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TRINITY COLLEGE

Senior Thesis

“TO GIVE YOU MY LIFE, I MUST TELL YOU A STORY”:
READERLY EMPATHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVOLVEMENT IN FORD AND
WOOLF

submitted by

BEN M. GAMBUZZA, CLASS OF 2020

In Partial Fulfilment of Requirements for
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

2020

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Reader: Barbara Benedict

Reader: Sarah Bilston

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I read the news today, oh boy
 About a lucky man who made the grade
 And though the news was rather sad
 Well, I just had to laugh
 I saw the photograph.

-The Beatles, "A Day in the Life"

Introduction

In an April 6, 2020 article from *The New Yorker*, Jill Lepore reviews Fay Bound Alberti's book *A Biography of Loneliness: The History of an Emotion*, in which the author defines loneliness as "a conscious, cognitive feeling of estrangement or social separation from meaningful others."¹ Lepore goes on to explain that more people began to live alone in the early Twentieth Century, making loneliness a distinctly modern phenomenon. As more people became estranged from each other during this era, it might be argued that Modernist literature made an effort to estrange its readers from its characters and stories. In the literary arts, especially after the War and moving into the 1920s, there was a shift from what empathy theorist Suzanne Keen has called "the "unchallenging, absorbing, reading trance" that comes with reading novels by "Dickens, Gaskell, and Eliot," to what playwright Bertolt Brecht called the *Verfremdungseffekt* – the estrangement effect. For various reasons – the lingering effects of the war, the rise of a nascent far-right politics leading to Fascism, the general turn against the sentimentalism of mass culture – literature posited itself against didacticism and against affective responses to texts.² It was partly out of this suspicion that the New Critical hatred for the "affective fallacy" emerged.

¹ Jill Lepore, "The Isolation Ward," *The New Yorker* (April 6, 2020): 63.

² Keen, Suzanne, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 56-57.

And it is precisely *with* the affective qualities of novels by Ford Madox Ford and Virginia Woolf that this thesis is concerned.

Ford Madox Ford's 1914 novel *The Good Soldier* anticipates the postwar tendency of alienating the reader, making one feel distant and disconnected from its characters. Because of its ignorant, digressive, rambling, always-present narrator, and because of its black humor, it is a text that exemplifies the *Verfremdungseffekt*, or what Edward Bullough calls "psychical distance."³ The result is that we do not experience any empathy for the characters because there is no way to truly "know" them as long as the narrator obtrusively presides. Generally, empathy is "a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect" that "can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading." Usually, we feel empathy for someone's "negative" emotions. If someone is in pain, we might imagine that we feel what they feel – "I feel your pain." Sympathy, on the other hand, occurs if one feels "a supportive emotion about [one's] feelings" – one feels *pity* for another's pain.⁴ Empathy requires "intersubjectivity" – a linking of one's mind state to another's mind state.

In *The Good Soldier*, the reader is prevented from truly seeing into characters' minds and is thus prevented from engaging in an intersubjective relationship with the novel's characters. Empathy (or "mind-reading") becomes impossible. Although Ford sacrifices many qualities of novels that we are used to (an immersive reading experience, readerly empathy), *The Good Soldier* nonetheless produces unique affects for the reader that are *not* empathy. While so much is lost, much is also gained. In Chapter 1, I examine some of the weird feelings that I continue to experience while reading the book. I argue that these feelings were forecasted by Ford's ideas of

³ Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology* 5, no. 2 (March 1912): 87.

⁴ Keen, *Empathy*, 4-5.

fiction as well as by the Hume-derived aesthetic theories of Walter Pater, which heavily influenced Ford's work. In contrast to some of the leading interpretations of Modernist affects, I show that World War I was not the only reason that Modern English fiction began to estrange the reader. Instead, there were aesthetic and philosophical causes brewing in the Victorian period. The movement that embraced these aesthetic principles was Literary Impressionism, practiced by Ford in collaboration with Joseph Conrad, the Polish expatriate author of *Lord Jim*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostramo*, and *The Secret Agent*.

Ford and Conrad agreed on many things, but Conrad's model for what fiction should do for the reader was deeper than Ford's. While Ford was a literary craftsman who was obsessed with his own technique and who put "everything [he] knew about writing" (3) into *The Good Soldier*, Conrad was interested in revealing truths and provoking a feeling of solidarity with all humankind through his fiction.⁵ These high-minded ambitions were evidently laughed at by Ford. But Virginia Woolf, another admiring reader of Conrad's fiction, incorporated Conrad's "depth" model of Literary Impressionism into her own fiction.

In Chapter 2, I explore two of Woolf's novels: *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. Both were attempts to humanize Pater's often anti-humanist and anti-empathetic theory of solipsism. Pater's solipsism has its roots in David Hume's empiricism, which held that no one can truly know that anything exists outside of one's own mind; in Pater's famous phrase, we are trapped behind a "thick wall of personality" that no one will ever be able to pierce.⁶ While the 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse* struggles with the problems of knowing others and connecting, I suggest

⁵ All in-text citations refer to: Ford, Ford Madox, *The Good Soldier*, ed. Martin Stannard (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2012).

⁶ Pater, Walter, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California, 1980): 187.

that it ultimately fails as an experiment. It builds then destroys the reader's empathy with characters, falling into the same trap of solipsism that *The Good Soldier* did.

Woolf's 1931 novel *The Waves* succeeds in connecting reader and character in intersubjective and empathetic relationships. This highly unconventional book is told by a rotation of six characters, who speak their long soliloquies not to each other, but to the reader. These soliloquies are merely thoughts. The reader is the only one who hears them. There is also no narrator, other than one to say, "he said" or "she said." Thus, the minds of the characters are foregrounded. I suggest that this book offers, in part, a critique of Pater's solipsism and embraces the importance of connectivity by directing empathy outward toward the reader. Woolf is a solipsist, as we shall see, but her metaphor that we are stuck behind a "semi-transparent envelope" leaves much more hope than Pater's "thick wall" – at least we can somewhat *see* what is on the other side of the envelope.⁷ My discussion of *The Waves* is comparably short. However, since it forms a sort of antithesis for the theses of *The Good Soldier* and *To the Lighthouse*, my reading need not be extensive. It will be clear that *The Waves* redeems what was lost in the other novels: knowing and feeling with characters.

My methodology in this study draws from two sources: phenomenology and empathy theory. As a branch of philosophy that studies how humans perceive the reality outside of our own minds, phenomenology was championed in the early Twentieth Century in large part by Edmund Husserl. At its root is the larger issue of epistemology – what we can know. Wolfgang Iser's "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological approach" has provided one of the richest troves of ideas and vocabulary for someone studying the phenomenology of narrative and of

⁷ Woolf, Virginia, *The Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1925): 212.

reading.⁸ Iser's paradigm does not, however, account for readerly affect. And so, I draw on Suzanne Keen's work on readerly empathy from her important book *Empathy and the Novel*. Following in line with Wayne Booth's book *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, which was one of the first works of serious criticism to study "real readers," Keen identifies ways in which novels evoke or eschew empathy and whether empathy is necessarily a social good. Other critics who explore intersubjectivity and the phenomenon of a reader identifying with a character are Liza Zunshine and Blakey Vermeule, whose *Why We Read Fiction* and *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*, respectively, blend cognitive science and literary criticism to make studying the process of reading and studying the character of the reader essential methods of literary criticism.

In a wider context, I see this project as being situated in what theorists call the "affective turn" from the New Criticism. The "affective fallacy" is no longer a fallacy, but an important point of study in the context of rhetoric and hermeneutics. Literary theory has, in a sense, come full circle back to Plato's and the hated Athenian sophists' emphasis on rhetorical strategies. In this project, I study how words evoke emotions. In studying readerly affect, we acknowledge that the brain is a part of the body. While a predominantly-male phalanx of literary critics has emphasized reason over feeling for decades, I hope to contribute a small part to the project of reclaiming the body as a nexus of knowing. And while Modernist fiction has often been immune from discussions of feeling, even the absence of *conventional* feelings is worth studying as a feeling within itself. At a time of international crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic – a discussion of connectedness seems as relevant as ever.

⁸ Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *New Literary History* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1972): 279-299.

Chapter 1
An Ocean of Distance:
The “Wall of Blue” Between Reader and Character in *The Good Soldier*

Ford and Joseph Conrad collaborated intensely on three novels: *The Inheritors* (1901), *Romance* (1903), and *The Nature of a Crime* (1909). They also forged a theory of fiction that they tried to apply in these works. In his highly subjective and exaggerated memoir (what Ford calls a “novel”) of Joseph Conrad, Ford writes, with typical Fordian confidence, that both authors “had the same aims” in their fictions.⁹ Many of these aims boil down to ways in which they want their fiction to affect the reader. In the discussion that follows, I will suggest that *The Good Soldier* poses a problem for the reader who expects to be phenomenologically involved with the novel’s characters while reading. The novel also undercuts the empathetic link between reader and character that many readers of Victorian or Edwardian novels, or even of many novels of today, are used to. These problems of the phenomenologically uninvolved and unempathetic reader present themselves in Ford’s theory of Literary Impressionism. We can also trace these problems back to the writings of those who influenced Ford, especially Walter Pater. In this chapter, I will suggest that the theories of art and of the mind that Ford was working with predict, even stipulate, a reader who feels the bleakness of a purely aesthetic outlook on life, rather than one who feels engrossed in the story and characters themselves. For *The Good Soldier* produces weird effects and affects for the reader. I will argue that Ford’s Impressionism is anti-humanist and anti-empathic because of the way in which he interprets his aesthetic precursors, especially

⁹ Ford, Ford Madox, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965, [c1924]), 179.

Joseph Conrad and Walter Pater (and David Hume before him). *The Good Soldier* shows that relying on unreflective experience inhibits one from truly connecting with one's fellow humans.

Theories of Impressionism (Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford)

Ford's and Conrad's shared aims were based on a visual and subtly emotive theory of fiction. Their central goal was "by the power of the written word...to make you *see*."¹⁰ Conrad asserts this goal in the Preface to his novella *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* while Ford makes a nearly identical statement in his book on Conrad.¹¹ Conrad's Preface is often considered a manifesto of sorts for Literary Impressionism, the movement which Ford and Conrad pioneered, and which drew inspiration from the empiricism of David Hume and John Locke, as well as from the aestheticism of Pater.¹² Literary Impressionism came to be characterized (with varying degrees of agreement among critics) as interested in how the mind forms its own *rendering* of an affair.¹³ In contrast to Imagism, which, according to Ezra Pound, strives to present "the image itself," and Expressionism, which has its roots in Freud's work and tries to give voice to the *unconscious*, Impressionism strives to present the "impression." The impression is the moment in

¹⁰ Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 178.

¹¹ Conrad, Joseph, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), xiv.

¹² Matz, Jesse, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13. According to Ford, he and Conrad accepted the label "Impressionists" readily. Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 194.

¹³ For similar definitions of the term, see Bender, Todd K., *Literary Impressionism in Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, and Charlotte Brönte* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 6, Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, 1-11, Kronegger, Maria Elisabeth, *Literary Impressionism* (New Haven: College & University Press, 1973), 14, and Parkes, Adam, *A Sense of Shock: The Impact of Impressionism on Modern and British Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5. For Literary Impressionism as an effort to present a muddled image like in visual Impressionism, see: Fried, Michael, *What Was Literary Impressionism?* (Cambridge, Ma: The Belknap Press, 2018).

which an affair or scene *impresses* itself upon the senses. It is not the thing or object or event itself. The genesis of this idea goes back to Pater whose Hume-influenced theory holds that the object world is filtered through our perceptions, and that we can never know the *true* object. In this first goal of Ford and Conrad, then, we can already see how both authors are concerned with the reader perceiving an experience, rather than actually feeling involved in that experience. The “written word,” in this view, seems to connote a two-dimensional painting with a clear barrier between reader and text, rather than an immersive fictional world.

Since Ford’s and Conrad’s Impressionism is focused on individual perception (they even speak to us in the second person: “you”), their novels experiment with limited perspective, riffing on the idea of solipsism by using unreliable first person narration. Frederic Jameson has written persuasively about the barrier between human and world, reader and text, that Impressionism embraces, commenting that Impressionism “discards even the operative fiction of some interest in the constituted objects of the natural world, and offers the exercise of perception and the perceptual recombination of sense data as an end in itself.”¹⁴ In other words, where other novels are concerned with the account itself or, as Ford calls it, “the corrected chronicle,” Impressionist novels and writers see the *process of knowing* as having intrinsic value. Critics often echo this precept when they say that *The Good Soldier* is a story about how the narrator “knows.”¹⁵ It is partly a novel *about* epistemology. But such a meta-focus on *knowing* often results in the reader being not so much attentive to the events and characters of the story, as to

¹⁴ Jameson, Frederic, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 230. As we will shall in Chapter 2, this blanket statement does not hold up when we consider Virginia Woolf’s Impressionistic experiments in readerly empathy.

¹⁵ Armstrong, Paul B., *The Challenge of Bewilderment: Understanding and Representation in James, Conrad, and Ford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 191. Denis Donoghue, “Listening to the Saddest Story,” *The Sewanee Review* 88, no. 4 (Fall 1980): 562.

the narrator (the one who, allegedly, *knows*). We become trapped in the narrator's mind, whether we are aware of it or not during the reading experience.

As we make our way through the effects that Ford and Conrad want the reader to experience, we might start to wonder if we can ever live up to what they require of us. By examining the Impressionist reader, we will venture into territory hitherto not fully explored by critics of Literary Impressionism, perhaps with the exception of Paul B. Armstrong. Armstrong envisions the reader of *The Good Soldier*, and of works by Henry James and Conrad, as one who experiences a loss of verisimilitude because the style of narrative lays bare the epistemological process. In other words, as the narrator's process of "knowing" becomes more apparent, the story the narrator tells feels less real. Reading this narrative style, one becomes more self-consciousness about the work of interpretation, rather than feeling "the experience of living for a time in another's world." The consequence of losing this verisimilitude, to Armstrong, is always a "heightened sense of solipsism in the reader." Since one does not feel that one has been fully immersed in a fictional world, one's attention is brought back to one's own interpretative mind, leading one to feel horribly alone. Armstrong's conclusion that *The Good Soldier* results in "epistemological wonder" in the reader, however, seems to me an overclaim and wishful thinking.¹⁶ I agree that the novel limits immersion in a lifelike world, but my own interpretation focuses on the ways in which this loss contributes to an *affective* reading that is caused by the very qualities of the novel that Armstrong recognizes. Moreover, I situate my argument in a wider context and assert a theory of the Impressionist reader that helps explain how Impressionist writers revised the role of the reader.

¹⁶ Armstrong, *The Challenge of Bewilderment*, 16-17, 25, 191.

While many critics explore the legacy and defects of Literary Impressionism solely with regard to its own stated intentions, I will center on the way this fiction acts on the *reader* and raises questions of hermeneutics similar to those raised by Armstrong.¹⁷ As reception theorist Wolfgang Iser stated, we must take into account the text *as well as* “the actions involved in responding to that text” if we wish to bring to light the fullness of a literary work.¹⁸ I am concerned with the real consequences, based on my own reading experience, of Literary Impressionism.

Here is what Conrad aims to do for the reader, in his own words:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*. That – and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts [sic]: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm – all you demand – and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask... It is to show [a fragment of life’s] vibration, its colour, its form...¹⁹

To arrest, for a space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile...²⁰

There are ambiguities in Conrad’s theory as he presents it here.²¹ Does Conrad merely mean that he wishes to describe scenes and people most realistically so that the reader can

¹⁷ The only long study of the reader’s place in *The Good Soldier* is an unpublished dissertation, by Laura Kaplan Tracy, who focuses her attention on the “assumed reader” (the reader intended by the writer) to make an argument about Dowell’s reliability. I am not so much concerned with whether he is reliable (I think it is clear that he is *unreliable*) but how his process of understanding effects the reader’s experience of his story. I am also concerned with the “actual” reader, whereas Kaplan is not. See: Laura Kaplan Tracy, “That One Congenial Friend: The Reader’s Place in *The Good Soldier*” (PhD diss., The American University, 1982).

¹⁸ Iser, “The Reading Process,” 279.

¹⁹ Conrad, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* xiv.

²⁰ Conrad, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* xvi.

²¹ There are severe class implications in Conrad’s theory of audience, which are not necessary to go into here, but which Jesse Matz treats at length in his seminal *Literary Impressionism and*

imagine exactly what Conrad had in mind? A sort of “mimesis of the mind”? Or is he primarily concerned with the reader creating his or her own unique perception out of the picture presented to him or her by the author? If we take the meaning of “see” to be not visual but intellectual, Conrad could mean that he wants the reader to see, or understand, a certain truth or message that he is trying to convey. His theory appears to be hyper-realistic, mimetic, and visual. By showing the reader a fragment of life as clearly as possible, Conrad will allegedly lead that reader to encounter a reality that is an escape from “actual reality” (the room in which the reader reads). As we shall see in our discussion of Wolfgang Iser, this escapism can be dangerous.

In contrast to Conrad’s aesthetic theory, Ford is more concerned with the formalities of writing. In 1913, a year before *The Good Soldier* first appeared as a fragment in the Vorticist magazine *BLAST*, he articulated his own Impressionist manifesto in his essay “On Impressionism.” Here is *his* vision of how an Impressionist novel should interact with the reader:

Always consider the impressions that you are making upon the mind of the reader, and always consider that the first impression with which you present him will be so strong that it will be all that you can ever do to efface it, to alter it or even quite slightly to modify it.²²

In that way you would attain to a sort of odd vibration that scenes in real life really have; you would give your reader the impression that he was witnessing something real, that he was passing through an experience...²³

And finally:

[The author must] address himself to such men as be of goodwill; that is to say, he must typify for himself a human soul *in sympathy* with his own; *a silent listener* who will be attentive to him, and whose mind acts very much as his acts.²⁴

Modernist Aesthetics. Conrad wants his fiction to be for a “distant laborer.” Similarly, Ford imagines a “peasant cabman” for his fiction, and Woolf invokes the “common reader.”

