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2020

The Novel-Manifesto: Modernist Kunstlerromane and the Discourse of Modernist Aesthetic Theory

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THE NOVEL-MANIFESTO: MODERNIST KUNSTLERROMANE
AND THE DISCOURSE OF MODERNIST AESTHETIC THEORY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

of

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

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ABSTRACT

THE NOVEL-MANIFESTO: MODERNIST KUNSTLERROMANE AND THE
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Edward Marks

This dissertation proposes the modernist *kunstlerroman* as a site for

aesthetic theorizing. Like the aesthetic manifestos that proliferated

between 1890 and 1939, the *kunstlerromane* of this period advance a set

of aesthetic criteria and values. The modernist *kunstlerroman*'s formal

qualities—it's an art object about art—as well as the period in which it is

written—the aesthetically revolutionary modernist period—provide the

foundation for reading modernist *kunstlerromane* as manifesto-like novels.

Through close reading, three *kunstlerromane* of the period are explored as

examples of the novel-manifesto: *The Tragic Muse* (1890), by Henry

James; *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), by James Joyce; and

The Revenge for Love (1937), by Wyndham Lewis. These novels were

chosen for two reasons. First, they span much of the modernist period and

represent what we might call emerging, high, and late modernism. Second,

the authors have produced important theoretical statements, and their

positions in the canon mean that each has been the subject of extensive

critical work. My readings of the three *kunstlerromane*, then, trace the

authors' theoretical statements and subsequent critical work. Such tracing is not to show that the *kunstlerromane* are novelized statements of the theoretical statements. Rather, such tracing shows the *kunstlerroman* is an unrecognized, supplementary site for critical understanding of modernist theory. There are at least three important implications for this research. First, it introduces a heretofore unrealized source for researching modernist aesthetic theory. Next, it provides an underutilized source for studying the theoretical ideas of specific modernist writers, and, finally, it provides a fuller understanding of modernist aesthetics. To this last point, I conclude that for these three canonical writers, at least, theories of perception were foundational to modernism, and perception itself was being redefined in late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century literature.

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Introduction: Why the Novel-Manifesto?

This dissertation reconceptualizes the modernist *kunstlerroman*. It argues
that the modernist *kunstlerroman*, or artist-novel, is an overlooked site of
theoretical engagement with modernist aesthetic theories and that the
modernist *kunstlerroman* contributes to the period's vigorous, competing
theories of art by making its own aesthetic claims. The aim here is to
reconceptualize the modernist *kunstlerroman* as a novel-manifesto, a
novel that speaks out its artistic principles. Convention categorizes
manifestos separate from art, and where the conventional line blurs, it
blurs in favor of calling a manifesto "artistic," not in calling an art work
"manifesto-like." Ascribing manifesto qualities to a novel seems
disparaging: "novel-manifesto" sounds like a didactic piece of
propaganda, an overtly tendentious position thinly couched in narrative
form, a novel wagging its finger prescriptively at its cultural or political
moment (think *Atlas Shrugged*)[1]. Indeed, the Latin origin for "manifesto,"
manifestus, can be roughly translated as "obvious," and a conventional
manifesto asserts its positions explicitly. The conventional manifesto is a

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[1] In a recent *New York Times Sunday Magazine* piece discussing this kind of "political art" ("Much Obliged"),
Lauren Oyler objects to using the adjective "necessary" to describe works of overtly political art.
"Necessary," she says, is intended as a compliment, to suggest importance, that the object reviewed
presents, in the mind of the reviewer at least, "right minded views" (12). Oyler says that this, however,
reduces art to a political position: "When applied to bad art with good politics, 'necessary' allows the
audience to avoid engaging with a work in aesthetic terms, which tend to be more ambiguous and difficult.
When applied to good art with good, or even ambivalent, politics, it renders aesthetic achievement
irrelevant. Not only is that depressing, it also nullifies the political argument in favor of art in the first
place: Why write a novel when a manifesto will do?" (13).

non-fiction, expository genre. It attempts a direct connection to what is. Novels, on the other hand, are narrative fiction, and meaning in a narrative mediated by fiction is always more oblique. Narrative fiction is "one remove" from non-fiction: it begins with what isn't. The novel, therefore, is not a platform for obvious, direct declarations. However, my position is not that the *kunstlerroman* is making an obvious aesthetic claim, but rather that it uniquely contributes to a theoretical discourse of aesthetics in a period rife with manifestos.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault defends this kind of previously unrecognized contribution: "beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline, or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruptions" (4). The modernist *kunstlerroman* interrupts the discourse of modernist aesthetic theory through what Foucault calls "recurrent redistributions: *Recurrent redistributions* reveal several pasts, several forms of connexion [*sic*], several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change" (5). The modernist *kunstlerroman* is an unacknowledged form, connected with modernist manifestos in the work of aesthetic theory. Furthermore, in *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*, Martin Puchner argues that in the Modernist moment "manifestos intrude onto artworks and are in turn absorbed and assimilated by them" (6). Puchner is exploring the relationship between manifestos

and the avant-gardes, the influence that manifestos had on the tone of the avant-gardes. However, his argument for the absorption and assimilation of manifesto qualities is evident, too, in modernist *kunstlerromane*. The manifesto's intrusion is not tonal but theoretical, but unlike a conventional manifesto's positions, the *kunstlerroman*'s positions are presentations, not declarations.

The modernist *kunstlerroman* performs its position not as exposition but narratively. However, to be read this way requires contextual preconditions. In J. L. Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, Austin describes performative statements thus: "the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something" (162). Austin outlines the requirements that make performative statements, not true or false, but felicitous or infelicitous. The requirements for felicitous performative statements are contextual. The participants, intentions, and procedures must exist in appropriate, conventional social conditions (166)[2]. The modernist *kunstlerroman* exists in a context that pushes us to read it manifesto-like, and it does so for three reasons. First, the *kunstlerroman* is an *ekphrastic* text; however, unlike texts that have *ekphrastic* moments, the *kunstlerroman*, as an "artist novel," *is* the *ekphrastic* moment: the art

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[2] Derrida's rejection of performative statements appears to be based on the incompleteness of any utterance: because all statements are at play and indeterminate, they can't "perform" (do) anything. However, Austin's assertion of performatives is much narrower and contextual: performative statements may not "perform" (do) completely, but they still do. Performativity describes a specific circumstance, a social function of language that doesn't require fixed totality.

object about art is necessarily self-referential. Second, the modernist *kunstlerroman* is unique among *kunstlerromane* because of the period in which it emerged. Because the modernist period was a revolutionary aesthetic period, the art that was produced in this period must be historicized in a revolutionary condition. Lastly, because it's in the unique position of being an *ekphrastic* work in an extraordinary moment of artistic revolution, the modernist *kunstlerroman* should be approached as a possible destabilization of the conventional rigidity between manifesto and art object, a destabilization of what the reader expects from these texts.

The *Kunstlerroman* as *Ekphrasis*

The initial assumption here is that a novel with an artist hero is a novel uniquely "about" art. This isn't to say that the *kunstlerroman* is about art in the way that, say, the *bildungsroman* (the "education novel) is about education. The *kunstlerroman* is unique in that it is an aesthetic object that constructs an aesthetic object. The *kunstlerroman* as an *ekphrastic* text. And as the novel itself is art, the *kunstlerroman*'s form is, in part, an *ekphrastic* presentation: the art object explicitly representing, performing, and describing art, artists, and the conditions of artistic production. The *kunstlerroman* is a self-referential discourse whose form invites another layer of interpretation. However, unlike traditional ideas of *ekphrasis*, the *ekphrasis* of a *kunstlerroman* is not a digressive moment in a larger work: the *kunstlerroman* is the *ekphrasitic* moment. The very existence of the *kunstlerroman*, its essence, is a presentation of aesthetic principles. It

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doesn't declare aesthetic principles in the way a manifesto does, but through its presentation of art within art, such principles emerge.

Ekphrastic moments outside of *kunstlerromane* are conventionally understood as moments in which one artistic medium depicts or describes another. The oft-used example is the detailed description of the shield of Achilles, from *The Iliad*. In Mack Smith's *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition* (1995), Smith says that the Greek term from which *ekphrasis* comes, *ekphrazein*, translates as "to speak out" (36). In this sense, the term suggests a declaration of some sort. The description of the shield of Achilles, then, in this original understanding, is explicitly saying something to readers (or the earlier "hearers"). Smith says *ekphrazein* wasn't solely used to describe artistic depictions of art, but "any elaborate digressive description embedded within rhetorical discourse" (10). This suggests an earlier understanding of *ekphrasis* as an added, supplemental description of some complexity. Taken together with the idea of "speaking out," the *ekphrastic* moment is an explicit proclamation, a statement of "something else" or "something more," the kind of statement that, in discussions of meaning, used to be considered extra or background or even off-topic. Today, however, in questions of meaning, ideas of supplementation or digressions are largely rejected as naive. (If there's nothing outside the text, there certainly aren't "digressions" within.) In "The Villanelle Perplex: Reading Joyce" (1998), for example, Robert Adams Day compares chapter V of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

Man with and without Stephen's construction of the villanelle. Far from

being something "extra," the villanelle is essential to the section. Still,

while the idea of supplemental meaning may be gone, the idea of

ekphrastic "speaking out" has remained. Artistic descriptions within other

art objects enrich and complicate the production of meaning, and when

those descriptions are constitutive of the art object, when the art object is

determined by *ekphrasis*, the speaking out inevitably is a speaking out

about art. The shield of Achilles, for example, may reference Greek myth

and culture, but Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" has no choice but to make

an explicit aesthetic claim, which it speaks out at the poem's end. The

Grecian urn is constitutive to Keats's poem in a way that Achilles' shield

is not constitutive to the *Illiad*. The *kunstlerroman*, which takes artists, art,

and the production of art not as a momentary flourish, but as a determining

characteristic, is fundamentally speaking out art, without the manifesto's

explicit declarations.

Aesthetic Revolutions

What distinguishes the artist-novel of the modernist period, however, is

that it speaks out in an extraordinary moment of aesthetic revolution, a

tumultuous period of aesthetic theorizing. And because the *kunstlerroman*

is an artist novel in this period, it recommends itself as a site to express

aesthetic ideas. Indeed, the modernist *kunstlerroman* is a manifesto-like

project unlike the *kunstlerromane* of other periods precisely because of its

revolutionary moment; the modernist *kunstlerroman* can be read for

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manifesto-like claims in a way that *kunstlerromane* of other periods might not. Calling the modernist period "revolutionary" seems self-evident: artistic experimentation went beyond, well, experimentation. Along with art, the period underwent foundational social shifts in science, technology, religion, and politics (hence the profusion of manifestos). In Peter Nicholls' *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (1995), for example, Nicholls references French linguist Henri Meschonnic as identifying "fifty 'isms' invented in the period between 1886-1924" (76). These are fifty *new* "isms." Such prolific theoretical invention suggests a condition of cultural and political upheaval, a transitional revolutionary moment fertile for the testing of alternative aesthetic forms and ideas. Many "isms," according to Nicholls, disappeared as quickly as they emerged. But "the fashion was now for energetic and outspoken expressions of faith and…for manifestos" (76). In this revolutionary discourse, this open scramble to establish aesthetic positions through manifestos, novels of art get yoked to the more expository genre, to the swirl of isms. In the moment of destabilized aesthetic ideas, novels of art will necessarily participate in artistic theorizing.

Indeed, all art created during an aesthetic revolution is, in some sense, a position; the art about art (the ekphrastic novel), however, speaks out such positions. When intellectual and social transformations destabilize traditional aesthetic forms and foundations, the novel that takes aesthetics as its subject must, in its very essence, be speaking its

theoretical position. Its existence in a period of aesthetic transition situates the *kunstlerroman* as an example of its position, even if its form appears unrevolutionary. During the revolution, all acts, rebellious or reactionary, are revolutionary. The revolutionary period is the period of open uncertainty, the suspension of "rules"; everything is up for grabs. In this period, all assertions are revolutionary. To embrace any position in this moment is to take a position on the future, on the "next," and therefore to shape and create the next, even if what's next looks an awful lot like what came before.

The profusion of manifestos in this period is evidence of revolution, and a revolution is nothing more than an attempt to shape the post-revolution. The historical moment that is the modernist revolution, therefore, facilitates the *kunstlerroman*'s intersection with aesthetic manifestos. In their introduction to the "New Historicism" chapter of *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (2004), Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan describe how history participates in intertextuality, forming common discourses with other genres: "History is not some unmediated reality out there, some stable background that the literary text reflects or refers to; it is not a context. Rather, it is like the literary text itself – a different genre, granted, but no less a discourse" (506). Rivkin and Ryan identify history as another text, another discourse, and therefore, another site of intertextuality. However, genre formation can sometimes obscure intertextuality. We create genres by carving out formal distinctions, and

genre can suggest that these distinctions are categorical exclusions. The novel genre, for instance, gets excluded as a site for aesthetic theory. The moment of social upheaval, of revolutionary discourse, though, is the moment when such intertextuality—history/manifesto/artist-hero novel— is most likely. Modernist *kunstlerromane* are, obviously, generically novels; however, they are artist-novels in a historically revolutionary moment, and, as such, they are part of the discourse of aesthetic theory in that moment, a discourse largely informed by the manifesto.

The Structure of Artistic Revolutions (1985), Remi Clignet's extrapolation of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) presents more specific support for the claim that the Modernist period was a moment of aesthetic revolution. Clignet generalizes the precepts of Kuhn's scientific paradigms to include artistic paradigms. There are, Clignet argues, enough similarities between science and art to understand artistic revolutions in the language of scientific revolutions: "As both modes of cultural production [science and art] presuppose perspectives that provide the vocabulary for defining problems and the tools for solving them, they are equally susceptible to tensions between tradition and innovation; and those tensions affect relations between practitioners as much as they affect the creative process of each practitioner" (40). Clignet argues that the relationships responsible for stabilizing scientific and artistic paradigms are also the relationships responsible for destabilizing them, for revolutions: the relationships

between tradition and innovation. Paradigms take shape when the tension

between tradition and innovation is stabilized; revolution irrupts when

innovation destabilizes the paradigm. Destabilization is more than

experimentation: it's an institutional upheaval. Like science, art

inescapably belongs to a tradition to which it adheres and which it also

inflects. When this tradition is destabilized, as it surely was in the

modernist period, the resulting condition is revolutionary.

This is seen more clearly when we consider the structure of artistic

and scientific paradigms. The tools in both the scientist's and artist's

toolbox are threefold: "Symbolic generalizations, models, and exemplars

help both artists and scientists to define the puzzles to be solved and the

techniques or concepts crucial for such solutions" (Clignet 45). Symbolic

generalizations are the methodological principles that guide the practice;

models are "heuristic and regulate …the internal grammar of the symbols

used by each discipline" (44), and the examples are "the concrete solutions

to the problems they face" (44). When the paradigm is stable, methods,

models and exemplars refer to one another in a comprehensive whole.

When that whole breaks down (shifts), and before a new paradigm is

established, is the moment of revolution. In science, the symbolic

generalizations are often laws or theorems or rules: symbolic

generalizations are "the formal or the readily fomalizable components of

the disciplinary matrix" (Kuhn 182). Kuhn suggests f=ma (force equals

mass times acceleration) as an example. Importantly, for Kuhn, the

symbolic generalizations "function in part as laws but also in part as definitions of some of the symbols they deploy" (182). The above example, f=ma, for instance, is not only an algorithm for determining, say, one of the missing values; it's also a definition. The equal sign is the copular verb "is." So f=ma doesn't serve only as an algorithm; it tells us what force is (and mass and acceleration, too).

This distinction between laws and definitions is an important one in the determination of revolutions. To qualify as "Kuhnian revolution," of course, a paradigm must shift. This involves more than simply adopting new laws; it often requires re-defining long-held symbolic definitions. According to Kuhn, because all definitions are tautologies – the definition of x is some definitional description of x – "revolutions involve, among other things, the abandonment of generalizations the force of which had previously been in some part that of tautologies. Did Einstein show that simultaneity was relative or did he alter the notion of simultaneity itself?" (183). The destabilization of the tautologies, the definitions, are indicative, then, of the revolutionary moment.[3] In art, according to Clignet, "Symbolic generalizations imply the elaboration of rules of correspondence between form and content" (42). These rules of correspondence can be determined by something as fundamental as the physiology of "the relations deemed to exist between the right or the left

[3] One need only consider the definitional destabilization of the word "art" that followed the showing of Duchamp's "The Fountain," in 1917, to see that, in the modernist moment, a paradigm shift was afoot.

hand, as far as the piano is concerned" (42). Or the rules of

correspondence can be "technological innovations" or "the dominance of a

particular religious or political philosophy" (43). The modernist period, of

course, underwent fundamental technological, philosophical, and religious

transformations, and the period's aesthetic manifestos informed and

inflected these rules of correspondence. The manifestos are explicit

propositions of rules of correspondence. In the seminal manifestos on

Cubism, Futurism, and Vorticism, for example, we see Apollinaire,

Marinetti, and Lewis struggle to position art in a starkly new technological

and sociopolitical moment.

However, while both science and art may similarly define puzzles,

innovative and new techniques for solving these puzzles emerge in two

distinctly separate ways: in science, innovations in puzzle-solving

strategies often displace the obtaining strategies; in art, they absorb and

inflect the obtaining strategies. And this is an important distinction

between scientific and artistic revolutions: "Paradigms tend to succeed one

another within science but to coexist within art" (Clignet 46). Artistic

revolutions, therefore, might be harder to delineate because they don't

introduce zero-sum reversals of the paradigm. Scientists, for example, will

"immediately discard less efficient paradigms in favor of new versions

that supposedly explain more fully the phenomena being described"

(Clignet 82). Art, of course, is different. While forms may change, there

isn't a disqualified or "false" form that gets rejected. The implicit

assumption is that science has transparency, the transparent explanation of what is, and art is phenomenological, the human expression of what is.[4] When science's explanation doesn't hold, it must be discarded because it no longer transparently identifies what is; however, when human expression changes, the earlier form/style/method/rules are not false, but merely passé, and as such, meanings change but aren't "wrong." When a scientific paradigm is no longer effective, or certainly less effective, at explaining phenomena, the paradigm shifts. This is not so in art, whose shifts are not determined by effectiveness, but rather through larger cultural, less well-defined changes.

Clignet indicates that there are some general progressions that can happen in the arts. Perspective in painting, for example, is a method that builds on previous techniques to more convincingly produce the illusion of depth and three dimensions. But even here, non-perspectival art is never "wrong" or "false." Non-perspectival art is not negated by perspective, and in this way art is more like technology than it is like abstract science: travel by automobile didn't make travel by horse "false," for example. Likewise, revolutions in art are not identified by displacing knowledge so much as creating what Clignet calls "discontinuities." Stark discontinuities in artistic methods, strategies, themes, or conceptions mark revolutionary

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[4] There are, of course, arguments against this distinction, arguments that say science, too, is an art that can't get outside of interpretation. However, this debate has greater implications for scientific revolutions than for artistic revolutions. The "science wars" of the 1990's saw science, not art, in a defensive position. As this dissertation is not "about science," it doesn't engage such arguments.

periods, which can give way to new paradigms. The new paradigm, according to Clignet, is established, if at all, in two important ways: institutionally and retrospectively. Institutionally, artistic revolutions refute the dominant, established artistic institutions and, later, are either recognized and absorbed by these institutions or spur the creation of new institutions. Paradigm shifts, by definition, happen on an institutional level. The manifestation of any revolution – political, scientific, or artistic – requires institutions against which to rebel. Without social organization of the activity, there can be no revolution. Artistic revolutions, though, are expressions of, and contributors to, cultural change. Because of this, artistic revolutions are often recognized (arguably created, certainly defined) retrospectively. Indeed, the duration of aesthetic revolution is determined only from the vantage point of the stable paradigm that emerges. The moment of revolution, according to Clignet, is an "open class of events" that later historians see as "belonging to a closed series" (86). So while the moment of revolution can be determined by discontinuities, its "beginnings" and "ends" are determined retrospectively, the openness is the revolution, the destabilized moment in which possible stabilizing theories are put forth, tested, rejected, accepted, perhaps rejected again until some stability emerges.

The Modernist Revolution

"If…you wish to use 'revolutionary' in the wider and more intelligent sense which I generally give it here, then there is a form of

artistic expression that has attempted something definitely new; something that could not have come into existence in any age but this one"

Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (1927)

Lewis's idea about revolution applies, he says, to a very small segment of the art community, but that it does qualify as revolutionary and it is unique to its period. The periodization of literature is, of course, a murky business. The rationales and evidence for staking out any period change over time, periodization being as much a creature of the current moment as it is the moment periodized. In Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), Jameson sees periodization as a false sense of essence. He likens periodization to Althusser's description of "expressive causality." Expressive causality is a structuralist idea that a "whole" might be phenomenal expressions of an "inner essence" (24). The inner essence, here, "causes" the phenomenal expressions. Jameson argues that class struggle is the inner essence. Conventional periodization, Jameson says, falsely implies a similar structuralist essence: "[A] historical or cultural period tends in spite of itself to give the impression of a facile totalization, a seamless web of phenomena each of which, in its own way, 'expresses' some unified inner truth—a world-view or a period style or a set of structural categories which marks the whole length of breadth of the 'period' in question" (27). The falsity arises, Jameson says, because invariably one of the expressions "becomes a master code or 'inner essence' capable of explicating the other elements or features of the 'whole' in question" (28). There is, then, no

real inner essence, only the privileging of an expression such that it gets

misinterpreted as an inner essence. Regarding the modernist period,

James's critique seems buttressed by the malleability of the descriptor

"modernism" itself. It has been pluralized, for example, by Nichols—his

book is titled *Modernisms*—suggesting a more various period, one in

which no single expression gets privileged. Similarly, disagreements about

the postmodern period—is it a "standalone" period or simply a phase of a

longer modernist period—seem to support Jameson's description. What

Jameson doesn't consider, however, is that periodization might be more

akin to Althusser's description of *darstellung*, a post-structuralist

relationship of expressions, absent an inner essence. As the expressions

are refined over time, so, too, is the period. The period's signifier

("modernism," for example), in fact, gets defined/redefined as the

expressions shift, which they invariably do. And this seems to be more

reflective of the way periodization works in the academy. The rules for

periodization are, on one hand, contentious and debated, and, on the other

hand, stubbornly resistant to change or removal. Medieval, Renaissance,

Romantic, Victorian, Modernist, Post-Modernist are period terms

frequently criticized and redefined, but nonetheless ubiquitous[5].

