know, authors instead had to rely on style to make themselves known to readers" (756). The *early* modern public, however, was different. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt discusses "the perception … that there is in the early modern period a change in the intellectual, social, psychological, and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities" (1). For the sixteenth century, a "heightened awareness of the existence of alternative modes of social, theological, and psychological organization" was matched by "a new dedication to the imposition of control upon those modes" (2). According to Greenblatt, Montaigne responds by "invent[ing] in effect a brilliant mode of *non-narrative* self-

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[12] Montaigne called his *Essais* "consubstantial with its author" (Frame 1). His title, which he invented and was the first to use, had two meanings "related to his subject of self-study, of which the *Essays* were rather the method than the vehicle: tests or trials of his judgment, the instrument of self-study; and probings and samplings of that self." (3)

fashioning," which grants his writing the freedom from restraints that also claims for it an anti-social nature—Montaigne "withdrew to his study" and traced his own mind rather than shaping his text for an audience according to conventions (252). Likewise, for Erich Auerbach Montaigne portrays himself through his difference from "others" (288). Here is neither a construction and display of self for an unknowing audience, nor tightly-guarded authoritative control over self-presentation. Montaigne uses style to communicate the process of discovering and articulating a self in isolation, much like those modernists preoccupied with aesthetic autonomy are claimed to have done.

While Montaigne's exploration is directed to his inward, present self to effect a sort of modernist autonomy, this is all in the name of portraying an authentic, unadorned self. His style is wide-ranging—"free, oral, informal, personal, concrete, luxuriant in images, organic and spontaneous"—but it is, above all, "plain" (Frame vi). He sought "to create in his book a replica of his self, with the least possible distance between work and creator," he sought to write himself without artifice, authentically. From the start the essay form was an unadorned "ordinary" communication from an everyman sort of person to an everyman sort of reader (*Essais* 2).[13] For Montaigne, "artifice" or any such effort toward a style beyond natural habit was anathema to the goal of his essays: to depict his authentic self. Authenticity, for Montaigne, is the uninfluenced self. And yet, as one social scientist defines it, authenticity is "an attribution—nothing more, nothing less. Attributions about authenticity are usually made by individuals in reference to other entities of all kinds: persons, places, products, things, experiences, organizations, and so on"

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[13] Of his plain style, Montaigne maintains that had he "written to seek the world's favor, [he] should have bedecked [himself] better, and should present [himself] in a studied posture" (*Essays* 2).

(Carroll 3).[14] [15] Authenticity is a quality conferred by an audience and shaped by social mores.

Stylistic naturalness and self-disclosure, if possible at all, are generally the privilege of the relative few whose natural selves already hold a reasonable amount of social power. In Montaigne's opening "Au Lecteur" he "purports to lay himself open (like the volume itself) before the reader who has been invited into the author's private inner circle" (Nash 70-1). John Nash connects this opening of the self to Montaigne's social position: "It was precisely Montaigne's patriarchic sense of security and social superiority that allowed this gesture to be recorded positively as a way of entrusting the safe dissemination of his life's work to a familiar reader" (71). He could open his private inner circle, in other words, precisely because he lived in a world so certain of the stability of hierarchy—nobody would gain entrance who wasn't supposed to be there.

But Montaigne's time wasn't completely stable, as William Bouwsma reminds us: "The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries constituted one of the most chaotic periods in European history; the disorder of the times was much on Montaigne's mind and was a major stimulus to the *Essais*" (301-2). This disorder shows up in the *Essais* itself as "disorderly order, paradoxical certainties, sinuous composition, and unbridled intertextuality" (Marchi, *Montaigne* 90). Take, for instance, his essay "Of Cannibals": while praising one cannibalistic South

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[14] Glenn Carroll continues: "Institutionalized attributions are those that have become engrained in cultural life such that they are not only accepted by many others but, in an almost unthinking or cultural way, what psychologists call automatic cognition. Typically, small cues or markers of a behavior, product, service, or place signal when an attribution about authenticity is appropriate according to prevailing social codes." See also Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* for a conception of the authentic in a more literary context.

[15] Montaigne isn't always as sincere as he seems. His prefatory "To the Reader," for instance, "has all the earmarks of a self-consuming artifact, where the author lays a series of booby traps which turn his invitation into a rejection…. It is possible and legitimate to see devious practices at work in this preface. But it is equally possible and legitimate to see Montaigne's preface as his attempt to grapple with some genuine problems." (Brush 6)

American tribe Montaigne intersperses passages from such texts as Virgil's *Aeneid* and *Georgics* and at one point launches a lengthy diversion on the formation of rivers with no explanation of the divergence's relation to cannibalism. There is some suggestion that Montaigne's experiment with form is a typical response to a chaotic social context, as many have said of modernist experimentation. But while for some modernists convention-breaking was antagonistic, for Montaigne it was adaptive: "The *Essai*'s chameleon-like quality, changing color to match the surrounding environment, allows them to adapt to diverse climates of opinion, yet at the same time to remain constant" (Marchi 83). Again, we have reference to Montaigne's sense of an audience, these "diverse climates of opinion" to which his writing adapts. Indeed, referencing the etymology of "essay," Dudley Marchi suggests that both "the *Essais* and their receptions are experimental assessments" (84). If Montaigne's writing strayed from convention to locate and test the possibility of a free, seemingly authentic writing, readers, too, confronted a text in which their expectation of custom would not be fulfilled. Marchi calls Montaigne's essays "interactive," "a text demanding active reading in order to apprehend its implications on its own terms." This ideal of autonomous response has, of course, a different reality. Montaigne himself acknowledges the pressures of readership in "Of Practice": "Even so one must spruce up, even so one must present oneself in an orderly arrangement, if one would go out in public. Now, I am constantly adorning myself, for I am constantly describing myself" (qtd. in Frame 55). Montaigne's desire to depict himself unadorned lacks that simplicity in practice—as Frame puts it, for Montaigne "self-portrayal is a sort of self-formation" (55). Or, we might say, self-styling.

Since its advent, the essay form has offered a kind of freedom to its practitioners, but as a published piece it has its constrictions. Authenticity, as I've mentioned before, is a quality

conferred by others who perceive it—it is socially determined. Of the "paradox" of authenticity

under the conditions of globalization, Russell Cobb writes:

> For [Lionel] Trilling, it was only relatively recently in Western culture—during
> the early modern period (especially the seventeenth century in England)—that
> authenticity displaced sincerity as the most elevated character trait. For a speaker
> to be sincere, he or she merely needed to mean what was said in a given social
> situation. In early modernity, the authentic person needed to be more than sincere;
> society required a correspondence between a person's moral core and his or her
> speech acts. (2)

Here again we see the deep connection between moral standing, personality, and character. The

essay explores the self insofar as that self is deemed to be trustworthy by the reading public.

However, when authenticity becomes even more questionable in modernity, as we saw in the

Victorian era in chapter one, the distinctions between the concept of style as inherent quality and

style as tool are further muddied.