²² Ford Madox Ford, “On Impressionism,” in *Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 39.

²³ Ford, “On Impressionism,” 42

²⁴ Ford, “On Impressionism,” 48. Italics mine.

As simple as his vision of the reader may sound, Ford's typical nonchalance leaves much to be desired in knowing how to be an Impressionist reader. All at once, Ford calls for a lasting, almost tactile, unchanging, impression to be made on a reader's mind; he wants to conjure an experience for the reader that is like a voyeuristic experience in real life; and, he wants a reader who will put down the baggage of real life and give him or herself over completely to the novel at hand. These ideas are beautiful, if unrealistic. They are also similar to Victorian conventions of the novel, not so far from, say, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. But it is evident that Conrad and Ford, while changing the tide of Modernism, or perhaps producing its incipient moment, also are intent on changing the role of the reader.²⁵ Instead of the leisurely, time-consuming reading experience afforded by Victorian fiction, there is an element here of captivity by the storyteller.

Particularly with regard to Ford's last comment above, both writers seem to posit the reader as being in a relationship with the author not unlike that between the wedding guest and the compulsive storyteller in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Just as the Ancient Mariner tells a sea-faring tale to a wedding guest who "cannot choose but hear," Ford's reader must give up everything to be consumed by his fiction. Great demands are put on the reader. As empathy theorist and critic Suzanne Keen shows in her *Empathy and the Novel*, Modernist novels induced readers "to work as strenuously thinking collaborators...depriving them of the emotional effects" that they had come to rely on in Victorian literature, in which the reader was (in Keen's language) "submerged in an unchallenging reading trance."²⁶ Contrary to Ford's and Conrad's intentions, *The Good Soldier* does *not* result in a trance. I agree with Armstrong's

²⁵ Stowell, H. Peter, *Literary Impressionism, James and Chekhov* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 4.

²⁶ Keen, *Empathy*, 56.

observation that the principle themes of the novel are interpretation, representation, and epistemology, rather than true love or fidelity.²⁷ But these seemingly abstract themes not only affect the phenomenological reading experience, but also the emotions associated with that experience. Since recent studies have confirmed the positive intersections between affect and cognition, it is necessary to couple a discussion of phenomenology with a discussion of emotion.

Ford and Conrad seem to acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between cognition and affect. Their desire to make the reader “see” is further complicated if we look at the textual context surrounding this statement. In Conrad’s case, his fiction will also make you “feel.” The artist makes his appeal to the unconscious, to the “secret spring” of emotion, by creating an “emotional atmosphere” in his fiction with words that have an “evanescence.”²⁸ The result, for Conrad, is the revelation of “truth in colors” and an “unavoidable” feeling of solidarity with all humans through a gleaming break from habitual perception.²⁹ In short, Conrad’s is a *depth* model, humanistic and concerned with deep feelings of brotherhood. We will see this strain of theory appear later in our discussion of Woolf, particularly in her love for Russian writers like Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. More than Conrad, though, Ford wants the reader to be engrossed by his novel at every point during reading, using a method he called *progression d’effet* (speeding the novel up as it approaches the end) to keep the reader interested. He values the architectonics of fiction writing more than any universal feeling of brotherhood it might inspire in its reader. He wanted the reader to live in the story to the point that the reader was made “entirely insensitive to his surroundings.”³⁰ Decades after Conrad and Ford articulated these ambitions, Wolfgang Iser

²⁷ Armstrong, *The Challenge of Bewilderment*, 1.

²⁸ Conrad, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* xiii.

²⁹ Conrad, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* xi, xvi.

³⁰ Ford, “On Impressionism,” 43.

helped establish the field of reception studies when he observed that we can think the thoughts of another while reading.³¹ Armstrong has labelled this connection between reader and character “intersubjectivity,” emphasizing that during the reading experience the reader “may have the experience of living in another’s world.”³² And Suzanne Keen, working under the influence of the cognitive sciences, has also employed the term “intersubjectivity” to describe the emotional response to another’s mental state as a result of mirror neurons, blurring the lines between phenomenological literary criticism and neuroscience.³³ I will return to these critics throughout the present study. In a significant way, then, Ford and Conrad predicted later theories of readerly participation. Between Conrad’s wish for his fiction to be a diaphanous emotional atmosphere and Ford’s wish for his fiction to capture the reader’s attention to the point that the reader forgets the world outside of the novel, we find an Impressionist theory of the reader. Engrossment in this view was to take place within the experience of another mind, not as a result of the experience of the narrated/represented events themselves.

If Ford’s 1915 novel *The Good Soldier*, his crowning achievement, was an effort to put into a novel “*all* that [he] knew about writing,” we should be able to find illustrations of each and every principle of Ford’s Impressionist theory (3). Specifically, the novel should involve the reader in an intersubjective relationship with its immediate characters, and elicit emotions from the reader, especially because of the tragic events that happen in the story. As we will see, however, the emotional and phenomenological position that the reader occupies in the novel is complex and contradictory. The reader is often *prohibited* from being involved with the personages of the story because of the nearly insurmountable barrier of the narrator’s voice and

³¹ Iser, “The Reading Process,” 299.

³² Armstrong, *The Challenge of Bewilderment*, 25.

³³ Keen, *Empathy*, 4.

because of the novel's hilarity, which also works to undercut tragic events. The narrator stands *between* the reader and the story that he tells. As Maria Kronegger says, an Impressionist work of fiction *is* the perception of the story that is told.³⁴ The meaning of the work is the perception itself – the only thing the reader is permitted to experience. In this case, this perception is the narrator's. In *The Good Soldier*, this results not in empathetic responses to its characters, but a certain bleakness, confectioned by black humor. Throughout this study, we shall constantly be asking and trying to explain the question: what do we *feel* when we read *The Good Soldier* and why? And what had Literary Impressionism to do with these feelings? Before I explore the answers to this question, let us examine how the book actually works.

Interruptions, Digressions, and Hilarity in *The Good Soldier*

The Good Soldier is told in the first-person by narrator John Dowell. His method of storytelling is anything but orthodox. A rambling, digressive storyteller, Dowell constantly doubts if he is telling the story in the right way, and often goes on tangents about events, personal or historical, only tenuously related to the story at hand. The result is a tale that is chronological only in the sense that the series of events are narrated as they come into Dowell's mind.³⁵ The novel is not in the stream of consciousness mode, though, since Dowell *does* make an effort to structure the story. When he is not steeped in epistemological torpor and solipsism, he attempts to figure out exactly how he could have missed that his wife Florence was having an affair with Edward Ashburnham, a supposed friend of Dowell, but also a rake and a member of the novel's central quartet (and the eponymous "good soldier" of the title). The book is thus

³⁴ Kronegger, *Literary Impressionism*, 21.

³⁵ Vincent Cheng has written a "true" chronology of *The Good Soldier*. Vincent Cheng, "A Chronology of *The Good Soldier*," in *The Good Soldier*, 391-395.

obsessively centered on the narrator and his struggle to come to terms with his own ignorance and the suicides of Edward and Florence.

Dowell and Florence, and Edward and his wife Leonora, make up a quartet who spend much of their time together in the German spa-town of Nauheim. Dowell tells us at the beginning of the book that Florence and he had known the Ashburnhams “with an extreme intimacy” for nine years there. Of course, now that he knows what was going on under his nose, he also claims that during those years he “knew nothing whatever” (9). The mere “shallows” that he knew of these people is evident in his frequent characterization of them as “good people” – that is, they exemplify typical upper class English people whose real problems are never apparent because of the convincing superficial customs that govern their behavior and conversation (10, 31, 14, et passim). The book probes the connection between superficiality in English relations and the greater question of whether we can know any reality, let alone any person, outside of ourselves.³⁶

Throughout the book, there is a constant tension between what Dowell sees and what is really going on. The Ashburnhams travel to India, where Edward has an affair with a Mrs. Basil, Florence has another affair with a certain Jimmy, and Florence pretends she has heart problems as an excuse to travel from their native America (Florence is from a rich Connecticut family) to Europe to see Jimmy; Edward declares his love to Nancy Rufford (a minor whom Dowell later intends to marry after Florence kills herself, though he never does); and, on learning of Edward’s

³⁶ See: Samuel Hynes classic account of “how Dowell knows.” Samuel Hynes, “The Epistemology of *The Good Soldier*,” in *The Good Soldier*, 327-334. See Karen Hoffman for a discussion of Dowell’s narrative as a way to negotiate anxieties about identity, specifically imperialistic masculinity. Karen Hoffman, “‘Am I No Better than a Eunuch?’: Narrating Masculinity and Empire in Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2004): 30-46.

death, Nancy goes mad, resulting in Dowell bringing her back with him to Bramshaw Teleragh, the Ashburnhams' house in England that Dowell buys. While Dowell writes, Nancy sits across from him "enigmatic, silent," sometimes muttering the single word "shuttlecocks" as they eat dinner (168). Leonora, who remarries, tells Dowell of his wife's infidelity and suicide after the fact. It is after he finds out everything, that he sits down to write in 1914.

Though the plot points of the story that Dowell tries to tell make for an intriguing story, I do not think we keep reading the book after all these years because it is a gripping yarn. In other words, we do not necessarily read it for the story Dowell tells, but the way Dowell tells it. This conclusion is evident in much of the criticism on *The Good Soldier*.³⁷ The book is certainly not something that Edward Ashburnham would read. For Edward is fond of "novels of a sentimental type – novels in which typewriter girls marr[y] Marquises and governesses, Earls" (26). *The Good Soldier* is not a popular sentimental novel. It is not one in which "the course of true love runs as smooth as buttered honey" (26). Edward, much like Tatyana in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* or Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, loves to read "sad love stor[ies]" and incorporate their drama into his own life, particularly into his (in fact highly tawdry) romantic pursuits. *The Good Soldier* is not a "good read" in that it does not do what Ford thinks the English novel has done until now; that is, it does not "go straight forward."³⁸ Ultimately, we read it because we are fascinated by Dowell and the ubiquity of his voice, even though it confuses us. The book's unique narrative technique is its most distinctive feature. And yet critical work on the reader's reception of this technique and the feelings it conjures is nonexistent.

³⁷ Todd Bender, "The Sad Tale of Dowell: Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*," *Criticism* 4, no. 4 (Fall 1962): 353-368.

³⁸ Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 180.

The Good Soldier is also not an easy read. Following Dowell's recursive mind is difficult, and the struggle to grapple with Dowell puts a barrier between reader and story that is phenomenologically insurmountable. We cannot experience the story without encountering Dowell not only because he is the narrator, but because he constantly insists on breaking the fourth wall and talking about his failings as a storyteller, digressing from the point at hand. Here is Dowell speaking at the beginning of the last part of the novel, after he finishes ruminating on Leonora's unfaithful marriage with Edward:

I have, I am aware, told this story in a very rambling way so that it may be difficult for anyone to find their path through what may be a sort of maze. I cannot help it. I have stuck to my idea of being in a country cottage with a silent listener, hearing between the gusts of the wind and amidst the noises of the distant sea, the story as it comes. (124)

In this passage, Dowell digresses from telling the story to reflect on his own method of storytelling. This comes as a shock to the reader. In the passage immediately before this digression, Dowell's own voice does not feature prominently. We are told of Leonora's fondness for a certain Maisie Maidan and Maisie's fondness for Leonora, and how Leonora never would have expected Maisie to have an affair with Edward. We almost feel like Dowell has disappeared. We almost feel like we can let ourselves be involved in the story, without having to worry about the narrator. The story goes on, verging on the conventional. But Dowell's voice is constantly lurking under the surface, appearing in sly interjections of free indirect discourse like "But really" or "in an odd way" (123). He even lapses into the ambiguity of ellipsis when he says, flippantly and colloquially, before the block quote above, "Florence knocked all that on the [sic] head..." (124). Dowell is there, and in these small signs we are aware of him constantly. The metaphor of natural interruptions, the gusts of wind and the sounds of the sea, can apply to our reading experience as well. Dowell's voice and personality are the wind and the sea noises,

between which the actual story lies. His voice and digressions are distractions from the *story* itself.

In the most visually Impressionistic passages, the potential of an engrossing atmosphere is undercut by humor or Dowell's colloquial tone. In these instances, the "fourth wall" is *not* abruptly broken and Dowell does not make a self-referential comment on his own narrating style. Rather, a scene or image is created, and then is slowly corrupted by Dowell's voice. This is not quite free indirect discourse, but something different. In one scene, for example, Dowell is riding a train through Germany and describes what he sees out the window. What results at first could have been written by Tolstoy; we need only remind ourselves of Lëvin gazing into his fields in *Anna Karenina*. Here is the first part of what Dowell sees:

The sun shines, the earth is blood red and purple and red and green and red. And the oxen in the ploughlands are bright varnished brown and black and blackish purple; and the peasants are dressed in the black and white of magpies; and there are great flocks of magpies too. Or the peasants' dresses in another field where there are little mounds of hay that will be grey-green on the sunny side and purple in the shadows—the peasants' dresses are vermilion with emerald green ribbons and purple skirts and white shirts and black velvet stomachers. Still, the impression is that you are drawn through brilliant green meadows that run away on each side to the dark purple fir-woods; the basalt pinnacles; the immense forests. And there is meadowsweet at the edge of the streams, and cattle. (36)

This description is as mimetic as one will find in *The Good Soldier*. First, there is a clear image of what Dowell sees that is unfettered by the use of the first person. Dowell's personality is almost nowhere to be found. If we gave this passage to someone who did not know that it was taken from the *The Good Soldier*, he/she would not be able to tell anything about the narrator because there are practically no indicators of his tone. He/she might merely surmise that the speaker has a fine ability to observe. Second, we are given a clear rendering of the "impression." Even if we know nothing about Dowell's character from this passage, it is clear that we are

experiencing what it is like for one person to see this countryside. Consequently, we are situated in the viewer's head, seeing with the viewer's eyes, and even engrossed in an atmosphere.

But this passage quickly turns comic, sinister, and one might say “cringe-worthy.”

Immediately following the foregoing Tolstoyan/Conradian Impressionistic scene, Dowell goes on to describe a cow he sees, thrown onto its back in a river, legs, presumably, up in the air:

...Why, I remember on that afternoon I saw a brown cow hitch its horns under the stomach of a black and white animal and the black and white one was thrown right into the middle of a narrow stream. I burst out laughing...I chuckled over it from time to time for the whole rest of the day. Because it does look very funny, you know, to see a black and white cow land on its back in the middle of a stream. It is so just exactly what one doesn't expect of a cow.

I suppose I ought to have pitied the poor animal; but I just didn't. I was out for enjoyment. And I just enjoyed myself. It is so pleasant to be drawn along in front of the spectacular towns with the peaked castles and the many double spires. In the sunlight gleams come from the city—gleams from the glass of windows; from the gilt signs of apothecaries; from the ensigns of the student corps high up in the mountains; from the helmets of the funny little soldiers moving their stiff little legs in white linen trousers. (36-37)

How do we even characterize Dowell's amusement here? Unsophisticated, shallow, childish, certainly not sympathetic or empathetic. Dowell knows what he *should have* done, which is to feel sympathy for the cow. But because of his consistent inability to engage emotionally and phenomenologically with the world (he says earlier that he knows nothing of “hearts of men”), he cannot feel sympathy. Perhaps if we are familiar with Dowell's typical flippant tone, his black humor won't be surprising. But since we are focused on examining the reading experience, which happens minutely, from sentence to sentence, we must pay attention to how individual passages affect how we pay attention to the story and to Dowell. In the context of this passage, then, this humor is shocking to encounter. We have just emerged out of a beautiful description of the countryside to encounter *this* (!). The image of a cow upside in a stream is almost Dadaist or Surrealist, for it features the juxtaposition of two ordinary things in an extraordinary visual

coupling, that “one doesn’t expect.”³⁹ And after Dowell’s stupid amusement, we are lowered back again into a picturesque and effervescent image.

We are jerked back and forth by a tone that oscillates between serious and mimetic, and comic and “cringy.” We are immersed in the Impressionistic bath, lifted out by Dowell who pours ice-cold Gatorade on us, then lowered back into the bath, unsure of what just happened and certainly uncomfortable with the orange Gatorade in our hair. When we re-enter the “serious” atmosphere, the student soldiers are defamiliarized (they look strange) and are transformed into play things (like toy soldiers).⁴⁰ We need only to compare the description of the soldiers to Anna’s impression of a scene at the opera in *Anna Karenina* to see the affinities to Tolstoy. This kind of digression, showing Dowell’s insensitivity, contributes to the readerly feeling of not experiencing the story itself. We are prohibited from being engrossed in a visually impressive atmosphere that exists outside of Dowell’s mind because he reminds us, through black humor, that we are still in his mind. We will soon encounter Dowell’s tendency to deal with pain and death through humor with regard to Maisie Moidan’s death. Oddly enough, Dowell also witnesses her dead body, legs in the air – this time in a trunk.

One more point I want us to realize in this passage is the *causal* relation between Dowell being “out for pleasure” and his inability to sympathize with the cow. Instead of feeling bad for

³⁹ See Laura Colombino’s book for a study of the relationship between visibility and writing in Ford’s work. Colombino sees Dada and Surrealism as movements that have been overlooked by critics as influences on Ford. Colombino, Laura, *Ford Madox Ford: Vision, Visibility, and Writing* (Peter Lang, 2008), 135.