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[5] In "Modernism and the Issue of Periodization," (2005), Leonard Orr says there are, broadly, four ways to periodize literature: cyclically ("birth-maturation-death" for example), by qualities ("Realism and Naturalism"), by arbitrary chronological markers ("centuries and decades"), or historically ("Elizabethan, Restoration, or Victorian") (2). A conflation of the four seems to be the way that periodization works today. (The exception might be cyclical periodization, which I can't recall seeing anywhere but Northrup Frye's theories of modes.) Periodization by qualities, though, seems to be the way most designations develop. The qualities

Modernism is remarkable in that its periodization is determined not only by a set of distinct expressions, but it is also a revolutionary literary period. It requires an art that has qualities that are more than just "different" from preceding and succeeding moments. Clignet uses the term "discontinuities" to signal a cultural paradigm shift, but this word doesn't quite convey the rupture of the modernist moment. As stated in the previous section, the sheer proliferation of "isms" and manifestos in the Modernist period is one marker for a revolutionary moment. But it's not simply the number of "isms" and manifestos; it's the use of the manifesto itself. While a profusion of propositions for what the "new" ought to be is certainly an indication of a stark cultural shift, defining that "new" through manifestos and "isms" indicates a revolutionary turn toward intellectualizing art. Modernism produced founding documents. Manifestos don't stand only as competing propositions for a new sense of art. They are mission statements, declarations of principles. And the profusion of rule-based foundational documents indicates a more theoretical-based art, an art of ideas. The Modernist period saw the deracination of many foundational Western ideas, destabilizing traditional conceptual paradigms. In *Modernism: A Very Short Introduction*, Christopher Butler summarizes some of the, what he calls, "stresses and

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redefine even those periods that were originated by arbitrary historical markers, performing a quality/meaning coup over a previously established designation. Unstable definitions are the inevitable result of periodization in the same way that all meaning has been destabilized.

strains": "the loss of belief in religion, the rise of our dependence on

science and technology, the expansion of markets and the

commodification brought about by capitalism, the growth of mass culture

and its influence, the invasion of bureaucracy into private life, and

changing beliefs about relationships between the sexes" (1-2). The force

of these changes is described in Tim Armstrong's *Modernism: A Cultural*

History: "At the beginning of the twentieth century, the shock of change is

intensified. Indeed, for a variety of reasons modernity is increasingly

viewed in terms of crisis" (1). While all narrative history and periodization

are constructed series of changes – the popular, tongue-in-cheek

expression is that history is just one damned thing after another—the

changes occurring in the modernist moment are the deep, penetrating

changes that suggest revolution. "Stress," "strain," "shock," "crisis": these

are terms indicative of a culture in need of foundational theoretical

documents. a period so tumultuous that we read its *kunstlerromane*

manifesto-like.

Michael Bell's "The Metaphysics of Modernism" (2011) outlines

some of these deep conceptual shifts that occurred in the modernist period,

the kinds of shifts that are, in the terms of Kuhn and Clignet,

"definitional." Bell argues that the modernist period may not have begun

until 1910, but the intellectual preconditions began with the thinkers

whom Paul Ricoer would later say ushered in a hermeneutics of suspicion:

"[Modernism's] peak period in the Anglo-American context lay between

1910 and 1925 while its intellectual formation encompassed a coming to terms with the lines of thought associated with Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche" (9). What these three do, Bell says, is turn "human life into a fundamentally hermeneutic activity" (9). This suggests a paradigm shift in perception. Human life may have long been a hermeneutic activity, but the shift Bell describes is one of recognition, one that acknowledges a new hermeneutic quality and makes it explicit. Hermeneutics overlay what was previously considered "natural" or "preordained." The emergence of self-conscious hermeneutics, of self-conscious interpretation, undermined the stability of traditional modes of thought and expression. This destabilization is the revolutionary moment, and this moment of explanation and interpretation trammels up all human activity, including artistic expression, (maybe especially artistic expression). In the period of self-conscious hermeneutics, yoking human expression (art) with the explanation of human expression (artistic manifesto) seems unavoidable. The art of the period will bend toward explanation, and the artist-hero novel of the period will bend more so.

The modernist period, though, was more than a period of explanation and interpretation. The human mind could rationalize and control, but the human mind itself, human perception, ceded a measure of autonomy and became its own obstacle: "it is not just that the external appearances, and the common-sensical or rational means of understanding them, are limited and fallible. It is that such appearances and reasoning

may be actively disguising contrary truths to which, by definition, there is no other access" (Bell 10). The modernist period experienced the most fundamental shift in understanding: that understanding itself was deceptive. This second-guessing of human understanding emerged across disciplines. In science, for example, the obvious transformations were produced by Darwin and Freud; however, Einstein's theory of relativity and Heisenberg's theory of indeterminacy "seemed to have an analogical application to other, nonscientific spheres" (Bell 11). Relativity and indeterminacy were not only concepts of physics and quantum mechanics; they were cultural concepts. They were part of a larger shift that undermined fixed, transparent human understanding of the world.

In 1938, according to Bell, Heidegger looked back on the first decades of the century and saw the beginnings of "the age of the world picture" (12). Humans didn't perceive a world; they perceived a human world. The world was no longer the object viewed transparently; it was the world as humans see it, a human representation. Human understanding moved away from observing the object and toward the relationship between the subject and object, a relationship mediated by humanness. And such a mediated perception of the world requires reconsidering the conditions of mediation. Stable, foundational concepts like history, time, and thought were now representations of history, time, and thought. Bell offers the ideas of Nietzsche and Heidegger as philosophies that efface the separation of subject and object and, instead, consider the value and

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mystery of the human world. If history, for example, is always a mediated analysis, then it is always a projection of the present, and, indeed, talk of the "past" is always the present's past (or present-past). If, as Clignet argues, aesthetic revolutions can be recognized by their discontinuities – and the non-representational work in art, the stream-of-conscious work in prose fiction, free verse in poetry, and a-tonality in music all demonstrate formal discontinuities in art – then we should expect to find that these discontinuities occur in the same moment as the cultural displacement of many traditional Western conceptions. The shift from "what is" to "the interpretation of what is" not only destabilizes the modernist period, but it's the kind of destabilization that necessarily promotes manifestos. What other document would more naturally attend the interpretive moment than the one that interprets that moment? In this revolutionary moment, the *kunstlerroman* serves as the aesthetic interpolation into theoretical engagements. The modernist *kunstlerroman* is the art object that retains its aesthetic value while also declaring aesthetic principles.

Reader Expectations

The ekphrastic characteristics of the *kunstlerroman* and the revolutionary moment of the modernist period combine to influence the way one reads the modernist *kunstlerroman*. However, these conditions also require a willingness on the part of the reader to approach the *kunstlerroman* as a manifesto-like text. The conventional relationship between aesthetic manifesto and aesthetic object is that the former describes the latter; the

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former prescribes conditions, judgments, or rules for the latter. The aesthetic object is the example that adheres to or deviates from those rules. Readers of novels, of course, do not expect manifesto-like declarations from a novel, and, therefore, they tend not to read the *kunstlerroman* as a theoretical site. This lack of theoretical expectation effaces the *kunstlerroman*'s intrinsic theoretical positions, or at least the reader's recognition of these positions. Reader expectations determine, in large part, the meaning of any text, so to recognize a genre transgression like a novel-manifesto is to surmount strongly reinforced, long-held reading practices.

In "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935), Heidegger describes a hermeneutic circle that begins with a sense of art, moves to an art object, and then cycles back and forth between the two: "What art is should be inferable from the work. What the work of art is we can come to know only from the nature of art. Anyone can easily see that we are moving in a circle" (18). Heidegger argues that, in questions of logic or reason, such circles are usually avoided as they are illogical (circular logic); however, unlike circular logic, we are, he says, "compelled" to follow the aesthetic circle because it's an act of discovery, not a logical syllogism. Discovery seems always to cycle from the general to the specific, with the categories "general" and "specific" shifting as we cycle. Similarly, in *Validity and Interpretation* (1967), E. D. Hirsch describes the importance of interpretive expectation as a precondition in the production of meaning.

Hirsch defines "intrinsic genre" as a "sense of the whole by means of which an interpreter can correctly understand any part in its determinacy" (22). Interpretation is always circumscribed by a sense of genre, which determines the interpretations of individual parts. Sense is made of particulars through a pre-judging of the whole. In this way, manifesto-like qualities are not a preconceived sense of the whole when approaching a novel, and, thus, they might get overlooked. This may help to explain why *kunstlerromane* have not been read as sites of artistic principles (even though their self-referentiality would seem to demand it). Furthermore, according to Hirsch, the production of a text is circumscribed by the same expectations as the reception of the text. The production of the text, he argues, is "determined by the kind of meaning [it] is going to complete" (23). Textual choices, conscious and unconscious, are determined, in part, by the expectations of the genre. Generic conceptions of novel structure, then, influence textual creation and interpretation (as do generic conceptions of manifesto structure, or any structure for that matter). This suggests that genre influences interpretation of the text not only in its reception but also in its production. For novels, this dual expectation combines to, perhaps, divert any production of aesthetic manifesto-like meaning, even for a novel "about" art.

The categorical horizons of novel and manifesto, however, are not inviolable. In fact, the *kunstlerroman*'s blurring of the divide between art and the art manifesto is consistent with the blurring effects of the

modernist avant-garde and experimental literature. As, for example, a text like *Ulysses* changes how the novel genre is conceived, so, too, do the formal qualities of the *kunstlerroman* perform a reconceptualization. The new conception, though, is not so much a formal innovation as it is an interpretive recognition. The *kunstlerroman* may lack the jarring formal deviations of a *Ulysses*, it may not announce its work so starkly, but its formal qualities combined with its historical period subtly produce the hybrid genre novel-manifesto. In "Toward a Theory of Non-Genre Literature," Jonathan Culler acknowledges "the astonishing human capacity to recuperate the deviant, to invent new conventions and functions so as to overcome that which resists our efforts" (55). The *kunstlerroman* is clearly not a new convention, but it does comprise an unrecognized function: reading the statement of aesthetic theory in narrative form. The project of this dissertation, therefore, is not so much to bring a "deviant" quality into the genre called "novel"; artist-heroes are hardly a deviant (or new) trope. Instead, the purpose here is to acknowledge and be open to an unconventional reading. And if, as Hirsch suggests, textual production is determined, in part, by genre expectations, then the same may be true for tropes. That is, while the *kunstlerroman*'s construction is, in part, colored by the expectations of the genre called "novel," it's also colored by the expectations of the trope "the artist novel." This dissertation's purpose is to broaden those expectations. *Kunstlerromane* are not only novels, they are novels about art. And if

textual production is determined by notions of genre, then these particular art novels are determined by notions of art. The intentional fallacy has made authorial intent a much more rigorous, specialized endeavor, one point in a network of strategies for interpreting texts. Similarly, considering that generic conventions are influenced by reader/writer expectations, these expectations should be subject to similar suspicion and scrutiny. In general, as the reading and writing of texts become more interrelated, as each reading is seen as its own instance of writing, readers' predispositions must undergo the same scrutiny as writers' intentions have. And while a manifesto of art would seem to be a naturally distinct discipline from an object of art, like the rules of baseball are separate from the game itself, such distinctions become less clear within the horizon of aesthetics. In baseball, to extend the metaphor, the action and outcome of any individual game doesn't change the rules of baseball. However, in aesthetics each individual performance inflects the understanding of the genre; each dancer, as Yeats suggests, in effect, creates the dance.

Traditional Critical Approaches to the *Kunstlerroman*

To be clear, it's not my argument that the authors of modernist *kunstlerromane* consciously set out to make aesthetic claims in novel form, or that they used the *kunstlerroman* trope to narrate manifesto intent. The authors' aims and intentions are subjects for a different study, and this is where this study diverges from most other *kunstlerroman* work. The "encyclopedia" of *kunstlerromane* studies is Maurice Beebe's *Ivory*

Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to

Joyce (1964). In it, Beebe compiles a thorough list of *kunstlerromane*

titles and conventions in an effort to define the genre. (Beebe calls the

artist-hero novel a "genre." I've used the term "trope" and will continue to

do so unless specifically referring to Beebe.) For centuries, he says, the

artist-hero novel has adhered to an identifiable set of conventions. Beebe

argues, for example, that the author of an artist-hero novel is often

recognized in the artist hero of that novel. Traditional *kunstlerroman*

criticism often emphasizes the *kunstlerroman* as autobiography,[6] and one

of the three novels of this dissertation—*Portrait of the Artist as a Young*

Man—certainly contains a good deal of what biographies of Joyce would

contain. But along with making autobiographical connections, Beebe's

analysis also constructs an archetype for the artist heroes themselves.

Beebe argues, for instance, that, in general, artist-heroes hew to a specific

set of characteristics: "The person blessed (or cursed?) with 'artistic

temperament' is always sensitive, usually introverted and self-centered,

often passive, and sometimes so capable of abstracting himself mentally

from the world around him that he appears absentminded or 'possessed'"

(5). And, again, *Portrait*, as well as other *kunstlerromane*, have artist

heroes who neatly fit Beebe's characterization. While this characterization

may seem like a bit of ambiguous psychologizing – and Beebe, perhaps,

acknowledges as much with the quotation marks around "artistic

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[6] In *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye calls the *kunstlerroman* "fictional autobiography" (307).

temperament" – it also had the perhaps unintended consequence of being the framing idea of the artist-hero genre.

However, the bulk of *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* is Beebe's formulation of a three-part pattern of the artist-hero's identity. First, the artist hero is a "divided being, man *and* artist, a historical personage who merely serves as the medium through which the creative spirit manifests itself" (6). More specifically, the divided nature of the artist hero splits thus: "The man [the artist is almost always a man in these examples] seeks personal fulfillment in experience [the Sacred Fount], while the artist-self desires freedom from the demands of life [the Ivory Tower]" (13). The sacred fount is the artist hero's intense desire for experience: "Because he feels more intensely than others, he is tempted to explore the extremes of experience" (67). The experience is often sexual, and in the artist-hero novel, sex and art seem to be a zero-sum game: a finite amount of creative energy means that energy invested in one is energy unavailable for the other. The artist must choose. The women – and, again, in Beebe's analysis, most artists are men and their sexual interests are almost always women – are in an intellectual, emotional, or artistic sense "below" the artist. They lack the artists' discerning, sensitive nature, and artists must reconcile the contrary pulls of sexual fulfillment and artistic creation. Against the sacred fount tradition, Beebe suggests the ivory tower tradition, in which the artist "resents his carnal appetites and natural instincts and yearns for release from human bondage. His Ivory Tower…is

often without windows; and if he looks out at all, it is not so much *at* the world as down upon it" (114). The ivory tower is the position separate from the world of physical desire, so much so that windows, potential vantage points of temptation and desire, are absent. It is in the ivory tower, Beebe says, that art is materially produced. The sacred fount/ivory tower distinction suggests several structural binaries: active/reflective, body/mind, natural/ideal. But Beebe prefers the religious: physical/spiritual. He says that "the artist of the Ivory Tower tradition seeks annihilation of the suffering, human self in order to free the creative spirit that represents the God in man" (171). The artist has abstracted himself from human desire and physical want, creating art almost indifferently. (One imagines Joyce's artist/god, removed and paring his nails).

Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts does extensive work in bringing together artist-hero novels under the umbrella of a single pattern – divided self, sacred fount, and the ivory tower. As a comparative study, it produces a set of qualities that very neatly (too neatly?) describes a great number of *kunstlerromane*. Beebe seems to acknowledge the "too neat" regularity of his analysis when he compares his work to Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949): "Indeed, some readers may well feel that I have too fully illustrated the artist and his situation, for it is apparent that the artist-hero, like the hero with a thousand faces, is always the same man and the conflicts he faces are essentially the same conflicts" (299). Such

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regular, standardized formulations make important connections of similarity, and Beebe's wide-ranging analysis does this, and it remains influential. *Kunstlerroman* studies since Beebe have mostly followed his lead and done similar work, focusing on characterizations of what it means to be an artist of the sacred fount or ivory tower, or presenting the artist figure of the *kunstlerroman* as a proxy for the text's author. In 2004, for example, volume 150 of *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* was largely given over to essays on *kunstlerroman* studies, and most of these essays focused on some aspect of the artist-hero's characterization – what it means to be an artist or the artist's role in a given culture – or else aligning the artist of the novel with the novel's historical author.

However, a genre rigorously defined through similarity overlooks important differences (like the differences Campbell and other monomyth writers are criticized for overlooking). While *Sacred Founts and Ivory Towers* ably groups artists by these general characteristics, it avoids the particular aesthetic observations and assertions of the individual work, the *kunstlerroman* itself. Beebe briefly acknowledges that *kunstlerromane* may be "exercises in criticism and esthetic theory" (299), but exploring these theories never becomes part of his project. The pursuit of this dissertation, then, diverges from other *kunstlerroman* studies by investigating an important subset of *kunstlerromane*, the modernist *kunstlerromane*, and reading them for the manifesto-like claims they inevitably present. These theoretical claims engage with various aesthetic

questions of the modernist moment. If, as Nichols says, over fifty aesthetic "isms" were invented (and he uses the word "invented") from 1886-1924, then this suggests a moment of instability and change, or at least the potential to change; it suggests a moment rife with ideas for how that change should look, and a dissatisfaction for how it currently looks. Novels about art in this period would be ideal sites for such conversations to emerge.

The Three Kunstlerromane:

As noted above, the modernist *kunstlerroman* exists as a novel-manifesto because of its controlling trope and its historic moment, not because of its author's stated purpose. However, the three *kunstlerromane* that I chose for this project were chosen, in part, because each of the authors has produced textual evidence of aesthetic positions. The works on aesthetics are supplemental, but they also serve as guideposts. Also, because the modernist period is a revolutionary period, the aesthetic ideas of the *kunstlerromane* address the kinds of foundational concepts that the manifestos of the period addressed. Both Joyce and Lewis have, of course, contributed non-fiction that engages these foundational concepts. And James has contributed prescient theoretical work that senses the imminent revolutionary shifts. I will, therefore, use some primary authorial assertions on art and the modernist moment, but will in no way try to fit perfectly the author's *kunstlerroman* with the author's written aesthetic ideas. Instead, I will trace the relationship between the aesthetic ideas of

the *kunstlerromane* with the stated aesthetic ideas of the authors without unreflexively conflating the two.

The first *kunstlerroman* I investigate is Henry James's *The Tragic Muse* (1890). In the closing decade of the nineteenth century, Henry James acknowledges an important shift in attitude toward English literature. In "The Art of Fiction" (1888), James says that English literature is becoming more openly discussed, more openly theorized, suggesting his sense of the coming profusion of "isms." Two years after "The Art of Fiction," in this burgeoning theoretical moment, James publishes *The Tragic Muse*, a *kunstlerroman* that promotes three aesthetic principles. First, it presents keen, discerning observation as an important aesthetic foundation. The artist, James says in "The Art of Fiction," must be "one of the people on whom nothing is lost" (6). Second, the novel celebrates the acceptance of aesthetic experimentation. It reminds us that traditional artistic forms are always changing, and it encourages an openness to, or at least a willingness to listen to, more radical modernist invention. If modernism is, in part, a revolutionary moment of experimentation and change, then one of the establishing preconditions for its prehistory would seem to be openness to such experimentation, a cultural willingness to consider, if not adopt, aesthetic change. Last, the novel admires but ultimately rejects, the late nineteenth-century's attitude toward aestheticism. *Muse* presents the period's aestheticism (personified in the form of the dandy Gabriel Nash) as formidable and insightful but suffering

from ennui. The novel replaces this bored aestheticism with an assertion of artistic action, presaging the modernist period's emphasis on movement, progress, and the new.

The second *kunstlerroman* is James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). *Portrait* presents an archetypal modern artist, Stephen Dedalus, working his way out of the fetters that prevent creativity and toward the freedom that both artistic creation and reception require. Art, like the creation of the artist, is a process, an essentially human process that has been blunted by social institutions and physical desire. *Portrait*'s aesthetic position is that stripping away social and material obstacles is necessary for engagement with our most human self, our aesthetic self. Engaging our natural inclination, the aesthetic inclination, is to engage the essence of humanity—Joyce's uses the word "spirit." His descriptions of the disembodied feel of art, its presence first and foremost in the imagination, suggests the deeply religious (spiritual) culture from which he comes, and the relationship that exists between religion and art. *Portrait* suggests that the point at which this seemingly disembodied, immaterial, imaginative, spiritual essence enters into culture is in myth and art.

The final *kunstlerroman* is Wyndham Lewis's *The Revenge for Love* (1937). *Revenge* presents an eclectic cast of characters around London's artistic/leftist political scene in the period between the wars. A satirical novel, *Revenge* mainly targets the "salon reds," the "bourgeois

bohemian" intellectuals who naively support a politics they don't really understand and to which they can't really relate. *Revenge* broadens its satire, though, critiquing the whole of English society. It's a political novel, and the politics are foundational: it echoes the claims made by Hobbes and Rousseau, and concludes that all social formations create repression and distortions. Art is the site for resistance, where the individual can push back against social pressure and express him- or herself freely.

Chapter One

The Tragic Muse: Unfolding Modernism

The Tragic Muse, published in book form in 1890, was a commercial and

critical failure,[7] and it continues to inspire little critical interest today.

W.R. Macnaughton's "In Defense of *The Tragic Muse*" (1985)

acknowledges that *Muse* is quite likely "the novel by [James] least often

read and least highly regarded" (5). Reasons for *Muse*'s poor reception

and poor critical reputation are various: it's too long (it's James's longest);

it's predictable; its un-Jamesian, a thematic and tonal outlier in James's

oeuvre; and its claims for artistic freedom are "self-indulgent"

(Macnaughton 5). Such criticism, however, doesn't engage the aesthetic

arguments that the novel makes. Is it long? Sure. Predicable? Maybe. But

to say that the novel is "un-Jamesian" is to submit to precisely the kind of

reader-expectation bias noted above, the bias that E. D. Hirsh describes

and that Jonathan Culler argues against. It may be unique in the James

canon, but this is different from saying "un-Jamesian." Furthermore, to

say that claims for artistic freedom are self-indulgent is to ignore the

reactionary response that much of the coming experimental modernist art

endured as well as to ignore the censorship with which important

modernist works soon had to contend. (Joyce's struggles publishing

Dubliners and *Ulysses* come to mind.). In light of these coming instances

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[7] After *Muse* had completed its serialization in the *Atlantic*, James's publishers told him, presciently, that they
doubted the book would sell. They offered him an advance of seventy pounds, not the two hundred fifty to
which he had become accustomed (Edel 363).

of censorship, James's claims for artistic freedom seem more prescient

than self-indulgent.