II. A Modern Turn

To better understand the early modern-to-modernity shift in how we construct, assert, and

view authenticity, I will now consider these essayistic values (presentness, inwardness, and

authenticity) in the critical essays of Walter Pater.[16] Like Montaigne, Pater occupies a point of

flux; "he marks an intersection of divergent trends, and although it cannot be said that he

inaugurated the modernism or 'modernity' of which he often spoke, nevertheless he is a

transitional figure who highlights both a waning of Classical and Romantic traditions and a

yearning for something new" (Iser 1). To the extent they can be separated, what exactly that

"something new" is which Pater seeks is not as important as the means by which he seeks it—

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[16] Denis Donoghue sums up Pater's significance for modernism nicely when he states, "it was Pater, more
than Arnold, Tennyson, or Ruskin, who set modern literature upon its antithetical—he would say
antinomian—course" (7).

through challenges to conventions of style, perspective, and pose in the essay form. What exactly is the relation between individual subjectivity and the social quality of style? What does the essay form offer to both Montaigne's boundless self-portraiture and the constrictive critical efforts of Woolf and Eliot, Pound and Beerbohm? The answer, as I will demonstrate with Pater, is in the role of style in the drawing and dissolving of those boundaries between critical self and its object of study.

Influencing proto-modernist Pater, Montaigne himself was a proto-modernist in his use of "the essay as the form of writing best able to embody personal experience, the provisional nature of truth, and the suspension of dogmatic judgment" (Marchi "Crossing" 3). We might shoehorn these embodiments into our terms of inwardness, presentness, and authenticity. In Montaigne's essays these were not merely three discrete qualities. Rather, the inwardness and presentness ("personal experience" and "provisional nature of truth") were necessary conditions for authenticity.[17] [18] But while in Montaigne's essays his distinctive style emerges with the picture of the man writing himself, in Pater style results from the interaction between the writer and a material outside of the self, both the action of the artist on his material and its impression on him.

In "On Style" Pater theorizes that style is not a quality of the artist that somehow manifests in the text, but, more specifically, it is the effect of an action taken by the artist. The

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[17] Montaigne goes to great lengths to clarify that his digressive writing style in no way indicates incoherence of thought. Klaus tells us, "Montaigne depicts his essays as the outcome of a complex mental balancing act, in which he lets his thoughts wander freely enough so that they seem to be 'casual' and 'accidental' yet keeps them sufficiently controlled so that they do 'follow one another,' no matter how superficially disconnected they may seem to be. He conceives of his writing, then, as being at once the embodiment and the enactment of a mind freely following its own changeable directions—a paradoxical conception echoed in [various] essayists." (12) For these ideas to cohere, the essayist himself must be the connective logic.

[18] Of Montaigne's commitment to rendering the self in the moment of writing, Auerbach says, "the result is not… a mass of unrelated snapshots, but a spontaneous apprehension of the unity of his person emerging from the multiplicity of his observations. In the end there is unity and truth; in the end it is his essential being which emerges from his portrayal of the changing" (294).

artist acts by paring down the received chaos of the world—visually or textually, art is what is left after "the removal of surplusage" and the presentation of these selected bits of the world in the artist's idiosyncratic manner (*Appreciations* 16). For Pater, that act of removal breeds style:

> Into the mind sensitive to 'form,' a flood of random sounds, colors, incidents, is ever penetrating from the world without, to become, by sympathetic selection, a part of its very structure, and, in turn, the visible vesture and expression of that other world it sees so steadily within, nay, already with a partial conformity thereto, to be refined, enlarged, corrected, at a hundred points; and it is just there, just at those doubtful points that the function of style, as tact or taste, intervenes. (28-9)

The creator of any sort (even, for Pater, the critic) interacts with his material, bringing his own finely developed tastes and judgments to it (note, too, his word "tact" as both "ready and delicate sense of what is fitting and proper in dealing with others, so as to avoid giving offence, or win good will" and tactile [OED]). For Pater, a direct communication with "no surplusage" is the "exponent of truth" (32). But "truth" is yet inescapably relative to the position of the writing subject. For Pater, it is difficult to define the point at which the recording of facts becomes "a pleading … an appeal to the reader to catch the writer's spirit, to think with him …—an expression no longer of fact but of his sense of it … changed somewhat from the actual world" (4-5). The literary communication of facts inevitably transmits the writer's impression of those facts—both the effect they have had on the writer, and the writer's impression on those facts (his changing of them "somewhat from the actual world").

Yet if representation is always involved in a process of the giving back of impressions received, it is also subject to and shaped by the reader's openness to that transmission. To accommodate this, a practice of heavy revision, or rather excision, is in keeping with Pater's theories of what constitutes a "good" style—for Pater the two major errors a writer can make are condescending to the reader (writing down to them rather than allowing them the pleasure of

exercising their minds on the text) and using any kind of ornamentation (Chandler 23). Both

errors undermine the writer's authority to make truth claims by positioning the reader as victim

to the will of the writer—authority here means curating (cutting through) the *critical* text, as it

were, to give the reader interpretive range. The reader interacts with the critical text just as she

does with the literary. Pater's insinuation that effective writing allows readers a freedom to

"exercise their minds on the text" is nevertheless somewhat disingenuous: the "removal of

surplusage" is not merely a paring down, but is in its own way an imposition of will through an

imposition of perspective—the writer's *re*-vision, the reconstruction of an original impression

meant, in turn, to impress upon the reader. But insofar as revision itself necessitates an even

further re-visioning, with the reader in mind, it is impossible to isolate the origins and ends of the

impression and, in turn, the origins and ends of the style.

    We can most clearly see the irrevocable muddiness of these origins and ends of the

impression in Pater's critical theories. Pater seeks to judge an artwork by investigating his own

sensations of it, an effect of reception. As he memorably describes in the "Preface" to *The

Renaissance*: "the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own

impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly" (xix). "One's own

impression," however, is not itself so easily locatable. Pater describes the impression as a

"power" or "force" which produces sensations—the sensations experienced by the critic or artist

are the object of analysis rather than the concrete material world (xx). This version of the

impression is particularly suited for the aesthetic experimentation of modernist art and literature,

in which subjectivity was to become a badge of authority as it was for Montaigne. Pater himself,

however, is not involved in finding new genres or narrative techniques for depicting these

sensations—for Pater impressionism is primarily a mode of criticism.

To be impressed by the impression, however, is not enough for criticism. For Pater, "most significantly, 'impressionism' is the method by which the critic stimulates his reader to approach the work in question and to compare his own impressions to those of the critic" (Conlon 148). The critic's job does not end when she receives and analyzes an impression—she must create, or *re*create the impression for readers, challenging them to assess and reevaluate their own impressions against her authoritative judgment. By making the private sense of the impression public again, critics and artists seek to leave their own impression on their audience, maintaining their subjective singularity while giving shape to the experience of others.