⁴⁰ The Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky identified Tolstoy’s technique of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) as essential to making a text “literary.” Defamiliarization happens when a writer describes a well-known object or environment like he is seeing it for the first time, deconstructing it into its constituent parts much like a child does. Instances of defamiliarization in Tolstoy, and here in Ford, are often meticulously crafted and, as a result, really very beautiful. See Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1965), 3-24.

it, he laughs. I will return to this point more thoroughly in my section about Walter Pater and his influence on Ford. But for now, I want us to remember this correlation between (1) an aestheticism-derived solipsism which characterizes Dowell's outlook on life (and the reason for his ignorance about his person life), and (2) a lack of empathy and the inability to care for humans and animals. Dowell shows us how inhuman and uncaring a life characterized by delectation can be. The poor cow is even framed by the train window as if it were in a painting.

Immediately after this countryside passage, Dowell witnesses Florence lay a finger upon Edward's wrist, sending Dowell into a fit of dread. Leonora also sees this and has to flee the scene, overwhelmed, because she already knows about the affair. But Dowell is still ignorant. After asking Dowell if he "sees" what is going on, he denies seeing (really *getting*) anything. He then goes on to use Leonora's eyes as a metaphor for his disconnect with the world: "for a moment I had the feeling that those two blue discs were immense, were overwhelming, were like *a wall* of blue that shut me off from the rest of the world. I know it sounds absurd; but that is what it did feel like" (39, italics mine). Between Dowell and Leonora are her eyes, which prevent Dowell from getting into her minds, knowing her, and being able to empathize with her. This "wall" is the wall of solipsism (a direct callback, as we shall see, to Walter Pater) that critics since Samuel Hynes have identified as one of Dowell's central struggles. This wall is also the same one that we have identified as standing between the reader of *The Good Soldier* and Dowell's story. Since we are trapped in Dowell's mind, the novel is not only about what it is like to know someone else's perception. The book is also about what it is like to read the book. The reader is doomed to solipsism as well.

“I know it sounds absurd; but that is what it did feel like”: Weird Feelings

I would now like to square Dowell’s “wall of narration” with its impact on readerly *affect*. For this, I can only rely on my own unique experience of how the text made me feel on a first reading (and still, to a certain extent, makes me feel). I subscribe to Frank Kermode’s assertion (made in an article on *The Good Soldier*) that, “We are in a world of which it needs to be said *not* that plural readings are possible...but that the *illusion of the single right reading is possible no longer*.”⁴¹ And in following Kermode, I am opposed to Vincent Cheng’s assumption that a correct reading of *The Good Soldier* “does exist.”⁴² After defining what I feel are the affective consequences of the text, I will suggest a textual justification for these feelings using Wolfgang Iser’s theory of the phenomenological reading process. This analysis builds on what we have already said about Dowell’s interruptions and digressions, as well as his tendency to snatch us from the evanescent Impressionist bath and shock us.

When I first read *The Good Soldier*, my own emotional reaction boiled down to the fact that I felt I had not experienced a story at all. I felt “ugh,” at the characters. I felt frustration, bleakness, and sadness at the fact that I could not experience the characters and the story more fully. It made me feel cynical. It made me anxious. I found myself asking the questions that Virginia Woolf asks regarding the “materialist” fiction of Bennett and Galsworthy, in her essay “Modern Fiction:” “Is life like this?” “Must novels be like this?”⁴³ I was annoyed that Dowell always insisted on getting in the way of the story. He was getting in the way of my ability to truly connect with the characters of the quartet. I was prevented from identifying with them. And

⁴¹ Frank Kermode, “Recognition and Deception,” in *The Good Soldier*, 347-354.

⁴² Vincent Cheng, “‘All the Devices of a Prostitute’: Sincerity and the Authorial Persona of Ford Madox Ford,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 15, no. 4 (Spring 1989): 532.

⁴³ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 212.

thus, the possibility of any sort of comradeship with these characters was denied. I was not even able to *hate* these people because the story itself felt like a Styrofoam cup, fragile and disposable. I was ambivalent and dejected that this was the way *The Good Soldier* was to be. The characters seemed merely like chess pieces that Dowell needed to fill his story. I felt that I had not even gotten to know people or events, but a passing suggestion of a narrative. The *Gestalt* feeling that I had cannot be summed up in one word (“maybe you just didn’t like the book?” as a friend put it to me) but is best characterized as feeling drowned in a bleak and confusing atmosphere. Most important to note is the fact that my feelings were toward the way the story was told, rather than the story itself. I did not care about the morality of the characters, or even if Dowell was unreliable. Startlingly, as I began to read criticism of *The Good Soldier*, I *felt* that discussions of character, morality, and politics were necessarily *beside* the point. I will attempt to justify these feelings by referring to the paradigm of reception theory. As we will soon see, Ford’s Impressionism, inherited from Walter Pater, actually *forecasts* a literature that evokes my feelings of ambivalent disgust.

I was not the only reader who felt that this novel, whose original title was “the saddest story,” did not evoke sadness for its characters as presented narrative. It turns out that the first reviewers of *The Good Soldier* felt much the same way after reading it. Up to this point, we have explored techniques that Ford uses to create a distant relationship between the reader and the personages of Dowell’s story. Underlying all the difficulties we have explored is the basic effect of reading *The Good Soldier* that events which should be sad do not seem sad. Similarly, in contemporary reviews of *The Good Soldier* there is an admiration for its technical virtuosity, but a disdain for its characterization, and seeming lack of engagement with the reader. Particularly, critics found fault with how the novel failed to live up to the emotion promised in the first line:

“This is the saddest story I have ever heard” (9). They apparently missed the irony, since part of the fun frustration of *The Good Soldier* arises out of the conflict between the tragic events of the story and the nonchalant way in which they are recounted. Nevertheless, it is evident that the weird feelings I had when I read *The Good Soldier* were apparent from the moment it was published.

In the 2012 Norton edition of *The Good Soldier* are some of these reviews. Among them, a reviewer for *Times Literary Supplement* concluded that sadness “is not conveyed by [Ford].”⁴⁴ And in calling the book a “challenge,” the *Morning Post* remarked that although the novel’s subtitle is “a tale of passion,” “there is no more passion in it than in an entomologist’s enthusiasm” over his bugs.⁴⁵ The same reviewer does not see any depth in Ford’s characterization, calling the characters “specimens.”⁴⁶ Perhaps the most scathing review comes from *Outlook*, where the critic says that “the novel may be enjoyed as an essay in style, even after it is recognized that as an essay in characterization, it is one long blunder.”⁴⁷ The consensus among many contemporary reviewers is that the reader of *The Good Soldier* is “never really stirred. You are never hurt. You are merely told and referred. It is all cold narrative, never truly poignant.”⁴⁸ This tension between how tragic the events of the story are, and how they are

⁴⁴ Review of *The Good Soldier*, by Ford Madox Ford, *Times Literary Supplement*, March 25, 1915.

⁴⁵ John Rodden associates the term “tale of passion” with Freud’s and Klein’s theories of libidinal development. Rodden, John, *Between Self and Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 96.

⁴⁶ Review of *The Good Soldier*, by Ford Madox Ford, *Morning Post*, April 5, 1915.

⁴⁷ Review of *The Good Soldier*, by Ford Madox Ford, *Outlook*, April 17, 1915.

⁴⁸ Theodore Dreiser, “The Saddest Story,” review of *The Good Soldier*, by Ford Madox Ford, *New Republic*, June 12, 1915: 155-156. A curious exception is Rebecca West’s assertion that it is a “moving story.” She also had a story published in the *BLAST* edition in which Ford was published, so she could presumably commiserate with his artistic aims. Rebecca West, “Mr. Hueffer’s New Novel,” review of *The Good Soldier*, by Ford Madox Ford, *Daily News and Leader*, April 2, 1915.

recounted is our starting point. How can a book so set on being allegedly “sad” elicit weird emotions (“ugh,” disgust, disappointment, a sense of bleakness, anxiety, etc.) from the reader other than sadness at the story? And why is Ford so enthusiastic about making a novel seem like the “odd vibration that scenes in real life really have,” if the novel that results is one shining in formal brilliance but devoid of the sadness we typically experience while reading Bennett or Trollope, or while crying for Little Nell in Dickens’ *The Old Curiosity Shop*?⁴⁹ Most importantly, what is *gained* when so much is apparently lost?

The critical tradition of *The Good Soldier* arose out of this exact difficulty, that is, the tension between the objective sadness of events in Dowell’s past and the emotional tone of the story Dowell tells. Mark Schorer inaugurated criticism of *The Good Soldier* in a 1948 article by questioning what this tension *means* for the novel. Schorer identifies the central irony of the book in the tension between “the character of the event as we feel it to be and the character of the narrator as he reports the event to us.”⁵⁰ I would like to revise this assertion and argue that the central tension is between the character of the event as we feel it is *supposed* to be and the character of the event as it is *presented* to us. In other words, the events of the story are “sad” in themselves. But the way Dowell describes them is not sad at all. This has to do with the emotional expectations that the first line of the novel sets up, as well as the expectations set up by every sentence in the rest of the book.

⁴⁹ Ford, “On Impressionism,” 42. Richard Walsh, “Why We Wept for Little Nell: Character and Emotional Involvement,” *Narrative* 5, no. 3 (October 1997): 306-321. Oscar Wilde once said, anticipating Ford, that “one must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing.” See Marcia Muelder Eaton, “Laughing at the Death of Little Nell: Sentimental Art and Sentimental People,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (October 1989): 269-282.

⁵⁰Mark Schorer, “*The Good Soldier* as Comedy,” in *The Good Soldier*, 321-326.

Reading as a Creative Project: Iser and Affect

At the heart of the above reviewers' emotional estimation of *The Good Soldier* is the breaking of expectations. As readers who were used to the engrossment that comes with reading Eliot or Bennett, *The Good Soldier* came as a shock. This first line sets up expectations, and the rest of the novel breaks them. The line is seemingly spoken by Dowell, and thus the "story" is the tale of the quartet and the tragic events that make up the story. But if we consider the publication history of the novel, the identity of the persona who characterizes the story as "sad" is complicated. The "sad" story actually becomes Dowell's *telling of the story*, or rather his failure to tell a coherent story.

The Good Soldier was first published as a fragment called "The Saddest Story" in the inaugural June 1914 issue of *BLAST*, a Vorticist magazine run by Wyndham Lewis.⁵¹ Its famous first line ("This is the saddest story I have ever heard."), which appears in the published book edition in 1915, is absent. The title was changed out of necessity. As Ford tells us in his dedicatory letter to his wife Stella, he changed the title in "hasty irony" because his editor told him it would be "unsaleable" if a book called "*The Saddest Story*" appeared in full during the "darkest days" of World War I (5-6). For buyers, the new title would signify a tale of heroism, patriotism, and morals. Ford's "hasty irony" is apparent, for the eponymous hero Edward is a philanderer and a cheater, far from a "good" man. His only redeeming quality is perhaps that he is "a sentimentalist," but even this is a superficial judgement of his character. Despite the irony, or perhaps because of it, reviewers still reacted in frustration at this novel which was advertised as sad. For the original title cannot be pure irony, since the tragic events of the story *are* heartbreaking in themselves: infidelity, deception, suicide, Dowell's loneliness. It is evident,

⁵¹ Ford Madox Ford, "The Saddest Story," *BLAST* 1, no.1 (June 1914): 87.

then, that the irony of the first line, or the title in the *BLAST* version, is not immediately recognizable. Or at least we recognize the irony while still anticipating the emotional payout that this first line promises: that we as readers, as Dowell's "sympathetic soul[s]," will feel sad like Dowell. However, if we read the "sad story" as *Dowell's telling of the story* (the outermost narrative frame, the valence shell of the novel), then *Dowell* becomes the tragic character because of his moral failure and his ability to "know" or connect.

We have already identified some of the reasons a reader might not feel sad while reading *The Good Soldier*: Dowell's digressions and interruptions, his breaking of the fourth wall, and black humor. But there is another reason why we cannot be *engrossed* in the story. Namely, Dowell makes it difficult to identify with the characters and thus feel any sort of empathy for them. This effect is especially apparent in the death of Maisie Maidan and the suicide of Edward Ashburnham. Dowell (and Ford) elide the deaths of these characters, reporting them in a cavalier way that makes them seem unimportant or funny. To explain how Ford achieves this effect when he elides deaths, we will examine these deaths through the lens of Wolfgang Iser's theory of the reading process. We will start to move from the problem of readerly engrossment in *The Good Soldier*, to readerly affect by examining the ways in which the novel prevents us from identifying and empathizing with the characters.

Nearly 60 years after *The Good Soldier* was first published, Wolfgang Iser formulated a theory of the reading experience, contributing to the critical field we now refer to as Reception Theory. He envisions the reader as realizing, or "concretizing," the text by using his or her imagination to fill in gaps of information.⁵² Since every reader will fill in these gaps with different information, the text is constantly changing with each reader's experience of it. This

⁵² Iser, "The Reading Process," 279.

intangible and dynamic text (which he likens to a musical score, needing to be performed differently by each reader) is what he calls the “virtual” dimension. The virtual dimension is located in the union between text and reader, and can never be exactly pinpointed, since the reader fills in gaps on a sentence by sentence, word by word level. Every sentence, Iser argues, opens a “horizon of expectation.” Each sentence signifies, by the information presented in that sentence, an idea of what sentence will come after it. A reader’s expectations can be either confirmed or denied by the succeeding sentence. Roman Ingarden, Iser’s primary influence, calls the ways sentences succeed and transform each other “intentional sentence correlatives.” Each sentence correlates with the sentences around it, but if a sentence breaks the “pre-intentions” (Edmund Husserl’s term) set up by the preceding sentence, the reading process is more creative because the reader feels more *involved* in creating the virtual dimension of the text. *Satzdenken*, “sentence flow,” is blocked and the onus is on the reader to create a connection between one sentence and another that is seemingly unrelated to the prior one. In a “truly literary text,” Iser says, “expectations are rarely fulfilled.” If our expectations are always confirmed, the text can seem didactic, limiting the reader’s creative facilities and causing us to either “accept or reject a thesis forced upon us.”⁵³ A text that lends itself to a more creative reading experience leads to various individualized interpretations and eliminates the possibility of one correct reading, which lends credence to Kermode’s estimation of *The Good Soldier*.

The less agency a reader has to be creative during reading (the fewer gaps there are to fill), the more authoritarian the text and author are. If a text is didactic, it can be illusory and politically dangerous, akin to propaganda. If reading were merely a building of illusions, Iser

⁵³ Iser, “The Reading Process,” 283-285, 279.

thinks, the text would be “suspect, if not downright dangerous.”⁵⁴ His theory, then, is positively anti-fascist, probably in response to his experience growing up in Nazi Germany.⁵⁵ The seductiveness of “escapist” texts results from a less individualized reading experience.

The Good Soldier, on the other hand, anticipates Iser’s language of anti-fascism, since, as we have seen, it prohibits engrossment and the illusion of living in the world of Nauheim and the quartet’s misfortunes. And, for Iser, it is the incompleteness of the illusion that makes a text literary. A text that removes us from reality almost extinguishes the identity of the reader, turning him or her into a mere voyeur rather than a creative participant in the narrative. *The Good Soldier* certainly results in a creative reading experience, brought on by Dowell’s digressions, surprises, and humor. But the text also prevents *identification* with the characters. Iser does not see identification as an end in itself (which would contribute to didacticizing and illusion building, and which the author should limit, judiciously) but rather as “a stratagem by means of which the author stimulates the attitudes in the reader.”⁵⁶ If we examine how Dowell (Ford) treats the importance of the deaths of characters, we will find that we do not feel sad at their deaths and do not connect with these characters because of the way sequent sentences act on each other.

If, as Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford agreed, “life does not narrate,” then life does not *tell* us to laugh, cry, or to feel empathy for anyone. It should follow then, that a fiction which does not “narrate but render...impressions,” should not tell us what to feel, or for whom to feel.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Iser, “The Reading Process,” 289. Bertolt Brecht similarly abhorred “Fascism’s grotesque emphasizing of the emotions.” Cited in Keen, *Empathy*, 57.

⁵⁵ John Paul Riquelme, “Wolfgang Iser’s Aesthetic Politics: Reading as Fieldwork,” *New Literary History* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 7-12.

⁵⁶ Iser, “The Reading Process,” 289.

⁵⁷ Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 194-195.

In order to evoke an emotional response in the reader, even “ugh” or cynicism, the novel must do a good job *showing* instead of telling. In other words, the picture or characters must be realistic enough for the reader to feel involved with them. Only then will an “intersubjective” relationship, one between reader and characters, emerge. Ford wanted use “all the devices of the prostitute to seduce his reader.” But this seduction does not happen in the way we would expect just by reading Ford’s attempts to explain himself.

The elision of death’s weight in *The Good Soldier* is significant because, during moments which we would expect to evoke empathy or identification with characters, the reader is prohibited from these experiences. Maisie Maidan’s death is a case in point. Mark Schorer, in his 1948 article, noticed the hilarity of the description of Maisie’s dead, using it to conclude that the novel is a comedy. But, of course, for our purposes we must be cognizant of what expectations a description of a dead body sets up, and how *The Good Soldier* breaks those expectations. Here is how Dowell describes Maisie’s dead body, after Leonora resolves to take her into her care, not knowing at first that she is dead:

[Leonora] had not cared to look round Maisie's rooms at first. Now, as soon as she came in, she perceived, sticking out beyond the bed, a small pair of feet in high-heeled shoes. Maisie had died in the effort to strap up a great portmanteau. She had died so grotesquely that her little body had fallen forward into the trunk, and it had closed upon her, like the jaws of a gigantic alligator...

The image of feet sticking up out of the trunk is, there is no other way to put it, hilarious. If you have trouble envisioning what this would look like, just think of the feet of the Wicked Witch of the West sticking out from beneath the house that has just crushed her in *The Wizard of Oz*. The image is terrifying and abject but also terribly funny and sinister. Or, refer to our discussion of when Dowell sees the cow on its back, legs up, in a stream. How can we feel sad for someone’s death when the description of his/her dead body is more potent for its humor than for its tragedy?