In the preface to the New York Edition of *The Tragic Muse*, James

confesses that he can't recall the origins of the novel or what prompted

him to take up its themes. Yet he acknowledges a vague sense, a glimmer,

that he must have intended to write about art: "To 'do something about

art'—art, that is, as a human complication and a social stumbling-block—

must have been for me early a good deal of the a nursed intention, the

conflict between art and 'the world' striking me thus betimes as one of the

half-dozen great primary motives" (3). And while much of James's

connection to the modernist period emphasizes his later work, the interest

he claims here suggests not only a theoretical exploration of art in "the

world," but also the deeply human importance that such a theme

embraces: art in the world is one of the "great primary motives." These

aesthetic ambitions hint at the aesthetic theorizing to come. And if, as

mentioned in the previous section, we consider modernism as a literary

period with approximate beginning and end points, then *Muse* is of the

moment that Nichols calls the "prehistory of the various modernisms,"

what Kolkotroni et al. call the moment of "emergent inflexions of the

new." Although we consider modernism as a discrete period, periodization

is always fluid. However, there is a sense suggested by the above texts,

that the late nineteenth century was a transitional period; that this moment

of "prehistory" and "emergence" was a liminal period, an elision into the

modernist period, into something "new." *Muse* seems to anticipate the

coming aesthetic revolution in three important ways: it prefigures the shift

in emphasis from writer to reader by declaring the importance of astute

observation; it welcomes aesthetic experimentation; and it rejects

aestheticism, which it suggests is a passive theoretical position, in favor of

more active theorizing.

First is the conviction that all art requires astute awareness; the

artist must be what James calls, in "The Art of Fiction" (1888) "one of the

people on whom nothing is lost" (6). And while "The Art of Fiction"

doesn't say the reader, too, should try to be one of the people on whom

nothing is lost, *Muse* certainly does. And in doing so, the novel blurs the

reader/writer distinction and anticipates the coming emphasis on reader

response[8]. Next, *Muse* advocates for the kind of experimentation that "The

Art of Fiction" seems to sense is imminent. *Muse*, for instance, opens at an

art exhibition, which is praised thus: "There was youth in the air, a

multitudinous newness, for ever [sic] reviving, and the diffusion of a

hundred talents, ingenuities, experiments" (20). The exhibition described

is a late nineteenth century French exhibition, but the description would be

equally apt for the 1913 Armory Show, in New York. Finally, *Muse*

respectfully, even affectionately, puts to rest one of the prevailing

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[8] In *Henry James's Portrait of the Writer as Hero* (1990) Sara Chapman makes a similar claim about James
   prefiguring the later emphasis on reader response. She argues that this is evidenced in James's Prefaces to
   the New York Edition. During the process of re-reading the novels and writing the prefaces, James came to
   see "the collaborative role of the reader…the writer will require the reader to interpret the experience of the
   fiction for himself" (5).

aesthetic positions of the late nineteenth century: the role of the aesthete and the art-for-art's sake. position *Muse* suggests that the more "passive" art-for-art's-sake position isn't tenable in the coming shift towards the more "active" work of aesthetic theorizing.

But first, a note of caution. The suggestion that *The Tragic Muse* (or any Henry James novel, for that matter) is explicitly contributing to aesthetic theory might, at first, strike some as far-fetched, especially if one considers the word "idea" to be a reasonable synonym for "theory." While James was responsible for much literary criticism outside of his fiction, there is a lingering suggestion that the fiction itself is a-theoretical, created by a painterly mind, painstakingly detailed but without larger "ideas." This critique is given significant purchase in 1918, two years after James's death, by, arguably, the early twentieth-century's most influential critic. T.S Eliot famously characterized James as having "a mind so fine that no idea could violate it" (151). Taken out of context, Eliot's characterization reads like a backhanded compliment at best, at worst an insult, the suggestion being that James wrote stylishly or elegantly but thoughtlessly. However, Eliot had something quite different in mind. His description of "ideas" is such that none of us would like to be caught dead with them. In his piece on James, Eliot more narrowly defines what he means by "idea": "the political, the emotional idea, evading sensation and thought" (152). Eliot's argument that contemporary ideas are removed from sensation echo his notion of the dissociation of sensibility, which he defines later in

"The Metaphysical Poets" (1921). There he argues that, regarding some of England's most celebrated poets, "the masters of diction" have a "dazzling disregard of the soul" (66). In both the James piece and the metaphysical poetry piece, Eliot contends that ideas are fragmented, and as bits of ratiocination without feeling or soul, they remain something other than fully developed human thinking. And along with the lack of feeling or soul, "ideas" also evade "thought," which suggests that the knowledge inhering in these fragmented ideas lacks the kind of intellectual rigor and continuity, the comprehensive reflection that, for Eliot, a more complete concept would provide[9]. James, of course, was not a poet. But the similarity between the dissociation of sensibility and Eliot's description of James's lack of "ideas" indicates that, for Eliot, James resists the fragmented ideas of his contemporaries.

However, crediting James with avoiding "bad" fragmented ideas is not the same as saying he trucked in "good," comprehensive ones. But Eliot's strongest praise of James does suggest that Eliot saw in James's novels the kind of comprehensive thinking that he saw in the metaphysical poets. James's novels, he says, don't present a character or group of characters so much as they present "a situation, a relation, an atmosphere" (151). This kind of totalizing language suggests a similarity between the comprehensive conceits of the Metaphysical poets and the novels of

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[9] G.K. Chesterton, Eliot claims in the James essay, was exemplary in his production of these kinds of fragmented ideas: "Mr. Chesterton's brain swarms with ideas," Eliot writes. "I see no evidence that it thinks" (152).

James. Eliot says, "The real hero, in any of James's stories, is a social entity of which men and women are constituents" (151). James's novels are not "about" heroes, Eliot claims. James's stories present social relations, the rules, norms, and traditions that inform and are informed by his characters. (Art, of course, is the social entity-hero of *The Tragic Muse*.) What made the Metaphysical poets great, Eliot says, was their ability to recognize connections, or wholes: "the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary… [He] falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes" (64). If James's great talent was for "social entities," then it, too, must have been a talent for "forming new wholes."[10] The implication seems inescapable: James didn't have "a mind so fine that *no* idea [or theory] could violate it"; he had a mind so fine that only the best (most complete) ideas – as defined by Eliot – could inhabit it. And if, in fact, Eliot did see these relations, atmospheres, and social entities in James's novels as corresponding to the conceits of the Metaphysical poets, then Eliot might be suggesting that James was a happy accident, a pleasant aberration, a return to a time when thought and sensibility were united.

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[10] Eliot's discussion of the relationship between fragments and wholes prefigures Heidegger's later discussion (mentioned earlier in this piece) of a hermeneutic circle. Indeed, the relationship between fragments and wholes is a consistent theme of modernity and post-modernity—Marxist ideas of totality and post-structuralist ideas of fragmentation, for example. Critical theory in modernity seems to be a matter of how subjects position themselves in identifying and re-defining fragments and wholes.

James, then, is not a figure for whom aesthetic theory would be anathema; indeed, he's a writer who sees such theorizing as essential for literary development. His reviews of other literary works often make such literary claims. In his assessment of Flaubert, for instance, James argues that the writer "must be present in his work like God in Creation, invisible and almighty, everywhere felt but nowhere seen," an image later echoed by Joyce (Chapman 2). And in "Henry James and the Invention of Novel Theory" (1998), Dorothy Hale says that "Henry James's literary critical essays, especially the Prefaces that he wrote for the New York Edition of his fiction (1905-7), have generally been regarded as the foundational documents for Anglo-American novel theory" (79). But the prefaces, reviews, and essays are not fiction, and James's aesthetic theories have been located outside the fiction. Indeed, according to Hale, James's theoretical work has been criticized for being strictly formal, that "his study of fictional technique is embedded in a larger aesthetic theory that values artistic form to the exclusion of other sorts of meaning" (80). James's theoretical position, Hale says, is that life is limitless relations; the novel circumscribes an arbitrary boundary on those relations, puts a frame, as it were, about some section of life (80). The implication is that the novel is detailed, keenly observed reportage. It is not a site for theory, but merely canny observation. Hale allows that James "sometimes describes novel writing as a process of self-expression and other times as a process of reporting" (85). However, the self-expression often feels more like

empathy, not the expression of the artist but the artist penetrating an object. This understanding of James's insistence of form over meaning, of canny empathy, can lead to a reading bias against aesthetic declarations in James. *The Tragic Muse*, however, as noted above, is an art object about art, written at the beginning of a revolutionary explosion of aesthetic theorizing, and it can't help but make aesthetic claims. The "other sorts of meaning" that Hale says are absent form James's non-fiction studies of fictional technique emerge in his novel-manifesto.

Aesthetic theorizing and the people on whom nothing is lost

In "The Art of Fiction" (1888), Henry James's essay promoting artistic freedom, James acknowledges that "only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French would call *discutable.* It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it—of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison" (1). James recognizes here a new emerging aesthetic sensibility regarding the English novel, a theoretical sensibility. There is always, he says, a "latent core of conviction" in any work of art, but the new moment is bringing this latent core to the surface, and theoretical ideas are more openly discussed (1). For James, theorizing art—recognizing and exploring the "conviction" and "consciousness," making theory explicit—has recognizable consequences for the art of the moment:

[T]he era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened. Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints; and there is a presumption that those times when no one has anything particular to say about it, and has no reason to give for practice or preference, though they may be times of genius, are not times of development, are times possibly even, a little, of dullness. (1)

The nascent theorizing of this emerging modernist moment will re-animate art, according to James, because such theoretical discussion is essential to the very life of art. Whatever else it may be, art is fundamentally another voice in ongoing social conversation. When these conversations about art become more prominent, the art itself must surely become richer. James recognizes that a new period of development and more innovative art has begun, and the increase of active aesthetic theorizing is instrumental for, and essential to, the discourse of aesthetic innovation.

This kind of communal, discursive thinking about art might seem conventional today, but it was by no means conventional in 1888. Michael Inwood's Introduction to Hegel's *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (2004), for example, argues that Hegel, along with other nineteenth-century German aesthetic theorists, felt German art could not rise to the level of classical art precisely because of the intense critical discussions in early nineteenth-century Germany: "Reflective thought is inimical to

artistic creation and impairs the art into which it intrudes. And Hegel's age was above all an age of criticism and of reflective thought about art" (xi). For Hegel, Inwood says, ideas were the combination of concepts and reality. The soul (concept) and the body (reality), for example, made man (the idea). The work of art, too, is an idea. It is the combination of a concept and materiality (paint and canvas, for example). The problem for art, according to Hegel, is that it declines as a mode of ideas when, say, philosophy or theory, more direct modes of expressing ideas, ascend. While "The Art of Fiction" clearly claims, as opposed to Hegel, that art improves when ideas of art flourish, James may very well have felt that the proper site for these ideas was the philosophical treatise, the manifesto, not the novel. However, in this emerging, revolutionary moment of new theoretical discussion, at the same time he was valorizing aesthetic theory, James was serializing *The Tragic Muse,* a *kunstlerroman* with three artists at its center. Both the essay on art and novel are participating in the discourse of this newly opened era of aesthetic discussion.

The *Tragic Muse* opens at a French art exhibition, and it's significant that in an artist's novel, this one begins with artists as viewers. The opening moment is observational, not creative. And it's here that James's foremost aesthetic injunction is expressed: the artist needs to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost. We are introduced to the novel's three artists: the budding painter, Nick Dormer (his name suggests the sleeping artist who needs to awaken); the writer/dandy, Gabriel Nash;

and Miriam Rooth, the budding actress and tragic muse of the novel's title. The novel's introduction to the three artists, however, is not as artists at work, but artists as readers or audience. And, in fact, at this opening moment, none of the three is a working artist: Nick and Miriam are aspirants, and Nash is a "retired" writer of one novel who is now determined to live his life as a dandy and flaneur.

However, the three are not presented as mere observers at an exhibition: they are *astute* observers. The contrast between the discerning and the unobservant is made early when Nick takes his youngest sister, Biddy, to see the art more closely. His disapproving mother, Lady Agnes, watches Nick walk away until "she lost sight of him; he wandered behind things, looking at them all round" (18). This willingness to observe details from all perspectives separates Nick from his disinterested mother—not only does she lose sight of him, but she also never "sees" the objects about her, dismissing the art objects as so many "horrors" (15). Nick's appreciation for careful analysis, which he tries to impress on Biddy, marks him as one of the people on whom nothing is lost. And this is the case, too, of the retired author Gabriel Nash. While taking his observant turn around the exhibition with Biddy, Nick encounters Nash, a former schoolmate from Oxford. The first description of Nash comes from the perspective of Biddy—who, we're told, is "quick," which is to say she perceives quickly, and who later makes her own attempts at sculpting— and it's Nash's manner of speech that Biddy first notes: "[His manner of

speaking] had in truth a conspicuous and aggressive perfection, and Biddy was sure no mere learner would have ventured to play such tricks with the tongue. He seemed to draw rich effects and wandering airs from it—to modulate and manipulate it as he would have done a musical instrument" (21). Nash's very speech is a work of art, and it serves to help construct his identity as a self-declared work of art. Also, the precision with which Nash speaks mirrors the precision with which he observes. Throughout the novel, he is a canny judge of character, art, and circumstance. He is the linchpin between the novel's two budding artists, Nick and Miriam Rooth. Miriam, along with her mother, is with Nash at this initial reunion with Nick, but she isn't properly introduced to Nick or Biddy because she has drifted toward a painting. Biddy watches her as Nick and Nash get reacquainted. Along with signs of Miriam's reduced social standing, Biddy notices that Miriam has "largely-gazing eyes" (21). These are not large eyes that gaze, but instead voracious eyes that work to take in perhaps more than the eye can hold. If Miriam isn't yet one of the people on whom nothing is lost, these largely gazing eyes suggest that she will work tirelessly to become one. (And she does.) This opening scene introduces the reader not only to the three artists at the novel's center, but to their shared appreciation for the importance of close, detailed observation.

That these three observant artists should be spectators at an exhibition emphasizes *Muse*'s valuation of discernment, but their being in

France is significant, too, to the observational quality of the novel. In Martin Jay's *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1993), Jay presents this period in French art as one of shifting emphasis on how art is observed. Impressionists, for example, "left their work seemingly unfinished, their brush strokes still evident, the contours of their forms blurred, their colors often juxtaposed rather than smoothly blended" (154). Clear, distinct lines were less important to the impressionists than was color. This contrasts not only with the generation of artists who preceded them, but also with much of the history of Western art. Post impressionists followed hard on the heels of impressionists. Pointillists and symbolists, for example, retained clarity in their lines (and points) and re-emphasized the object. Jay argues that post impressionists, such as Cezanne, rejected the impressionist "naïve belief in unmediated perception, seeking instead to rediscover the objects they [impressionists] had dissolved" (158). What's at stake here is the value of one's perception: for the impressionists, perception is primary; for the post-impressionists, the relationship between perception and object is primary[11].

The aesthetic function of perception that James addresses in "The Art of Fiction," and that scholars like Dorothy Hale say are present in the Prefaces, also are prominent in *The Tragic Muse*, which proves a rich vein

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[11] This is a question at least as old as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781): does subjective experience provide access to the things in themselves, or is subjective experience only influenced by them and, thus, "separate"?

for mining James's ideas of aesthetic perception. The impressionist/post-impressionist divide, which I've simplified here, translates to the novel thus: Is novel writing self-expression or reporting? What is the relationship between artists' perceptions and the world around them? Is the novel authorial impressions or authorial observations? For *Muse*, the answer seems to be an insistence on observation, on empiricism. Like the post-impressionist insistence that objective reality guides perception, so the novelist concedes that individual perceptions are circumscribed. One's perception of people, events, objects, and concepts should be an active engagement, a discovery more than a feeling. This isn't quite the same as saying painting, or a novel, should aspire to the kind of verisimilitude that predominated in the nineteenth century. Rather, it's an assertion of observational engagement. That *nothing* is lost on the artist and reader suggests a penetrating observation, an understanding that transcends the obvious and superficial. The modernist painting and literature to come— cubism or stream-of-conscious technique, say—might be characterized in the same way: they are more penetrating, detailed engagements with the world rather than mere impressions of the world.

In "Visual Art Devices and Parallels in the Fiction of Henry James" (1961), Viola Hopkins makes a similar claim. Descriptions in James, she says, often mirror the way we might analyze a painting. We begin globally, then focus on details, and then on the emotions the work may evoke. It is a "progression from description to evocation and

symbolization" (566). *Muse*'s characterizations are often structured this way, and the opening paragraph is an excellent example. It begins thus: "The people of France have made it no secret that those of England as a general thing are to their perception an inexpressive and speechless race, perpendicular and unsociable, unaddicted to enriching any bareness of contact with verbal or other embroidery" (13). The description begins with an account of one nation's (race's) generalized account of another. The paragraph narrows its scope to inside of the exhibition, and then to the four English figures who seem to exemplify this French stereotype: Nick, his two sisters, and his mother. It's not merely a shift from global observation to detailed analysis; it's also the evocation of emotional response. The English in general, and Nick's family in particular, have the aura of "security and persistence…which excites, according to individual susceptibility, the ire or the admiration of foreign communities" (13). Not only does this opening paragraph exemplify Hopkins's idea that James often describes in the manner that one reads a painting, but the paragraph itself repeatedly invokes readerly concepts: the French "perception," the salon's "spirit of observation," the general "solicitation of the eye." The reader takes in the scene the way she would a painting, while the scene itself declares the importance of being a reader.

While *Muse*'s adherence to penetrating the superficial may intimate the modernism to come, the novel's firm conviction in empirical reliability—the importance of being one of the people on whom nothing is

lost—also distances it from the modernists to come and places it in the more familiar position of nineteenth-century realism. Where the coming modernism became suspicious of sensual perception, such perception grounds *Muse*. Jay quotes British art historian T.J. Clark's assertion that the modernist aesthetic was very much about doubting its own ability to "see" the world: "Doubts about vision became doubts about almost everything involved in the act of painting; and in time the uncertainty became a value in its own right: we could say it became an aesthetic" (159). The aesthetic to which Clark is referring is, according to Jay, "what we call modernism" (159). Suspicions about our ability to discover truth, as well as suspicions about truth itself, are common themes in the modernist aesthetic. On the threshold of this coming skepticism about the value or validity of what can be "seen," *Muse* retains the empiricist's insistence on unmediated subjective truth that is associated with realism. In her essay on *The Bostonians*—"Realism, Culture, and the Place of the Literary: Henry James and *The Bostonians*" (1998)—Sara Blair says that "*The Bostonians*, like James's writings of the 1880's at large, intently engages American literary realism" (151-2). Blair argues that while James did not subscribe to the progressive project that American realists like William Dean Howells pursued, the James of the 1880s did see himself as a "realist historian" (154), suggesting the sense of truth that James felt realism produced[12]. In describing James's characters, Eliot says that they

[12] Blair says that James's "novels and criticism throughout the 1880s and early 1890s pointedly but unevenly consider the role literature will play as a cultural force in this 'age of new revelations'" (154). Again,

are "[d]one in a clean, flat drawing, each is extracted out of a reality of its own, substantial enough; everything given is true for that individual" (151). This kind of scrupulous adherence to a nineteenth-century notion of empiricism, which closely ties realism with truth, is a notion that modernism will soon challenge. However, the discipline required to excavate this truth hints at the coming skepticism. Neither James nor future modernists trust the surface, and reality in *Muse* is not an obvious surface perception. It requires penetrating attention to detail. Jay says that "the Naturalists [of this period] relied on a vision that privileged the raw description of surface appearances over the more penetrating gaze revealing deep structures preferred by Realists" (173). *Muse*'s Realism requires penetrating surface appearances to get at the real. Poised in this way, penetrating empiricism casts a modernist doubt on surface appearances, but such doubt falls short of the doubt that would be modernism's more intractable skepticism of empiricism itself.

In *Muse*, the three artists share this ability to penetrate superficial surfaces. Nick Dormer is caught between a practical, remunerative position in politics and a less practical, less remunerative career as an artist. The social forces pushing him into politics are almost comically manifold: His well-born but poor family is financially relying on him; his intended, Julia Dallow, is rich and desperately wants him to run for a seat

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"revelation" suggests a truth that is hidden from superficial observation, yet still accessible, and his sense of the age of new revelation indicates, again, James's sense of being on the threshold of something starkly new.

in her district (a run she will finance); his deceased father (who was a politician) has a wealthy friend, Mr. Carteret, who has promised Nick a sizable inheritance if Nick takes a job in politics; and Nick has an easy, almost uncanny knack for the political game. But, alas, his real desire is to be an artist. It's noteworthy that his first pushback against this array of forces pulling him toward politics is that it's superficial humbug. Speaking to his patron/girlfriend, Julia, Nick rejects the cliched boilerplate of the hustings, a language, he ruefully acknowledges, he can speak fluently: "[A]nd that's what I'm ashamed of. I've got the cursed humbugging trick of it. I speak it beautifully…It has nothing to do with the truth or the search for it; nothing to do with intelligence, or candour, or honour. It's an appeal to everything that for one's self one despises…to stupidity, to ignorance, to density, to the love of names and phrases, the love of hollow, idiotic words, of shutting the eyes tight and making noise" (54). Nick's negative description of political language implies his understanding of what the proper strategy for pursuing truth would look like: it would require intelligence and candor and honor, of penetrating beneath the superficial. Truth is not found on the surface. And his closing metaphor is a visual one: if humbug requires closed eyes, then the truth requires open ones.

Likewise, the novel's other two artists, Gabriel Nash and Miriam Rooth, are also keenly observant, Nash effortlessly so and Miriam doggedly so. When Nash is first reunited with Nick at the French art

exhibit, without any prompting from Nick at all, Nash intuits his friend's

career predicament and offers his service: "Ah, it was high time I should

meet you—I see. I've an idea you need me" (22). The visual metaphor in

the middle of these sentences emphasizes Nash's almost preternatural

ability to penetrate the surface. He sees (understands) without being

shown. In a crowded, busy exhibition, without any prompting from Nick,

Nash intuits his friend's distress. Indeed, Nick's reply—"Upon my word I

think I do" (22)—suggests Nash knew Nick's need before Nick did. And

this is a large part of Nash's characterization throughout the novel. His

predictions about future events are almost unfailingly accurate, and he's

by far the novel's most astute character. Miriam Rooth, too, is one of the

people on whom nothing is lost, but hers is a hard-earned insight (an

important virtue in *Muse*). She first speaks in the novel at a drawing-room

recitation for the renowned French stage actress Madame Carre. Miriam

hopes to get an assessment from Madame Carre and possibly be taken on

as an acting student. Miriam has had little formal training, and the

recitation goes poorly. Still, in this early moment in the novel, despite

being the youngest and most vulnerable person in the room, Miriam shows

flashes of cutting directness. When Madame Carre's opinions vacillate,

Miriam intuits the truth: "You think me actually pretty bad, don't you?"

(66). And when Madame Carre, who is French, advises Miriam that she

would do better with an English-speaking teacher, Miriam says, "Madame

Carre listens to me with adorable patience, and then sends me about my

business—ah in the prettiest way in the world" (67). Miriam sees through the courtesies and niceties, despite what must be an overwhelming urge to be convinced that she does have talent. She is positioned perfectly to be self-deluded but refuses. Instead, she commits herself to work tirelessly, which ultimately pays off: she masters being one of the people on whom nothing is lost, and she becomes a widely praised actress.