Pater's theories of the impression heralded the destabilizing of notions of surface and depth, form and content in modernist aesthetic experimentation. In his study of the impressionist movement's influence on modernist aesthetics, Jesse Matz reminds us that the literary impressionists locate fiction in the lingering intuition—not what something definite means, but rather the feeling of suggestion. The text is not loyal to surface or depth, but demonstrates the relationship between the two (fragments suggesting wholes, for instance, like a distinct characteristic metonymically evoking a whole person); it is involved in "the undoing of such distinctions" (1). Matz suggests that this mediation and "undoing of distinctions" is where the impression gets its power. I read the results of the work of the impression in a similar fashion, but in understanding that work itself in the critical essay I will lean more towards Adam Parkes's argument regarding the violence inherent in the impression:

> the notion of literary impressionism may be made to answer not only to the idea of psychological receptivity, with which it is often associated, but also to the sense of rhetorical emphasis or violence evoked by its etymological roots in *impressio*, the Latin word for 'irruption, onset, attack.' For, if impressionism bears the stamp of its time, it also does its fair share of stamping. (4)

Much like the term style, impression carries violent heritage. Rather than signifying the passive experience of being impressed, impressionism is an active mode of relation between the thing seeking to impress and that which it impresses. I contend that the disruptive power of the impression's ambiguity—the anarchic impulse of modernism—only takes full effect through the perceiving subject's interaction with her social context. It is as the meeting place of an ambiguous subjectivity and its social context that the stylistic surface holds the capacity to provoke a radical questioning of the relation between the private and the social. Visual cues to identity still play a strong role in social positioning, but style becomes a tool to be used rather than an essence to be displayed as modern identity becomes more ambiguous. For Montaigne, style is the means by which both audience and writer come to discover the mind of the latter. For modernism, I will show, the essay playacts this process of discovery without sincerity.

It is hard to ignore the role Walter Pater played in the development of the essay form in literary criticism. While critical writing for Matthew Arnold sought a disinterest that could allow the critic "to see the object as in itself it really is," the crux of Pater's impressionist aesthetic theories is an entanglement of private and public, creation and response (26). Pater's work allows that both public and private worlds exist but does not identify where one begins and the other ends. In Pater's criticism, Parkes explains, the "impression becomes, not a haven of private sensory experience, but a site where self and other, like mind and body, interact in exhilarating and sometimes perilous ways; Pater's impression, in other words, is inextricable from its various interpretations" (48). Impressions and interpretations alike carry the traces of both writer and reader.

III. The Modernist Essay (and the Critical Artist as Credentialed Authority)

To call the essay a form is a bit misleading. It is more or less defined by its freedom from formal conventions to such an extent that it may be easier to define it by what it is not—though that, too, is uncertain territory. Michele Richman suggests that, since its inauguration by Montaigne, the essay has ramified into many different types that may themselves have definitive rules. Richman suggests some cultural differences in the essay form that can better help us understand the crucial points of departure the British modernist essay takes from the French Montaignian essay: for Richman the French best maintain the richness and complexity of Montaigne's essays while the British essay suffered from what she calls "duplicity" after the essay "split into two distinct modalities: one remained informal, personal, intimate, relaxed, conversational, and often humorous; the other, dogmatic, impersonal, systematic, and expository" (ix, x).[19] The essay, in other words, had split in England into the discrete realms of the personal creative and the systematic critical—the different styles here implicitly associated with different aims. According to Richman, "this specialization is allegedly responsible for the diminished incisiveness and pungency of the essay at the turn of this century, leading to its modernist demotion to 'belles-lettres'" (x). Richman never elaborates on this "modernist demotion," perhaps relying on its self-evidence.[20] After all, the *belles-lettres* is involved in matters of taste and aesthetic experience, very much present in the impressionistic shape Pater gave to the essay which modernist writers at least partly took up. But while Richman sees this "duplicity" hindering the modernist essay, diminishing its bite and aroma, I hope to show here

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[19] For an interesting overview of the etymology of "essay" in both French and German, see "Binding Proteus: An Essay on the Essay" by O.B. Hardison Jr, pg 612.

[20] Curiously, one independent bookstore I entered recently had a "belles-lettres" section in which could be found collections of essays alongside Steven Pinker's New York Times bestseller *The Sense of Style*. There is something to be said for the level of seriousness given to both questions of literary style and writing that strays from the fiction/non-fiction binary.

that the duality of personal and objective combine to be a live force for the modernist essay rather than a dampening. Here we can get a better sense of how, exactly, the opposing realms of ethos ("one's moral standing in a community") and personality become conflated in readings of the modernist essay's style.

Whatever the essay is, it is not strictly narrative, as we've seen with the temporal dislodgings of Montaigne, and yet many notable essayists use narrative to give shape and meaning to their exploratory reflections. Essays that unfold through what we might call "unpacking" tropes, for example, often use narrative in both frame and memory. In "unpacking" essays the speaker in the recent present tells a story of finding an object or a series of objects, which sparks reflective memory that is also often relayed in story form. Walter Benjamin theorized this reflective relationship between self and object in "Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," in which reflection on the nature of collecting more generally is framed by a narrative of an atypical day with his own collection (in unpacking, "the books are not yet on the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order" [59]). *Illuminations*, the book in which this essay appears, is subtitled "Essays and Reflections"—"Unpacking My Library" can easily be considered both: a reflective essay that is part development of a theory, part story.[21] Benjamin engages readers with narrative not only to, in a sense, bait and switch them with philosophical musings, but also to establish that he, as a collector himself, is an authority on the very subject about which he is writing. The narrative credentials the essayist. In another essay on storytelling, Benjamin himself notes that storytellers often tell stories with a purpose, giving "counsel," but also that this tendency has by his time begun to feel "old-fashioned" (86). Trilling clarifies: "Old-fashioned: which is to say inauthentic for the present time" (135). This

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[21] This is an admittedly simple reading of a very complex essay, the complexity of which is beyond the scope of the point I am making here.

knowingness, too, paradoxically credentials the essayist through his self-awareness of his own (in)authenticity.

In modernism, the discrete coexistence of the personal and objective theoretical modalities isn't always as obvious as in our Benjamin example. A similar example, this time more distinctly modernist and less overtly theoretical, is Max Beerbohm's 1918 essay "A Relic"—an "unpacking" narrative, but not of the library. This work opens with the speaker (an essayistic voice we take to be Beerbohm himself) discovering his old suitcase, the case and its contents "dimly remembered" except for one broken fragment of a cheap fan that recalls vivid memories (280). The framing story and the memories recalled both take narrative form—the speaker explores and explains his emotional response to the object through story. It plays out much as a short story, the reader entertained by narrative and intrigued by the mystery of the fan owner, but we soon come to realize that the essay is ultimately about the writer himself—it is a reflection on his origins as a writer. In his first encounter with the fan he finds himself "examining it … hoping to read the mystery it had been mixed up in, so that I might reveal that mystery to the world …. I was determined to make a story of what I had seen" (282). The story is constructed to grant the man authority in his identity as a writer. It is present and inward, yes, but its entire purpose is committed to granting Beerbohm the man the authenticity of Beerbohm the Writer. He shows himself young, struggling to write, failing, and in that failure strengthening his credibility. All of this is to say that while its formal parameters are uneasy of definition, the essay's primary characteristic is that it is exploratively self-guided, with a vested interest in explaining the writing self—it is "personal, intimate, relaxed." The fundamentally intimate style of the personal essay exists not separate from the didactic critical impersonal essay, but rather often exists alongside it in the same work. Furthermore, these voices split in how they

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stylistically engage with the reader: the informal reflective voice disarms a reader seeking to impose meaning on style (Beerbohm, in telling his own story, evinces a seeming natural style), which grants the voice the identity of writer and the authority to write that style (it performs the origin story of its own burgeoning cultural authority).