Indeed, the way we see the body is the impression: not the body itself, but a perception of the body. Moreover, the juxtaposition of Maisie's "little body" with the trunk's "gigantic alligator" jaws makes for a grotesque size difference within itself. It is almost Surrealist in the sense that the exotic alligator is chosen as the best analogue for how her body looks. An alligator can be nowhere near where Maisie has died, in a German spa-town.

Subjecting this passage to an Iserian analysis, we should first examine how the sentences act on one another and what expectations each one sets up. Since this story is allegedly "sad," we would not expect a death to be funny. So, when we see Leonora rush into the room and immediately notice Maisie, we (or at least I) would expect Leonora to be the center of our attention and to see an emotional reaction from her. The "pre-intentions" of this first sentence signify a description of death that is sad. The death of a character also seems like a good place for the narrator to slip into indirect discourse, offering his own thoughts on a moving and tragic situation. Instead, Dowell foregrounds Maisie's feet sticking out, an absurdly funny detail. Is this really the most important detail to include first in the description of her dead body? Does it conjure up any sort of negative affect? Even if it does, the sadness is undercut by the humor. The whole description is devoid of passion and completely objective, insofar as it is an accurate rendering of the impression. In this way, to use the language of Iser, the *Satzdenken* is interrupted by humor and the verisimilitude of actually seeing and experiencing a dead body, along with the feelings that that evokes, is undercut. We cannot identify with Maisie because she is merely the butt of a joke and it is difficult to feel empathy for her, or for Leonora for that matter, since the description is so devoid of passion and breaks our expectations of a proper death scene. In contrast to Iser's example of the man who read *Jane Eyre* throughout the night and effectively married Mr. Rochester in the morning, Maisie Maidan's death is not conducive to

readerly engrossment. The effect is not that “one is...drawn into the text in such a way that one has the feeling that there is no distance between oneself and the events described.”⁵⁸ There is an ocean of distance, arbitrated by Dowell’s own insensitivity. There is also, however, a chance for the reader to be creative, as that reader processes the interruption of expectations and the *Satzdenken* in this passage.

Edward’s suicide on the last page of the novel is also elided by humor and by a complex set of “pre-intentions.” The end of the novel is anything but *catastasis*. Before Edward’s suicide, Dowell wraps up his tale by saying “...that is the end of my story. The child [i.e. Leonora’s child with a new husband] is to be brought up as a Romanist.” Then, a line break is drawn in the text of the novel. After the line break, Dowell says, “It suddenly occurs to me that I have forgot to say how Edward met his death.” Dowell relates the suicide of Edward, the central member of the quartet and the title character, as an *afterthought*. The intentional sentence correlatives between the sentence before the line break and the sentence after the line break are shocking. Needless to say, our expectations of the story being over are broken and a sense of closure is denied. Once again, Dowell shocks us out of the bath of narrative and slaps us with suicide, preventing us from being engrossed or seduced by mere narrative. After this first break of *Satzdenken*, Dowell launches into the scene, which is worth quoting in its entirety to give a fuller sense of Dowell’s (and Ford’s) voice and comic irony:

It suddenly occurs to me that I have forgotten to say how Edward met his death... Well, one afternoon we were in the stables together, looking at a new kind of flooring that Edward was trying in a loose-box. Edward was talking with a good deal of animation about the necessity of getting the numbers of the Hampshire territorials up to the proper standard. He was quite sober, quite quiet, his skin was clear-coloured; his hair was golden and perfectly brushed; the level brick-dust red of his complexion went clean up to the rims of his eyelids; his eyes were porcelain blue and they regarded me frankly and directly. His face was perfectly

⁵⁸ Iser, “The Reading Process,” 297.

expressionless; his voice was deep and rough. He stood well back upon his legs and said:

"We ought to get them up to two thousand three hundred and fifty."

A stable-boy brought him a telegram and went away. He opened it negligently, regarded it without emotion, and, in complete silence, handed it to me. On the pinkish paper in a sprawled handwriting I read: "Safe Brindisi. Having rattling good time. Nancy."

Well, Edward was the English gentleman; but he was also, to the last, a sentimentalist, whose mind was compounded of indifferent poems and novels. He just looked up to the roof of the stable, as if he were looking to Heaven, and whispered something that I did not catch.

Then he put two fingers into the waistcoat pocket of his grey, frieze suit; they came out with a little neat pen-knife—quite a small pen-knife. He said to me:

"You might just take that wire to Leonora." And he looked at me with a direct, challenging, brow-beating glare. I guess he could see in my eyes that I didn't intend to hinder him. Why should I hinder him?

I didn't think he was wanted in the world, let his confounded tenants, his rifle-associations, his drunkards, reclaimed and unreclaimed [sic], get on as they liked. Not all the hundreds and hundreds of them deserved that that poor devil should go on suffering for their sakes.

When he saw that I did not intend to interfere with him his eyes became soft and almost affectionate. He remarked:

"So long, old man, I must have a bit of a rest, you know."

I didn't know what to say. I wanted to say, "God bless you", for I also am a sentimentalist. But I thought that perhaps that would not be quite English good form, so I trotted off with the telegram to Leonora. She was quite pleased with it. (168-169)

There is a sense that Dowell recounts the suicide because he decides that a typical narrative *requires* it. In other words, to relate the main character's death is to confirm the reader's expectations of a traditional narrative. But he only conforms to traditional narrative *after* he has already broken our expectations, trying to make us believe that his story was over. Since he forgot, it is not necessarily important to Dowell to relate Edward's death, but he knows he must if he is to complete his story.

There is a difference between a story *ending* and a story *stopping*. In this case, we are in the presence of the latter. We would *expect* that this death be rendered solemnly, since Dowell after all “loved Edward because he was just myself.” We would *expect* a respectable and satisfying end to the novel, not a banal statement of Leonora’s being pleased with the telegram. We do not even get a sense of how she felt when she learned of Edward’s suicide. And we do not *expect* Dowell to be so insensitive as to fail to stop this man’s suicide and put so much thought into what *he* should say rather than what Edward *needs* from him.⁵⁹ Dowell is bereft of empathy. The reader does not feel empathy either, since *the impression we experience is not characterized by empathy*. The horizon of expectation that a sentence sets up must have some signifier of what we should feel when we read it. But since we are not even given a route to empathy, we cannot help but surmise (as a creative, gap-filling reader) Leonora’s pain upon learning of her husband’s death, and mourning the fact that we could not know her feelings, or her husband’s, better. For we only know what impressed upon Dowell’s mind. This, as we shall see, is the result of an aestheticism-derived solipsism which forecloses on the ability to have empathy for our fellow human beings.

Alan Friedman has noticed that the elision of death is a prominent trope in English Modernist fiction. In Chapter 2 we will examine this phenomenon in Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse*. In his authoritative book on the changing depictions of death in Modernism, *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise*, Friedman ignores aesthetic reasons for why authors choose to elide the importance of death. He focuses on cultural and historical reasons, which of course are equally valid. He argues that the horrors of World War I resulted in individual death not mattering

⁵⁹ Maybe we do expect it from Dowell, but we do not expect it from an emotionally available human.

anymore if such great numbers of people could die in one war. He agrees with Paul Fussell who, in his *The Great War and Modern Memory*, argues that World War I disrupted the Hegelian idea of history as progress. This idea is accepted across disciplines, even in Richard Taruskin's survey of Modernist music. Friedman applies this theory to *The Good Soldier*. But a key element of his argument lies in seeing *The Good Soldier* as a war novel. Friedman says that the whole novel was written during the war.⁶⁰ Much of it *was* written during the war. However, as we have seen, parts one to three were published in *BLAST* before the start of the war, in June of 1914, eight days before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The story is also set in the pre-war time. This means that throughout the novel, even after the portion in *BLAST* came out, Ford seems to ignore the war.

Even if we consider *The Good Soldier* a pre-War novel, however, it still exemplifies many of the characteristics that Friedman discerns in War novels and post-War novels. First, like most post-War Europeans, Dowell struggles to find "epistemological certitude."⁶¹ Second, Dowell mocks Edward's profession as a "good soldier" by making fun of the words soldiers often invoke: courage, loyalty, honor. For Dowell, these are empty, "big words." For post-War fiction, they were ideals that were never really true in the first place.⁶² "Look where high ideals got us – mass death," was the thinking. But most importantly, the weightiness of death is elided in *The Good Soldier*. Death descriptions are objective, dispassionate, funny, and, to refer to contemporary reviews, "never poignant." But if the War was not the source of death's elision in *The Good Soldier*, and the reader's resulting inability to empathize or identify with the

⁶⁰ Friedman, Alan, *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20.

⁶¹ Friedman, *Fictional Death*, 18.

⁶² Friedman, *Fictional Death*, 20.

characters, there must be another reason for this. We must instead look to the genealogy of the Impressionist theory that inspired Ford's novel in the first place.

Pater and the Good of "Pure Perception"

She felt profoundly that things do not stand much looking into. She made her force and her wisdom of that instinct.⁶³

-Winnie Verloc, *The Secret Agent*,
Joseph Conrad

Literary Impressionism has its roots in Aestheticism. This late-Victorian movement was initiated in part by Walter Pater and led during the 1890s by Oscar Wilde. Both authors emphasized the doctrine of art for art's sake and advocated for ecstatically living (*carpe diem*-style) as if the world and one's life were works of art. Pater, in particular, was an essential influence on Ford, Conrad, and – as we shall see – Woolf. In the much-quoted Conclusion to his study *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), Pater outlines a theory of perception that is solipsistic, and one that produces an impasse in fiction writing for Modernist authors. Two key components that Pater embraces are (1) an unanalytical experience of the world and (2) a belief that is impossible to ever truly connect with people.

In Pater's view, to live one's life as if it were a work of art, one must experience the world through "pure perception" without wondering about what lies beneath the surface. He says of perception:

At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion [sic] begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence... Analysis goes a step further still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind...are in perpetual flight.... Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. (187-188)

⁶³ Conrad, Joseph, *The Secret Agent* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 172-173.

Pater is a materialist in the sense that he believes that objects are real and *out there*. However, according to him, each individual perceives an “impression” of these objects differently.

Anticipating the language of Impressionism, Pater submits that this impression is all we can know. Each of these impressions is created by the mind’s work of reflection, as it filters outside objects. Pater values the “experience” of these impressions, “the things we see and touch,” over “the fruit of experience.” In other words, he values the moment of perception over any sort of deeper concern, judgment, or questioning *of* that moment. For Pater, “success in life” is “to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy.”⁶⁴ Pater is against a deeper questioning of experience because it waters down the impression. He acknowledges that reflection (the filtering of objects into perceivable impressions) is inevitable, but submits that it is the aesthete’s aim to struggle *against* analyzing these impressions. For if one maintains “ecstasy,” “we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch.”⁶⁵

Whereas Iser sees novel-reading as an exercise which stimulates attitudes in the reader, creating the text as one reads and reflects, Pater’s ideas of experiencing life as art seem (though he would hardly think of it in these terms) to lead to complacency and acceptance, not active engagement. He is nearly anti-intelligence, for he absolves the mind of any responsibility to do any work that is deeper than the *a priori* filtering of impressions that the mind already does.

Pater’s push for unanalytical, sensual experience of the world is further complicated if we consider the anti-humanist and anti-empathetic implications of his solipsism. Pater says of the impossibility of connecting with others:

Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever

⁶⁴ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 188-189.

⁶⁵ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 189.

pierced on its way to us, and from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. (187)

According to Pater, everyone's "experience" (which boils down to merely the impressions in one's own mind), is limited by a "thick wall of personality" that prevents us from connecting with others and prevents them from connecting with us. Since the self is the only thing we can truly know exists, there is no possibility of true intersubjectivity with others. Thus, there is no possibility of "feeling through" them. Empathy with others is impossible if not even one "voice" can pierce through to us. It seems that if one lived one's life according to Pater's philosophical premises, one would be almost catatonic, like Dowell. One would also live like Winnie Verloc, a character in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), whose words comprise the epigram to this section and who shows that Conrad was also working through the same problems of solipsism as Ford was. For if one does not meditate on and analyze one's experiences, one is doomed to ignorance.

Dowell embodies what Pater's theory of experience looks like when it fails. For the result of Dowell's solipsism is not "ecstasy" but ignorance. He "know[s] nothing...of the hearts of men." His consequent disconnectedness does not result in him "getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time [of one's life]" or in "a life of constant and eager observation."⁶⁶ His ignorance and blindness concerning what is going on around him lead to his own suffering and to the suffering his acquaintances. Dowell never reflects. Even when Leonora tells him the truth about the affair between Edward and Florence, he does not deduce this information himself. In this moment, his epistemologically safe and uninformed outlook is revealed as illusory. Even his name is ironic, if we read it as "Do-Well," because he *never* does well (he never does *anything*). He never acts. Even in the face of suicide, he has an opportunity to stop Edward from killing himself.

⁶⁶ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 188-189.

But that would require analysis and, more importantly, a touch of empathy. We can see this failure when Dowell is back at Bramshaw Teleragh, with the catatonic Nancy across from him:

Then she will say that she believes in an omnipotent diety or she will utter the one word “shuttlecocks,” perhaps. It is very extraordinary to see the perfect flush of health on her cheeks, to see the lustre [sic] of her coiled blackhair, the poise of the head upon the neck, the grace of the white hands – and to think that it all means nothing – that is is a *picture without a meaning*. Yes, it is queer. (168, italics mine)

Dowell’s elegant description of Nancy is observant, if male-gazey in the manner of Tolstoy, and Impressionistic in the visual sense. His viewing of Nancy here embodies his entire perception of life. All he finds “extraordinary” are moments such as these, or perhaps a good train ride (36). But what he never finds extraordinary, and what he dismisses as impossible, are the little hints of infidelity that Florence shows, such as laying a finger on Edward’s wrist (38-39). When Leonora asks him if he gets what is going on he says ““No! What’s the matter?”” (39). All of these hints have *meaning*. They *mean* that Dowell is being duped. For Dowell to say (in the above passage) that the picture of Nancy he sees has no meaning is to be complicit in the ignorance he has maintained throughout his life. The *meaning* of this image of Nancy is that Dowell, after never acting, is stuck with the fallout of all the problems of the quartet: the catatonic Nancy. And his only conclusion is “it is queer.” This confused response is not a very sophisticated conclusion to the tragedy of the novel. Such negation and ambiguity is the reason Dowell does nothing to prevent Edward’s death. Dowell’s hermeneutic faculties are inhibited. When he merely “sees” Nancy across the table, he does not feel any sort of empathy for her. If we learn anything from Dowell, it is how *not* to see the world. If we wish to have empathetic, meaningful relationships with other humans, we cannot rely on “pure perception” and “experience itself.” If we take solipsism at face value, people die.

Ford's reading of Pater influenced him to model Dowell as a successful solipsist and, therefore, a failed human being. By accepting Pater's epistemology, Ford is also led to create a novel that sacrifices what we most care about (especially in Victorian novels): immersion in a fictional world, a reading trance, and readerly empathy. He makes a solipsist out of the reader. But when so much is apparently lost, *The Good Soldier* produces important gains. One of these gains is a creative and participatory reading experience, which we deduced using Iser's theory of the reading process. The reader must fill in numerous gaps out of a disjointed text and do hard phenomenological work to try and circumvent Dowell's mind and his voice, to get at the "real" characters, whom we can never truly know. The *real* story and the *real* characters are *suggested* in the gaps of the text, but they are realized by each reader in different ways because of the limited access we are afforded to the characters' minds and because of the unreliability of Dowell. In this way, *The Good Soldier* is anti-didactic and engages the reader's creative mind at an unprecedented level. Moreover, by turning the Victorian novel of engrossment and immersion into one of extreme readerly creativity, Ford also achieves some of the weirdest effects and affects for the reader of any novel. Dowell's colloquial tone, his solipsistic dread, and his rambling storytelling all lead the reader to a heightened anxiety about the process of narrative itself. This is a gain precisely because the effect (and affect) is so new. I sense that one is hard pressed to encounter fiction that produces these unique affects (anxiety, disappointment, "ugh"), certainly before *The Good Soldier* (one possibility is *Tristram Shandy*) and even after it (before postmodernists like Calvino). While *The Good Soldier* succeeds precisely because of its loss-gain structure, not all Modernist authors were willing to make Ford's sacrifices. In Chapter 2, we will explore Woolf's critical interpretation of Walter Pater, and her alternative reading of Joseph Conrad. I will suggest that although Woolf also accepted the basic truth of solipsism, she

subscribed to a “depth model” of Impressionism, valuing human connectivity and empathy much more than Ford did. I will examine two novels that were successive attempts at solving the same problem: how to fuse Modernist experimentalism with true readerly empathy.

Chapter 2
Humanizing Perception:
Woolf's Phenomenology of Empathy in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*

The Craftsman and the Humanist

As personalities and novelists, Ford and Woolf could not have been more different. Each has a distinct tone and temperament, particularly evident in his or her critical prose. In essays like "On Impressionism," Ford is characteristically jolly, light, ironic, and almost Pushkin-like in his quixotic self-righteousness about the ease of his writing abilities.⁶⁷ In essays like "Modern Fiction," Woolf is subtle, serious, composed, and rarely funny in the way that Ford is. When she *is* funny, her tone is always tempered by a Victorian restraint that makes itself apparent in pithy remarks about other writers, for example. While Ford jumps off the page and imposes his voice on us in person like Dowell does, Woolf writes to be read.⁶⁸ It is no wonder, then, that the social circles in which they moved were so vastly separated. The two authors met at least once, through Cambridge historian G.W. Prothero. And although none of Woolf's famous essays and reviews devote themselves to Ford or his work, she was fascinated by him and wanted to know "the truth about him."⁶⁹ For his part, Ford denied ever knowing Woolf as of December 1928. In fact, in a laudatory review of *To the Lighthouse*, Ford says that he never even *knew* anyone who knew Woolf.⁷⁰ And in his quest to trace the genealogy of the English novel, he fails to list Woolf as an important Modernist novelist while Dorothy Richardson and Katherine Mansfield are awarded

⁶⁷ Sinyavsky, Andrei (Tertz, Abram), *Strolls with Pushkin*, trans. Catherine Theimer Nepomnyashchy and Slava I. Yastremski (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 52.