Miriam's success suggests that the skill of observational acuity is not only for the elect who are born to it (Nash, for instance), but for any who are willing to work at it. James expresses this belief in "The Art of Fiction," in which he proposes that art is not a product genius so much as it is a product of diligence. "The Art of Fiction" is structured as a response to an earlier essay by the British critic Walter Besant. Besant's is a more prescriptive essay, setting out what he feels novels ought to do. One prescription, a cliché today, is that writers of fiction should write what they know, and what they know is a matter of experience. For example, a young country woman, Besant says, should avoid writing about "garrison life" (5), presumably because she has no experience with it. James rejects this reasoning, arguing for one's imagination as part of one's experience: "The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military" (5). James's trust in keen, penetrating observation can be seen in much of his fiction, and this character trait is repeatedly demonstrated by Nick, Miriam, and Gabriel

Nash throughout *The Tragic Muse*. And as we see in Miriam, oftentimes what perfecting a skill like this requires is merely effort. Anyone, or almost anyone it seems, can improve his or her ability to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost. There is a sense of universalism in *Muse*, a democratic aesthetic sense. If the artist's greatest advantage is to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost, and one can work to be one of those people, then the artist is neither an exceptional genius, in the romantic sense, nor a denizen of the ivory tower or sacred fount, but merely one who is willing to roll up his or her sleeves and get to work.

Invention and Experimentation

In conventional periodization, Henry James will sometimes be paired with a figure like Thomas Hardy as canonical transitional figures, each with one foot in nineteenth-century realism and one in modernism. In "Modernism and the Issue of Periodization," Leonard Orr notes H.M. Dalesky's strategy for working with such figures. He looks for "affinities between them and the temporally undoubted modernists such as Joyce, Conrad, and D.H. Lawrence" (4). The strategy is to comparatively identify those moments when a James or Hardy betrays modernist impulses. *Muse* certainly doesn't exhibit modernist impulses, the kind of aesthetic experimentation and innovation that has come to signify much of the modernist period; however, James's later novels, notably *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), do share affinities with modernist texts, the kinds of

affinities mentioned in Orr[13]. Hugh Kenner, for example, begins *The Pound Era* (1971), his exploration of the modernist era, with a brief examination of the Jamesian style's influence on Pound and the Moderns. More than just a writer whom modernists like Pound admired, James produced a prose style suggestive of the coming imagism in poetry, with its emphasis on the object. Kenner says that "James made not stories but 'things,' and did not write them but 'did' them" (27). He argues, for instance, that James's sentence construction, especially the sentences of the later James, "vanquished the linear rigor of linked sentences" (5). Pound, too, according to Kenner, claims that James talked much the way he wrote, the lengthy sentences "deferring and deferring climax" (11), reaching an unexpected conclusion that often, to use Pound's metaphor, ratcheted up slowly only to come down like "a pile driver" (12). His unique style of sentence construction was, in a sense, a kind of prose prelude to poetic imagism. Referring to Eliot's famous observation about James and ideas, Kenner says, "The mind unviolated by an idea holds converse with particulars" (18). This, of course, refers to James's emphasis on observation and detail, his unwavering belief in getting to the essence of the thing.

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[13] In "James's Elusive Wings" (1998), William Stowe calls *The Wings of the Dove* "a direct progenitor of literary modernism and postmodernism, providing a preview of the…willful obscurity of the modernists" (188). Stowe says of *Wings* that the "language is notoriously difficult, sometimes even undecidably obscure; sentences wind interminably on, pronouns lack definite antecedents" (188).

The often lengthy Jamesian sentences may, at first, seem contrary to the tenets of imagism, which promoted spare description, and contrary to the Pound-influenced prose of, say, Hemingway, who produced clipped, subject-verb sentences. Yet Imagism wasn't simply a matter of length (shorter); it was an assertion of things (nouns). In "A Retrospect" (1918), Ezra Pound's brief treatise on his hopes for twentieth-century poetry, Pound's first monition is that poets present a "[d]irect treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective" (810). In the lengthy sentences of James, we often get the full examination of one thing. Such detailed analysis doesn't merely describe the object; it discovers it: "James's effort to articulate such matters within the shape of the formal English sentence yielded the famous late style, where the subject and verb are 'there' but don't carry the burden of what is said" (Kenner16). This diffusion of meaning throughout the sentence, beyond the subject-verb relationship, is a way of emphasizing other phrases or clauses in the sentence, which Kenner likens to the effect of imagism. These sentences don't embellish so much as observe. They don't add imaginative flourish but delineate inconspicuous detail, overlooked perspectives.

This style of sentence construction is of a piece with some of modernism's efforts to present multiple perspectives. Cubism, for example, is sometimes characterized as a simultaneous presentation of multiple perspectives. James's sentence construction presents a similar multi-perspective approach. This isn't to say that James was a "literary

cubist" or even a proto-imagist, sharing in the theories of Pound and Gertrude Stein; rather, it's that James was willing to push formal boundaries, to practice the values of experimentation that he preached in "The Art of Fiction" and elsewhere, willing to experiment with narrative devices even at a later stage in his career[14]. *Muse*, of course, is an earlier novel, a more conventional novel, but even here one finds instances of the packed, multi-perspective sentences more common to later James. The opening sentence of *Muse,* for example, which was noted above for its emphasis on reading and observation (the narrator's observation of the French observation of the English), serves as an example: "The people of France have made it no secret that those of England, as a general thing, are to their perception an inexpressive and speechless race, perpendicular and unsociable, unaddicted to enriching any bareness of contact with verbal or other embroidery" (13). Instead of simple subject-verb assertions, James packs the sentence with multiple perspectives and nine nouns, as though the narrator were observing the stolid English through a French lens. It's a sentence not so much about the English or the French as it is about perceptions.

Muse*'s promotion of experimental art, though, lies not so much in its form but in its attitude toward experimentation. In "The Art of Fiction," James explicitly welcomes increased aesthetic theorizing and experimentation, and *Muse* promotes having readers who are open to, and

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[14] James was just shy of sixty when *The Wings of the Dove* was published.

supportive of, such experimentation. It's the novel that defends the coming

aesthetic experimentation as though it anticipated the reactionary

backlash. The opening of the novel, as noted above, presents two

untrained, marginalized artists meeting at an exhibition that has

scandalized the old guard. In Nick's one effort to convey to Lady Agnes

(an admirer of "safer," more traditional art) his interest in the exhibition

and its artists, he says, "They try everything, they feel everything…Some

of them can only *taper fort,* stand on their heads, turn somersault or

commit deeds of violence to make people notice them…But I don't know;

today I'm in an appreciative mood—I feel indulgent even to them" (17).

Nick admires the experimental spirt. He concedes that much of the

experimentation fails, that many of the artists are merely trying to gain

attention, but it's the willingness to try something new that has value. It's

noteworthy that his indulgence extends even to those whose efforts at

originality are less inspired and more a strategic device for notice. This

suggests that motivations matter less than the work. Nick ends his defense

to Lady Agnes by saying that the artists of the exhibition give him the

impression of "eager observation" (17). His closing remark, again, makes

the reader/viewer central to the work itself and implicitly tasks all readers

to show the same indulgence that he shows.

So while *Muse*'s style will never be confused with the kind of

revolutionary experimentation seen in some strands of modernism, or even

in a novel like *The Wings of the Dove*, James was quite accepting of the

more daring experimentation he saw around him. It supported his conviction that art needs experimentation to develop. In 1884, James had been spending time with a small group of writers at the home of Alphonse Daudet, in Paris. In a letter to William Dean Howells, James says, "I have been seeing something of Daudet, Goncourt and Zola, and there is nothing more interesting to me now than the effort and experiment of this little group, with its truly infernal intelligence of art, form, manner – its intense artistic life. They do the only kind of work, today, that I respect; and in spite of their ferocious pessimism and their handling of unclean things, they are at least serious and honest" (28). If we compare James's observation here to Nick's first pushback against a career in politics, in *Muse*, we can see some interesting connections. In his outburst, Nick argues that politics has nothing to do with "intelligence, candor, or honor" (54). These virtues can, however, be found in his desired career, that of an artist, and it appears that James finds these exact virtues in these experimental French artists: they have "infernal intelligence," are "honest," and the work is "respected." Here is James's candid statement for what he feels is important in art: openness to the experimental and doing the work honestly. He may not always like what it produces— perhaps too much pessimism, too many "unclean things"—but this coterie of French writers' willingness to honestly experiment is itself a value, the same value expressed in *Muse*.

At the French art exhibition in the opening of *Muse*, Nick is moved, not so much by the achievements of the new art, but by the artists' willingness to try new things. Nick is at the art exhibition with his mother and two sisters, and a tender tension arises between his mother, the disapproving Lady Agnes, and the inspired Nick. For her the exhibition is a failure, a gallery of poor taste, representations of "the murders, the tortures, all kinds of disease and indecency" (17). Nick lovingly condescends to what he sees as his mother's old-fashioned, circumscribed taste, but he also attempts to make her understand what it is about the art that invigorates him: the work, he says, is "full of ideas, full of refinements; it gives one such an impression of the artistic experience. They try everything, they feel everything" (17). Nick doesn't defend the art so much as the artists' experimentation—they try everything. He later concedes that some of the artists try, in fact, too hard; much of the effort is simply to draw attention to itself. But he allows that this is a consequence of so many artists vying to be seen. What matters, for him, is the willingness to experiment. And while *Muse* never explicitly engages with the exhibition's artistic ideas—we never get an ekphrastic description of any of the exhibition's paintings or sculpture—the amenable attitude that the novel takes toward the "new" expresses an open receptivity to artistic experimentation. And Nick's equally enthusiastic praise of the artists' "ideas" suggests an eagerness to engage aesthetic ideas, as one might in, say, a manifesto.

The novel's two beginners, Nick and Miriam Rooth, exemplify

Muse's support of the new and experimental. The two share a strong

artistic desire, but they're also both non-traditional artists. Neither has

demonstrated ability in any kind of standardized, institutional way. They

are outsiders, untrained, and non-traditional aspirants. Nick's and

Miriam's entries into art require the same leap of faith that the later

modernist experimentation would require. Nick's natural talent may, in

fact, be the political stump, not art. Similarly, the brash, low-born Miriam

doesn't have traditional artistic or educational pedigree, and her being at

least half Jewish further distances her from the established cultural

environment (the English theater) that she wants to enter. Neither Nick nor

Miriam has been groomed or trained to perpetuate English art and theater.

They are outsiders certain to bring the kinds of changes to their crafts that

conservative old guards like Lady Agnes would most likely reject. While

Nick and his younger sister, Biddy, take a turn around the exhibition, he

reminds her that "[a]ll art is one…any spark that's struck in any province,

is of use and of suggestion to all the others" (17). This democratic view of

art, while not proclaiming all art "good" or "worthwhile," does insist that

all art is welcome, that all ideas should be tried, if for no other reason than

it supplies potential inspiration for something else. It implies an

acceptance of new artists like Miriam, and it acknowledges the influence

that culture has on all art. Nick's vocational choice is between art and

politics, and when his choice is ultimately made (art), he has chosen art

largely because it is thoughtful and honest, experimental and new. Politics in the novel, even progressive politics, remains boilerplate and cliché. *Muse* gives very little evidence of what directions experimental, innovative literature ought to take, but it does suggest a methodology for getting there.

The Tragic Muse suggests that the determinative method for creating thoughtful, honest, innovative art is effort and perseverance. Art is hard work. *Muse* consistently presents artistic achievement as the product of hard work. Art is not so much inspiration and passion as it is dogged, persistent effort. (Trying to be a person on whom *nothing* is lost, after all, seems an exhausting task.) A week before writing the letter to Howells praising the honest experimentation of Daudet's group, James wrote to *Atlantic Monthly* editor Thomas Baily Aldrich about the same group: "The torment of style, the high standard of it, the effort to say something perfectly in a language in which everything has been said and re-said—so that there are certain things, certain cases, which can never again be attempted—all this seems to *me* to be wearing them all out, so that they have the look of galley-slaves tied to a ball and chain, rather than of happy producers" (26). The struggle for these writers reflects the unavoidable daily grind that goes into their work. But we also know how much James admired this group. Again, his admiration was for their inventiveness, their honesty, their willingness to experiment—all qualities of method, all qualities requiring hard work. Now, there's nothing tragic

about the *The Tragic Muse*—Leon Edel calls it "a large cheerful mural of English life and art" (352). And never are the artists in *Muse* reduced to looking like tortured galley slaves. However, we do see in *Muse* hard-working artists explicitly juxtaposed with less rigorous artists, and quality is always determined by making the choice of doggedly hard work.

Nowhere in *Muse* is this more evident than in the character of Miriam Rooth. As previously noted, Miriam is an untrained, unschooled ingenue whose first "audition," with the French actress Madame Carre, goes horribly wrong. However, she greets this initial failure with redoubled determination. She doesn't secure Madame Carre as a teacher, at first, but she does get the English critic and statesman Peter Sherringham to tutor her. Her second drawing room performance, at Sherringham's home, goes as badly as the first. Still, she persists. Miriam repeatedly shows up at Madame Carre's home, unannounced, just to listen to Madame Carre recite to her: "If she doesn't succeed," Madame Carre says, "it won't be for want of knowing how to thump at doors" (87). Eventually, the actress agrees to take Miriam on as a student. They work together for months, until Madame Carre takes an extended trip with her children. When Madame Carre returns, Miriam gives her another recitation, to which Madame Carre says, "You've learned all that I've taught you, but where the devil have you learned what I haven't?" (149). Miriam replies, "I've worked—I have; you'd call it work—all through the bright, late summer all through the hot, dull, empty days. I've battered

down the door" (149). Miriam emphasizes the word "work" by assuring Madame Carre, who can be a severe instructor, that when she, Miriam, says "work," she means it the way Madame Carre would mean it: "you'd call it work," she says to Madame Carre.

Contrary to the example of Miriam's work ethic is the enigmatic Gabriel Nash's work ethic. Most summaries of *The Tragic Muse* begin by describing it as a novel of two artists, Nick Dormer and Miriam Rooth. It's rarely noted that Nash, too, is an artist, a novelist. And even though he has openly declared never to write another novel—and every indication is that he won't—he also sees himself as an ongoing artistic creation. Leaving aside the latter creation, his creation of "Gabriel Nash," which I'll take up shortly, *Muse* says little about Nash's novel. It's first mentioned by Nick to his sister Biddy, and he calls it "a very clever book" (23). When she presses him on this, he struggles to characterize it. He calls it a "sort of novel," and when she presses further, he says, "Well, I don't know—with a lot of good writing" (23). Nick's struggle to describe Nash's novel suggests its peculiarity. Nash, evidently, has written something experimental, innovative. Later, when Nick suggests that Nash write more, that his book was "complicated and ingenious," Nash responds, "Oh I shall never do it again" (25). Nash says that he's "extremely ashamed of that book" (25). At first one might read Nash's dismissiveness as garden variety self-effacement, polite downplaying of his achievement, or even a passive braggadocio—suggesting that he's even better than his friend

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thinks. It might even be that he's fishing for further compliment. But none of these explanations is quite consistent with Nash's character. He is, if anything, candid to a fault, even when his candor makes for awkward social situations. What's more likely is that his dismissive attitude about his novel reflects the ease with which the writing came to him. And while Nash may have an abundance of wit, acumen, and erudition—and *Muse* consistently reinforces that he has—he lacks the willingness to work at his art, a willingness that *Muse* strongly suggests is necessary for any quality art and for the health and development of art in general.

The Tragic Muse is not the first novel James wrote with artists at the center, and it's worth noting that two earlier works, *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and *The Lesson of the Master* (1888), also advance this same idea of the importance of hard work to an artist. In *The Lesson of the Master*, for instance, the plot turns on the attempt by an older, established writer, Henry St. George (the Master), to convince the young aspiring writer, Paul Overt, that marriage to Marian Francourt will ruin Paul's writerly ambitions. Marriage, the Master says, will lessen Paul's ability to work hard. When Paul tries to convince St. George that Marian, who has a passion for literature, would help his art, the Master replies, "She has it [a passion for literature] indeed, but she'd have a still greater passion for her children—and very proper too. She'd insist on everything's being made comfortable, advantageous, propitious for them. This isn't the artist's business" (99). Marriage and family, the Master claims, take away from

the singularly dedicated work required of a writer. Paul follows the Master's advice. He rejects Marian and goes abroad to Geneva, isolating himself and writing for two years. And, in fact, he produces his best work. However, upon returning to London, he discovers that the Master is engaged to marry Marian. Paul is left to wonder, as is the reader, if the Master had tricked Paul into leaving so that he, the Master, could marry Marian himself. The insult to this injury is the suggestion that the Master seems professionally reinvigorated by his much younger bride and that marriage may, in fact, revive his stagnant writing career[15]. Despite the ambiguous (and tantalizing) end, the fact of artistic production remains: it was hard, uninterrupted diligence that produced Paul's best work, not the muse or passion or genius.

Similarly, in *Roderick Hudson* the title character, a young sculpting enthusiast, is planning for a career not in art but in the law. Like Nick Dormer in *Muse*, Hudson is poised between a practical, remunerative career (being a lawyer) and a riskier, less remunerative career (being a sculptor). It's not until Rowland Mallet, an independently wealthy friend of a friend, offers Hudson an educational sojourn to Europe (at Mallet's expense) that Hudson forgoes his law career in pursuit of art. Hudson possesses "natural" talent, and Mallet recognizes it immediately. Mallet is

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[15] Sara Chapman argues that, while the Master is described as reinvigorated, the novel also asserts that he hadn't yet returned to writing, even after having been married for some time. Chapman posits that his lack of production suggests "that the requisite discipline is still missing from his character" (42), which again indicates the necessity for artists to develop discipline and strict work ethics.

first introduced to Hudson after being dumbstruck by a sculpture that Hudson had done. Their mutual friend, Cecelia, who received the sculpture from Hudson as a gift, tells Mallet that Hudson only "half suspects his ability" (23), and he "has had no education beyond what he has picked up with little trouble for himself" (22). Hudson appears to put no effort into his art or learning his craft. When Mallet later suggests to Hudson that, to be a first-rate artist, Hudson need "only to work hard," Hudson replies, "I think I know what that means" (30). His facetious reply belies his extreme confidence in his innate talents as well as his unfamiliarity with hard work. In Italy, where Mallet introduces Hudson to some local artists, Hudson makes an initial splash with two sculptures that Mallet arranges to show. Among the artists are the older, established, and highly regarded sculptor Gloriani and the young American painter Sam Singleton. Though impressed by Hudson's sculptures, Gloriani questions if Hudson can maintain this quality: "He can do it once, he can do it twice, he can do it at a stretch half a dozen times. But—but--!" (91). When Hudson responds angrily, Gloriani tells him that "passion burns out, inspiration runs to seed" (92). At the same gathering, Sam Singleton shows two of his paintings. Singleton's name is often preceded by the epithet "little"—he's little Sam Singleton. However, along with being repeatedly characterized as physically small, quiet, and humble, he's also repeatedly characterized as hard working. Looking at Singleton's two paintings, Gloriani predicts, "Oh you…you'll keep it up" (93). And this, in

fact, turns out to be so. Roderick's importance, as well as his ability to create, declines as quickly as it ascended, and Singleton, possessor of a "happy diligence," rises to prominence. Just before his tragic fall (literally and figuratively) Roderick notices Singleton as if for the first time. The little artist has made his way down a hill, canvas and paints in hand, on his way to work. Hudson says, "You remind me of a watch that never runs down. If one listens hard one hears you always at it. Tic-tic-tic, tic-tic-tic" (357). Hudson has lost his ability to create, his passion and genius having soon been spent, and he has no reserve to fall back on. His situation is contrasted with Sam Singleton, the portraitist who lacks Hudson's natural ability but has a doggedly persistent work ethic.

James's belief in the necessity of hard work is not about his advancing a Protestant work ethic—put your nose to the grind stone and you'll get ahead—a term Max Weber would coin fifteen years after *Muse*. Instead, it suggests a theory of art's place in larger social conversations. "The Art of Fiction" is structured as a response to a lecture by Walter Besant at the Royal Institution, and James takes issue with Besant's seeming to say "definitely beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel will be" (4). James, on the other hand, appears to be arguing for a theoretical position that won't prescribe formal or thematic "rules." He doesn't enumerate the several qualities that ought to make up a novel. On the contrary, he seems to be arguing for the omnivorous structure of the

genre: one can't put borders around what a novel should do[16]. James's

injunction, then, that the artist needs to scrupulously observe and work

hard, taken together with the importance of experiment and invention, is

not about what a novel should be so much as what a novelist (and a

reader) should do. This repudiates not only the romantic idea of the artist

as exceptional genius, but it also rejects an ascendant idea that art is its

own end, art-for-art's sake. James promotes both an abiding empiricism

and an acknowledgement that artists must do, not simply be. "The Art of

Fiction" is as close as James comes to a conventional aesthetic manifesto,

and its lack of prescription is conspicuous. He doesn't lay out specific

qualities for what constitutes the new. However, in the figures of Nick and

Miriam, as well as Paul Overt in *The Lesson of the Master* and the

eponymous Roderick Hudson, we see the rejection of a romantic notion of

the artist as passionate genius. Passion and genius matter, but it's dogged

perseverance that produces the honest and inventive art that can then

participate in larger social discussions. "The Art of Fiction" is a manifesto

of method, and *Muse* echoes its claims of method. That all these novels

position artists in relation to social institutions—Nick Dormer/politics,

Roderick Hudson/law, Paul Overt/marriage, and Miriam Rooth/marriage

(Sherringham proposes marriage to Miriam on the condition that she give

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[16] It should be noted that James's openness to experimentation doesn't mean that he agrees with every experiment. Trollope's acknowledgements in some work that the work is, in fact, "make believe," a kind of post-modern breaking of the fourth wall, is unsettling for James, who likens the novelist to the historian. Explicitly stating the fictionality of a work of fiction in that work of fiction is, for James, "a betrayal of a sacred office" (2).

up the stage. She refuses)—James is putting art in a specific conversation with social institutions: if each social institution, even marriage, can somehow blunt the freedom and inventiveness of art, then inventive, experimental art could offer social institutions a language for becoming more inventive and freer.