While the larger argument of my project is that this unstable convergence between personal and culturally authoritative is a primary function of modernist style in any genre or art form, I'm suggesting here that the essay form provides the model for literary modernist experiments. That the primary collapse between ethos and personality comes from the essayistic form is curious given how little studied that genre is in modernist studies. While Richman emphasizes the "diminished" state of the modernist essay, and thus its insubstantiality as an object of study, some scholars of modernism disagree. According to Randi Saloman, the essay is "a central genre of the modernist period," but is little studied as such (2).[22] Those who do study it do so mainly to argue for or reiterate the essay's centrality, often restating that "the essay was a key expression of the Modernist movement" (Good 178). That we seem to need convincing of this genre's importance for the period suggests something amiss—the "key expression of the modernist movement" is not the logical or most obvious expression of the modernist movement. Why is it that free verse poetry or stream-of-consciousness come readily to mind as representative modernist forms and not the essay? Perhaps the novelty of the former techniques makes them seem more appropriate as key to modernism while the 500-year-old essay form languishes under the weight of fustier periods.

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[22] Some claim that it is little studied at all. Klaus and Stuckey-French, for one, preface their 2012 collection of essays about essays with the assertion that "the essay has largely been ignored in the world of criticism and theory" (xi).

For Saloman the essay holds importance for its influence on the formal experiments of modernist novelists. This trend is rooted in modernism's break with the nineteenth-century realist novel form. Where nineteenth-century essayists were free to explore the ill-defined limits of their form, nineteenth-century novelists were yet bound by strict mimetic conventions. When novelists broke from that realism, they sought the freedom of form that the essay, for one, made itself amenable to. Modernist novelists, however, faced a problem in using essay techniques in novel form. Given that the primary difference between these forms is the author's role (self-reflexive and personal in the essay, authoritative and outwardly reflective in the novel), Woolf understood the possible bad faith in using the experimental essay devices. She was "painfully aware, in a way that her contemporaries were not, that the modernist novel's use of essayistic techniques concealed an inescapable and fatal contradiction. While the novelist needed to maintain authority and distance from the reader, the essayist could (indeed, was expected to) invite the reader to dialogue and to the intellectual exercise of an open debate" (Saloman 2-3). While this has a limiting effect on the novel, this duality between objective distance and subjective intimacy is freeing in the essay: "while the essay assumes fictional and imaginative freedoms, its innate claim to authenticity and to a non-fictional status allows it to make assertions and to seek effects that are closed to more explicitly fictional forms such as the novel" (Saloman 3-4).[23] That authorial authenticity, assertion-making, and the effects of fiction in non-fiction works are intimately linked is perhaps not surprising in critical works by creative writers, but as a tension inherent in the essay form itself it taps into a larger critical shift at the time that has implications for the relation between writer and reader. This tension is that of two opposing voices, but also, by extension, that of the writer's pose in front of the reader.

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[23] See chapter 3 for more on the effect of this fractured voice on the style of the modernist novel.

In the mid-twentieth century theorists began to reconsider the essay's ambiguous identity in terms that reflect an academic discourse very much still grappling with the supposed modal "split" between the "informal, personal, intimate, relaxed, conversational" and the "dogmatic, impersonal, systematic, and expository" writing styles. Lukács and Adorno reflect on "the tension in the essay between authority and engagement, or knowledge and exploration" (Saloman 3). In 1910 Lukács wrote "On the Nature and Form of the Essay" to question whether the essay could be considered a work of art, and thus what a work of art is. He begins his piece by wondering what criteria makes an essay such—what unifying characteristics all essays have— but when Lukács refers to "essays" it is clear from the start that he means, more or less strictly, critical essays: "the critique, the essay—call it provisionally what you will" (17). Beyond this ostensible critical content, Lukács is seeking a unity in form, particularly a "literary form." That critical essays should have a literary form is a curious requirement. But he goes on to describe the difference between "genuine essays" and those that "do not deserve to be described as essays"—essays give us more than just "information, facts, and 'relationships'," they give us a reason for reading beyond the exchange of mere information. This something more in the true essay is what it has in common with "works of literary imagination" and is the basis of what Lukács sees as a "literary form": "Science affects us by its contents, art by its forms; science offers us facts and the relationship between facts, but art offers us souls and destinies" (18). Literary form, then, is in some crucial way generated by the "soul" in the writing, much as style is said to be produced. A "genuine essay" for Lukács, then, is essentially dual, in the terms of the binary established by the nineteenth-century split between scientific and impressionistic discourse—it is both critically authoritative and formally personal. Curiously, paradoxically, as we've already seen, the latter begets the former. If there is indeed a "tension … between

authority and engagement, or knowledge and exploration" inherent in the essay form, that tension is productive.

But if the form of the essay consists of the soul, if the voice is the personal anecdotal voice of a reflective Benjamin or Beerbohm, the *style* of the essay is more complicated. Rather than representing the writer's distinctness, or suggesting the nature of the critical content or rhetorical situation of the piece, the essay's style is what joins these competing impulses of personal expressive and public instructive together. Take, for instance, one recent critic's description of Kaiser Wilhelm, who "regarded art in the public domain as a means to cultivate ideals in society and particularly to educate the lower orders, in his private life and personal sensibility he was inclined to look on art in vitalistic terms" (Eksteins 88). This is characterized as a "paradox" in his character, due to "splits in his personality." For Wilhelm this concealing of the personal is meant to strengthen his public authority—his competing impulses indeed cause him to operate under one truth in one situation and an opposite truth in another. There is nothing, really, of paradox here. In an essay, however, the personal and the impersonal exist in service to one another, no matter how discordant these impulses may be—these are not situational styles dependent on audience, but rather a murky paradoxical style.[24]

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[24] Take Lukács again: "Becuase all writing aspires to both unity and multiplicity, this is the universal problem of style: to achieve equilibrium in a welter of disparate things, richness and articulation in a mass of uniform matter. Something that is viable in one art form is dead in another" (21). While Lukács ultimately bemoans the hybridity of the essay, its lack of "independence" from an "undifferentiated unity with science, ethics, and art," for Adorno the very identity of the essay is in this undifferentiation: "the essay…does not permit its domain to be prescribed. Instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done" (152). It is a "mirror," an act of play, rather than an independent creation of the intellect. In Richman's characterization of the French essay and Lukac's reading of the German essay we see perhaps the reflective nature of the essay at work. If it is personal rumination, it is also external image in the same way Pater's essays are at once impression and assertion.

I use Wilhelm as an example of how suppression of a personal view on art can serve to bolster authority, showing that these two views are not paradox at all, but rather emerge under different contexts. In the modernist essay, on the other hand, assertion or enactment of the personal view is what gives the writer a social authority—this is paradox because inward and outward are held as distinct values, yet they must coexist in service to one another—ethos *is* character. This dualism, however, must not be overt. Take, for example, the uncertain categorization of Woolf's essays. A 1925 *New York Times* review of her *Common Reader* proposes the ambiguity of Woolf's writings well: "this volume of collected essays and reviews is not primarily a critical work. It does not put the author in the attitude of a defender or an expositor of certain trends in literature. Instead of this it shows an unwearying creativeness on the part of the writer." Woolf's essays are notable for being both critical and, what is unusual in the critical work, creative. The reviewer suggests that this creativity is a result of the writer's unwillingness to play a role, to take "the attitude of" a typical critic.[25]

Woolf's essays are heavily influenced by Montaigne's, and, indeed, as Marchi points out, Woolf may have first experienced Montaigne through Pater (2). It is thus unsurprising that her criticism evinces much of the same subjective thrust as Pater's. The same NYT review later considers her essayistic prose in Paterian terms:

> The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from the old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no

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[25] Katerina Koutsantoni points out that Woolf not only uses the essay genre, she also engages the history of the genre through her subject matter: "Emerging in seventeenth-century England with Addison and Steele, and progressing significantly through to the nineteenth century in terms of focus and address with Pater and Beerbohm, Woolf's discussion of the essay in relation to these essayists aims at concentrating on the genre's subjective quality" (2).

comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style [….] Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged, but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We […] are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

Here we read of impressions raining down on the open mind of the writer, who makes selections that impart a style, as Pater would have it. An implied impressionistic style is set in opposition to the conventions of an "accepted style." First, these impressions "shape themselves," *then* the writer sets them down in words. The communication of these impressions on the mind are shaped not by the writer but in the process of experiencing. I quote this reviewer at such length to show how Woolf is here positioned as both passive perceiver and active creator. That the reviewer discusses the "proper stuff of fiction" in a review of critical essays suggests this dual role is perhaps generated from the blending of creative and critical writing.