⁶⁸ Ford was known as a born storyteller and was famous for rattling off tales amongst company.

⁶⁹ Saunders, Max, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life, Vol. 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 186.

⁷⁰ Ford Madox Ford, "The English Novel," *The Bookman*, December, 1928, 369.

mentions, along with now-forgotten writers like Frank Swinnerton and Clemence Dance.⁷¹ Most striking of all, those novelists whom Woolf singles out as “materialists” (In “Modern Fiction” and “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”) who, in her view, precipitated the death of substantive character in fiction are the very ones whom Ford helped establish as major talents as editor of *The English Review*: H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy.

Ford and Woolf were separated by geography, too. While Woolf was a Londoner through and through, and stayed in England for most of her life, Ford lived and wrote in France in the 1920s, dying in America in 1939 after having lived there since the late 1920s. Woolf’s Bloomsbury Group was thoroughly English, while Ford moved in circles that included the Irishman Joyce and the American Hemingway. He also had an affair with Jean Rhys, the Dominican-Welsh novelist. But in this sea of separation, there is one influential writer who bridges the gap between Ford and Woolf: Joseph Conrad. As we know, Ford and Conrad were close friends and literary collaborators.⁷² Woolf did not work closely with Conrad, but praised him in numerous essays, notably in “Modern Fiction” (1919) and “Joseph Conrad” (1924), both included in the first iteration of the *Common Reader*. Both writers hailed Conrad as one of the foremost catalysts of Modernism. But when we read what each writer said about Conrad, it almost seems that they could not have been talking about the same novelist.

The disagreement between Ford and Woolf surrounding Conrad concerns the moral qualities of his fiction. In Woolf’s 1924 essay, “Joseph Conrad,” she says that to read Conrad is

⁷¹ Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, 122.

⁷² Only until 1909, when Conrad became estranged from Ford because he was angry that Ford was no longer his apprentice, but was growing considerable in his literary powers and success. 1909 was the same year that Ford’s friendship with Henry James withered away. Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, 235-236. Conrad, writing to Edward Garnett, attributed these rifts to the fact that Ford was a “megalomaniac” who behaved like a “spoilt kid.” See Conrad, Joseph, *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, ed. Edward Garnett (Indianapolis: Charter Books, 1928), 239.

to learn that it is “better to be good than bad.” His fiction shows us “something very old and perfectly true.” This is the *effect* of his books. His *intention*, on the other hand, according to Woolf, is “ostensibly...merely to show us the beauty of a night at sea.”⁷³ In Conrad’s *Preface*, he indeed posits the revelation of truth as secondary to the image, something that “we forgot to ask for.”⁷⁴ But as I showed in Chapter 1, Conrad also values the feeling of solidarity with our fellow humans that fiction can potentially conjure. Woolf’s concern with morality and truth goes back to 1905, when, in a review of Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (which, like *To the Lighthouse*, features an unmarried young woman named Lily) she writes that the “moral may be left up to the reader.”⁷⁵ And in a 1917 essay on Tolstoy, she praises him for his ability reveal hidden secrets of human nature in the smallest details, like a horse moving its tail.⁷⁶ As we shall see, Woolf incorporated this phenomenon into her own fiction, as Eric Auerbach famously noted in 1946, citing Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* as another example.⁷⁷ Woolf, then, seems to always be more serious than Ford, concerned with the “big questions” of truth and morality, which leads some to call her a philosopher – a title that is never bestowed on Ford.⁷⁸ She reads the same Conrad as Ford, but where Ford sees Conrad as primarily a master of the surface impression and the transient moment (i.e. akin to himself), she extracts from him a concern with morality and human behavior that aligns her with a *depth* model of Impressionist and Modernist

⁷³ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 311, 318.

⁷⁴ Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, xiv.

⁷⁵ Woolf, Virginia, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 1*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 67-68.

⁷⁶ Woolf, Virginia, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 2*, 77.

⁷⁷ Auerbach, Eric, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 525-553. Woolf was reading Proust when she was writing *The Waves*. See: Woolf, Virginia, *A Writer’s Diary*. Ed. Leonard Woolf (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 138.

⁷⁸ Frank, A.O., *The Philosophy of Virginia Woolf* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2001), 11.

fiction. The different ways in which Ford and Woolf grapple with Pater's heritage is mediated by their different readings of Joseph Conrad.

In the same strain as her concern with morality and behavior is Woolf's preoccupation with literary characters who are well-drawn enough for the reader to truly "know" them.⁷⁹ As we saw in Chapter 1, Ford's characters in *The Good Soldier* are fragmented and tainted by Dowell's voice to the point that the reader must fill in numerous gaps to make a coherent picture of each one. This is one of the reasons we feel like we can never really "know" and identify or empathize with any of Ford's characters. In his own Impressionism, then, Ford sacrifices depth of character for what *he* thinks is an accurate representation of how a mind (Dowell's) recounts events that happened long ago. Woolf does not ultimately make this sacrifice. And neither, she thinks, does Conrad. In a 1917 review of Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Woolf states that Conrad's characters are sometimes "static" but that "they are enveloped in the subtle, fine, perpetually shifting atmosphere of [the narrator] Marlow's mind; they are commented upon by that voice which is so full of compassion..."⁸⁰ Her use of the word "static" is similar to her use of "solid" to describe characters in Victorian authors like Elizabeth Gaskell, whose characters are, in Woolf's view, not "interesting." Because of this, "One will never get to know them; and that is profoundly sad."⁸¹ But the difference between Conrad and Elizabeth Gaskell is that Conrad makes us "know" characters by representing them within the *compassionate* mind of the narrator (Marlow), rather than presenting the characters themselves. This idea will recur again and again in Woolf's fiction, particularly in the seemingly insignificant thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*

⁷⁹ Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 1*, 343.

⁸⁰ Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 2*, 142.

⁸¹ Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 1*, 343. Readers who cry at the death of Little Nell in Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* would disagree.

and the inevitable readerly dives into characters' minds in *The Waves*. And so, when Woolf says that she wished to present "the brain and the view of life" (perspectives) in her fiction, instead of "worlds," she is advocating for an *emotional Impressionism* that will connect the reader with the novel's characters in a deeper way, because the reader has ventured into another's mind.⁸²

Indeed, Paul Sheehan has stated that *To the Lighthouse* is "built on the humanist tenets of empathy and intersubjective yearning."⁸³ By focusing on the *effect* of Conrad's fiction as well as what she perceives are his formal intentions, Woolf is already enacting a sort of Reader Response criticism, veering into issues of the phenomenology of reading and readerly identification with fictional characters. These are issues that are the focus of the present chapter.

Ford, the literary craftsman and technician, was dismissive of any revelations of truth or morality that we might experience while reading Conrad. In a move that echoes what Iser said about didacticism in literature, Ford claims that Conrad was not a "moralist." It was allegedly Conrad's practice to make sure there is no moral attached to the end of his story.⁸⁴ Ford's idea of morality in literature is shallow, though. Instead of thinking of morality in terms of decisions characters make that are right or wrong, he focuses on the author's views. Ford's beliefs on the matter are contradictory. On the one hand, he says he does not want a trace of the author's personality in the work. But on the other hand, he says in 1914 that any work which leads to a "more perfect expression of personality is a form of the utmost value."⁸⁵ One way to reconcile this contradiction is to say that Ford believes an author's work should *sound* like him or her, but

⁸² Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 1*, 341.

⁸³ Paul Sheehan, "Time as Protagonist in *To the Lighthouse*," in *Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse*, ed. Allison Pease (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 48.

⁸⁴ Ford, *Joseph Conrad*, 177-178.

⁸⁵ Cited in Damon Marcel DeCoste, "'A Frank Expression of Personality'? Sentimentality, Silence, and Early Modernist Aesthetics in *The Good Soldier*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 101.

should not preach what the author *believes in*. A Structuralist approach to that imperative would reveal a contradiction in Ford, since the *way* an author speaks (words, symbols, allusions) will inevitably signify, at least in part, what he or she believes, or has been socialized to believe. Ford's ideas of morality are then starkly different from Woolf's. Ford is content that Conrad doesn't tell us what to think at the end of his stories.⁸⁶ But Woolf sees in Conrad deep characters from whom we as readers can actually learn, even if Conrad-the-author does not specifically tell us to learn from them or identify with them. We can cite the ethical dilemma Marlow finds himself in at the end of *Heart of Darkness*: whether or not to tell Kurtz's fiancée what her intended husband's last words were.

Woolf sees Conrad's exploration of morality as not wholly dissimilar to Tolstoy's or Dostoevsky's, whom she read and wrote on during the years 1916-1918 and from whom she thought British fiction could learn a lot.⁸⁷ In contrast, Ford condemned Dostoevsky for his "enormous detective stories" which "destroy the art" of the novel, but admired Turgenev for his more French than Russian delicacy in the manner of Flaubert.⁸⁸ To Ford, the Russians whom Woolf loves are nothing more than "Neo-primitives."⁸⁹ Although Ford and Woolf derive their ideas about fiction from different literary genealogies, Conrad is the axis around which Woolf and Ford devise their aesthetic opinions. I will argue that Woolf took a deeper look into Conrad's theories, opting to experiment with feeling and solidarity in her fiction, as well as with formal innovation. Whereas Ford took Pater's proto-Impressionism and created a work that continually distances the reader from the characters, Woolf finds a way to synthesize the sensuality of

⁸⁶ Something that would be dangerous for Iser because of its didacticism.

⁸⁷ See the essays "Modern Fiction," "The Russian Point of View," "Tolstoy's 'The Cossacks,'" and "More Dostoevsky."

⁸⁸ Ford, Ford Madox, *Henry James: A Critical Study* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1916), 11.

⁸⁹ Ford, *Henry James*, 11.

Impressionism with the darkness she found in Russian fiction, resulting in two novels that attempt to engage the reader in an intersubjective relationship with their characters. These attempts are not equally successful. In what follows, I will suggest that, while parts of *To the Lighthouse* apparently succeed in evoking empathy and reader-character identification, the experiment ultimately fails, spurring Woolf to write *The Waves*, which consistently brings us closer to characters and fulfils Conrad's goal of "solidarity." *The Waves* resolves the seeming impossibility that Woolf had experienced of writing an experimental Modernist novel while also allowing the reader to "know" its characters.

"Modern Fiction": Pater Problems and the Possibility of Empathy

Woolf never labelled herself an Impressionist in the way that Ford and Conrad did. Critics, though, often like to call her a "Postimpressionist." According to common interpretation, Postimpressionist painters rejected the naturalism of Impressionism in favor of more symbolic content and tighter formal structure.⁹⁰ Whereas the Impressionist painters were interested in the play of light and shadow in different colors, the Postimpressionists were influenced by Expressionism, aiming to create works that were revelations of personal meaning.⁹¹ Critics cite the 1910 Postimpressionist exhibition in London as influential on Woolf. This exhibit featured works by painters such as Manet (a precursor to Postimpressionism), Cezanne, and Van Gogh, and was organized by Roger Fry, a prominent member of the Bloomsbury Group, a close friend

⁹⁰ "Impressionism and Postimpressionism: Introduction." Grove Art Online, accessed February 22, 2020, <https://www.oxfordartonline.com/page/impressionism-and-post-impressionism/impressionism-and-postimpressionism>. Parkes, Adam, *A Sense of Shock: The Impact of Impressionism on Modern British and Irish Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 148.

⁹¹ Goldman, Jane, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 124.

to Clive and Vanessa Bell (Woolf's sister), the man who coined the term "Postimpressionism," and one of the prime shapers of Woolf's aesthetic views.⁹² Woolf would later write Fry's biography.⁹³ There is no doubt that the profound visual qualities of her fiction were influenced by the Postimpressionists, as Suzanne Bellamy and Jane Goldman have shown.⁹⁴ However, in thinking about Woolf's relationship to Pater, Conrad, and Ford, we can also call her an Impressionist, since she deals with similar problems of phenomenology and the mind that concerned authors who were more explicitly Impressionist.

In her essays and her fiction, Woolf deals with many of the same problems that Ford dealt with. Namely, she engages directly with Pater's theories of life and the mind, navigating how exactly to implement these ideas into fiction. She was not uncritical of Pater, however. Published in 1927, *To the Lighthouse* was Woolf's most significant attempt, prior to *The Waves* (1931), to synthesize her aesthetic theories with fictional prose to create a new type of novel. Much of the book humanizes Pater's often anti-humanist and anti-empathetic focus on unquestioning experience. However, as we shall see, the novel's middle section produces feelings of "ugh" similar to *The Good Soldier* because it severs the reader's intimacy with characters' minds. After this severance, the novel and the reader never recover. *To the Lighthouse* does not fully solve the problem of both creating a novel that deals with solipsism, and that brings reader and character into an unbroken intersubjective relationship. Ultimately, *The Waves* does solve this problem by radically changing the phenomenology of reading from what it was up to that point. In beginning with a discussion of *To the Lighthouse*, we shall see

⁹² Suzanne Bellamy, "The Visual Arts in *To the Lighthouse*," in *Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse*, 137-145, 139. Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf*, 116.

⁹³ Woolf, Virginia, *Roger Fry: A Biography*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1940).

⁹⁴ Jane Goldman, "*To the Lighthouse*'s Use of Language and Form," in *Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse*, 30-46.

that it is a time-bending masterpiece whose most stunning achievement *is* that middle section: “Time Passes.” And yet, the immediate plot of the novel is like a small bit of thread tied around a slender spool. Its whole action can be said to boil down into Arnold Bennett’s summary of the book: “A group of people plan to sail in a small boat to a lighthouse. At the end some of them reach the lighthouse in a small boat.”⁹⁵

In this three-section novel, Woolf runs into many of the same problems as Ford: the secondary (un)importance of plot, the elision of death, and the distance that results between reader and story/characters, invoking the problems of readerly identification and empathy. We explored all of these issues in our discussion of *The Good Soldier* and concluded that the elision of characters’ deaths made the reader unable to feel truly sad at those deaths. We also found that the novel’s humor prevents true readerly empathy and results in weird affects that are unique to Ford’s style. And lastly, we saw that Ford’s novel creates an unusually vast distance between the reader and the characters because of the foregrounding of Dowell’s voice. And all of this under the umbrella of its place as a work of Literary Impressionism: we argued that Ford embraces Pater’s aesthetic theory as anti-humanist and anti-empathic, which results in the character of Dowell, a eunuch-aesthete who ultimately lives a life of ignorance at the cost of meaningful human relationships. Woolf’s fiction deals with all of the foregoing problems. But the avenue she takes is much different from Ford in significant ways, as we shall see. At the same time as these problems arise out of her *own* aesthetic theory, laid out in her essay “Modern Fiction,” her creative *practice* serves to remedy these problems. It is necessary, then, to first look at Woolf’s

⁹⁵ Kate Flint. “An Introduction to *To the Lighthouse*,” British Library, accessed February 26, 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-to-the-lighthouse>. Woolf detested Bennett’s novels.

aesthetic theory within the context of the novels that preceded her own fiction: the novels of the Victorians and Edwardians. There is no bigger problem for Woolf than, to use Henry James' phrase, the "loose baggy monsters" written during these periods.

Woolf's most assertive denunciation of the Edwardian "materialist" authors appears in her famous essay, "Modern Fiction," written in 1919.⁹⁶ In it, she defines a problem of English fiction that she says goes back to the Victorians, offers a panacea (Russian psychological realism), and ends with a call for change. In short, she points to a problem which she herself tries to solve in her fiction. The ideas that preoccupy her in this essay, though, had always been with her and continued to last well into the 1920s. Her views on (from her perspective) Victorian superficiality and the unknowable characters of Victorian novels can be found in "Mrs. Gaskell" (1910), "Tolstoy's 'The Cossacks'" (1917), "More Dostoevsky" (1917), "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (1923), and "The Russian Point of View" (1925). Before writing "Modern Fiction," Woolf had read the parts of Joyce's *Ulysses* that had appeared in *The Egoist* in 1919, an occasion which evidently prompted her to take a wide-angle lens to the state of fiction, distinguishing between the "spiritual" Joyce and the "materialist" Edwardians.⁹⁷ After denying the idea that there is a march of progress from Fielding to Austen and onward ("We do not come to write

⁹⁶ Woolf is much fonder of the Victorians than the Edwardians. King Edward VII ruled England from 1901-1910. King George V, who ruled from 1910-1936, was in power when Woolf was writing *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, and when Ford was writing *The Good Soldier*.

⁹⁷ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 214. However, Woolf despised Joyce's work for its vulgarity. She says in a letter to patron of the arts Lady Ottoline Morrell in 1922 that Joyce "has only got the dregs of a mind compared even with George Meredith. I mean if you could weigh the meaning on Joyces [sic] page it would be about 10 times as light as on Henry James." And elsewhere: "Joyce to me seems strewn with disaster. I can't even see...his triumphs. A gallant approach, that is all that is obvious to me: then the usual smash and splinters." Woolf, Virginia, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol. 2*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 548, 598.

better.”⁹⁸), she says that novelists like H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and James Galsworthy write of “unimportant things.”⁹⁹ When she calls them “materialists,” she means that these authors are hyper-attentive to depicting/drawing people, setting, and plot in painstaking detail, at the expense of “true” interiority. Even though they are the most popular with the reading public, they miss “the thing we seek. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off...”¹⁰⁰ Woolf is serious and earnest. Echoing her criticism of Elizabeth Gaskell, Woolf says that these writers have been subservient to an invisible “tyrant” who mandates a “plot” and that the novel be “done to a turn.”¹⁰¹ If their characters showed up at our front doorstep, they would be dressed “down to the last button,” perfectly illustrated, every detail described by the author, no room for gaps.¹⁰² And, because of this absence of gaps, there is consequently, as we learned from Iser, little room for a creative reading experience.