Art for Art's sake

James knew well the ideas, positions, and proponents of the aesthetic movement of the late nineteenth century. However, his investment in aestheticist thinking is unclear. On the one hand, he had, according to Adeline Tintner in *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James* (1991), a "*Yellow Book* phase, during which he contributed three stories to the journal" (27). *The Yellow Book*, of course, was the short-lived (1894-7) London journal that published many of the authors associated with the aestheticist movement (though not these authors exclusively). Likewise, Leon Edel says that James knew "intimately" the work of Walter Pater, a central figure of aestheticist thinking, and met Pater in London in 1879 (224). And In Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity Culture* (1990), Freedman quotes an early assessment of James's relationship to aestheticism, a 1917 Stuart Sherman essay called "The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James," in which Sherman places James squarely in the aestheticist movement: "One the whole," Sherman says, "there is no better side light on James's 'philosophy' than Pater's Conclusion to the *Studies in the Renaissance* and

his *Plato and Platonism*" (xv). The suggestion is that James's aesthetic philosophy is best understood as aestheticist philosophy. A more modulated assessment, on the other hand, sees James as sympathetic to some aestheticist principles but suspicious of others. Freedman suggests that James has engendered two critical poles regarding aestheticism: he is either an "aesthete *tout court*" or he needs to be "defended from the 'taint' of aestheticism at all costs" (xiii). Freedman himself provides a more nuanced reading of James's position: "Toward aestheticism, James was "alternately critical and celebratory, antagonistic and obsessed, and finally deeply, powerfully assimilative" (xvii). This more nuanced position of aestheticism is expressed in *Muse* in the figure of Gabriel Nash, who is the aesthete *tout court*. Through the characterization of Nash, *Muse* expresses strong admiration for the aestheticist position that engaging art, being discriminating, and experiencing art emotionally is a critical human activity, but it ultimately rejects the passivity that inheres in the aestheticist position.

Reading Gabriel Nash's thoughts and dialogue, in *Muse*, can sometimes feel like reading a novelized transcription of the "Conclusion" of Walter Pater's *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873) [17]. Pater's Conclusion was influential for the aesthetic, or decadent, movement of the late nineteenth century, and it served as something of a manifesto for many of the movement's adherents, most famously Oscar

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[17] Freedman calls Nash "James's fullest representation of the aesthete" (170).

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Wilde. (Peter Nicholls calls the Conclusion "a gospel for aesthetic hedonism" (69).) Pater's argument proceeds in three general steps, all reinforced by Nash in his first extended dialogue. First, Pater asserts that "our whole physical life" and our "inward world of thought and feeling" are constantly changing, are in flux[18]. In *Muse*, Nash acknowledges this flux in his first exchange with Nick Dormer. Nick wonders aloud why he and Nash, fast friends in college, see so little of each other now even though they live in the same time and place. Nash replies, "Ah my dear Dormer, excuse me. I don't live in the nineteenth century" (22). Nash is being partly facetious, but he's also suggesting a more fluid sense of time and space, one that corresponds more to the fluctuating sense of one's interior mental life.

Pater's next, somewhat contradictory claim is that, within this flux of human experience, the human spirit's only obligation is to capture, arrest, observe, and appreciate those moments that excite our passion and intellectual curiosity. With a rhetorical question, he concedes the contradiction of "arrested moments" in a "fluid experience": "How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?" (154). Pater leaves the question unanswered (mostly), but Nash presents himself as a possible solution. When Nick asks him how he has

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[18] Freedman notes Pater's statement of time and transience: "The value of art, then, lies not in its own static perfection, but rather in its 'frank' participation in the transience of things" (10).

spent his time since college, Nash replies, "I rove, drift, float…my feelings direct me—if such a life as mine may be said to have a direction. Where there's anything to feel I try to be there" (22). Nash let's his feelings lead him to interesting moments from "point to point." He claims not to adhere to any external social pressures or directives[19].

Finally, Pater asserts that those philosophies that help us attain and appreciate these arrested points of presence are useful philosophies; those philosophies that do not help us are formulaic, dogmatic "facile orthodoxy" and should be avoided (155). How do we determine which philosophies are useful and which not? It's rigorous independent analysis. The error, Pater says, is to simply acquiesce to orthodoxy. Similarly, in *Muse*, Nash derides the "formulas" of politics, the "sides" that political discourse invariably requires. These "sides" are exactly the kinds of facile orthodoxy against which Pater warns. Nash's conviction is that the aesthete's thoughts are refined and nuanced to such a degree that even to articulate them is to blunt them and generalize them. He calls these aesthetic thoughts "shades." Opposed to the aesthete's shades are the political person's bulky, generalized positions, or "sides." Party politics forces sides on all its practitioners: Nash says, "[The political figure] sees his 'side,' his dreadful 'side'…Poor man [to Nick] fancy your having a 'side'—you, you—and spending your days and your nights looking at it!

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[19] Freedman, again, echoes this when he says Pater's Conclusion "asks us to embrace a metonymic chain that leads us from one perfect moment of intense apprehension to another" (42).

I'd as soon pass my life looking at an advertisement on a boarding" (26).

The emphatic "you, you" at the center of this plea indicates that "sides"

are more than political positions: they are the practitioner's consciousness,

his or her identity. To allow boilerplate political discourse to infect one's

consciousness is to degrade one's identity.

Because the shades of the aesthete are so refined, because they are

so nuanced, they can't be presented even in literary form, which is why

Nash has abandoned his earlier literary ambitions. Language, of course, is

the unavoidable medium for literature, and language blunts, generalizes,

and distorts the refinements of one's shades. Literature is social, Nash

argues; it's for a reader and, therefore, too crude to accommodate the

refinements of the aesthete's shades: "But from the moment [a shade] is

for the convenience of others the signs have to be grosser, the shades

begin to go. That's the deplorable hour! Literature, you see, is for the

convenience of others. It requires the most abject concessions. It plays

such mischief with one's style that really I've had to give it up" (25-6).

Nash's emphasis on the limitations of language strike our twenty-first-

century ears as prescient, if his conviction in the autonomy of subjective

thinking does not.[20] But here, too, in the conviction of the autonomy of the

subject and the limitations of language, Nash echoes Walter Pater. For

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[20] Oscar Wilde's preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, published in 1890, the same year as *The Tragic Muse*, is a short set of aphorisms about art and artists. One set of aphorisms echoes Nash's distrust of language: "All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (3). Indeed, Wilde is often conjectured to be James's model for Gabriel Nash (as is James McNeill Whistler and The Count Robert de Montesquiou)

Pater, when the mind perceives an object, "[the] object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer" (153). The individual mind then reorganizes the vastness of experience in all its fluctuations. Here, the individual, through "reflexion" [sic] conceives objects "not…in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent" (153). Pater argues that impressions of the world reside within each individual mind, impressions that become uniquely individualized. When these impressions are put into language, though, they lose the flickering quality of impressions and become fixed distortions[21].

So what does the enigmatic Gabriel Nash—decadent aesthete, Pater-esque writer who won't write—do in James's modernist *kunstlerroman*? Throughout the novel, he's consistently the smartest person in the room for every room he enters. His keen observations are almost always acknowledged as such, and they lead to predictions that invariably come to pass. He is almost a seer, almost an oracle. Early on, for instance, after Miriam's second disastrous "audition," the astute theater critic Peter Sherringham concludes that she just "isn't any good." Nash concurs, but adds, to Sherringham's surprise, "Ah but she'll become so" (74). And she does. Nash further intuits a long-term connection between

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[21] After Miriam masters her craft, Nash comes to the theater regularly to watch her performances. However, he is less interested in what she says than in how she says it: "he came to the theatre or to the villa simply to treat his ear to the sound…issuing from Miriam's lips. Its richness was quite independent of the words she might pronounce or the poor fable they might subserve" (218-19). Nash's sentiment echoes Pater's observation that "[a]ll art constantly aspires to the condition of music" (90). In emphasizing the sound of words over their signification, Nash (and Pater, too) de-emphasize language's social (signifying) dimension.

Sherringham and Miriam, which, too, comes to fruition—Sherringham falls in love with her and proposes marriage. Along with his brilliant, almost savant qualities, though, is Nash's awkward social presentation. His social inelegance leads many to suspect he's merely an eccentric humbug. Even Nick, Nash's staunchest defender and intimate friend, wonders at times if Nash isn't just a clever charlatan. He concludes, however, as does the novel, that while Nash is a brilliant aesthete, art for art's sake is a solipsistic position that pulls art away from being the social activity that it can't help but be.

Nash's tendency to speak in elaborate metaphors and abstractions puts off almost all the characters with whom he comes into contact. This verbal indirection gives him a fey, otherworldly quality and, at the same time, brings him under suspicion of being a sham, an affected dandy. His supreme self-confidence only exacerbates the skepticism with which others view him. Julia, Nick's almost-fiancée, calls him "the odious man" and "[i]mpertinent and fatuous" (79); Sherringham calls him "damned impudent"; and when Nick tells Sherringham about Nash's acrobatic rhetorical flights back in college, Sherringham wonders, "Mayn't it be simply that he's too great an ass?" (44). Nick, in fact, entertains this possibility. He determines to re-connect with Nash, in part, to investigate Nash's character and ideas. In "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893), Arthur Symons articulates this ambivalence toward late-nineteenth-century aestheticism. Symons calls the decadent movement a

"new and beautiful and interesting disease" (105). This is, oddly, a kind of aestheticist description of aestheticism. That it's a disease, a harmful presence, doesn't preclude it from being a beautiful presence, and, as such, it can prompt the kind of emotional joy that aestheticists sought in beautiful objects. This seeming contradiction is present in the character of Nash and aestheticism in general. "Disease," for Symons, doesn't so much mean moral depravity in the sense that the literature is licentious or that it contravenes middle-class values—although, of course, some does. Rather, Symons sees "disease" in the unwillingness of decadents to make social critique, to enter social and political discourse. Decadent work, Symons says, is "typical of a civilization grown over-luxurious, over-inquiring, too languid for the relief of action, too uncertain for any emphasis in opinion or in conduct" (106). Again, this is a moral critique of the lack of action, the lack of social or political conviction. It's the critique that *Muse* makes of Nash. It's not a critique of the "rightness" of the conviction; it's a critique of not acting on conviction.

The two positions that Symons describes here are the same two positions between which Nick Dormer is poised—a political life of social conviction and an interior artistic life, answerable only to the self. At the beginning of *Muse*, Nick enlists Nash as a kind of mentor, the man best suited to advocate for the artistic position. (Nick has, as noted above, many inducements and arguments for the political position.) And Nash proselytizes a radical independence that suggests social indifference, the

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radical independence of the decadents on whom Symons looks askance.

When Nick asks Nash about the affirmation of his shades, his refined

ideas, Nick is thinking about social affirmations: what good are these

interior shades, these refined thoughts of the aesthete, if there are no

positive social consequences? Nash responds, "One is one's self a fine

consequence. That's the most important one we have to do with" (25). It's

not clear here if Nash advocates for everyone being his or her own end, or

if he's arguing that, by solely pursuing one's own end, one's very

existence, one's being, will serve as a social benefit. However, Nash

seems wholly disinterested in the effect he might have on others: "Let me

add that you don't *begin* to have an insight into the art of life till it ceases

to be of the smallest consequence to you what you may be called. That's

rudimentary" (25). The term "art of life" is a literal one for Nash, and he

sees himself, his interior self, as his only consequential creation. How

others interpret what he's created is of little or no consequence to him. He

tells Julia that he's an artist who "work[s] in life" (73). What strikes her as

pompous and absurd is, for him, a serious and essential personal

obligation: to be is his métier.

However, Nash belies his radical individualism when he attends

Miriam's second "audition," a drawing room performance at Peter

Sherringham's home. Miriam's performance is universally acknowledged

as bad, but Nash was expecting this. What upsets him more is the vogue

for drawing room performances at all. Interestingly, his opposition is, in

part, that such performances cut off dialogue: "If there's a thing in life I hate," he says to himself, "it's this idiotic new fashion of the drawing-room recitation and of the insufferable creatures who practice it, who prevent conversation, and whom, as they're beneath it, you can't punish by criticism" (64). The practitioners of drawing room recitations, whom Nash deems always bad, cannot be criticized; they're beneath criticism itself. The recitations "prevent discussion," he says. But if his ethos is simply to live an interior life of refined thoughts and "shades," if such criticisms lose their refinements when put into language, why does he lament the absence of criticism? He should be content with forming his own nuanced thoughts on the horrible performance and be done with it. Likewise, his interest in helping Nick's art career might be ascribed to their friendship, but why did he take an interest in Miriam's career? He connects her with Madame Carre, a significant introduction for the furtherance of her career, an introduction that would seem to have nothing to do with Nash's "shades."

Muse's suggestion here is that even the art-for-art's sake crowd, even the devoted aesthetes, cannot escape the irrepressible urge to socially interact around art and the inescapable sociality of art. Art is not separate from social engagement; it is social engagement. For *Muse,* the inherent flaw of the disinterested position of aestheticism is the insistence on abstracting art from social engagement. Freedman describes Nash's long stretches of absence toward the end of Muse as his vanishing "back into

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the empyrean" (190). Such an abstraction, Freedman says, is "understood by the novel to be impossible. [Nash's] Paterian privileging of mere being as opposed to rigorous doing simply has no place in either the theatrical or the aesthetic spheres that the novel portrays" (186). Art is a social discourse, and the richer the discourse the healthier the artistic moment. This is what James asserts in "The Art of Fiction": The times of rich aesthetic theorizing are the times of art's greatest development. Sherringham, whose opinion of Nash vacillates throughout the book, ultimately envies Nash's "power to content himself with the pleasures he could get"; at the same time, Sherringham remains suspicious of Nash's "unapplied ideas" (219). And the novel does, too. It shows great respect for Nash and the aesthetic devotion to art, but it laments the solipsistic limits of this devotion.

Toward the end of the novel, meditating on his time spent with Nash, Nick considers the difference between talk and action: "talk engendered a sense of sameness much sooner than action. The things a man did were necessarily more different from each other than the things he said" (236). And Nash, Nick laments, will at best be a man who provides only talk, much of which will be talk of the limits of talk: Nash "could never surprise [Nick] any more save by doing something" (236). And Nash was determined not to do, and only reluctantly to talk. Chapman says, "Although James's interest in the aesthetic issues to which Pater addresses himself is undeniable, it is clear in his fiction and criticism

about writers that he disapproved of the obsessive aestheticism, the essentially passive, self-serving ethic of Pater's work" (12). She offers *The Sacred Fount* as example but could just as aptly have said *The Tragic Muse*. As noted in the previous sections, James recognized hard work as essential to the production and reception of art, and he sensed that a moment of aesthetic theorizing and experimentation was imminent. *Muse* amplifies this by contrasting two hard working artists, Nick and Miriam, with their more naturally gifted, more naturally discerning counterpart, Gabriel Nash. In this otherwise cheery novel, the treatment of Nash is the only melancholy note struck, and it's struck at the end, when the reader is left with a sense of the wasted potential that is Nash's. The suggestion is that insular, individual appreciation of art, no matter how talented, is not suited for the coming moment of theoretically active, experimental art.

Conclusion

A *kunstlerroman* poised between nineteenth-century and modernist literature, *The Tragic Muse* contributes to the coming profusion of aesthetic theorizing in three important ways. First, it encourages writers to continue scrupulous empirical observation. The latter half of the nineteenth century is a period of great technological innovation[22] and population shifts to urban areas. However, this period emerges from a long period of widespread naturalist observation, of which Darwin is the

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[22] In "Reading the Fin De Siècle," Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst list "duplex telegraphy, the gramophone, the telephone, wireless telegraphy, X-rays, cinematography" as just a few of the period's many influential innovations (xiii).

apogee. James remains, at the end of the nineteenth century, very much a believer that truth lies in scrupulous observation. His adjuration that artists should be among the people on whom nothing is lost is a call to this kind of careful, empirical analysis. This is not quite literary realism, which is more invested in representing everyday bourgeois life; nor is it literary naturalism, which presents the hidden forces (natural and social) shaping human thoughts and actions. This is meaning through observation. Leon Edel quotes the artist John La Farge saying that James had "the painter's eye" (128), and this certainly suggests the detailed precision of James's prose. However, it's not mere journalistic observations that James produces: it's observation wedded to imagination—the painter's eye. In his essay "Is There Life After Death" (1910), James argues that, with his creative consciousness, he "reach[es] beyond the laboratory brain" (717). The eye and brain are the initial, empirical instruments for creating, but they are then shaped, through invention, into art.

And this, of course, is *Muse*'s second important position: the encouragement of aesthetic experimentation. If the coming modernism is, in fact, a revolution—and we argue here that it is—then one of the establishing preconditions for this revolution would be openness to such experimentation, if not universal openness then discrete moments of acceptance, pockets of willingness to consider, if not adopt, cultural

change and to emphasize the valence of artistic invention[23]. And this leads to *Muse*'s third injunction, the rejection of the solipsism of the art-for-art's-sake (Decadent) movement. In "The Metaphysics of Modernism," Michael Bell says, "For Modernism is importantly not aestheticist, it is rather a turn against an earlier generation's aestheticism, but it uses highly self-conscious aesthetic means to do so" (26). Breaking from the aestheticist position in this way suggests anything but a clean break. Bell suggests that some of the conventions of aestheticism are retained in the effort to do something new. *Muse* serves as a precursor to this ambivalence. As already noted, Walter Pater's *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* was an influential text for this movement, decadence's own manifesto. *The Renaissance*, too, is from modernism's emerging moment, and Pater, as James does, encourages openness and willingness to experience new and experimental ideas. Pater argues that we are "to be for ever [sic] curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions" (154-5). *Muse*, though, offers an inevitable social dimension to art, one that even the decadent Gabriel Nash cannot escape. Art may not have realpolitik ends; it may, at its best, be far more suggestive and nuanced than stump speeches and party platforms, but it is always a political act. It grows and develops, as James says in "The Art of Fiction," through theoretical discourse.

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[23] At the French art exhibition, Nick says to Biddy, "All art is one…It's the same great many-headed effort, and any ground that's gained by an individual, any spark that's struck in any province, is of use and of suggestion to all the others" (17).

Muse, therefore, is not only demystifying art—placing its production not in the hands of the genius but, rather, in the hands of the grinder—it's also democratizing it. It argues for taking art out of the hands of select few and putting it into the hands of those willing to scrutinize the world around them and do the hard work of expressing and interpreting it. Careful, penetrating observation, coupled with persistent, demanding effort, will produce the kind of honest, inventive work that other social institutions might benefit from. Because art is inescapably a social activity, the refined concepts of the interior mind will unavoidably become external. *Muse* acknowledges that there may be some loss of refinement in the transition from interior concepts—Gabriel Nash's "shades"—to external presentation, but this loss is an unavoidable and necessary component to art. Through art, *Muse* argues, we pursue important ideas like honesty and candor and invention. The conflict that propels *The Tragic Muse* is the tension between the margins and mainstream, between the unconventional and conventional, specifically between art and bourgeois conventionality. Not only does art win, it presages a coming revolution.

Chapter Two

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Ineluctable Modalities and

Intangible Phantoms

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)

seems to declare an autobiographical intention in the title—it's not a

portrait of "an" artist but rather "the" artist—and the dates, places, events,

and characters conform to Joyce's own biography so closely as to make

autobiographical interpretations unavoidable. As noted earlier, Maurice

Beebe's *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction*

from Goethe to Joyce (1964) holds that autobiography is a consistent

feature of *kunststlerromane*, and he notes that this is especially so in

Portrait. But *Portrait* is not a declared autobiography or memoir. It's a

novel. And biographies of Joyce reveal several differences in the lives of

James Joyce and Stephen Dedalus[24]. These kinds of divergences in

autobiography or memoir are often attributed to the author's own biases—

the selective inclusion/exclusion of events and people—or an imperfect

memory. In an autobiographical novel like *Portrait*, however, such

differences are not lapses nor mistakes or misrepresentations. Novels

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[24] Richard Ellmann's first revision of his biography *James Joyce* (1982) notes several such divergences, some of which are clearly not memory lapses. Ellman notes, for instance, that Joyce spent the two years between Clongowes and Belvedere at the "Christian Brothers' school on North Richmond Street"; Stephen, on the other hand, spends this time in "two years of reverie," not going to school at all (35). This is not a period of Joyce's biography that he was likely to have forgotten; one suspects, rather, that Joyce shared Simon Dedalus's disdain for the Christian Brothers' school and chose to spare Stephen the indignity.

require no fidelity to fact. As a novel, *Portrait*, therefore, is not held to standards of historical accuracy. Indeed, genre, as has been discussed earlier, shapes all writing and reading; the very declaration of fiction opens the text to a less "factual," more interpretive reading that allows for a loosening of biographical or historical ties. Calling the text a novel allows it to be "loosened" from biography and history, which is a stated objective of Stephen's and an important concept in *Portrait*[25]. Even if no divergences could be found between Joyce's biography and Stephen's biography, the novel would still, in a sense, be as separate from Joyce's life as it is from yours or mine. Joyce, for instance, attended a school named "Clongowes," just as Stephen does, but meanings for "Clongowes" in *Portrait* are not dependent on Joyce's school as much as they would be in a declared biography or memoir. Indeed, all the historical/biographical points in *Portrait* point towards and away from their real-world referents. Beebe concedes as much when he says that "the novel in which Stephen appears is a modern classic partly because Joyce…achieved a detachment from self in his treatment of his autobiographical hero" (57). And there is, in fact, a "less biographical" way of reading the "the" in *Portrait*'s title: "the" artist may not refer to the historical Joyce, the artist of this particular novel, but rather to a type, a type of which the historical Joyce is part.

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[25] For contemporary readers (like Jameson), fleeing history might seem naïve or, perhaps, romantic. However, *Portrait*'s movement toward imaginative life is suggesting that it's precisely in the imagination that we escape history.

Indeed, Beebe reads *Portrait* this way. He sees it as a type laid over the biography of James Joyce: "One way in which Joyce sought to detach himself from his hero was to depict not James Joyce, but the universal, representative, archetypal artist, the ideal which Joyce could achieve only partially in reality" (266). Joyce, Beebe argues, was well acquainted with artist-hero stories, and Stephen's divergences from Joyce's biography might be a way to conform to the more universal ideas that a type presents. Ellman, too, notes that, for *Portrait*, Joyce would "draw upon two types of books he had read: the defecter [sic] from religion and [the] insurgent artist" (148). If Joyce was dealing in types, and this is an assumption on which my thesis is founded, then by characterizing the archetypal artist *Portrait* is making foundational claims about art. *Portrait* is a novel that, like *Ulysses*, is structured on the armature of earlier texts. Joyce loves to layer: *Ulysses* has whorls overlaid onto whorls—Bloom mapped onto Odysseus, the history of literary styles mapped onto the events of "Oxen of the Sun," which is itself mapped onto stages of gestation.[26] (264). *Portrait* uses one outline (one of the infinite possible outlines) of James Joyce's biography to structure a portrait of Stephen Dedalus, the archetype of the modern artist. However, just as Bloom belies many of the heroic qualities of Odysseus to become the

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[26] *Ulysses Annotated* suggests that Joyce would have presumed the process of gestation to be ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny (408), yet another "mapping" that the "overlayer" in Joyce would surely enjoy. Likewise, Ellman notes that in the short story from which *Portrait* develops, the artist asks, "Is the mind of boyhood medieval that it is so divining of intrigue?" (145). The question suggests a kind of individual progression that mirrors historical progression.

modern hero, so, too, will this new artist type diverge from his predecessors.