Woolf's essays blur that line between critical and creative writing most obviously out of the modernist writers we look at here. The *New York Times* reviewer suggests that creativity is a matter of instinct for Woolf: "Even in the essays which are more formal in cut and confined more closely to a semi-critical exposition, this itch for creativeness exposes itself." Here the language of refinement of the text, "cutting" it close, is associated with critical objectivity, with the implication that creativity involves free rein—quite contrary to Pater's excision in the production of style. The reviewer cites Woolf's essay on Montaigne as an example. The reviewer's implications in this small example are many:

Paralleling the self-revelations of Montaigne … the essayist recreates a figure in toto that is much less the result of a critical analysis than a fine gusto in rebuilding from scattered bricks. There is both charm and a subtle propagandism in this sort of treatment. Mrs. Woolf inveigles the reader into her conception of Montaigne so cleverly that when the essay is finished it has served the purpose of critical

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argument and adducement. This creative-commentative method of attack is quite in accordance with the scheme of workmanship implicit in the title of her book.

First we see Woolf's work in the language of parallel—she mimics his method, but instead of recreating herself in true Montaignian fashion, she recreates *him*, the "figure in toto." And yet, though method and subject are borrowed, the effect is all her own. By means of her skill, her "workmanship" in mimicking the master, her particular "charm" shines through (we might read charm as synonymous with style), and a feeling of covert inner workings lingers in "subtle propagandism"—she is indeed charming us, luring and hooking us through style. The reviewer doubles down on this insistence on Woolf's stealthy purposes when he calls this her "method of attack." If she is indeed attacking or inveigling the reader, why?

To answer that question let's first take a closer look at how style is working in Woolf's essays. For Woolf, the unconventional techniques associated with the essay were "made possible by a quality in the essayistic *voice*. While the novelistic voice is authoritative, and always, necessarily, in control of its fictive world, the essayistic voice is unmoored: explorative, open to self-doubt and prone to risky exchanges with its audience" (Saloman 3). For Koutsantoni, the style Woolf uses in her essays derives from that used by early essayists to shift the audience of their writing; to "[address] not … the world of the learned but … ordinary man and woman" (2). Much like Montaigne, Woolf positions herself as a common writer writing for a common reader. Woolf's "common reader" is the reader discussed in Samuel Johnson's *Life of Gray*. This is a reader who:

> differs from the critic and the scholar. He is worse educated, and nature has not gifted him so generously. He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all, he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole—a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing. (Woolf, "Common Reader" 1)

Woolf's understanding of the common reader can help us better understand the role of the critic—here we see an assumption that education, judgment, and correction of opinions go hand in hand as the scholar's main vocation, while the "whole" that the common reader seeks to create is one commonly seen as informed by style, whether style is the man, the age, or the act of writing. Woolf continues: the common reader "never ceases, as he reads, to run up some rickety and ramshackle fabric which shall give him the temporary satisfaction of looking sufficiently like the real object to allow of affection, laughter, and argument." The reader constructs for himself, that is, an understanding of the text via its stylistic texture. Whether or not Woolf is a common writer, she writes for a pre-conceived audience that is putting her text together, styling the fabric of it to make it mean something to them. Woolf's "workmanship," "charm," "subtle propagandism," her "method of attack" works covertly on the reader's "instinct to create for himself."

Indeed, if the Montaignian style Woolf seeks to use in her essays is generated from his turn away from convention, recent critical narratives of modernism countering the idea of modernist autonomy remind us that turning against conventions does not necessarily indicate that an author is unconcerned with convention—indeed it is often great preoccupation with conventions that leads to the deliberate breaking of them. Woolf makes this lesson clear when she tells us that Montaigne's "great bug-bears" are convention and ceremony, which the soul must guard itself against: "The man who is aware of himself is henceforward independent …. He alone lives, while other people, slaves of ceremony, let life slip past them in a kind of dream. Once conform, once do what other people do because they do it, and a lethargy steals over all the finer nerves and faculties of the soul. She becomes all outer show and inward emptiness" (60-1). Even when talking about the general theory of living and self-awareness here

Woolf alludes to the inevitability of a style generated from a carefully curated relational existence, particularly the relation between inner reality and outer show.

The tendency to see style as some essential relationship between author and material is so persistent that metaphors of surface and depth abound to explain the abstract concept of style. This tendency is only made stronger when the piece of writing, like the essay, is intended to explore the writing self. Indeed, writing in 1964, Richard Ohmann revises the idea of rhetoric to accommodate style's role as an indicator of personality. He summarizes a slew of recent theories of a "new rhetoric" poised to replace the time-worn rules of Aristotle: while "classical rhetorical theory assumed that the speaker or writer knows in advance what is true and what is good," the new rhetoric treats writing as itself the pursuit of truth: "Truth is not a lump of matter, decorated and disguised, but finally delivered intact; rather it is a web of shifting complexities whose pattern emerges only in the process of writing, and is in fact modified *by* the writing …. Rhetoric is self-discovery" (19).[26] This process of self-discovery necessarily precludes the possibility of deceit in the new rhetoric. Thus, theorists like Pater come to see the written work "as a revelation of the writer's mind and of his moral character. The style may always have been the man, but now the equation holds by fiat." This is more obvious in the pseudo-anecdotal examples from Benjamin and Beerbohm that we looked at earlier, but what of more strictly critical essays published *as* criticism? Writing as self-discovery suggests that the aim of writing is, in fact, discovering the self. The modernist critical essay enacts this aim, but ultimately for ends of cultural authority, with telling implications for style.

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[26] In a study of Thomas Mann's essay writing, Michael Allen Smith positions the essay between the poles of fiction and "philosophy and other kinds of criticism which have as their main purpose to supply a truth or set of truths about reality" (319).[26] They are not mere criticism and not mere fiction "because they emphasize the author's personality and his response to his subject, rather than the subject itself." For Smith, the essay's emphasis on the author's personality is a function of style.