Woolf then moves to her theory of life and of the mind. She asks the reader to consider: “Is life like this? Must novels be like this?”¹⁰³ By “this,” she means the superficial and material detail of plot-driven Edwardian novels. She then attempts to show how life *really* strikes us. In a 1927 diary entry (the year of *To the Lighthouse*) she comments that, “The method of writing smooth narration can’t be right; things don’t happen in one’s mind like that.”¹⁰⁴ The phrase “smooth narration” recalls Ford’s observation that the English novel has tended to “go straight forward.” Both authors were certain that the great Victorian novelists did not represent the workings of the mind sufficiently, but Ford and Woolf each took different paths in fixing the

⁹⁸ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 207.

⁹⁹ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 211.

¹⁰⁰ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 211.

¹⁰¹ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 211-212.

¹⁰² Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 212.

¹⁰³ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 212.

¹⁰⁴ Woolf, *A Writer’s Diary*, 104.

problem. The novel, to Woolf, must render experience the way the mind perceives experience.

Here is what that experience feels like, according to Woolf:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent or engraved with the sharpness of steel. For all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms... 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.¹⁰⁵

Now, a lot of this is Pater-derived, almost Pater-plagiarized from his conclusion to *The Renaissance*.¹⁰⁶ Ford himself, as we saw in Chapter 1, was working through the same passages of Pater. But Woolf's revision of Pater appears in her emphasis on solipsism coupled with a deep humanism, as well as an explicit prescription for what a Pater-derived fiction would look like.

First, what should be stressed here is Woolf's insistence on the ordinariness of the person and the mind. In spirit with the title of the collection in which this essay appears, *The Common Reader*, this is not how some *special* mind works. *Everyone's* mind works this way. The subject of scrutiny is not a hero or intellectual, but a common mind. Second, there is no order, natural or pre-ordained, to the "impressions" we experience. The only ordering is the work our mind does to recognize the very existence of these impressions: "these things exist." That's it. We must remember that Woolf, in the spirit of Hume even more than Pater, does not believe these

¹⁰⁵ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 212.

¹⁰⁶ Pater says in his conclusion: "*Let us begin with that which is without – our physical life... What is the whole physical life in [a particularly] moment but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names? ... Our physical life is in perpetual motion from them... Far out on every side of us those elements are broadcast, driven in many currents... Or if we begin with the inward world of thought and feeling, the whirlpool is still more rapid... At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects... But when reflexion [sic] begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence.*" Pater, *The Renaissance*, 186-187. My italics signal the affinities between Pater's description and Woolf's.

impressions derive from any foundational material reality.¹⁰⁷ For part of being a solipsist is acknowledging that our own mind is the only thing we can know truly exists. To put it in Impressionistic terms, the thing itself is not guaranteed to exist, but the impressions of the things which our minds experience *do* exist. This leads to her third point: because these impressions (of people, things, spaces) exist, life boils down to a “semi-transparent envelope” that surrounds us from birth until the day we die. This is Woolf’s term for solipsism. If we cannot escape across this barricade between us and the “real” then we can never truly *know* anyone or anything. We are doomed to know ourselves alone. A crucial difference between Pater’s and Woolf’s metaphors for solipsism, though, is that Woolf’s “semi-transparent envelope” is more hopeful than Pater’s “thick wall of personality.”¹⁰⁸ In Woolf’s paradigm, we can at least somewhat see an impression of what is outside of that envelope; there is some hope for connectedness, while Pater’s theory is hopeless.¹⁰⁹ She explores this hope in *To the Lighthouse*, while connectedness is realized in *The Waves*.

The problem of knowing others and of getting into people’s minds, feeling what they feel, is central to understanding *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*. They are both experiments in solipsism and tackle the problem of truly connecting with others, even if *The Waves* succeeds while *To the Lighthouse* fails.¹¹⁰ Thus, they are also successive experiments in empathy, for the

¹⁰⁷ For David Hume’s importance as an influential philosopher in the genealogy of Impressionism, see Matz, *Literary Impressionism*, 12-52. In Hume’s essay “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding” he relies on empiricist theory to make the solipsistic claim that nothing exists unto itself, save for the impressions of things that we experience. In other words, he essentially posits that all knowledge (derived from experience) is *a posteriori*.

¹⁰⁸ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 187.

¹⁰⁹ I follow James Harker in his critique of Auerbach’s assertion that external reality is arbitrary to Woolf. James Harker, “Misperceiving Virginia Woolf,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 34, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 1-21.

¹¹⁰ Or, in Vernon Lee’s translation of *Einfühlung*, “feeling into.” Vernon Lee, a disciple of Pater, introduced empathy to a broader, English-speaking audience, and began the work of fusing

question arises: how can we empathize with another person if that person is not even guaranteed to be real?

One of Woolf's solutions for the novel to tackle the problem of solipsism is the mimetic (phenomenological) representation of the workings of the mind. By the time she writes *The Waves*, this new focus on cognitive representation challenges the traditional experience of reading a novel and gives unprecedented access to the minds of characters, resulting in radical effects and affects for the reader. But before this, Woolf struggles with how to achieve her goal through formal and stylistic experimentation. For the central problem remains: how does one create a novel whose main quality is to be an account of human interaction, while the "life" it attempts to represent makes it impossible to truly know another person? How does a novel represent disconnection, and what are the readerly implications of that? There are perhaps at least two outcomes to an experiment such as Woolf conducts. On the one hand, if Woolf were to succeed, that is, accurately represent the disconnectedness of life, her fiction will seem to be hyper-realistic because the reader's mind (conscious or unconscious) *should* recognize the familiarity of experience presented in her novel. But on the other hand, the reader (especially an Edwardian reader) will be fundamentally encumbered because that reader will expect traditional forms of representation in novels. For this reader, it might not be totally *obvious* to him or her that life is perceived in the way Woolf describes. Even if her discovery (inherited from Pater) is, to her, a revelation of truth, it might seem weird and off-putting to the reader. We will explore these queries soon in our exploration of Mrs. Ramsay's mind in *To the Lighthouse*. Here is what a fiction based on Woolf's theory of the mind would look like:

phenomenology with a study of the emotions. Lee, Vernon, *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 66.

[I]f a writer were a free man and not a slave...if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it...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?¹¹¹

“No plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style” equates to a loss of what we might suppose to be the essence of the novel: narrative and all the conflicts that come with it. But Woolf does not advocate for doing away completely with plot, only plot “in the accepted style.” She describes a fiction that renders the *Gestalt* of life, instead of being a presentation of life’s constituent parts. This description also checks the boxes of what we identified as the main characteristics of Ford’s Impressionism, with one exception. We said that (1) Ford wants fiction to be a hyper-realistic image of what we perceive to be reality (how it looks and how one perceives time as not moving straight forward), (2) present a visceral atmosphere, and (3) be engrossing (see Chapter 1, page 9). Woolf affirms the first two, but makes no mention of the reader, despite the title of the essay collection. The only statement that comes close to a theory of the reader appears at the end of her essay.

As I have mentioned above, Woolf had a love affair with Russian fiction through Constance Garnett’s translations. Woolf is reliant on the idea that fictions of certain countries have qualities that the *people* of the countries also have. This fact is not very hidden either, since Woolf here speaks of Russian fiction as representative of its people, or of the “Russian mind,” as Professor Katherine Lahti would say. And so, when she compares Russian fiction to English fiction, Woolf makes one of her most scathing criticisms of British fiction yet: that it is

¹¹¹ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 213.

symptomatic of the English tendency to “enjoy and fight rather than to suffer and understand.”¹¹² This is crucial. For Woolf, English literature since *The Canterbury Tales* has been adept at satirizing and making fun of suffering. But Woolf’s advocacy of *understanding* rather than *criticizing* also has implications for empathy. In the fashion of the motto “Only Connect” from her fellow Bloomsburian E.M. Forster, and of Conrad’s demand for “fellowship with all creation,” Woolf is interested not only in an Impressionist fiction that renders vividly “an incessant shower of innumerable atoms” but in one that helps us to understand and “feel through” other people rather than immediately dismiss them and pass judgement. The main conflict in Woolf’s aesthetic theory (as in Conrad’s) is between solipsism and the importance of “connecting.” Woolf attempts to reclaim the intimacy of reading with a new phenomenological account of the mind. In the course of her experiments in this strain of intersubjectivity, as the minds of characters are made more available to us, readerly empathy for characters ebbs and flows.

To the Lighthouse: Reading Mrs. Ramsay’s Mind in “The Window”

Woolf’s modestly proportioned novel of 1927 compresses and expands the conventional time schema of the mammoth works of the Victorians and Edwardians.¹¹³ *To the Lighthouse* differs in many significant ways from *The Good Soldier*, but I would like to single out two differences in particular. First, unlike *The Good Soldier*, *To the Lighthouse* does not feature a self-obsessed narrator who is prone to manic digressions, distracting from the story at hand. On the contrary, the story has something like a third-person omniscient narrator who purports to

¹¹² Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 218. See her essay “The Russian Point of View,” for more on Russian fiction’s probing of the psychology.

¹¹³ All in-text citations refer to Woolf, Virginia, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1981).

present transparently characters' minds with free indirect discourse. The effect: a shape-shifting narrator who is at once all and none of the characters whom she embodies and whose thoughts she reveals. If there is anyone who truly "connects" in the book, I venture to say it is the narrator, for the result of her metamorphoses is utter nonidentity. The second main difference between the novels is that Woolf's is largely chronological. Although, as we shall see, the novel has both a plot and a meta-plot (in the background, contained in bracketed sentences), there is no skipping backward in time to reiterate something after the fact.

Free indirect discourse is ubiquitous in the book, but so subtle and attuned to the characters' minds that the reader might sometimes feel that it is the characters themselves who are narrating. And even though the story is chronological, this does not mean that ample time is given to those important plot points which deserve it (death, marriage, war). Although Woolf does not experiment with the *order* of events, she *does* present traditionally important events in a way that elides their significance, while elevating the everyday monotony of life and observation to almost metaphysical status. She achieves this by allotting unimportant events (like fitting a sock or painting a picture) a huge amount of novel-time, while stealing time away from weighty plot points like the deaths of characters and World War I.¹¹⁴ This compression and expansion of time affects the reader's relationship with characters, as well as his or her capacity to identify or empathize with them.

¹¹⁴ When I use the term "novel-time" I am referring to how much time (how many words, to be blunt) is given to any action, event, or series of events in the book. The term refers to how much time it takes the reader to experience an occurrence in the narrative. For example, even if Mrs. Ramsay's fitting of her son's sock takes just a few minutes, several pages are devoted to the episode. At the same time, 10 years is contained in only 18 pages. Any discrepancy in novel-time must be considered relative to sections in this one novel; we will not (and perhaps cannot) compare novel-times across novels.

Woolf's transfiguration of time occurs most grandly in the structure of the novel. The novel is divided into three sections, the first and third of which each elapse within one day, while the middle section spans a period of 10 years, from a few years before World War I to the War's end. The outer sections are long – the first, “The Window,” is 120 pages in Mariner Books' 1981 edition, while the third, “The Lighthouse,” is 64 pages. The middle section, “Time Passes” is a mere 18 pages. We are not given a specific year for when “The Window” begins, but we do know that it is a September day, certainly “several years before World War I.”¹¹⁵ The Ramsays, an upper-class English family, reside at a summer home on the Isle of Skye, where they host a number of friends.¹¹⁶ The guest list includes Lily Briscoe, a painter who is single; Charles Tansley, an unpleasant and insecure misogynistic atheist who would always rather be reading; and Augustus Carmichael, a dignified opium-eating poet who cannot find an audience. “The Window” constantly asks the question that James, one of the Ramsays' sons, asks: will he and his father take the boat and travel to the lighthouse on the horizon, where the lighthouse keeper and his little boy with tuberculosis live (3-5)?

After the uncertainty as to whether they will travel to the lighthouse in “The Window” (they don't embark in that section), the ten years of “Time Passes” encompasses several important events for the family, all while leaving the question of travel to the lighthouse unanswered. These events include World War I as well as some that are merely mentioned in a

¹¹⁵ Allison Pease, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to To the Lighthouse*, 1.

¹¹⁶ The family is based on Woolf's own. In her collected memoirs *Moments of Being*, she relates in “A Sketch of the Past” how writing *To the Lighthouse* was akin to an act of narrative therapy for childhood trauma. Writing it allegedly ameliorated Woolf's lifelong obsession with her mother, Julia Stephen, who died when Woolf was 13. After she wrote the novel, Woolf could “no longer hear her voice, I do not see her.” Woolf, Virginia, *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 81. Woolf was reading Freud for the first time while she was writing “A Sketch of the Past.” For more on trauma-theory approaches to Woolf, see Parkes, Adam, *A Sense of Shock*.

single bracketed sentence each. These are: the death of Mrs. Ramsay (128), the marriage of daughter Prue Ramsay (131), Prue's death (132), the deaths of thousands of soldiers (133), Andrew Ramsay's death in the War (133), and the publishing (at last!) of a volume of Carmichael's poetry (134). Here is one example of how shocking these brackets (which form an umbrella plot of their own) are in context. During the ten years that elapse in "Time Passes," the Ramsays have abandoned the house:

... Then again silence fell; and then, night after night, and sometimes in plain mid-day when the roses were bright and light turned on the wall its shape clearly there seemed to drop into this silence, this indifference, this integrity, the thud of something falling.

[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.]

At that season those who had gone down to pace the beach... (133)

We will subject one of these bracketed interruptions to great scrutiny soon. For now, note the short intervals of space between each one of these significant events I have just listed. Tragic or significant events unfold rapidly. And each takes up little novel-time, since each is only one sentence. In Section 3, "The Lighthouse," we are back to a single day, during which Mr. Ramsay, his son James, and his daughter Cam finally travel to the lighthouse, while Lily finishes a painting she was working on in "The Window." The main plot is strictly controlled and centered on an intimate group of people. The secondary plot in brackets leaves most of the circumstances around each event to be imagined by the reader, as the setting changes drastically from the Isle of Skye all the way to France. The book also takes as one of its subjects the intimacy of family and friends, including the struggle of truly *knowing* another person (173, et passim). But like Ford, Woolf is less concerned with *what* happens in her story, than with *how* it is presented, as well as with how the reader's expectations and feelings are manipulated by the text.

We can, then, start here: with how Woolf's text manipulates readerly empathy through characterization. Most prominently, she engages the reader in an intersubjective relationship with Mrs. Ramsay through free indirect discourse. To take Blakey Vermeule's wonderfully succinct definition, free indirect discourse is "a technique for presenting a character's inner thoughts from a third-person point of view."¹¹⁷ This free indirect discourse inevitably leads the reader to read the mind of Mrs. Ramsay, a characteristic that Lisa Zunshine and Blakey Vermeule have identified as a tool authors use to make the reader care about literary characters.¹¹⁸ It "allows a writer to express sympathy and distance from her character at the same time."¹¹⁹ As William Galperin notes about Jane Austen's use of free indirect discourse, the technique can sometimes be sinister, *coercing* readers to empathize when they should not, something Iser would identify as a potentially fascist tendency.¹²⁰ For we must remember that, as Suzanne Keen finds, empathy is not necessarily a consistent social good, and can sometimes lead us to feel for a character whose actions are unethical (I am thinking of Dostoevsky's criminals and perhaps the tormenters in de Sade).¹²¹ But in the case of Mrs. Ramsay, she does nothing particularly evil. On the contrary, her relationship with her husband is strained, she often feels "outside of the eddy" of personal connection (83), and she finds herself asking, "But what have I done with my life?"

¹¹⁷ Vermeule, Blakey, *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 75. Anna Jones Abramson has argued that Woolf's usage of free indirect discourse in *Mrs. Dalloway* allows the narrator (not the reader) to "absorb and be absorbed" by the novel's characters. She does, however, point the way forward to a "next step" that will involve "a clearer articulation of the readerly consequences of the turn from shock to absorption." Anna Jones Abramson, "Beyond Modernist Shock: Virginia Woolf's Absorbing Atmosphere," *Journal of Modern Literature* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2015): 39-56.

¹¹⁸ Vermeule, *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*, 71. Zunshine, Liza, *Why We Read Fiction: Mind Reading and the Novel* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), 277.

¹¹⁹ Vermeule, *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*, 76.

¹²⁰ Galperin, William H., *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 10. Vermeule, *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?*, 72.

¹²¹ Keen, *Empathy*, 170. "Authors' empathy can be devoted to socially undesirable ends."

(82). In “The Window,” the reader comes to truly *know* Mrs. Ramsay because we know her most intimate thoughts. Most importantly, the empathy set up between the reader and Mrs. Ramsay in “The Window” prepares for that empathy to be manipulated in “Time Passes.”

One of Mrs. Ramsay’s greatest struggles is her desire to connect with her husband. At the end of “The Window,” after an extended dinner scene between the guests and family members living in the house, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay sit alone in the drawing room. Mr. Ramsay reads one of Walter Scott’s “Waverley” novels while Mrs. Ramsay knits. Nothing happens externally in this scene, but the reader is offered extended portraits, through free indirect discourse, of the characters’ lines of thought. We are especially granted unprecedented access to Mrs. Ramsay’s second-by-second thoughts. At one point, she debates whether or not she should tell her husband she loves him:

And what then? For she felt that he was still looking at her, but that his look had changed...A heartless woman he called her; she never told him that she loved him. But it was not so – it was not so. It was only that she never could say what she felt. Was there no crumb on his coat? Nothing she could do for him?...She knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever. And she felt herself very beautiful. Will you not tell me just for once that you love me? He was thinking that...But she could not do it; she could not say it. Then, knowing that he was watching her, instead of saying anything she turned, holding her stocking, and looked at him. And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him (123-24).