From this assumption about *Portrait*—that Joyce overlays an archetypal artist over his own biography to present "the modern artist"—this chapter will develop the idea that *Portrait* uses the archetypical modern artist to assert aesthetic principles. Stephen serves as archetype, an originary symbol of the modern artist. So, too, the novel in which he appears presents a similar marker for modern art. Stephen Dedalus's name, of course, originates in myth, and it's clear that *Portrait* is interested in art's origins and foundational functions. Myths are our first stories, and they're inextricably entwined with religion, a primary preoccupation for Stephen. The argument here is that *Portrait* defines art as the cultural activity that most closely approximates what Joyce might call our spiritual state, a state which best finds expression (with some limitation) in myth-work. Literature can do myth-work, but it's work that gets distorted by social institutions; the artist's role is to serve as a means of liberation from such control and for reconnecting (almost) to the spiritual state, best identified in the imagination.

The First Entelechy and the Sixth Sense

Richard Ellman's biography *James Joyce* (1982) contains examples of Joyce's earliest literary criticism and Joyce's defense of art as constitutive of something essentially human. In one of his college essays, "Drama and

Life" (1899), Joyce defends Ibsen against the criticism of fellow student Arthur Clery, who argues for a return to a traditional theatrical repertoire of Shakespeare and the Greeks, and who called out Ibsen by name as an example of failing to "produce an elevation" (71). Joyce responds to Clery first by defending modern literature against a bias for "classics." Different eras produce different styles, Joyce argues, and Ibsen's realistic style is appropriate for this more scientific age: "But the deathless passions, the human verities which so found expression then, are indeed deathless in the heroic cycle, or in the scientific age, *Lohengrin*, the drama of which unfolds itself in a scene of seclusion, amid half-lights, is not an Antwerp legend but a world drama' (72). In his defense of Ibsen's realism, Joyce asserts a timeless condition: universal human passions. This timeless condition "founds expression"; it is the source from which expression (art) emerges. When art gets constricted by the social pressures of history, its ability to express the fundamental passions is limited. It's important to note the two eras Joyce puts forth—heroic cycles (the era of myth) and the scientific age. The literature of today, in the scientific age, can do what myths and heroic cycles did before, say, the Enlightenment. There is a foundation, human passion, that is deathless, that runs through all eras and epochs.

Ellman notes that in Joyce's response "[t]he artist is not concerned to make his work religious, moral, beautiful or ideal, only to be truthful to fundamental laws, whether these are expressed as myth, as in Wagner's

operas, or in realist fiction" (71-2). Joyce seems to acknowledge that ideas of morality and ideas of beauty are transient (constructed), but that there is something "below" this, something essential, something "fundamental," at which art can get, or to which it can aspire to express. Beyond morality and even truth are fundamental laws. We might today call this a naive structuralist conviction, mystifying social activity by ascribing a universal, timeless immanence. However, Ellman says that in Joyce's 1901 essay "Day of the Rabblement," Joyce made just such an assertion; Joyce "stated once and for all his lifelong conviction that literature was the affirmation of *the human spirit*" [my italics] (96). Joyce's assertion of a universal human spirit recuperates his essay from charges of elitism. The seemingly elitist claim of the essay's title—the "Rabblement" is the mob—is qualified by Joyce's insistence on this timeless immanence: the rabblement are not *in essence* the mob, but they've become so through the historical forces that distort or occlude the immanent human spirit within us all.

While it's almost quaint to say that art is timeless or that art deals with the "human condition" (as though the human condition were timeless), Joyce is saying something more complex with the concept of "spirit." He acknowledges a modality of being outside history, like another sense. Such a claim for a transcendental condition of freedom, again, strikes our post-modern ears as highly problematic. Post-structuralist criticisms of universals see them as merely subject positions; Joyce's

position on human spirit is just that, his position. But this is not quite what

spirit is for Joyce. It's a mystery, an energy, the entelechy (Joyce's term)

that galvanizes the imagination. Post-structuralists argue convincingly

against a centered structure of human expression, but it's precisely this

limitation—human expression—that *Portrait* wants to penetrate: art is the

expression; imagination creates/reads/interprets the art; and the entelechy

fires the imagination. *Portrait* presents imagination as an active process, a

work that has no end (think of the circularity of *Finnegan's Wake*, but

instead of a closed circle, the widening gyre of Yeats's mythical "The

Second Coming," or Constantine Brancusi's symbol of Joyce, the

widening spiral that doesn't close). In *Ulysses*, Stephen calls gesture "the

first entelechy, the structural rhythm" (353). If "entelechy" is a

galvanizing energy, a force both vital and mysterious, then the idea here is

that gestures, which are of course signifiers, are the first signifiers, the

primal signifiers, and they point to something that can't be contained.

These gestures are produced in the imagination, which is something like a

sixth sense.

Stephen often considers the imagination in relation to the senses.

Earlier in *Ulysses*, when Stephen is walking with his eyes closed along

Sandymount strand, he says to himself, "Rhythm begins, you see. I hear"

(31). Art (rhythm) begins when the eyes are closed. The word "see" is

both the limitation of vision and the expression for understanding: "you

see" can be interpreted as "you understand." The "you see" reads as

understanding, Stephen confirming understanding with himself. But it can also be read as contrast, two ways of creating rhythm: sight or sound. Stephen chooses sound ("I hear") while you—the reader perhaps or, given Stephen's aesthetic arrogance, the philistines—see. "You" (philistines) rely on vision to create your rhythms; I (Stephen, the archetypal artist) hear something rhythmic, something more fundamental. Culture, however, is sparked in the imagination and manifested in gestures (signifiers), which in their interpretive quality point to that which cannot be wholly defined, can't be wholly understood (seen). And art, which declares itself symbolic, performs only signs, is closest to our gestural origin. This is our imaginative—again, Joyce might say spiritual—condition. The rhythmic gesture toward understanding. And in Stephen's own aesthetic theory, based on Aquinas's description of apprehension, the culmination of the three-part process is *claritas* (after *integritas* and *consomantia*), which Stephen says is the "supreme quality… felt by the artist when the esthetic image is first conceived in his imagination" (231). It's the "clear radiance" that in other contexts Joyce might have called an epiphany.

The suggestion here is that the musicality of language—the rhythm and sound—is the more fundamental aspect, and it is separable from and prior to, the content—the signification and the logic. In his introduction to *Portrait*, Seamus Deane says that "the speech of others is listened to intensely…The aural dimension in *Portrait* is crucial because sound is physical and yet disembodied. It is through the channels of the ear that the

talkative world of Dublin reaches Stephen's soul" (xxvi). Walter Pater

famously argues that all art aspires to the condition of music. Music is the

non-rational, heard and not seen. And in this way music and rhythm

suggest the spirit. However, music is primarily emotional (as well as

mathematical). Language, on the other hand, has the fundamental

rhythmic quality of music, but is also connected to referents and reason.

It's a vibrating *meaningful* medium. Indeed, Levi-Strauss, in "The Naked

Man," emphasizes the chanting, musicality of much myth, and he argues

that "music is a common form into which an unlimited series of significant

contents can be fitted according to the personality of the listeners" (114).

This description of myth would serve equally well to describe poetry, of

course, but also Joyce's and Stephen's sense of language itself: a common

rhythmic form with significant contents. The rhythmic process is

described in chapter V of *Portrait* when Stephen is composing in his mind

a villanelle: "The verses passed from his mind to his lips and, murmuring

them over, he felt the rhythmic movement of a villanelle pass through

them. The roselike glow sent forth its rays of rhyme; ways, days, blaze,

praise, raise" (236). The entelechy is a rhythm and it forms itself in the

shape of a villanelle, and the rhymes come as a matter of sound, not sense.

Then later, "The rhythm died away, ceased, and began again to move and

beat" (236). In "The Villanelle Perplex: Reading Joyce (1998). Robert

Adams Day argues that this scene shows Stephen's immaturity. Stephen,

Day says, practically wakens to declare "I think I'll write a villanelle this

morning," and the scene shows he's "thinking in clichés" (60). However,

Day overlooks the importance of rhythm in the section (and perhaps the

importance of rhythm to the villanelle). Stephen doesn't wake and declare

that he's going to write a villanelle; "the rhythmic movement of a

villanelle passed through" his mind and lips. This isn't the forced, showy

impulse of an arrogant adolescent—though Stephen has plenty of those—

this is the artistic impulse of the entelechy flowing through a developing

artist. The rhythm of the poem is itself produced by the entelechy, the

energy of the imagination, what Stephen calls the spirit, and what we

might think of today as a kind of sixth sense.

Joyce's reassertion of the spirit, the rhythm-producing energy, in a

scientific age was a primary concern for many modernists. Hermann

Broch (1886-1951), for instance, was a German modernist who responded

to Joyce's work and was also influenced by it. His ideas about the fate of

spirit in modernity echo those suggested by Joyce. In *Geist and Zeitgeist:*

The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age (2002), editor and translator John

Hargraves has collected six of Broch's essays on modernist aesthetics. The

eponymous essay, "The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age" (1934) was,

Hargraves says, "in part prompted by Broch's reading of Joyce" (ix).

Broch shares Joyce's concern that the spiritual sense is being lost and with

it an essential cultural concept. Hargraves says that, like Joyce, Broch

argues that spirit is a fundamental, animating concept, that cultural activity

is made up of "the Spirit (Geist) and the Logos ('word,' or the ordering

principle of all human activity)" (x). If the word orders, then one assumes

that there is some condition to order, some energy or entelechy. The

ordering of this energy is done through language, but as with any ordering

it is a constriction of an otherwise free condition. If logos is essential to

culture, then culture itself is a constrained condition. Hargraves says that,

for Broch, "Spirit and Logos are the twin driving forces of culture and

history, both necessary" (x). The best that culture can do, then, is to

intimate the spiritual, adumbrate it, suggest it without ever realizing it.

Broch argues that "spirit works through language. The word is nothing

without the spirit, which can live nowhere else but in the word" (43).

Broch's description, here, reads much like Stephen's description of the

entelechy.

Most of European intellectual history, Broch says, has been an

unfortunate separation of the two—Broch argues that the "classical

Golden Age and the High Middle Ages" were the closest that Europe has

come to something like spirit-word unity. The inextricable quality of

spirit-word suggests an almost utopian intellectual condition of humanity,

a return to Stephen's idea of gesture, the rhythmic origin of speech, the

essence of what it is to be human. The antithesis to the spirit-word ideal

for Broch is positivism, the misapprehension of fact for knowledge. If

positivism is the celebration of fact, art is the repository of knowledge. By

presenting itself as wholly symbolic, never without allegory, always

straining to cut free the referent, art is our most spiritual endeavor. When

Joyce takes a largely autobiographical set of circumstances and stamps them with the imprint "Fiction," he's attenuating the connection that signifiers have on referents; he's loosening the grip that history has on his story. And spirit, an essential way of experiencing the world and creating human culture, is seen by Joyce and Broch as tragically at the margins of the early twentieth-century cultural experience. Broch's anxiety over a loss of spirit reflects the value that Stephen places on spirit: it's an essential component to humanity.

Spirit, of course, must be considered in its religious denotations/connotations. In "Modernism and Religion" (2011) Pericles Lewis argues that, like Broch and Joyce, there was much unease in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century about religion's diminishing but persistent cultural place. Lewis says, "The Modernists were not the devout secularists that many critics portray; instead, they were seeking through their formal experiments to offer new accounts of the sacred for an age of continued religious crisis" (181). The death of God, Lewis says, was never complete, and many modernist intellectuals "continued to search for an adequate account of religious experience, a kind of essence of religion without God or church, and this search contributed to the development of literary Modernism" (182). Broch seems to lament this more religious understanding of spirit, and his *The Sleepwalkers* (1932) trilogy, which begins in 1888 and ends in 1918, traces the attenuation of religious faith and the emptiness that follows. *Portrait*'s spirit, on the other hand, seems

more secular. Spirit is the rhythm of the imagination, but its mystery is like the mystery of religion: "The esthetic image in the dramatic form," he tells his friend Lynch, "is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished" (233). A common criticism of Stephen's aesthetic theory is that it's the formulation of a clever schoolboy, but not much more, that it's designed to characterize Stephen as ambitiously smart, but not ready for aesthetic theory. Cordell D.K. Yee, though, in "The Aesthetics of Stephen's Aesthetic" is more generous: "Stephen's theory is not so faulty as to warrant the suspicion that it is meant to be undermined, and indeed it is strong enough to be taken seriously" (79).

In *Portrait*, Stephen's aim is to "discover the mode of life or art whereby [his] spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom" (267). Unfettered freedom is, of course, an aspiration, not a condition. To approach this free condition, artists require freedom, the liberation that institutions often obstruct[27]. But *Portrait* argues that working to achieve more freedom is a fundamental strategy for artistic production, an indispensable condition. Stephen's immediate notion of freedom is emigration, exile from his family, the Church, educational institutions, Irish politics, and English hegemony. Indeed, *Portrait* itself is a statement of such artistic freedom: fiction's exile from biography. By hewing so closely to, and at the same time fictionalizing, his own biography, Joyce's

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[27] This idea is foremost in Wyndham Lewis's *The Revenge for Love*, which we'll see below.

novel makes his history symbolic. This kind of novel—fiction layered

onto specifically detailed historical events, places, and people—wrests

from us our sense of a fixed real, a fixed present, into the imaginative

realm of signification, thus suggesting the interpretive quality of all

history. Art's unique position wrenches history from claims of fixity. Art

emphasizes the symbolic in history, the interpretive. It positions history

closer to art and affirms art itself as the "smithy" most appropriate for

Stephen's work of forging the uncreated conscience of his race. In *The*

Aesthetics of Dedalus and Bloom (1984), Marguerite Harkness argues that

Stephen likens this "transmutation" of history into art to the

transubstantiation of the Church. Stephen describes the artist thus: "A

priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience

into the radiant body of everliving life" (46). Stephen makes this claim in

a fit of pique, a woman he admires—the one for whom he was composing

the villanelle—is spending time with a young priest. Stephen's

characteristic of the artist is telling, though, for more than mere

comparison. The artist's imagination is eternal, suggesting that it is

something universal, something shared over time and space. And while

Christian theology teaches an everlasting life, the suggestion here is that

the body may die, but art lives and "everliving life."

In "Becoming James Overman: Joyce, Nietzsche, and the

Uncreated Conscious of the Irish" (2017), Patrick Bixby argues that

Joyce's argument for artistic freedom is often expressed in the extreme

language of Nietzsche, especially the latter's arguments for the *ubermensch*, or "overman," Nietzsche's "self-affirming individual, capable of transcending the slave morality of Christianity and the nihilism of modern European society" (Bixby 45). Bixby argues that, while Joyce could not properly be called a Nietzschean, he does express his ideas for artistic freedom in the language of Nietzsche. Bixby's essay begins by referencing a 1904 letter from Joyce to George Roberts, which Joyce signed James Overman (45). It's clear from this letter and elsewhere that Joyce was familiar with, and had some sympathy for, Nietzsche's ideas. Bixby argues that Nietzsche's overman influences Joyce's depiction of young Stephen Dedalus and his desire to reshape Irish values. At *Portrait*'s conclusion, Stephen famously states, "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (276). The idea of the overman, Bixby says, is instrumental in shaping Stephen's intention to overturn the values of colonial, Catholic Ireland, instrumental "for transvaluing communal values, for forging the 'uncreated conscience' of a 'race'" (46).

However, Stephen's declaration, and the overman's influence, might be read with less emphasis on the word "conscience," which Bixby reads as "values", and more on the word "uncreated." If the overman is the "self-affirming individual" that Bixby describes, then the values that the overman adheres to could be any; what matters to the overman is that he come to these values of his own accord, that they be created by him and

not foisted upon him. While it's true that Nietzsche identified Christianity with slavish values, and Joyce, too, had significant misgivings about the Church and colonial hegemony in Ireland, *Portrait* suggests that Ireland's real sin was to have these values thrust on it from outside, that these values were not self-created. The worth of the values is open to investigation. Stephen Dedalus, for instance, rejects the priesthood as a career and the Church as an institution, but when his friend Cranly asks Stephen about the divinity of Jesus, Stephen replies, "I am not at all sure of it…He is more like a son of God than a son of Mary" (264). Stephen's doubt suggests a dubious rejection of Christianity, as juxtaposed against a more certain rejection of the Church. And Stephen's refusal to participate in the Irish revival—the return to pre-colonial Gaelic language (and Gaelic football)—that his friend Davin proposes suggests that Stephen's declaration to forge the uncreated conscience is more about the *creation* of values than it is about new values (or in this case, returning to pre-colonial values). The Irish revival, for Stephen, is the past's way of foisting its values onto the modern Irish—another instance of uncreated conscience. *Portrait* suggests little about which values are best (a task taken up, perhaps, in *Ulysses*). What is clear, though, is that modern Ireland has yet to create its own values in the way an overman would, the way a free artist would.

Myth and the Novel: Spiritual Expressions

In the sentence preceding Stephen's declaration to create an Irish conscience, he says that he's going to gain experience "for the millionth time." Here, again, we see the suggestion that Stephen isn't speaking for himself alone but also for artists in general, for an archetype. As noted above, Bixby sees Nietzsche's overman as the armature onto which Joyce's new mythological archetype is overlaid: the overman, Bixby says, "offered [Joyce]…an imported resource for envisioning his personal myth of the artist and his relation to his family, his friends, his nation" (48). Joyce's archetype (Stephen) is laid over Nietzsche's (the overman). Stephen's relation to family, friends, and nation is reflective; after he extricates himself from these controls, he contemplates and expresses his experiences. Stephen frees himself from the bonds foisted on him in his youth, bonds that obscure the purpose of modern art, and he witnesses those bonds from a remove. What is this purpose? To reach for the fundamental existence, to approach and express the spiritual. This kind of extrication allows *Portrait* to assert the idea that artistic engagement, symbolic engagement, is closer to our imaginative (spiritual) reality than history's reality, social reality, or material reality. Bixby quotes Joseph Valente as saying that "in Nietzsche's superman [Joyce] found an empowering myth for his struggle against the mind-forged manacles of Irish society" (48).

Art in *Portrait* is, then, the effort to extricate from material

bonds—what Stephen later, in "Proteus", calls the "ineluctable modality

of the visible," and "the ineluctable modality of the audible" (31). It is a

movement away from the occlusions ("adiaphane" is Stephen's word)

toward an unreachable finish line. "Proteus" ends with Stephen referring

to himself as "[t]oothless Kinch, the superman" (42). Joyce's Stephen, the

archetypal modern artist, is laid over a Nietzschean archetype also laid

over a Greek myth. Stephen thus presents art-work as a spiritual event

expressed best in myth-work. In Jonathan Culler's *Toward a Theory of

Non-Genre Literature*, he says, "The essence of literature is not

representation, not a communicative transparency, but an opacity, a

resistance to recuperation which exercises sensibility and intelligence"

(53). The tension here is between art as the clear, simple translation of an

emotion, and an image or description that touches on the emotion in a

widening, indeterminate way. If the essence of literature requires

sensibility and intelligence, then it requires thinking, which is processual

not conclusive. Culler uses the first two lines from Wallace Steven's "Man

Carrying Thing" to present this tension: "The poem must resist the

intelligence / Almost successfully." The "intelligence" here is the rational

claim, the claim that a poetic image is understood, with all the

completeness that "understood" implies. Because the poem is language it

will always be, in some sense, interpreted (understood), but it will also

always be pointing to something not understood, something else, something that requires constant re-interpretation.

Culler's (and Stevens's) description of art as the site for processual mental work of re-interpretation echoes the work of myth. In *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (2000), William Doty spends a good deal of effort defining myth. The term elicits broad, wide-ranging concepts and many definitions, which Doty condenses to the following:

Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experiences intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life; that is, which has organizing value for experience. A mythology is a more or less articulated body of such images, a pantheon…Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend. (29)

It's a comprehensive definition, but worth quoting in its entirety as it expresses much of what *Portrait* expresses. That myth works to "make our experiences intelligible to ourselves" indicates that we're alienated from our own experiences because, perhaps, they're deceptively complete. We're alienated by all the ineluctable modalities—family, culture, institutions, and our very bodies—that appear as coherent totalities. The

experience is unintelligible because it gets in the way of the unending chain of interpretation. Myth attempts to emphasize the indeterminacy of experience. It is the cultural work (images and stories) that attempts to organize experience (not unlike the way logos, according to Hermann Broch, organizes spirit, or the way the language organizes the imagination). Myth creates a horizon for philosophy, a world view; interpretations of a myth image point to diffuse meanings for everyday life. A collection of such images indicates that they are part of a continuing, changing world view. Importantly, the myth "gives philosophical meaning to ordinary life." Myth-work cannot, then, be conceptualized as separable from aesthetic realism. Myths emerge from, and respond to, the real. As the young Joyce says in "Drama and Life," eternal passions underpin both myth and realism.

The language of Doty's definition—fundamental, instinctual, primary—echoes Joyce's early articulation of what art should aspire to: it is an essential human quality, residing in everyone, including the rabblement. The fundamental, instinctual, primary passions of art are not only appropriate to the myths and legends of the heroic age, but also to the literature and drama of the scientific age. At the intersection of spirit and philosophy is where we will find myth. Broch says that "it is the task of the philosophical human to answer not so much the question 'What is the nature of the world?' as the question how one is to conduct oneself in it; not so much the question of existing as the question of doing: in short, the

ethical question" (56). The question of existing, of what is, of what material bodies do under given conditions, is the purview of science. These are the facts and information of our understanding. Meaning, purpose, and value on the other hand—what Walter Benjamin might call wisdom or counsel, and what Doty calls our "awareness of man in the universe—is the purview of myth and philosophy and art.

The timeless quality of myth and art is seen in the opening of *Portrait*, which begins, "Once upon a time" (3). This folkloric opening is the beginning of a children's story that Stephen's father tells him, but it's also the beginning of the novel itself. *Portrait*'s self-introduction is part of a long tradition stretching back to the first stories. The traditional opening—almost a cliché—yokes the novel genre to its folk roots and asserts the novel's place as part of this tradition. As Joyce says in his response to Arthur Clery, the work that art does in realist fiction is like the work it does in myth. *Portrait*'s five sections cycle through the deathless passions that Joyce describes in his earlier essay. Each section presents Stephen's encounters with the confinements of history, institutional power, social controls, and his own desires. Earlier in the novel, he feels that he has escaped these controls; however, the "escapes" of his youth are provided by the same institutions that seek to control him: Father Conmee clears him of the accusations and injustice of Father Dolan, for instance, and the confessional clears him of his sexual "sin." These escapes are later seen for what they really are: temporary and illusory. (Father Conmee, for

example, later confides in Stephen's father that all the priests at Conglowes got a good laugh from Stephen's episode with the sadistic Fr. Dolan (76), and Stephen later determines that the "fear" and "shame" to which the Church attached his sexual desire were nothing more than "cerements, the lines of the grave" (184).) He later acknowledges that his earlier champions were really his oppressors in disguise.