IV. Critical Stylists and Perspectival Assertion: Modernist Criticism

> Pay no attention to the criticism of men who have never themselves
> written a notable work. (Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste")

Woolf sketched out her critical goals in her diary in the summer of 1940: "I wish I could invent a new critical method—something swifter lighter more colloquial yet intense: more to the point less composed; more fluid following the flight, than my CR essays. The old problem: how to keep the flight of the mind, yet be exact. All the difference between the sketch and the finished work" (*Second Common Reader* 6). Woolf's yearning for a more fluid criticism is a yearning for the feeling of a "sketch" rather than a "finished work." What is stodgy to her is the carefully constructed. Andrew McNellie quotes this diary entry in his introduction to the Second Common Reader in reference to "the burden … which the medium imposes on the message" that weighed on Woolf in these years. As the primary mode of criticism, the essay form tends to be treated "as if it were transparent as a pane of glass," and yet for Woolf that pane is heavy (Klaus and Stuckey-French xi). Woolf here and Lukács earlier insist that the essay, no matter how free seeming, is as densely constructed as literature. I belabor this point to emphasize the modernist desire to seem tentatively searching, freely exploring, alongside the necessity of establishing a critical authority and making critical pronouncements.[27] I end here by drawing out an answer to my earlier question about the stakes of Woolf's apparent attack or inveigling of the reader through the lure of style and its larger implications for the work of style in modernism.

Reconsider for a moment Woolf's claims about Conrad with which I began this chapter. There I asked whether criticism is a defense of art, as A.O. Scott proclaims, or an attack on it—in either case, criticism's role here, and indeed often as it is portrayed in other metacritical works, is

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[27] For more on the response of high modernists to the tension between cultural authority and "permanent novelty," see Rosenquist, Rod. *Modernism, the Market, and the Institution of the New*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.

as soldier on the battlefield of reception. Style, the pen which writes and the perspective which judges, is criticism's weapon. For Woolf, critics misread Conrad because they lift passages here and there and put these "cut flowers" on display—a mangled reconstruction of the text serving as evidence to support a judgment. This suggests that the object of their criticism is not the text itself, but rather the artificial bouquet they have created from its cutting. Furthermore, the visual metaphors Woolf uses—the cut flowers, the orchestra viewed by an unhearing person—suggest that the cutting action of criticism abstracts the experience and flattens it into the experience of a single sense. We do not smell the flowers and we do not hear the orchestra. The cutting action of critique intervenes in our experience of the work and, whether we resist the critic's judgments or not, affects our own interpretation. Perception and judgment become inescapably relational and curated by the critic herself.[28] In their critical essays Woolf, Eliot, Beerbohm, and other modernists shape and style the material they critique (whether author, artwork, or culture more generally) as all critics do, while playing the dual role of both the authentic creative writer and the authoritative detached critic. Essay writing in the Montaignian tradition is undoubtedly involved in an act of self-revelation, but the paradoxical nature of modernist style in the critical essay causes us to ask—revelation of which self? For what purpose?

The personal aspect of modernist style is generated in part in opposition to a perceived objectivity in Victorian criticism. When modernist critics turn away from the Victorian critic's "disinterested curiosity," they do so by writing a self-interested criticism. Laurence Lipking dubs the early modernist period "an age of poet-critics" who wrote to "spread the word" of the new type of literature they were writing (439).[29] While modernist writers were not attempting

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[28] J. Middleton Murry, writing specifically about style in the modernist context of 1921, claims "the critic… must be to some extent a creative artist in his criticism" (7).

[29] Lipking cites not only critical essays, but also the "lectures and position papers and manifestos" that "accompanied each innovation in style" (439). While his broader subject leads him to broader claims

anything the romantics hadn't already done in this regard, they positioned themselves in opposition to their more immediate predecessors, the Victorians, to suggest extreme newness (and thus validity) in their methods.

Part of the tension of the modernist essay is generated out of both this perceived newness in method in what is a very old form and the circumscriptive purposes of criticism. Where Saloman earlier saw the modernist novel drawing on the freedom of form of the Victorian essay in order to break with the constrictive forms of the Victorian novel, John Paul Riquelme sees the modernist essay also in reaction to the nineteenth century. He writes that the modernist essay "emerges as part of the reaction against Matthew Arnold that is characteristic of Modernism" ("Modernist Essay" 1024). Primarily Riquelme cites the modernist antipathy to Arnold's claims for a "disinterested curiosity" in the 1864 lecture "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." Riquelme's lack of pause to qualify or characterize the relation between the essay form and criticism suggests the modernist essay is wholly and unquestionably a vehicle of criticism. He will clarify that "the Modernist essay is not easy of definition," but his opening moves speak volumes: "The Modernist essay cannot be conveniently fitted either into the category of literary criticism or into literary criticism's categories," and yet the literary critical is the only categorical term Riquelme uses (1025). The terms don't work, but there doesn't appear to be anything more appropriate. Perhaps a more accurate description of the modernist essay would be that, rather than being literary critical, it's both literary and critical in the same way it's both personal and outward-facing.

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about poet-critics than claims I make here, his range of evidence does still serve to demonstrate for me the "interpenetration of criticism and poetry, their mutual influence and vitality" that helped shape the literary scene in the early twentieth century.

Despite Riquelme's claims of the modernist opposition to Arnold's call for a removal of the personal from the critical, Matthew Arnold, in fact, criticized any "separation of creative activity from disinterested inquiry," calling instead "for a literature nourished by 'a current of fresh and true ideas'" (Lipking 440). Lipking, too, points out that the poet-critic is nothing new: "poets had been among the best critics since ancient times, so ready to discuss their art that a history of criticism might be composed entirely from their statements" (439). Though Arnold touts an ideal that later modernists will pick up on, Lipking calls Arnold's criticism an "ambiguous" example of this ideal: "In practice, Arnold's criticism often functions as an enemy of his poems." Perhaps it is Arnold's inability to establish the ideal he apparently asserts that leads to Riquelme's alternate reading of "The Function of Criticism." For Arnold, Riquelme tells us, "the 'aim of criticism' is not the passing of judgment, though it is judgment's precursor, but the achieving of accurate perception through procedures exercised by a 'disinterested curiosity.' The critic strives 'to see the object as it really is'" (1024). As his example of modernism's counter to this Victorian objectivity Riquelme uses Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in which "the critical project is indistinguishable from the poetic one" (1026). He cites that essay's strangeness in "argument, organization, and even sentence structure," reading it as literature to ultimately claim that the modernist essay's "power inheres largely in its style, which it draws round us, shutting us in, not out, by giving us an experience of meaning that goes beyond semantics" (1032). Style, then, is the bridge that closes the gap between critical and creative writing. What modernist criticism does is credential itself through the stylistically personal to deliver aesthetic judgments to an audience that by this point has become suspicious of nineteenth-century literary critical claims to "disinterested curiosity," however true or untrue,

possible or impossible those claims were.[30] Public perception of the entanglements and

oppositions of influence between parties in the literary debate are everything.