The action of this scene is internal. The conflict is between two silent minds. Character is not revealed or deepened through dialogue. It is deepened by a narrative voice which dips in and out of each character’s mind. The reader’s conception of Mrs. Ramsay is also deepened by what Zunshine and Vermeule call “mind-reading.” But we have to be specific about how exactly this passage sets up an intersubjective and empathetic connection between Mrs. Ramsay and the reader.

Part of the reason we connect with Mrs. Ramsay in this passage is because we have felt what she feels. I do not think I am overgeneralizing and universalizing when I say this. And if I am, then let me admit that *I*, at least, have felt what she feels. And what exactly is she feeling? There is an elephant in the room which Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay occupy. To Mrs. Ramsay, this elephant is a matter of feeling and a matter of language. It is a matter of feeling because Mrs. Ramsay is struggling desperately to make a connection with her husband, to reach him. He sits silent behind his Scott book, identifying himself with its protagonist, “thinking himself the person in the book” (118). He is totally engrossed in this Victorian novel. This engrossment is always at risk of slipping, for he “was controlling his emotion” (118), making sure that Mrs. Ramsay does not see how much he is enjoying imagining himself as the book’s protagonist. Mrs. Ramsay, on the other hand, is distracted. She opens a book of poetry, but zigzags “from one line to another as from one branch to another” (119). She has something to say, but “they had nothing to say.” In a Tolstoyan exchange of glances, their eyes “seem to say” something to each other (121). She feels trapped, since she knows that he will judge her if she says what she feels. After all, the narrator in free indirect discourse tells us that Mr. Ramsay thinks his wife a “heartless woman” (123). Mr. Ramsay does not seem to be receptive to the thoughts of a woman, even if that woman is his wife. The overall feeling is that the atmosphere is at risk of shattering if anyone utters a word of significance. In the words of a Tennyson phrase (from “The Charge of the Light Brigade”) that appears in places throughout “The Window,” the scene cannot afford anyone “blundering.” Mrs. Ramsay is in a place of vulnerability. And this vulnerability leads the reader both to pity her (to feel *sympathy* for her) and to relate to her (to feel *empathy* for her). This is a situation that cannot be resolved and dissipated with truth, but with banality.

Banality perpetuates stasis and makes confrontation impossible. It also precludes anyone from truly *knowing* someone. For banality, in the form of language, will always take the form of convention, the purest form of saying something that people have said millions of times. And so, when Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay smile at each other, they not only smile because they know they love each other, as the narrator tells us. They smile because they know that the situation dictates stasis and banality. The smile, then, is also mournful. Husband and wife mourn the fact that the best they can do is recognize each other's love without words. And that is devastating, because to make something seem true, a word must signify a feeling or idea. Without words, feelings continue to be amorphous, abstract untruths.

Mrs. Ramsay's words end "The Window." She bows to banality and makes a tentative answer to the question that has consumed the first part of the novel: will they go to the lighthouse? She says:

"Yes, you were right. It's going to be wet tomorrow. You won't be able to go."
And she looked at him smiling. For she had triumphed again. She had not said it:
yet he knew (124).

But has she really triumphed? Or has she simply submitted to silent male authority? A reading of her smile as triumph could possibly argue that by escaping the bonds of language and expressing a thought without words, she has asserted a feminine language of feeling, one without words. She has created a language that uses the female body as a form of gestural communication, turning the only thing women have been good for (their bodies, in men's eyes) against men. Her gesture elevates the body to a more dynamic status – no longer an object, but one which has agency and will. This argument would entail strict adherence to Woolf's gender essentialism,

which posits women as feelers and men as reasoners.¹²² I suggest, though, that her triumph is not so much communicating to her husband that she loves him, but communicating to him the inevitable failure of getting any *deeper* with him. He knows it, and so does she. That is why she submits to banality. And through it all, the reader must reflect on his or her life: not every moment is a time for working out underlying disagreements and dissonances. Even if we did want every moment with someone to be one of interpersonal analysis, the experiment, as Mrs. Ramsay has shown, will fail and will result in recourse to non-feeling and superficiality.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay have participated in “mind reading” themselves. In the words of Zunshine, they have “ascribe[d] to a person a certain mental state on the basis of [his]/her observable action.”¹²³ Both of their smiles are evidence of this. The reader’s experience of this intricate social and mental dance is brought about through free indirect discourse, and lends credence to Frances Ferguson’s sweeping assertion that “free indirect style is the novel’s one and only formal contribution to literature.”¹²⁴ If not the novel’s *only* contribution to literature, it is certainly an important one.¹²⁵ It is easy to take for granted the phenomenological depth that this technique affords the novel reader. And indeed, in “Time Passes,” the second section of the novel, Woolf makes us realize how important free indirect discourse is for building empathy with characters by snatching empathy away from us. “Time Passes” throws away the

¹²² This binary runs throughout “The Window,” particularly during the scenes when men talk politics and wars.

¹²³ Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction*, 6.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction*, 76.

¹²⁵ Free indirect discourse goes back to Chaucer, after all. See Zunshine’s analysis of the narrator in the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales*, who, in free indirect discourse, says of the monk: “What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood, upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure...?” (GP 184-85). The assertion that this is free indirect discourse, though, comes into question when we acknowledge the fact that the narrator is *also* a character, who is agreeing with the Monk’s displeasure with reading so much. The utterance could merely be Chaucer-the-character vouching for the Monk.

psychological depth we have come to be familiar with in “The Window.” “The Window” shows us the possibilities of readerly empathy. But in “Time Passes,” it is evident that Woolf sees a conflict between the passage of time and her ability to sustain readerly empathy. In “Time Passes,” empathy for Mrs. Ramsay and other important characters is violently eschewed. As we shall see, the problems of intersubjectivity, phenomenological depth between reader and character, and readerly empathy were not completely solved in *To the Lighthouse*. For although we identified the narrator of *To the Lighthouse* as amorphous and freely able to jump from mind to mind, this fundamentally third-person narrator must make concessions to the passage of time and the fact of human distance. It was only in *The Waves* that Woolf solved the Modernist novel’s problem of readerly empathy by using exclusively very peculiar first-person voices. In Woolf’s goal to present life as it “strikes us,” she had to ransom the minds of characters with the death of the narrator.

“Time Passes”: Where did Mrs. Ramsay Go?

In “The Window,” the mind of Mrs. Ramsay is open to the reader, resulting in a reading experience that is phenomenological in the sense that the reader is hyper-aware of the presence of another subject, and empathetic/emotional in the sense that this phenomenological presence leads the reader to identify with Mrs. Ramsay. Both reading experiences are made possible by free indirect discourse. But in “Time Passes,” the consciousnesses of Mrs. Ramsay and the rest of the main characters are cut off from us. This fracture in psychical intimacy between reader and character happens because of the divergence of plot in “Time Passes.” As the Ramsay family vacates their home in the Isle of Skye, a Mrs. McNab takes care of the abandoned home. It is her caretaking which comprises the action (though there is no action in “Time Passes” per se) of the

second section of *To the Lighthouse*. In other words, her wanderings around the house take up the most novel-time, the most space. Suspended above (or beneath) this plot, though, is a series of events which are connected by their placement in crotchets (or brackets). These events happen far away from the Isle of Skye house. Each one would be important enough to warrant a significant amount of novel-time and narrative development in a traditional novel. Many of these bracketed statements, for example, report the deaths of important characters. But their importance is elided and stated in a matter-of-fact, unemotional manner (like newspaper headlines). Ten years pass in this section, and this rapid passage of time in such a short number of pages destroys the full and deep sense of character that the reader had come to know in “The Window.” The dual perspectives in “Time Passes” (one for the abandoned house, the other, bird’s eye view, focused on tragic or important plot developments) make intersubjectivity and readerly empathy impossible, revealing the falsity of the success (or what felt like success) that Woolf had achieved in “The Window.”

The first significant catalyst of the fracture in intersubjectivity between reader and character occurs when Mrs. Ramsay’s body is reduced from a thinking, feeling body with communicative agency (as we saw in “The Window”) to an object. Here is the moment when Mrs. Ramsay’s death is revealed in “Time Passes”:

...Almost it would appear that it is useless in such confusion to ask the night those questions as to what, and why, and wherefore, which tempt the sleeper from his bed to seek an answer.

[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.]

IV

So with the house empty and the doors locked and the mattresses rolled round...
(128)

The sense of shock that the reader experiences on a first reading of this tragedy is immense. First, Mrs. Ramsay is not even posited as the main subject in this bracketed phrase whose point is solely to communicate her death; instead, Mr. Ramsay is the main subject. Mrs. Ramsay is confined to a subordinate clause, a participial phrase (an ablative absolute in Latin grammar), which evidently stands as background for the unimportant detail of Mr. Ramsay merely tripping. The main action of this sentence is Mr. Ramsay stretching his arms out. Because Mr. Ramsay is the main subject, whatever sympathy or sadness the reader might feel here will be for *him*, not his wife. The reader might experience shock at this bracketed sentence and mourn Mrs. Ramsay's death by asking incessant questions and wanting her death to be treated more fully. But, the structure of the sentence makes it obvious that we should feel sad at how lonely Mr. Ramsay is, not at how dead Mrs. Ramsay is. In this way, even though we are not given explicit access to Mr. Ramsay's mind and cannot participate in true "mind-reading," we can intimate Mr. Ramsay's mental state based on context, while our sympathies are directed away from Mrs. Ramsay. When we were in Mrs. Ramsay's mind in "The Window," our sympathies were in fact directed *away* from Mr. Ramsay. After all, it was his domineering presence which prevented Mrs. Ramsay from uttering any significant word. And so, not only are our expectations of typical narrative practice broken, but they are diverted to someone who deserves less sympathy.¹²⁶

The subversive gestural language that Mrs. Ramsay devised at the end of "The Window" is also eliminated in this passage. For she is reduced to a body to be held in Mr. Ramsay's arms rather than a subject with agency. Mr. Ramsay's arms are stretched out to prevent his fall. But they are "empty" because nothing is within them. It follows, then, that Mrs. Ramsay is *supposed*

¹²⁶ Hammond, Meghan Marie, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 151. "Woolf distrusts male desire for female sympathy."

to be in his arms. At the very least, she should be there to guide him along the passage on this “dark morning.” In this sense, Mr. Ramsay is expecting her to be there as a guide, a means for him to travel safely without tripping. For this purpose, she could be simply replaced by a banister.

“Time Passes” comes excruciatingly close to evoking the same feelings of “ugh” and disappointment that *The Good Soldier* does. When I read not only of Mrs. Ramsay’s death but also of the deaths of the other characters in brackets, I feel like I am being mercilessly struck by gun shots, one after another. There are only three pages for the reader to process Mrs. Ramsay’s death before Prue Ramsay dies from “some illness connected with childbirth” (132), after having just married on the previous page(!). Just as there is no solemn regard for the deaths of Maisie Maiden and Edward Ashburnham in *The Good Soldier*, Woolf’s narrator does not afford meaningful novel-time to deal with death. Woolf differs from Ford in that she fastidiously avoids brash or cavalier humor in such scenarios. While Ford’s undercutting of death produces feelings of disgust with Dowell and hopelessness for how humans view each other, Woolf’s seriousness produces a bone-chilling shock, leaving the reader to mourn for company kept and lost, without a grieving period. Although *To the Lighthouse* attempts to fuse the psychological depth Woolf saw in Russian fiction, with Conrad’s call for fiction to evoke “solidarity with all mankind,” and with her Pater-derived theory of “emotional Impressionism,” the experiment ultimately fails. “Time Passes” conclusively reveals as illusory the complex, seemingly empathetic effects/affects achieved at the end of “The Window.” Far from “a burst of triumphant feminist prismatic” or a “flood of peace,” the novel ends in the same crisis as *The Good Soldier*: what should I feel?¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Goldman, Jane, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf*, 186. Richter, Harvena, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 244.

In the third and final part of *To the Lighthouse* we are placed in the mind of Lily Briscoe through a revival of free indirect discourse. Lily has returned to the Isle of Skye after the ten years of “Time Passes” to learn that Mrs. Ramsay has died. She decides to finish the painting she had started ten years before as she tries to cope with the death of Mrs. Ramsay.¹²⁸ Her reaction parallels the confused feelings of disappointment that the reader experiences during “Time Passes.” Lily is herself a bewildered reader and interpreter of the vicious shock of death from the previous section. In the first paragraph of “The Lighthouse,” she is plagued by hermeneutic uncertainty and asks herself:

What does it mean then, what can it all mean? Lily Briscoe asked herself, wondering whether, since she had been left alone, it behooved her to go to the kitchen to fetch another cup of coffee or wait here. What does it mean? – a catchword that was, caught up from some book, fitting her thought loosely, for she could not, this first morning with the Ramsays, contract her feelings, could only make a phrase resound to cover the blankness of her mind until these vapours had shrunk. For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs. Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing – nothing that she could express at all (145).

Lily’s shock at finding out that Mrs. Ramsay has died mirrors the reader’s shock at the same fact in “Time Passes.” Just as the reader did not have access to Mrs. Ramsay’s mind before she died, or the minds of any characters around her who experienced her death, it is evident that for ten years Lily has been left the dark, unable to truly “know” Mrs. Ramsay. She learned only the cold hard facts after Mrs. Ramsay’s death. This makes Lily angry enough to blame Mrs. Ramsay, saying that “it was all Mrs. Ramsay’s fault” (149-50) that she is now “wasting her time...playing

¹²⁸ In “A Sketch of the Past,” from Woolf’s memoir *Moments of Being*, Woolf envisages *To the Lighthouse* as an act of narrative therapy because it ended her obsession with her mother. Her mother, the pre-Raphaelite model Julia Stephen, haunted her throughout her life after her death in 1895. Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 81.

at painting” (149). Lily wanted to know and to feel *more*. So much had been *suggested* by Mrs. Ramsay’s bracketed death; there had been so much potential for a funeral, or a scene of common suffering in the family. Instead, there is nothing, just a reportage of death that reads like a newspaper subheading. And whether that report comes from the narrator (for the reader), or Mrs. McNab or Mr. Ramsay (or whoever told Lily), a statement of fact evidently cannot evoke empathy or definite “feeling into.” Lily knew only the “outline” (195) of Mrs. Ramsay, just as she knows the outline, “not the detail” (195), of Augustus Carmichael. If she knew the details, she would have been at Mrs. Ramsay’s deathbed, immersed in mourning with the Ramsays. But Lily knows that the way she sees Carmichael is not the way to connecting with people. “To know the outline” cannot mean to empathize.

Lily’s idea of the “outline” is what comprises the phenomenological critique that *To the Lighthouse* makes of Pater and Impressionism: Pater’s proto-Impressionism necessarily produces an “outline” of a person, not a whole “other” whose mind is open for the perceiver to know or “feel into.” This is why Pater’s metaphor for solipsism is a “thick wall” while Woolf’s is a “semi-transparent envelope.” Pater accepts solipsism, while Woolf is hopeful for some semblance of connectedness. This critique of Pater is also a critique of Woolf’s own narrative practice throughout *to the Lighthouse*. Although the narrator is amorphous and has no identity (as intimate with characters’ minds as he/she is), the narrator still exists apart from the characters. A narrator necessarily presents an outline of a character, not the whole picture. As long as there is a third-person perceiver to receive impressions in the form of outlines, there will always be a barrier between reader and character. Woolf subtly acknowledges that the novel has failed and succumbed to solipsism: the last stanza of William Cowper’s “The Castaway” (1799) runs through Mr. Ramsay’s thoughts in fragments: “Perished. Alone” (147, et passim). To

remedy this problem, Woolf had to write *The Waves*, in which she whittles down the narrator to the bare minimum, to one who merely says, “he said” or “she said.” The soliloquies of *The Waves* evoke perhaps more empathy between reader and character than experimental Modernist fiction could ever hope to achieve.

“Why not invent a new kind of play?” *The Waves*: Radical Connectedness

I have netted that fin in the waste of water which appeared to me
over the marshes out of my window at Rodmell when I was
coming to an end of *To the Lighthouse*.¹²⁹

-Woolf, on finishing *The Waves*,
diary, February 7, 1931

In “How Should One Read a Book” (1925), the essay which ends *The Second Common Reader*, Woolf instructs the reader to “open your mind as widely as possible” so that we might be brought “into the presence of a human being unlike any other.”¹³⁰ Woolf echoes Conrad’s aim to give the reader a glimpse of truth that “we forgot to ask for” when she says that by opening one’s mind, the reader will “find that your author is giving you, or attempting to give you, something far more definite.”¹³¹ Six years after penning “Modern Fiction,” and six years before writing *The Waves*, Woolf was still thinking about the problems of phenomenology, reader-character intersubjectivity, and narrative empathy. Even if Woolf’s fiction places “severe” demands on its readers, *The Waves* makes a significant effort to engage the reader in an

¹²⁹ Woolf, *A Writer’s Diary*, 169.

¹³⁰ Woolf, Virginia, *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960), 235.

¹³¹ Woolf, *The Second Common Reader*, 235. Here again, Pater’s influence on Woolf is apparent. She says that when one attempts “to reconstruct [an image] in words, [one] will find that it breaks into a thousand conflicting impressions” (236). Pater says that “experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects...But when reflexion [sic] begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence...”. Pater, *The Renaissance*, 187.

empathetic relationship with its characters, who speak to themselves in soliloquies and who never partake in dialogue with each other.¹³² Contemporary reviewers were aware of the novel's ability to link reader and character. Calling the book "miraculous" and Woolf "a metaphysical poet," Gerald Bullett wrote that "the use of the first person [sic] singular is a transparent device; it is even, if you like, a kind of cheating, since, once we have accepted it, it gives us just that illusion of intimacy which, in logic, the method cannot for a moment support. But this only means that Mrs. Woolf has solved, for herself, the problem of how one may eat one's cake and have it."¹³³ Various descriptions as a "poem," a "poetic novel," a "prose poem," and "a great poem" with a "seductive form," *The Waves* seems to transcend genre as it revolutionizes the novel in form and representation of the minds of characters, carrying "'internal monologue' a stage further than was dreamt of even by Joyce."¹³⁴

The novel follows six characters from childhood to death (they all die): Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny, and Louis, in order of appearance. Each one "speaks" in long soliloquies, but the words contained in quotation marks are really thoughts, since there is never any dialogue. Percival, the character on whom the arc of the novel turns and whom the other characters worship and adore, never speaks, and dies falling off his horse in India while on military duty

¹³² Richter, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, 236.