As he matures, Stephen sees that his own escape will be his own responsibility, as it would be for any overman. And more importantly, escape itself becomes more aesthetic, more imaginative. This is first seen at the end of section IV. Stephen has suffered the Church's terror of Hell in Section III; now, while not yet returning to his promiscuous habits, he acknowledges that he soon will. Caught between the control of the Church and the control of his own desire, he lays down along the shore and closes his eyes (as he does on Sandymount Strand in *Ulysses*, noted above). Here "his soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings. A world, a glimmer, or a flower?" (187). Again, as he does later in *Ulysses*, he shuts down his senses and releases himself from all control, even the control of his own body, and retreats to his imagination, the place of the origins of art. This state of being that Stephen experiences happens right before section V and his determination to exile himself and become an artist. Engaging his imagination allows him to disconnect from sensory influence and become, in a sense, artistic.

It is this kind of transcendence that mythic work aspires to, and Joyce's work is, if anything, aspirational; it's constantly reaching for something beyond its grasp. This is art (for Joyce, the novel) as extension of myth, or more specifically to Joyce, the novel doing myth-work. The possibility for conflation of the two genres is suggested by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957). Frye argues for the overlap of generic qualities: "The romance, which deals with heroes, is intermediate between the novel, which deals with men, and the myth, which deals with gods" (7). In his definition of genres, Frye acknowledges relationships between these conventional genres. He says that "a novel becomes more romantic in its appeal when the life it reflects has passed away" (8). If a novel can be more romantic or less romantic, so, too, can it be more or less "mythic." Claude Levi-Strauss, too, in *The Origin of Table Manners* argues that the novel was "born from the exhaustion of myth" (103). Such fluidity of characteristics suggests genre as assemblage; it suggests that literatures contain multiple genres but in varying degrees. Genre is not fixed in effect or in the work but read into the work by how the reader is situated. In discussing the cross-cultural transformation of myths, Levi-Strauss, in "How Myths Die" (1971), gives an example of a myth that takes on divergent qualities as it passes over cultural thresholds:

Thus, a myth of Salish origin is first inverted as a *myth* when it passes the linguistic and cultural threshold separating the Salish from the Athapascan; it then becomes a *romantic tale* when it passes from the

Chilcotin to the Carrier. When passing another threshold, it undergoes a different transformation, this time to the order of *legendary* tradition, as a means of founding certain modalities of an ancestral system. In one case, it swings toward the *novel*, and in the other toward what is certainly not *history* but has some pretensions to it. (111) (Emphasis added)

As the myth crosses cultures, it gets uniquely shaped in ways useful to those particular cultures—from myth to romance to legend to novel to an approximation of history. Some of those changes include fundamental typological questions: is this a novel or a kind of history? As a given myth "dies out," it doesn't go away, but instead is reimagined:

Thus, a myth which is transformed in passing from tribe to tribe finally exhausts itself—without disappearing, for all of that. Two paths still remain open: that of fictional elaboration, and that of reactivation with a view to legitimizing history. This history, in its turn, may be of two types: retrospective, to found a traditional order on a distant past, or prospective, to make this past the beginning of a future which is starting to take shape. (Levi-Strauss 112)

Stephen Dedalus's journey, of course, leads to a beginning, an emerging future. He rejects reclamations of the past (the Gaelic revival), and like a Nietzschean overman (and like his mythological namesake, Daedalus) intends a new, self-created beginning. *Portrait* itself makes this same movement twice: it takes a history (Joyce's) and a myth (Daedalus') and

makes them fictional elaborations, the mythic portrait of an archetypal artist.

Stephen's and *Portrait*'s declaration is to work toward the freedom of an overman, the freedom of an artist, to push toward the spiritual. However, Stephen has emerged from a religious tradition that has defined myth and spirit in its own way. Myth and spirit are, of course, constitutive of religion. Stephen's rejection of the Church, however, does not equal a rejection of spirit. While the Church may have become a constraining, dogmatic institution, spirit is not something that can be constrained. It is, as "Day of the Rabblement" suggests, essentially human. And as myth has served as spirit's expression within religion, *Portrait* suggests that, more generally, art can do as much without. Joyce's defense of Ibsen, noted above, affirmed the deathless passions in the "heroic cycles" and the "scientific age," and they can be expressed in myth or realist fiction. As we've seen, Levi-Strauss makes a similar argument of the fluidity of genre. In *The Naked Man* (1971), he says that the novel emerges "in the face of the new scientific knowledge" (116), which he sees as emerging in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries (117). "[W]orks of art," Levi-Strauss says, "with the death of religion, are no longer merely beautiful but become sacred" (117). In a more scientific age, the mystical elements of religion recede, but the spirit remains. Art still expresses the deathless passions. Levi-Strauss notes, "Before taking the place of religion, the fine arts were in religion" (117). The idea seems to be, for Levi-Strauss, that

myth-work was the answer to *some* questions that science now answers, but not all questions. Science doesn't answer questions of meaning or ethics or value—the axiological questions. Science explains only how things behave in certain conditions; it doesn't say what they mean.

The question of meaning still seems to require myth-work speculation and, importantly, imagination. Stephen's ambition to create the conscience of a race, for example, remains the purview of art. The meaning of any science or craft is open to aesthetic speculation. The epigram to *Portrait*, for instance, is often translated, roughly, as "and he applies his mind to obscure arts." It refers, of course, to the mythological Daedalus, and occurs in Ovid's recounting of the myth of Daedalus and his son's escape from Crete. However, along with Ovid's description of Daedalus's art as "obscure," he also describes it as altering "nature's laws" and as "wondrous" (177). The consequences are mixed of course: Daedalus effects his escape but loses his son. The language—"obscure," "unnatural," "wondrous"—along with the consequences suggest something Faustian in Daedalus's art. And so it is with Stephen's. The creation of a conscience, the creation of secular spirit, requires extreme rejection, including the cringe-worthy rejection of his dying mother's desire for Stephen to pray with her. The suggestion is that art and the imagination are so separate from nature and science that they're almost a perversion of nature and science. My translation of Ovid uses the word "unimagined" instead of "obscure." Mythological Daedalus's great gift

was to imagine possibilities outside of nature or science, and *Portrait* seems to argue that aesthetic imagination does the same.

In Sidney Feshbach's "A Slow and Dark Birth: A Study of the Organization" (1998), he argues that *Portrait*'s creation story, the creation of the artist, follows a five-phase process, one in each chapter, and each denoted by a cry: the vegetative cry, the animal or bestial cry, the human or rational cry, the angelic or intellectual cry, and the divine or imaginative cry (132). Feshbach argues that this "ladder of perfection" gives, among other qualities, "a teleology to each category and to the whole novel" (138). This teleology, considered in the context of Doty's definition of myth, identifies one of *Portrait*'s mythic structures. Myth, Doty says, is fundamental, "a dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life." Having one structure of *Portrait* be a kind of phylogenetic development suggests a teleology of art, that the artist needs to develop the "imaginative cry." Doty says that myth provides a "primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations." If we substitute "artist" for man, we can see the how the five phases describe separate configurations for the artist. Phase five, of course, is an aspiration, in no way is it a destination. The homological structure is characteristic of much of Joyce, as was mentioned above, but it is also an essential quality of myth. In F.L. Radford's "Daedalus and the Bird Girl: Classical Text and Celtic Subtext," Radford adduces several instances in *Portrait* that show Joyce's knowledge, and use, of Celtic mythology,

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despite Stephen's dismissal of it. But of course Stephen's dismissal is in line with Joyce's claim in "Drama and Life" that the deathless passions are the same in the heroic cycle as they are in scientific age. Myth work is done even without privileging the era of mythology or, specifically, Celtic mythology.

Imagination as the Modern Spirit

There is no thing that with a twist of the imagination cannot be something else.

-William Carlos Williams*, Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1920)

In the Williams line above, it's telling that he writes "no thing" as two words instead of the more conventional one, "nothing." The separation emphasizes the thing, makes it a concrete object, and at the same time subjects the object (all objects) to the power of the imagination: the thing isn't perceived as something else; it will *be* something else. In the age of myth and epic, myth-work affirmed a cosmogony; it answered the questions of science, history, and value (the axiological questions). In our more secular age, science has arrogated the cosmological questions to itself. It has taken the divine or supernatural out of our stories (a circumstance often credited with creating much modernist anxiety). This has two important consequences: first, we are left solely to history, and, second, our values are our own responsibility. The work that myth-work

does today, then, shifts: myth-work (art) no longer explains a cosmogony; rather, it positions us in history. As science becomes more responsible for answering questions of, say, the origins and mechanics of the universe, human experience is more historically situated. What we do with the objects (Williams' things) of the universe, will be determined by our own imaginations and the infinite possible permutations our imaginations can create. Myth-work becomes the attempt to create value in this new situation. In Diana Fortuna's "The Art of the Labrynth" (1998), Fortuna argues that the groundbreaking discoveries of ancient Minoan civilization in the early 1900s might have prompted Joyce to structure *Portrait* on the Labyrinth myth. Specifically, though, she connects Joyce's labyrinth myth with a reading of *Portrait*'s phylogenetic structure: Just as rites of Minoan civilization evolve from primitive human sacrifices to the Christian sacraments, so the baby's gestation gradually emerges from a virtually amoebic animalistic form to the youth's accretive shape. The development of religion originating in the Cretan labyrinth parallels the individual's physical development" (200). The parallel is compelling, but Fortuna stops before it finishes. *Portrait* doesn't end at the "youth's accretive shape or the development of religion. It ends with one more phase, in the imagination, the epiphanic place where all the preceding phases originated.

In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin discusses the difficulties that the novel encounters in doing this imaginative myth-work. The

storyteller, Benjamin says, comes from an oral tradition, has counsel (wisdom) for his audience, and relates social experiences in a social setting. The story lives with (gets repeated and re-shaped by) the hearer long after the story concludes, which, in a sense, it never does. The novelist, on the other hand, writes in seclusion and provides information (something like facts or the news of the day); this information is consumed at a distance in seclusion, and offers no counsel. The novel, like a fire, burns, consumes, and ends. Benjamin argues, however, that the storyteller and the novelist are not entirely separate. Among novelists, he says, Nicolai Leskov (1831-1895) is most like the storyteller, insofar as a novelist can be. Leskov was a student of the classics and had an epic sensibility, which is to say, in Benjamin's terms, he is more chronicler than historian. The historian "is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings in which he deals." The chronicler, on the other hand, attempts to display "them [the happenings] as models of the course of the world" (96). Leskov, Benjamin says, works to present this kind of timeless, epic chronicle of the world. The chronicler uses events and causality to create meaningful possibilities for imagining our position in history. However, just as the storyteller's story doesn't end with the telling, but rather lives on in the perpetual re-telling, so too does the chronicler/novelist's novel not end at the last page: it lives on in meaningful reading, in the imaginative re-telling of the reader. Benjamin's example of Leskov suggests the possibility for chronicler-novelists,

novelists who push beyond the cause and effect of narrative to present a site for imagining our historical position in new ways.

Is *Portrait* a chronicle-novel? Ellman provides this quotation from Joyce to his brother Stanislaus regarding Joyce's intentions with *Dubliners*: "Don't you think there's a certain resemblance between the mystery of the Mass and what I am trying to do? I mean that I am trying…to give people some kind of intellectual pleasure or spiritual enjoyment by converting the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own…for their mental, moral, and spiritual uplift" (163). Joyce famously described the stories of *Dubliners* as epiphanies, sudden realizations of something extraordinary in the heretofore ordinary. While we're rightfully skeptical of authorial intentions, it's noteworthy that Joyce saw his mission as the chronicler's mission, to present new ways of thinking about the events of the day. Joyce amplifies this further by saying to his brother, "Do you see that man who has just skipped out of the way of the tram? Consider if he had been run over, how significant every act of his would at once become. I don't mean for the police inspectors. I mean for anybody who knew him. And his thoughts for anybody that could know them. It is my idea of the significance of the trivial things that I want to give the two or three unfortunate wretches who may eventually read me" (163). If the chronicler takes the events, the information, the surface causes-and-effects of the day and tries to express them in a more original perspective, to

spark a new way of knowing, then Joyce is positioning himself squarely in this camp.

More than this, though, in his example of the unfortunate pedestrian and the tram, Joyce is echoing Benjamin's idea of death and the chronicler. Art, Benjamin says, can only exist because there is death. After Joyce's pedestrian is killed by the tram, his life exists only in memory and story; it's no longer living actions subsequent to change, but part of a completed narrative, wholly in language and out of nature. Joyce uses the word "significance," presumably, to mean importance. But it also suggests significance in the semiotic sense: the death or end of anything positions that thing as pure semiotics, pure sign. Benjamin argues this: "The idea of eternity has ever had its strongest source in death. If this idea [eternity] declines, so we reason, the face of death must have changed. It turns out that this change is identical with the one that has diminished the communicability of experience to the same extent as the art of storytelling has declined" (93). Benjamin is making a generic distinction: with reduced contemplation of eternity, there is reduced willingness, openness to the never-ending, shifting, changing story of the storyteller. Death is the "strongest source" for the idea of eternity because of its seeming finality: if something is gone "forever," it is eternally gone. Benjamin says, "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, it is natural history to which his stories refer back" (94). From the position of death or the eternal, one

"looks back" at natural history reflectively. Benjamin is making the argument that modernity has increasingly denied death, shunted it behind closed doors and, thus, changed the way we tell stories: we've lost the storyteller/chronicler (of the eternal) and gained the novelist (of the present).

As the death or passing of the "natural" gives way to the semiotic, so art gives way to the imagination. Art identifies itself as representation, fiction, symbol—never as the thing itself. Art objects are, of course, objects, but unlike any other artifact the art object's emphasis is to push beyond itself as object and toward interpretation. Art, like language, is the unavoidable modality through which the urge for immateriality expresses itself. It is the imagination made physical. In "Joyce and the Present Age" (1932), Broch says that "man can never grasp through 'natural' means the totality in the innermost part of which he lives (supposing of course that such a thing as totality still exists)" (67). Comprehension of totality (or the possibility of totality), Broch argues, is only conceivable when the moment has passed from nature and become "historical" (68). Today, we're less likely to allow for even the parenthetical possibility of totality for which Broch allows, but the precondition he sets for any understanding is clear. His use of the word "historical" is different from ours: he distinguishes the "historical" is past, and we are in the present. It is only the historical, that which has passed, which we can understand. Again, that which is out of nature and wholly symbolic (Joyce's unfortunate

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pedestrian) can be understood more fully than can the natural. The threshold between the two, of course, is death. Death as a marker for entry into the semiotic appears in Joyce's work with regularity: In *Dubliners*, for instance, "The Sisters," "A Painful Case," "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," and, of course, "The Dead" are organized around the traces of death; the death of Paddy Dignam and Stephen's mother, too, do much to structure *Ulysses*; and *Finnegans Wake*, of course, takes its name from "Finnegan's Wake," a popular Irish ballad of the comic death and "resurrection" of Tim Finnegan.

Portrait is a bit different in this regard, as its central push is the development and creation of an artist. *Portrait* is a novel about education, self-awareness, and growth. While the death of Parnell hangs over the earlier section, death is absent, explicitly anyway, from the novel. However, it's telling that Stephen's growth and development meets its fruition in exile and transformation, two concepts strongly suggestive of a kind of finality. Stephen the artist must first loosen the bonds, social and physical, that have informed him. He must leave Ireland to write Ireland. And he must loosen the grip of his own senses, as he does at the end of section IV in *Portrait* and on Sandymount strand in *Ulysses*, in order to enter more fully into his own imagination. If Joyce's position is that death makes the natural event a sign, then the imagination—which houses the traces of the unfortunate pedestrian and, indeed, all deaths—is pure signification. It is, perhaps, spirit. And this is the sense of art to which

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Portrait takes Stephen: art is not an object, not a novel or painting or piece of music. These are the points of intersection of the artist's and reader's imagination. Art resides in the imagination. Stephen's progression in *Portrait* is, as noted, toward imaginative life, the life of the artist. An important recognition on this progression is his repeated recourse to the "intangible phantoms" of his mind (88). In section two, while a student at Belvedere, Stephen feels besieged by obligations: his peers want a sense of comradery; his instructors want obedience; both his father and his country increasingly insist on his loyalty. He rejects them all in favor of his intangible phantoms: "he gave them [peers, family, country] ear only for a time but he was happy only when he was far from them, beyond their call, alone or in the company of phantasmal comrades" (89). What at first seems a child's escape becomes, by the novel's end, something much more serious, much more important. It's the privileging of the imagination, the essence of what it is to be human.

The narrative of *Portrait* is a chronology of childhood to adulthood, but it also moves from third-person to first, which suggests that the tone inverts this chronology. (Children are first-person creatures who, later, become "aware" of their third-person possibilities.) There is, therefore, the suggestion of another development, beyond the education of one boy: it's the movement into and out of dogma, history, and literal thinking, the movement toward imaginative life. The opening sentence of *Portrait* says that

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a

moocow coming down along the road and this moocow

that was coming down along the road met a nicens little

boy named baby tuckoo… (3)

The sentence, as noted earlier, begins a story that Stephen's father, Simon,

tells him. This opening sentence is the opening of a children's story, and

it's presented as though being told or read by an adult to a child. The

reader isn't provided a setting: there's no room with an adult, a child, and

(possibly) a book, and Joyce's em dash, which he uses to indicate

dialogue, is absent. The obvious conclusion is that this is an instance of

free indirect discourse, and the remainder of the first chapter strongly

suggests that this first sentence is young Stephen's point of view being

conflated with a third-person narrator. Free indirect discourse can range

from emphasis on a character's perspective to emphasis on the narrator's

perspective. However, in the moment of the sentence, the point of view

can also be read as the father's, Simon's. Indeed, the complexity of the

sentence argues more for the adult's perspective than the child's. It's not

until the second sentence—"His father told him that story…" (3)—that the

reader is inclined to remove the father's perspective from the narrative

options. So here in this first sentence is an instance of cultural inheritance:

the boy's introduction to art is done materially (through language), and it's

the art of his father, carrying with it the traditions and history of his father.

The novel begins with young Stephen's entry into the material, the

ineluctable modality. The last person he speaks with before leaving

Ireland is his mother. And by the novel's end, we see that, with his call to the father—this time a different father from Simon, his aesthetic father (Daedalus)—his artistic journey toward the return has begun.[28] He has left his material family and entered an imaginative life. In the leadup to Stephen's departure, the last six weeks are chronicled with days and months, with typically only a few days separating entries, never more than ten. Yet the last two dates and places in the novel, Dublin 1904 and Trieste 1914, are separated by ten years and a thousand miles. Time and place are no longer relevant measures; they're ineluctable modalities. Through art, he will reach for the unattainable: a return to the immaterial from which he came.

This return is expressed in his artistic declaration: "to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (276). What is it that gets forged through art? A conscience. And conscience is a concept that first gets mentioned in the novel by Fr. Arnall in his introduction to a religious retreat: "A retreat, my dear boys, signifies a withdrawal for a while from the cares of our life, the cares of workaday world, in order to examine the state of our conscience, to reflect on the mysteries of holy religion and to understand better why we are here in this world" (117). Here, the religious retreat does what Stephen, later, wants his imagination to do: take him out of the material, "workaday world" and reach for

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[28] Joyce hints at death as a return to a previous immateriality in a letter to Martha Fleischmann: "one day I shall leave, having understood nothing in the darkness which gave birth to both of us" (*Selected Letters* 235).

something beyond. It can't be reached, of course, because materiality is the ineluctable modality, but art is the best modality for the attempt. Art and religion, of course, have been inextricably bound together since at least the first myths and the caves at Lascaux. Narrative, poetry, pictures, music, and drama instantiate a sense (a longing for?) immateriality and transcendence. And, in *Portrait*, religion is the cultural activity that most often expresses the most fundamental human urge beyond the bodily urges (nourishment and propagation). *Portrait* presents the merging of imaginative art (literature) and religion through Stephen Dedalus's movement from one to the other; he moves from the literal, dogmatic, physical, historical religion of the Church toward the intangible phantoms of his imagination. If modernity is a moment when we're forced to situate ourselves solely in nature and history, *Portrait* is the novel that makes the claim for art (and language) as the best means for approaching the limits of nature and history. *Portrait* presents the changing, imaginative, evanescence of language as the best mode of outstripping material, temporal existence, which, alas, can't be outstripped. Imaginative work (art) is the modality that best strives to get beyond materiality while understanding that such transcendence cannot be reached. The analog here is the "heresy" that young Stephen is accused of by his English master at Belvedere. Stephen's essay says that the soul's relationship to god is a straining "without a possibility of ever approaching nearer" (83). He is accused of heresy because, of course, the Church teaches that one can get

closer to god, to "approach nearer." Stephen defends himself by saying

that he meant "without the possibility of ever reaching" (83). The religious

principle and the artistic are, again, closely related. The religious principle

seems to be that the soul cannot "touch" god, but it can come closer to

god. Likewise, art (and literature in particular) wants to transcend the

materiality of human existence, and the straining out of this existence is

best accomplished through the imaginative creation and contemplation of

art. However, art, too, is always material and, as such, cannot be the

immaterial for which it strains. It can't take us out of body, out of the

ineluctable modality of the material,

Conclusion

In "The Metaphysical Poets," Eliot famously says that "[the ordinary man]

falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to

do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of

cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new

wholes" (64). The creation of new wholes (not the singular whole)

suggests the imagination's ability to, as William Carlos Williams says,

have something *be* something else. The difference seems to be that Eliot

reserves this ability for the poetic imagination. Williams allows it for all

imaginations, and *Portrait* seems to take the side of Williams. Both the

rabblement and the poet have imaginative essence, the difference being

that the poet, the artist, has freed him- or herself from the ineluctable

modalities, the social and material obstacles that stand between us and our

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spiritual essence. By presenting the archetypal modern artist in an historically grounded, quasi memoir, *Portrait* instantiates a mythic text: it makes claims about fundamental aesthetic values in a realistic context much the same way that mythological images and texts made fundamental claims grounded in specific cultural moments. *Portrait*'s primary claim is for imaginative freedom, freedom not only from social institutions but also from material constrictions, the constrictions (distractions?) of the senses. In his introduction to *Portrait*, Seamus Deane says, "It was fear of freedom, fear of the body, fear of the complexity of experience that would always be in excess of the conventions which attempted to organize it into stereotyped patterns that wounded the Irish spirit" (ix). As Stephen Dedalus matures and develops, it's this fear of freedom that he imbibes with every breath and from which he must extricate himself. And while freedom takes, in part, physical exile, Stephen's emigration at the novel's close is almost metaphorical. The real liberation comes from wholly engaging and participating in his imagination.