If these perceptions of negative or positive social relations affect the efficacy of the

modernist's critical pronouncements, they are also reliant on a pose of autonomy from that social

world. While it may not be new to see the self-interested critic coming from the creative class

responsible for cultural production, modernist writer-critics actively foreground the autonomous

"untouchable" nature of their own art, seeming to disregard its "functional relationship[] within

society" at the very same time that they are making it function (Adorno 108). For Adorno,

although culture is unavoidably "administrated" by critical assessments and other institutionally-

driven measures, culture itself prefers to be viewed as autonomous: "Culture would like to be

higher and more pure, something untouchable which cannot be tailored according to any tactical

or technical considerations," he writes. Culture, in other words, seeks the same autonomy as

much modernist art. For Adorno, this has implications for how we receive culture: "Culture is

viewed as the manifestation of pure humanity without regard for its functional relationships

within society." Without administration, or critical curation, however, "when it is left to itself …

everything cultural threatens not only to lose its possibility of effect, but its very existence as

well."[31] Cultural production, Adorno suggests, relies on the social to shape its borders and make

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[30] This self-styling of the poet-critics didn't seem to last long. The critical authority of modernist essays was acutely complicated by the changes taking place in the academy later in the twentieth century regarding what is considered the proper form and subject of criticism. Evan Kindley, for one, shows how the decline of the early twentieth century little magazines gave rise to what he calls "Big Criticism," literary study backed by powerful institutions (73). As academic study of the humanities became institutionally supported by large foundations like the Rockefeller Foundation, the self-interest of modernist writers wanting to promote and promulgate their own work shifted to the self-interest of scholars operating under the "need to *justify* literature and literary culture, which means, in a capitalist society, justifying their subsidization" (93).

[31] In 1988 Graham Good noted that, as modernist literature became accepted as an object of study in academia, the modernist essay went largely unnoticed by "professorial critics" because, he says, "*at the same time* the essay was being replaced by the professional article as the form of literary criticism. The

it legible. Criticism as such operates much the same in any iteration—it defines and defends, giving shape to a field and asserting that field's validity.

This dual role—the writer-critic, but also the critic-writer, at once autonomous and entangled in defining the boundaries of culture—might be the necessary conclusion to the self-reflexivity of modernist literature, and perhaps might also be an answer to the problem of perpetual novelty required by the modern in modernism. Critical and literary aims are fulfilled when the writer establishes credibility in both roles at once, which can only be achieved in the essayistic style—both literary and authoritative because it is present and inward. So what is the poet-critic, armed with a pen-sword, defending? Perhaps it is that very authority of the creative self to determine the critical narrative of their own work. Given the inwardness of the modernist critical essay, it makes sense that Woolf would suggest that all literary criticism is interested in reputations. In "How it Strikes a Contemporary" Woolf writes, "In the first place a contemporary can scarcely fail to be struck by the fact that two critics at the same table at the same moment will pronounce completely different opinions about the same book…. Yet both critics are in agreement about Milton and Keats. …. It is only when they discuss the work of contemporary writers that they inevitably come to blows" (*The Common Reader: First Series* 231). Here we see Woolf suggesting the purpose Arnold gives to criticism—to identify the "best which has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold 190). This conservative canonizing instinct falls apart, Woolf suggests, when it addresses works that don't yet have the backing of critical consensus. The implication Woolf makes is that criticism deals solely with reputation, both the maintenance of old reputations and the generation of new: "the opinions tumbled out so

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essay disappeared from view simultaneously as an object of study and as a vehicle of that study" (emphasis original 179). We can assume, like Riquelme, that the modernist essay is a critical work, but not all critical works are essays.

spontaneously here will be starched and stiffened into columns of sober prose which will uphold

the dignity of letters in England and America" (232). On the aggressive character of this critical

defense or attack, Ezra Pound turns away from the conservative terms of criticism and takes a

forward view: "Criticism is not a circumscription or a set of prohibitions. It provides fixed points

of departure. It may startle a dull reader into alertness" ("A Retrospect"). To view criticism as

something that establishes definitions and parameters would be to read criticism with a backward

view—toward what it does to a body of extant literature. Pound rather asserts to what use

criticism can be put, both for the reader and for the artist in the generation of new works and new

ways of reading.

While this emphasis on the present- and forward-looking qualities of modernist criticism

echo Montaigne's efforts to reinvestigate himself without imposing a narrative on his reflections,

even where modernist critics return to their older work we see the imposition of a desire to affect

cultural narrative. T.S. Eliot, for example, doesn't revise his critical works in the way Montaigne

revises and republishes his essays, but he does revisit them in "To Criticize the Critic." In this

speech given at the University of Leeds in 1961, Eliot strikes a dissociative-yet-familiar pose to

his former self, much like Montaigne: "I must acknowledge my relationship to the man who

made those statements, and in spite of all these exceptions, I continue to identify myself with the

author" (14).[32] He is gently critical of his former self, expressing discomfort with being quoted

and criticized in turn. His discomfort spurs him to comment on that commentary: "When I

publish a collection of essays… I make a point of indicating the original date of publication, as a

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[32] Some note that the principal value of this speech is the glimpse it gives us of Eliot himself, rather than
any substantive claims he may be making about literature or criticism more distinctly. In a 1966 review of
To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings (published in 1966 posthumously by Eliot's wife), for example,
Joseph Frank writes, "one can feel in [Eliot's collection of writings] the natural tendency of advancing
age to ruminate and reminisce rather than to engage with the challenge of new subjects." (Joseph Frank,
"Eliot's Legacy." *Commentary*. Sept. 1, 1966)

reminder to the reader of the distance of time that separates the author when he wrote it from the author he is today." The way in which his impulse to shape the reception of his works manifests suggests some vital connection between the life of the critic and the critical observation. It also lends him the authority of presentness, inwardness, and authenticity that the essay form gave to Montaigne. Indeed, the essay from Montaigne through Pater to modernism locates criticism in the fallible, changing body of the critic (the body that is also commonly seen as the source of style) in a way that paradoxically renders the constrictive critical pronouncements more powerful.

I began this chapter by outlining the nature of the tension in the modernist critical essay—it is at once constrictively delineative and ostensibly boundless in form. William Carlos Williams holds this tension in place in his "Essay on Virginia," an essay on both essayism and America (and which is, according to Ned Stuckey-French, a quintessential modernist essay, though not, strictly, literary criticism). In it Williams argues, "the formless form of the essay mirrors the form of American democracy, which rests on an unresolvable tension between individualism and conformism" (Stuckey-French 97). We might hear echoes of this "tension between individualism and conformism" in Woolf's tension between the flight of the mind and the need to be exact. The metaphor of democracy stretches far with the essay as such—essay is a name that can be granted to a huge range of writing, from highly specialized journal articles to lengthy blog posts; it can cover topics from the high serious to the mundane; it can be comprehensive or brief. But, for any essay, what is determined and what is determining is style, understood as individual expression within a set of socially-determined constraints—the place where individualism (personal stylistic choices made and the meaning those choices gain in a socio-relational context). The choices made within this range of possibility indicate both the

individual writer and the extent of their compliance with custom. Stuckey-French describes

Williams's own style in "On Virginia" in various yet telling ways: it is "linguistic cubism," the

prose sometimes "simple and direct," other times "wry and mocking," and still further "dense

and knotted, as abstract and modern as anything Williams wrote"—in his description the critic

styles Williams's text in quintessentially modernist terms (97, 98). Impressive in itself as master

craftsmanship on the part of Williams, this verbal play becomes for Stuckey-French significant in

the effect it has on the reader. Whether it is a given, contested, or outright passé now to read

"modernist difficulty" as the challenge posed to the reader by a masterfully crafted text, this

reading of modernist style persists. Here Williams's essay "requires close attention and constant

backtracking" (101). Style, in mimicking the "frontier" of Virginia—a location at once wild and

providing opportunities to tame, to give shape to—serves as a model to the reader for how the

text wants to be read. That this imposition on the reader of a method of reading is presented

through the purported naturalness of style lends it its power.