¹³³ Gerald Bullett, "Virginia Woolf Soliloquises [sic]," review of *The Waves*, by Virginia Woolf, *New Statesman and Nation*, October 10, 1931.

¹³⁴ Review of *The Waves*, by Virginia Woolf, *Times Literary Supplement*, October 8, 1931. Frank Swinnerton, review of *The Waves*, by Virginia Woolf, *Evening News*, October 9, 1931. G. Lowes Dickinson, Letter to Virginia Woolf, October 23, 1931. Louis Kronenberger, review of *The Waves*, by Virginia Woolf, *New York Times Book Review*, October 25, 1931. Harold Nicholson, review of *The Waves*, by Virginia Woolf, *Action*, October 8, 1931. All entries found in Woolf, Virginia, *Virginia Woolf: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 263-275.

(114).¹³⁵ The reader never gets to know him. As Gillian Beer has observed, this makes the novel one of Woolf's many that composes itself around an absence.¹³⁶ The narrator, who is present as a necessity, only intervenes to state robotically, "he said" or "she said." Each section (there are no chapter numbers or headings) is separated by an italicized, Impressionistic, pastoral description of the sun rising over the waves from sunrise to sundown. There is disagreement about who is speaking during these interludes.¹³⁷ Abstract phrases from them find their way into the character's phrases and consume Bernard's speech at the end of the novel, giving a sense that he is being drowned under the waves of life.

This sense of phrases, persons, and identities melting into one another is central. Meghan Marie Hammond has characterized the novel as "a representation of the lifelong process of becoming 'I'."¹³⁸ However, no character (except perhaps Susan) succeeds in detaching himself or herself from the crew of friends. Characteristic of this "identity soup" is when Bernard says in the last section of the novel, "For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman, Bernard or Neville, Louis, Jinny or Rhoda – so strange is the contact of one with another" (216).¹³⁹ Earlier, he says, "I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis: or how to distinguish my life from theirs" (212). Other characters attempt to solidify their identity, to overcompensate and try to convince themselves that they *are* one person. Louis says at one point, "I have signed my

¹³⁵ All in-text citations refer to Woolf, Virginia, *The Waves*, ed. Kate Flint (London: Penguin Books, 2000).

¹³⁶ Beer, Gillian, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Grounds, Essays by Gillian Beer* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 29. *To the Lighthouse* and *Jacob's Room* are other examples.

¹³⁷ Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf*, 186-187.

¹³⁸ Hammond, Meghan Marie, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, 163.

¹³⁹ One can draw obvious parallels here with Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography*, in which the protagonist transitions from a man to a woman.

name...already twenty times. I, and again I, and again I. Clear firm, unequivocal, there it stands, my name” (127). His repetition of “I, who speak [sic] with an Australian accent, whose father is a banker in Brisbane” (15) is indicative of the tension between being one person and being part of other people’s consciousness, a phenomenon not dissimilar to Jules Romains’ Unanimism.¹⁴⁰ It is no surprise, then, that this is Woolf’s “most empathetic work” because of the “empathizing monad” of characters.¹⁴¹ According to Richter, they are all part of “a six-sided flower; made of six lives” (175). Even if they do not talk to each other, there is a profound intersubjectivity that borders on an “*intra*-subjectivity” between personalities of the same mind.

Criticism is unjustifiably sparse regarding the empathetic and intersubjective relationship between reader and characters in *The Waves*. However, Harvena Richter and Meghan Marie Hammond have produced the best discussions of these issues that I can find. Both authors differ on the degree to which the reader is made a participant in the text and an intimate companion with the characters. Richter sees the role of reader as changing from “voyeur” to “participant” when one reads the novel.¹⁴² The reader is “persuaded to experience emotions which for a variety of reasons he may not enjoy” and “may feel that the last protective barrier – his emotional anonymity – has been snatched away.”¹⁴³ That “protective barrier” is maintained in *The Good Soldier* as well as in *To the Lighthouse*. Our reaction of disgust and “ugh” is primarily at how

¹⁴⁰ Jules Romains (1885-1972) was a French author whose idea of Unanimism spurred a short-lived literary movement and posited that “the city triggers the spontaneous creation of communal consciousness in groups, the so-called *unanimes*, and this flow is largely due to changes in the flows of emotions.” See Elizabeth Skou Peterson, “‘One Thing Melts into Another’: Unanimism, Affect, and Imagery in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*,” in *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*, ed. Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 179. Leonard Woolf, Virginia’s husband, reviewed Romains’ novel *Les Copains* (1913).

¹⁴¹ Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, 163.

¹⁴² Richter, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, 237.

¹⁴³ Richter, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, 237.

Dowell and the reporting narrator of “Time Passes” depict the characters, whose heads we never enter and whom we never get to “become.” But in *The Waves*, seemingly all the tools are employed for the reader to become, identify with, and empathize with characters – Zunshine’s “mind-reading” is one tool. I explore this below. But Hammond offers a different interpretation. She says that *The Waves* “does *not* try to pull the reader into a single stream of thought.”¹⁴⁴ It may *seem* to be an empathetic piece of writing, “since the reader spends [much] time immersed in each represented mind.” But, “Ultimately, Woolf’s novel makes sure that the reader remains outside whatever community of feeling is established in its carousel of focalizers.” Hammonds argues that the novel actually “highlights” the “psychological distance between reader and character.” As proof of this, she reads the pastoral interludes as “a kind of narrator” which guides the minds the characters. That way, the “protective barrier” is maintained and the reader continues to be trapped in a “semi-transparent envelope.” I am more on the side of Richter and, as I hope will become clear, I think that what we have learned from Suzanne Keen, Blakey Vermeule, and Lisa Zunshine will greater illuminate Richter’s argument, fifty years after it appeared.

“To give you my life, I must tell you a story”: Identifying with Bernard

Bernard is the first and last to “speak” in *The Waves*. Out of all the characters, he also speaks the most. He is an aspiring poet who thinks he is “like Byron” (58) and who loves “tremendous and sonorous words,” (23) though he finds himself “done with phrases” (227) by the novel’s end. He may come off as pretentious to a reader who fails to “suspend disbelief.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, 168. Italics mine.

¹⁴⁵ Richter, *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage*, 237.

For Neville says that all the characters are “phrases in Bernard’s story,” although he tells his story unaware “of what we most feel” (51). Like the other characters, he tries to convince himself that he is “one person” (65) but recognizes that his identity is fluid and that he is “made and remade continually” (100). Attempting to solidify some sort of singularity, he says, “I rose and walked away – I, I, I; not Byron, Shelley, or Dostoevsky, but I, Bernard. I even repeated my own name once or twice” (195).¹⁴⁶ He also constructs his identity around “Great Men” (in the paralyzing way that Charles Tansley does in *To the Lighthouse*) and in contradistinction to the other five characters (and Percival, “who inspires poetry” (28)). Like Hamlet, he questions words: “what are phrases?” (166). He also detaches himself by wishing to create his own private language, “some little language such as lovers use” (183). On the one hand, the characters are united in mind. This is clear when we encounter passages such as when Neville “think[s] of Louis now” and immediately after, Louis begins to speak (68). Even if they do not talk to each other directly, their “unanimism,” their group consciousness, helps drive the narrative. But on the other hand, Bernard seems to think that this interconnectedness is not enough. His gesture of making a private language signals that he does not feel completely understood by the others. To have a private language would be to share a deeper level of himself with someone and gain deeper intimacy with that person. The reader is in a unique position because we *know* he wishes for a private language, whereas the other characters do not. Bernard sees himself as a pastiche who struggles with sincerity and can only express himself with guises and language that he has

¹⁴⁶ This “I, I, I” also appears in *To the Lighthouse* to represent a tendency for men to talk about themselves too much, which Mrs. Ramsay hates (106).

adopted from others, “so that”, as Neville says, “one word is now enough to lift a whole weight” (151).¹⁴⁷

One of the most striking qualities of *The Waves* is the way that, since there is no narrator, the characters must analyze themselves by taking the place of the narrator. The novel is so sophisticated because Woolf realizes that if she is going to create a narrative solely out of dramatic soliloquies, the characters cannot just say what they think. They must meditate *on* their thinking. This meta-cognition makes them readers of themselves, just as the we are a reader of them. John Dowell in *The Good Soldier* engages in a similar meta-cognition, but the effect is much different. Whereas Dowell undercuts his reliability with humor and ignorance, the characters in *The Waves* are much more thoughtful, much more serious, and we might even say much more philosophical, in the way that Woolf is more “philosophical” than Ford. This seriousness convinces the reader that we must take their meta-cognition seriously. In the character of Bernard specifically, his reading of himself is phenomenological, as he usurps the role of the narrator by almost enacting free indirect discourse with himself.

This surprising tendency comes through when Bernard envisions his “biographer.”¹⁴⁸ In a scene in which Bernard invites a certain Simes to dinner to make him feel better after being rejected by a certain Billy Jackson, Bernard says, “This he will attribute to an admiration which is not mine. That is true. But ‘joined to the sensibility of a woman’ (I am here quoting my own

¹⁴⁷ Neville here anticipates the Structuralists’ infinite semiotic chain. It is not too far to say that Bernard exemplifies the expressive difficulties that characterize the “postmodern condition,” a phenomenon certainly present in authors like Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco, and composers like Rochberg at the end of the Twentieth Century, who find that the only way to express themselves sincerely is through the language of past artists. Taruskin, Richard and Christopher H. Gibbs, *The Oxford History of Western Music: College Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1098.

¹⁴⁸ Other examples of a character envisioning a biographer are Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye* and Mr. Duffy in “A Painful Case” in Joyce’s *Dubliners*.

biographer) ‘Bernard possessed the logical sobriety of a man’” (56). Bernard envisions his life as something worthy of preservation in history. He also longs for someone who can get inside his head and analyze him. We can go so far as to say he envisions a reader to empathize with him.

Bernard also evokes his biographer in the last section of the novel, which is comprised of Bernard’s words only.¹⁴⁹ He goes on at length:

‘Once I had a biographer, dead long since, but if he still followed my footsteps with his bold flattering intensity he would here say, “About this time Bernard married and bought a house... His friends observed in him a growing tendency to domesticity... The birth of children made it highly desirable that he should augment his income.” That is the biographic style, and it does to tack together torn bits of stuff, stuff with raw edges. After all, one cannot find fault with the biographic style if one begins letters “Dear Sir,” ends them “yours faithfully”: one cannot despise these phrases laid like Roman roads across the tumult of our lives, since they compel us to walk in step like civilized people with the slow and measured tread of policeman though one may be humming any nonsense under one’s breath at the same time – “Hark, hark, the dogs do bark...” (199).

Bernard is making two critiques here. One pertains to the role of the reader, the other is a critique of fiction that Woolf identifies as “materialist” – of authors like H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett who, according to Woolf, were hyper-attentive to detail at the expense of “true” interiority. The critiques go hand in hand. First, in the time that has elapsed in the novel it is evident that Bernard has tried to give up thinking of his biographer. He is an older adult now, and that notion was just a childish way of asserting his arrogance while he was “at college” (56). But he has not succeeded in giving up this idea. This failure lends credence to the argument that even if Bernard were an amalgam of identities, there are things about him that just do not change. But by imagining the reader of his life as a biographer, Bernard makes a plea for empathy. This plea is clearly not heard by his biographer. I do not sense any sort of “flattering intensity” in what the

¹⁴⁹ This long monologue could be a reaction to Molly Bloom’s monologue that takes up the last chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922).

biographer says, but only material facts about Bernard's life. The biographer is attuned to causation (the thing that Mrs. Ramsay detests in men's conversation), but he does not even make a superficial judgement on Bernard's character and personality. Bernard is aware of the biographer's failure to empathize when he says that "one has to say that" (200); "that," meaning innocuous details about one's life that are supposed to comprise a full picture, but which end up producing, in Lily Briscoe's words, "an outline" (or "good people," in John Dowell's words). Bernard's imagined biographer has failed to understand him.

Bernard's critique of his life's reader is also a critique of its writer. The "style" of the biographer's writing and the rigidity which Bernard sees in it is exactly what Woolf hates about the "materialists." In Bernard's quest to find someone who understands him, the biographer he invents writes in the accepted, conventional style of Edwardian novelists. Of course, Bernard himself is more likely to be a reader of *that* literature than of Modernist novels. Woolf seems to be making a careful judgement of the failure of these novelists to evoke empathy. These materialist biographers produce "outlines" of characters. Their books are like "Roman roads" which, according to Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction," are "done to a turn," with every character described "down to the button."¹⁵⁰ But "things don't happen in one's mind like that."¹⁵¹ The alternative, indeed the solution, is a novel which goes below the surface, into the "dark places of psychology."¹⁵² Under the surface of superficial detail, "nonsense" lurks. This nonsense abounds in the "almost senseless song" of *The Waves*.¹⁵³ One need only approach the first page of the novel and encounter Rhoda saying, "I hear a sound...cheep, chirp; cheep, chirp; going up and

¹⁵⁰ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, 211-212.

¹⁵¹ Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 104.

¹⁵² Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*. 215

¹⁵³ Prince, Sophie A, "'A Discord to be listened for' in Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf," BA thesis (Trinity College, 2018): 93.

down” (5) to understand that Woolf’s project in empathy requires the representation of the mind, unfiltered.

Woolf succeeds in her project of readerly empathy in part because I identify with Bernard. Specifically, I identify with this very idea of envisioning a biographer. Whenever I write something, whenever I make a big life decision, I am thinking of how someone will write about *this moment* in my life if I become famous. In part, my subjectivity is socially constructed. For in many ways, Bernard and I, for better or worse, share similar versions of masculinity. I *learned* this masculinity from whatever societal forces influenced and continue to influence me. For example, his mentality of imitating the great men of letters was something I heavily embraced early in college, lauding Bloom’s *The Western Canon* as my Bible. Bernard’s struggle with making his life something more than a pastiche also resonates with me. More acutely though is how I relate to his representation of his own self-consciousness. Woolf could only achieve this level of empathy by eliminating the narrator, and letting Bernard narrate his life as it is happening, as well as a different, skeletal version of what one examining his life might write.

There is thus a sort of phenomenological mirroring that emerges between the reader and Bernard. As we read Bernard and Bernard reads himself, a phenomenology of mind is created. Since we recognize this phenomenology of mind as being an accurate representation of how the mind works, we feel empathy for Bernard. In this way, Woolf circumvents solipsism. Unlike *To the Lighthouse*, no narrator intervenes to undercut this identification. If we take the pastoral interludes to be, as Woolf said in her diary, “bridge[s]” and “background[s],” and agree with

Lawrence Bowling in saying that *The Waves* is a “non-narrated” text, then the interconnectedness via analogy between reader and character begins to emerge.¹⁵⁴

The Waves reclaims connectedness and emotional intimacy just as it rejects Pater’s anti-humanist and anti-empathic theory, which says that reality is a series of phenomena that the human mind can never recognize as anything but representations and impressions because of the Cowper-esque doom of solipsism. And yet, Woolf manages to include a character who inevitably evokes Pater’s theory of perception: Rhoda. She experiences reality the way Pater says that it is experienced. Before she commits suicide, the reader knows her as the character who, like Mrs. Ramsay, is “outside of the eddy”: “I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop... The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, ‘Oh save me, from being blown for ever [sic] outside the loop of time!’” (15). She is always “in flight from intimacy.”¹⁵⁵ As Goldman observes, “[Rhoda] does not successfully intervene in the material world but more and more retreats from its indifference.”¹⁵⁶ When she is a child in math class, she has “no answer” (14), while the other children hand in their answers. To even recognize herself she must “bang [her] head against some hard door to call [herself] back to the body” (31). As she bangs her head on this door, she stubs her toe on Pater’s “thick wall of personality.” When Bernard tells us (in a way that recalls the bracketed deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew) that Rhoda “had killed herself,” he also says that she was “always so furtive, always with fear in her eyes, always seeking some pillar in the desert, to find which she had gone...” (216). While

¹⁵⁴ Woolf, *A Writer’s Diary*, 153. ¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, 168.

¹⁵⁵ Beer, *Virginia Woolf: The Common Ground*, 87.

¹⁵⁶ Goldman, *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf*, 186.

Dowell's aesthetic outlook leads to his failure to understand what is going on around him, it also leads to Edward Ashburnham's death. Rhoda's failure to connect with the world spells her own death. Her aesthetic outlook is self-defeating. Even though Woolf manages to create a character who we truly know, Rhoda's perception cannot be allowed to stand. In a final blow to Pater, Woolf denounces a phenomenology that leaves no hope for intersubjectivity and gives us Bernard, an "opposite" (216) to Rhoda. In Hamlet's words, Rhoda is a "king of infinite space...bounded in a nutshell." Although Woolf, upon completing *The Waves*, thought of it as a mere "shot at [her] vision,"¹⁵⁷ the novel is a far better shot than *To the Lighthouse*. Ford, and Woolf in "Time Passes," snatch "mind-reading" and empathy away from the reader, merely *suggesting* to us the potentially open workings of characters' minds. In *The Waves*, Woolf reveals them luminously, open for the reader to accept or reject empathy and connectedness with them. Turning phenomenology, Impressionism, and solipsism on their heads, Woolf reverse-engineers concepts that typically center around loneliness into ones that embrace connectedness. Although Modernism is said to embrace estrangement, Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, and "psychic distance" between audience and work, Woolf allows the reader to be the seventh petal of the novel's "six-sided flower."

¹⁵⁷ Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, 173.

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