Modernist style desires to train us—it lures us and dashes us as HD's "Shrine" ("you

have tempted men/but they perished on your cliffs"), shapes and then undercuts our expectations

as Derrida's "projection of the ship which surges ahead to meet the sea's attack and cleave its

hostile surface" (*Spurs* 39). As my title for this chapter suggests, style is not here merely a

product of the medium's inefficiency at communicating the individual. Critical style is rather an

enactment, test, and proof of one's identity as a writer-critic—one's proper credentialing to write,

both critically and creatively.[33] The paradox of modernist style is this attempt at once to privilege

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[33] Ann Ardis has written at great length on this idea of modernist self-credentialing: in one dense scene
from *The Voyage Out* Hewet sets up a binary opposition between poetry and the silly things women
read—he champions aesthetics and art over social matters. Ardis reminds us in her reading of the scene:
"a crucial omission from this catalogue of Edwardian and Georgian concerns is the 'blasting and
bombadiering' about aesthetics through which the London-based Anglo-American avant-garde began
catapulting itself—and, not quite coincidentally, the discipline of English studies—to cultural prominence

aesthetic autonomy by means of an intensely personal style for the external goal of cultural

importance.

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during the pre-war years. In other words, Hewet's 'we' might well be the 'men of 1914': the coterie of writers and artists centered around James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis who credentialed themselves, each other, and the literary field through reference to the scientific precision of poetic observation, the a-politicization of aesthetics, and the elevation of individual consciousness over social action/inaction" (2). The "scientific" focus on aesthetics of the modernist critical essay is written in a distinctively "personal" style, a style no scientist would use in their observations and expect to be taken seriously by the field.

Afterword:

Rethinking Modernist Style

J. Middleton Murry's *The Problem of Style* is addressed to critics, concerning the way in which critics use the word style. For Murry, the successful critic accepts the vagueness of his terms and, with "compulsive vigour," "impresses upon them a meaning which shall be exactly fitted to his own intention and unmistakable by his audience" (1). The critic, in other words, is tasked with styling his own critical language. This crucial point—that style is a critical tool that must be continually defined and redefined—suggests that, whatever it is and however it's defined, style has some purpose. Furthermore, Murry emphasized the creativity involved in that styling ("The critic … must be to some extent a creative artist in his criticism"), but a quick look at any writing about academic style today shows how far we currently seem to be from Murry's ideal (7).

Indeed, guides and opinions on how to most appropriately construct academic prose proliferate, replacing a call to creative freedom with rigidly proscriptive rules and guidelines, not unlike the manifestos of some of modernism's most stylistically inventive movements. In his 2014 writing handbook for academics who write poorly, a recent addition to this growing canon of work addressing what has long been acknowledged as a problem, Eric Hayot is careful to blame bad academic writing on "a system that, though it thinks incredibly well about other people's writing (literature, for example), does not think well—or act or institutionalize

thoughtfully—about its own" (16). Note the dehumanized language here to characterize the problem—the "system" does or does not think "well" about writing. The individual writer, then, is simply victim to a system of which she is also an integral part. Murry's creative critic loses her active autonomous originality in Hayot's conception of the strict system of power relations in which the modern academic writes, but my readings of modernist style in the previous chapters might require us to question whether Murry and Hayot are really defining style under two different conditions—creative freedom on the one hand and hierarchical structure of relations on the other. As I've shown with modernism's use of style, the former is a pose struck in order for the stylist to gain power in the latter.[1] My three- or four-dimensional metaphor of the net is meant to accommodate the contradiction fundamental to style's functions—at once personal and social—in order to reimagine style's role in a system of relations. I now wish to consider what my re-conception of style does for our understanding of modernism more generally.

A common reading of literary modernism is that its primary characteristics are generated by experiments in style. Despite the proliferations of modernisms under New Modernist studies and the subsequent attempts to broaden the term to encompass myriad ways of responding to modernity, critical readings of modernism still necessarily focus on the formal, stylistic elements as the site of difference that sets this body of work apart from what came before. In response to Barthes' setting of the disintegration of classical writing (to be replaced by the "problematics of language") at 1850, Ben Hutchinson claims in his more recent taxonomy of modernist style, "if the whole of literature becomes 'the problematics of language', then the whole of literature becomes a question of style" (10). If to stylize is to emphasize artistry over fidelity to the object of representation, modernist style suggests a freedom from the conventions associated with

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[1] Murry is, indeed, offering his definition of style in 1922, the *annus mirabilis* of modernism.

realism, an allegiance to the idea of representational fidelity. The stylized text emphasizes artistry by making the text conform to strict aesthetic rules and regulations—therefore, readings of modernist style as concerned first and foremost with itself necessarily focus on the artist as stylistic creator. The aesthetic rules, then, are supposedly generated by the artist or the work of art itself and bring about the self-referentiality and autonomy that much modernist art explicitly strives for. But if stylization is associated with the division between an object and its representation by means of submitting that representation to conventions neither native to the object nor in service of some idea of accuracy, what is the purpose of this style? While it has traditionally been argued that the purpose of modernist stylization is a sort of anarchic purposelessness, much recent work on modernist autonomy suggests the importance of re-figuring the communicative aspect of language, the artwork's presence and role in the social world. What is that communicative role for modernism, exactly, and why does its oppositional, confrontational pose develop such that style is foregrounded and held apart from textual content?

What I mean to have shown in this dissertation is that to talk of an autonomous style is to talk of paradox—true autonomy would be unsocial and unrefined (insofar as it is supposedly outside of culture), but modernist aesthetic autonomy is constructed in a carefully refined style. To style at all is to prepare oneself or one's text to be received socially, so to style to the point of absolute refinement (as was the case with Brummell—in the figurative sense his dress was intricately polished, but it was pure in that it was free from outside purpose) is to desire to affect some sort of social authority.

Popular two-dimensional metaphors that see style as a surface, whether opaque, clear, reflective, etc. reproduce modernism's own self-narrative by implying that style is in some way a product of the author, carefully crafted to communicate with readers in a linear transmission of

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meaning from author to reader, which overlooks the way in which style only gains meaning socially. Rather than focusing on the materiality of style—what it physically is—the metaphor of style as a net calls attention to how entities are related by means of style. The net captures the entanglement of influences visual cues to meaning have on networks of relationships. As I've shown, style's meaning shifts according to the social context surrounding those relations. The metaphor of a net allows us room to acknowledge dominant readings of style without, necessarily, replicating those power structures.

As they appear in modernist works, the dandy, the spy, the artist, and the writer-critic all demonstrate this paradox through their supposedly concrete stylistic solidity paired with the ambiguity of that style's meaning. These figures style themselves in a way that gives them social power while also suggesting this style is merely an inherent essence on display. Ur-dandy Beau Brummell, whom I figure as proto-modernist in his fixation on aesthetics and his pose of detachment from the social world, had a style that was famously difficult to decipher (in part because it didn't signal his relative social power), which made it a point of intrigue for onlookers. In his lifetime, this lack of meaning to his style, its intriguing effect on his audience, was his source of social authority, but eventually his public began to critically respond by constructing narratives to confer meaning to his dress and affectations, and that of the dandy figure in general. The Victorian public assigned meaning to the dandy's style, a meaning which changes according to how the dandy figure relates to public values. Ultimately, when we discuss modernist style merely through its starting point as the visual effect of certain aesthetic choices—one node in its larger network of significance—we miss the larger impact of the role style plays in creating, maintaining, and challenging social relationships.

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