Portrait doesn't profess a kind of mind/body dualism, but it does encourage the idea of art as a mental activity, an ongoing imaginative process. This, for Joyce, is the spirit: the mysterious, intangible, imaginative phantasms of the mind. It's where Williams's "thing" gets turned into something else, and it's the fundamental essence of the human. And *Portrait* argues that art, which never pretends to be more than a sign, which celebrates its signification, is our material touchstone for this

imaginative site. In a science-driven moment like ours, it might feel quaint or passé or even anti-intellectual to speak of the mysteries of imaginative life, to call it spirit. But much of our theoretical and even scientific thinking about human consciousness lends itself to this characterization, or at least to the investigation of this characterization. The access point for a possible sense of the spiritual is language. In *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain* (1997), evolutionary biologist Terence Deacon argues that language is the essence of human consciousness, and the self-referential quality of language lends to our thoughts feeling like they're unmoored from materiality: "In a curious way, this recapitulates an unshakable intuition that has been ubiquitously expressed throughout ages. This is the belief in a disembodied spirit or immortal 'pilgrim soul' that defines that part of a person that is not 'of the body' and is not reducible to the stuff of the material world" (452). This quotation seems closer to continental philosophy than evolutionary biology. The qualities of language that Deacon describes—signs (he would call them symbols) that refer only to other signs in a network of un-centered signification—has been described by Saussure (langue) and Derrida (differance, trace). Deacon, though, adds that our symbolic consciousness lends to our experiencing a feeling of mind/body dualism, the feeling of spirit: "We are not just a species that uses symbols. The symbolic universe has ensnared us in an inescapable web. Like a 'mind virus,' the symbolic adaptation has infected us, and now by virtue of the

irresistible urge it has instilled in us to turn everything we encounter and everyone we meet into symbols, we have become the means by which it unceremoniously propagates itself throughout the world" (436). Experiencing the world symbolically means we can, to use Williams' formulation, imaginatively turn anything into something else. What Williams calls imagination, and what Joyce calls spirit, Deacon calls symbolic consciousness, an evolutionary adaptation manifested in language and genetically spread from generation to generation. Deacon's investigation into language as an evolutionary adaptation—as opposed to the Chomsky idea of a "switch" that got flipped in our collective past— has led him to see our very consciousness as symbolic, making a disembodied sense of spirit unavoidable.

It is not my contention that Joyce, coming from a traditional Irish Catholic background, misidentified symbolic consciousness for that background's more religious sense of "spirit." But *Portrait* does suggest a link between spirit, imagination, art, and language. (Joyce might more explicitly present this in the dizzying wordplay of *Finnegan's Wake*.) "Day of the Rabblement," Ellman says, is Joyce's statement that literature affirms the human spirit; in *Portrait*, Stephen longs for a mode of art that allows his spirit to express itself in unfettered freedom, unfettered even by his own body; Joyce's contemporary, Herman Broch, argues that that spirit resides only in the word. There is, of course, an argument (the linguistic turn) that says at this moment in modernity, language was seen

as a material influence on our thinking. And while Joyce is outside the intersection Deacon, Saussure, and Derrida, he plainly sees language, and by extension literature, as an access point to something that at the very least feels spiritual.

Chapter Three

The Revenge for Love: The Aesthetics of Disinterest

Satire and Individualism

Wyndham Lewis's *The Revenge for Love* (1936) pointedly satirizes

London's leftist politics at the outset of the Spanish Civil War. The novel

targets its most withering denunciations at what Lewis calls the "bourgeois

bohemians," London's intellectual, upper-class fellow travelers, the salon

reds. However, while *Revenge* is a political novel that ridicules leftist

politics, it advocates for neither the Nationalist nor Republican position in

the coming Spanish Civil War. Its satirical ambitions are much broader.

All satire, of course, presents inconsistencies, hypocrisies, excesses, and

exaggerations for purposes of critique, but the critique in *Revenge* extends

beyond the political left or right. If we think of satire as the subversion or

distortion of commonly held assumptions, then the assumption satirized in

Revenge is that the "correct" social system will produce justice or equality

or freedom. In *Revenge*, social justice is always elusive. In fact, the very

act of social formation produces injustice and inequality and dependence.

Revenge's satire stretches beyond specific targets or specific political

systems. The satire extends to all social systems, implying an unavoidable

sacrifice in the very formation of a social system or institution. *Revenge*,

however, does not advocate for nihilism or anarchism. On the contrary, it

sees social formation as a necessary evil[29]. The problem with social

formations is the inevitable lost freedom of the individual, the freedom

relinquished by entering the social condition. The individual's recourse to

this condition is to position him- or herself against the institutions while at

the same time acknowledging their inevitability. Like *Portrait*'s argument

that artistic freedom requires loosening the hold that social institutions

exert, *Revenge* argues that there is an innate, instinctual individuality that

social formations can't help but corrupt.

For satire to be effective, everyone who comes to the satire must

share certain assumptions. Readers can't be expected to identify

exaggeration if there isn't first an assumed norm. In Timothy Materer's

Wyndham Lewis the Novelist (1976), Materer cites W.H. Auden on the

social conditions necessary for the production and reception of satire:

"Satire flourishes in a homogeneous society where satirist and audience

share the same views as to how normal people can be expected to behave"

(28). In a more heterogenous society, satire might be less common, and

the interpretation of a text as satirical might be harder to establish. Auden

also recognizes that satire often targets human behavior and that the best

conditions for satire are those "times of relative stability and contentment,

for satire cannot deal with serious evil and suffering. In an age like our

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[29] This is not be confused with the principle (popularized by, but not original to, Thoreau) that "that government is best which governs least." *Revenge*'s position is not on the reach of individual political institutions, nor on realpolitik distinctions about, say, regulation or taxation. Rather, it recognizes the necessity and limitations of all social systems, all institutions.

own, it cannot flourish" (28). Auden made these statements in 1962, and an "age like our own" refers to the age of more heterogeneous societies, of world wars, and of nuclear threat. In a 1921 interview published in the Daily Express, Lewis, too, declares, "Satire is dead to-day [sic]. There has been no great satirist since Swift. The reason is that the sense of moral discrimination in this age has been so blurred that it simply wouldn't understand written satire if it saw it" (*Complete Wild Body* 359). Where Auden acknowledged suffering and anxiety as a limitation to satire, Lewis identifies the problem for modern satire as blurred discrimination: the British are unable to make the fine distinctions that satire requires. However, what Lewis perceives as an inability might more accurately be described as a less homogenous society's more various discriminations. A more heterogenous society will produce more diverse discriminations, more diverse distinctions. Without the homogenous norm, satire, perhaps, becomes niche. Auden and Lewis seem, then, to be describing the same condition but in different ways. Blaming the dearth of satire on British dullards, though, allows Lewis to employ the supercilious tone and voice of the haughty, cynical kvetch, a role he clearly enjoyed.

Revenge emerges at the onset of the age Auden describes. It's written before the age of nuclear threat, yes, but in a more heterogenous society[30], with a revolutionary regime in Russia, and during the rise of

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[30] The popularity of invasion literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggests not only a more heterogenous society but anxiety about this increased heterogeneity.

fascism in Italy, Spain, and Germany. Auden and Lewis acknowledge that theirs is a culture that shares fewer norms, that exists in an anxious age, is not, therefore, suitable for satire. In such a time and place, satire at best will produce various "misreadings." Why, then, does Lewis bother to write satire? Indeed, Materer says that Lewis "doubted that his own society offered any moral norms, he saw no sure [satirical] way to call the fools and knaves into account" (24). This leads Materer to conclude that, in fact, *Revenge* is not satire, that Lewis's "artistic vision was more tragic than satiric" (30). And there is certainly a tragic reading of *Revenge*. (If, as I've suggested above, *Revenge* presents the social condition as both necessary and necessarily corrupting, then the individual is always already in a tragic condition.) However, *Revenge*'s cast of laughable characters— the satyr Jack Cruze, the egregiously mercenary Sean O'Hara, and the entire set of deluded bourgeois bohemians—is so clearly over-the-top that it's impossible to deny *Revenge*'s satirical presentation. Again, though, if Lewis regarded satire as aesthetically impotent for the dullards of interwar Britain, then why write it at all? I will argue that the satire in Lewis's novel is the essence of his aesthetic position: satire itself, for Lewis, is an instantiation of the social condition. Because satire represents exaggerations and distortions, it is a "false" representation, and a false, satirical position is the unavoidable modern social position. In the social setting, the individual is compelled to wear a mask, to present a distortion. The individual submits to a confluence of social systems, sacrifices his or

her individuality and authenticity to the systems, and wears a mask to negotiate the systems' demands. It is this unavoidable, diminished social condition that Lewis can't help but mock.

What lies beneath the distorted, masked surface? *Revenge* argues that it's the free individual. *Revenge* presents an insistent, romantic kind of humanism: the individual's persistent assertion of his or her individuality against the systems that have eroded it, systems that demand the satirical mask. As exaggeration and distortion, satire is a "false" presentation, and if social formations demand false presentation, then *Revenge* is the satire that satirizes the satirical condition. The novel argues for acknowledging and reinterpreting the false position that social formation foists on the individual. This position is exemplified in Lewis's Tyro paintings, smiling enigmatic caricatures that Lewis describes thus: "The Tyro, too, is raw and undeveloped; his vitality is immense, but purposeless, and hence sometimes malignant. His keynote, however, is vacuity; he is an animated, but artificial puppet, a 'novice' to real life" (*Complete Wild Body* 359). The real life to which the Tyro is novice is the natural individuality that has been sacrificed in the social condition. His puppet-like expression is the mask that represents our social position. In *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer*, Paul Edwards notes this Lewis description of the Tyro paintings: "These immense novices brandish their appetites in the faces, lay bare their teeth in a valedictory, inviting, or merely substantial laugh. A laugh like a sneeze, exposes the nature of the individual with an

unexpectedness that is perhaps a little unreal" (254). The laugh that bursts

forth like a sneeze is the "nature of the individual," the natural that is

suppressed in society, an uncontrolled, unregulated, un-premeditated

outburst. The Tyro is a novice to his real self, his natural self. The Tyro is

the social puppet: a representation of the individual, merely a social shell.

The laughter bursts forth as appetite, animal desire, a kind of involuntary

muscle, the trace of the individual that social formation has suppressed.

Nature and the Individual

Just as satire requires a norm, so does the concept of social distortion. In

Revenge, this norm that society distorts is the individual outside of society,

the individual in nature. *Revenge* presents nature as outside of social

formation. It's a theoretical condition of freedom and individuality not

entirely dissimilar to the now famous (infamous?) description of nature by

the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes theorizes that the state

of nature, or more specifically the condition of mere nature, is an anarchic

condition of all against all. There is no law or right or even morality.

Everyone merely satisfies his or her appetite. To quit this condition and

obtain security requires renouncing the pure freedom of the state of nature.

Social formation, then, begins with renunciation. It is in this way that

Revenge sees the divide between the individual and the social. The

emphasis in *Revenge*, however, is not on Hobbesian anarchy so much as it

is on intellectual purity. Where Hobbes describes life in the state of nature

as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short," *Revenge* nostalgically laments

the loss of absolute freedom to reason and express oneself. Individuality and free reign of reason, which are appetites, are lost with the subjection of appetite. When speaking of the Tyros, Lewis couples appetite and vacuity. Lewis says, as noted above, that the Tyro's laugh is all appetite. The laugh—bursting forth like a sneeze, involuntary and unregulated—is the trace of nature that everyone retains. The Tyro's vacuity, though, is the forfeiture of "pure" contemplative intelligence. Now, instead of pure thinking, he or she thinks socially: thought has social parameters, social requirements. Intellectual expression, including aesthetic expression, is replaced by social negotiation, thinking in order to navigate social formations. Reason no longer contemplates what something is; reason contemplates what it's socially called.

Percy Hardcaster is *Revenge*'s most knowing character, the one who understands both the distortions of social formations and their necessity. He is a sindicalista, a leftist caught up in the escalating pre-war tensions of Spain. The novel opens with Percy, an English revolutionary in a Spanish prison, debating his Spanish jailer, Don Alvaro, on the relative merits of English and Spanish law. Percy defends the English system by saying, "There is a certain amount of justice in my country. Not much. But they do *pretend*" (3). Percy's best argument for the superiority of English law is that it pretends better than does Spanish law. The English political system, Percy argues, may not fundamentally be just, but it does, at least, approximate something like justice, present the appearance of justice,

make motions toward justice. This is the best that capitalist political formations have yet provided. And while Percy certainly behaves as a committed communist, it's not at all clear that he believes a communist system will provide complete justice and equality. The clarity of nature—which is a context without the concept of justice—has been relinquished for a corruption of social justice. And while social justice under communism will be an improvement, it will still be corrupted to some degree. In his debate with Don Alvaro, Percy quotes Paul's epistle to the Corinthians: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient" (2). "Expedience" here is widely understood as "beneficial." The idea is that while we may do as we please, that which is beneficial, as determined by a god, would be that god's law. But in a system without the fixed, transcendent law of a god, we're left simply with individual determinations of lawlessness—all things are lawful for me. (This, of course, is the state of nature.) And while it's unlikely that Percy is advocating a religious position, he does seem to suggest the necessity of a higher social law, and communism will provide this higher, more just law.

Percy's argument inflames Don Alvaro, who is a former Civil Guard, a group notorious for its strict adherence to the laws of state. Shortly after this debate between Percy and Don Alvaro, Percy attempts to escape. On the evening of his escape, though, Percy has misgivings. One of his guards, Serafin, has been paid by the sindicalistas to assist in Percy's escape. Earlier, Serafin suggested to Percy that they go on a

different night, that something wasn't quite right, but Percy dismissed Serafin's suspicions. Now, however, as the hour to escape draws near, Percy begins to feel unsure. He attributes some of his misgivings to the night itself. It is a beautifully calm evening, yet Percy cannot "support the placid night outside! There was not only the fact that Nature was blind to the intellectual beauties of the Social Revolution, and deaf to the voice of Conscience; there was also the fact that Nature, especially in these sumptuous climates, required a Spartan watchfulness" (40). Nature poses two difficulties for Percy. First, nature is politically and socially indifferent. In this moment of romantic reflection, Percy acknowledges that nature is neither helpful or unhelpful, neither just nor unjust. Nature is sublimely disinterested. Cruelty, benevolence, justice, right and wrong, these are social realities; they do not exist in the state of nature. Nature is always only nature. Percy's second difficulty emerging from this particularly serene night is that it might seduce him from the cause, and he struggles against this seduction with Spartan watchfulness. The allure of nature is its freedom, and because it is a condition of non-law ("lawlessness" won't work here), it is individual freedom that seduces.

Today we are, rightly, suspicious of the concept of a free, autonomous individual. Powerfully persuasive arguments, produced by the usual suspects, are adduced in favor of a constructed subject, not an autonomous individual: Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Derrida have displaced the autonomous individual with a language-based subject; Freud

has displaced the autonomous individual with a largely unconscious subject determined by drives; and Marxists have displaced the autonomous individual with a subject determined by history. Marx is, of course, the most relevant to *Revenge*; as noted above, the novel saves its most biting satire for the bourgeois bohemians. However, the novel's critique of social formations and institutions has an unexpected parallel in Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970) (a parallel that might provide Lewis a modicum of defense against charges of Fascism). *Revenge*'s controlling metaphor, for example, is the "false bottom," the appearance of a foundational concept that is, in fact, merely appearance. In *Revenge*, social formations inherently produce false bottoms. Althusser's concept of ideology, too, is a description of social "falseness": "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (691). For Althusser, the relationship between individual and social conditions is mere representation because it's a false consciousness. The relationship appears to be that which it is not. Likewise, as mentioned above, the controlling metaphor of *Revenge* is the false bottom, the apparent foundation that isn't a foundation at all. *Revenge* presents these false bottoms as inherent to social formations.

The duplicity of Don Alvaro is an example of this kind of false bottom. Don Alvaro learns of Percy's planned escape by discovering a literal false bottom: he finds a secret compartment beneath the "bottom" of a basket that a local woman has been using to bring Percy food. The

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instructions for the planned escape are hidden beneath. Don Alvaro then

reveals the false bottom of his own seemingly sacrosanct devotion to duty:

instead of informing Percy and Seraphin that he knows their plan, he waits

for them outside of the jail, in the woods. Don Alvaro ambushes them

both, killing Seraphin and wounding Percy in the leg. Why? He was angry

that Percy and the sindicalistas had offered the bribe to Seraphin and not

him. Despite his protestations about duty and law, Don Alvaro would have

betrayed these seemingly sacrosanct ideas for a bribe—"Everyone has a

price," he tells Percy (44). Don Alvaro's false claims for the inviolability

of the law echo Althusser's argument about ideology and justice.

Althusser argues that if a subject, through the influence of both repressive

state apparatuses (RSA) and ideological state apparatuses (ISA), "believes

in Justice, he will submit unconditionally to the rules of the Law, and may

even protest when they are violated, sign petitions, take part in a

demonstration, etc." (696). But of course this relationship to duty would

be a false one, foisted on the subject through RSAs and ISAs. Our ideas

are not free-formed, objective concepts. They are "material actions

inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are

themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which

derive the ideas of the subject" (697). This circular process, for Althusser,

shows how our actions, practices, and rituals produce and are produced by

the ruling ideology. What, then, to make of Don Alvaro, who defies the

ruling ideology of justice? *Revenge* presents selfishness not as

participating in the ruling ideology; rather it's the trace of the individual as he or she is in the state of nature: "all things are lawful to me."

The distrust of social formations present in *Revenge* is suggested, more generally, by Ivan Phillips as a distrust that Lewis held for groups of people. Phillips uses this distrust to defend Lewis against charges of racism and sexism. In "Political Incorrectness Gone Sane: Lewis, Race, and Gender" (2015). Phillips attempts to defend Lewis from the accusations of bigotry that critics, justifiably, level at Lewis. Phillips suggests that Lewis is guilty of "an anxious hostility towards what he [Lewis] sees as 'group rhythms'" (122). Group rhythms are defined as "a coagulation of individuals into mass units" (122). Phillips argues that grouping individuals in this way is an obvious oversimplification that, again, might explain some of Lewis's generalized ideas about race and gender. While I'm not sure the idea of "group rhythms" goes far in redeeming some of Lewis's more unpleasant observations—another term for "group rhythms" might simply be "chauvinistic stereotyping"—I do think Lewis, and *Revenge* in particular, portrays a distrust of sociality. And if Lewis saw women, Jews, people of color, or communists forming social and political units around these identities, he might well have seen such grouping as just another remove from the clarity of the individual in the state of nature. Where an Althusser sees the individual is an abstract— "Man," he says, "is an ideological animal by nature" (698)—Lewis sees the individual as naturally outside of ideology. It's not until we start

"moving in group rhythms" that a kind of ideology is formed. For Althusser, we are always already subjects. For Lewis, we become subjects, but never completely. While it's clear that the individual is always "in society," *Revenge* asserts a certain essence of individuality that is beyond the reach of subject-creation. It's the trace of a unique individual that is "underneath" the mask that social formation demands. In this sense, *Revenge* might be more akin to Sartre's claim that we are "condemned to be free," with the added caveat that we're also condemned to be social. And therein lies the tragedy.

Art and the State of Nature

As noted above, Percy Hardcaster's initial misgivings before his escape from prison suggest the temptation of our natural state. In the moments before his escape attempt, the seductive power of nature creeps into Percy's imagination. The seduction of nature is, again, its disinterested clarity, its free condition. And it is easy to imagine that Percy's desire to return to nature is motivated by the desire to get beyond political struggle and to rest in the indifference of nature. To combat his desire to return to nature, Percy maintains a "Spartan watchfulness." But Percy's concern is more than the temptation of nature. It is also the temptation of art, which *Revenge* connects to our natural state. While contemplating the lure of the state of nature, Percy also entertains the lure of art: "If he was not, in short, to be lulled into forgetfulness of social justice, he must never allow himself to play *the artist.* And Percy liked playing the artist. Percy the

gunman insisted upon Percy the 'artist'! It had been very awkward at

times" (40). The artist in Percy is that part of him which is drawn to the

indifference of nature and, perhaps, that which is natural in the human.

Like the calm Spanish night outside his prison cell, art is indifferent to the

social revolution and to social systems. If art is free individual expression,

then art doesn't promote social justice. It has no social agenda. It is the

indifferent expression of individual experience. Percy's conflicted notions,

his artistic desires and his political beliefs, are exemplified throughout the

novel. He is the novel's most celebrated revolutionary, the novel's most

practical and effective revolutionary. Yet he is also the least mercenary

and the one most aware of the cause's hypocrisies. One suspects the

source of his knowledge of the hypocrisies is the same source that inclines

him to play the artist. During his escape from the Spanish prison, he is

confronted with the possibility of another escape: the escape from both left

and right politics, from the social formations that he serves. And it is only

with great effort that Percy resists this secondary escape into art and nature

and remains an agent for the left.

Percy summons the strength to reject the Spanish night and his

inner artist, and he does so, in part, by recalling a sentiment attributed to

Lenin: "Did not Lenin say that he *hated* violinists, because they made him

feel he wanted to stroke their heads, and all the time he knew that it was in

fact his duty to bash their brains out?" (40). Lenin, as Percy presents him,

was just as conflicted as he. Lenin was deeply moved by art but resisted

this affection in the interest of his social responsibility. The danger of art

for men like Lenin and Percy is clear: art, like nature, is indifferent to

social formations (social justice), and the appeal of art and nature is their

promise of individual freedom. Art is presented here as the autonomous

individual's free expression determined only by reason and experience. To

pursue social justice means repressing this unadulterated expression, and

to pursue unadulterated expression is to disregard social justice: if art is

exploration and presentation, then it is this regardless of consequence or

social concepts of fairness, justice, order, or law. Again, Lewis's Tyro

paintings are instructive. He says the keynote of the Tyro is vacuity. The

Tyro is "an animated, but artificial puppet, a 'novice' to real life." Real

life is the life before social formation, the complete freedom of the

individual in the state of nature.

Fortified by this (apocryphal?) story of Lenin, Percy rebuffs his

own artistic impulse, his desire to abandon the systems and embrace art,

and he attempts his escape. Outside the prison, however, when he is

physically outside the manifestation of Spanish justice and in the woods,

his artistic sense resurfaces. The escape plan was discovered earlier by

Don Alvaro, the Civil Guard, who now lies in wait for Percy and Serafin.

Don Alvaro shoots and kills Serafin, and shoots Percy in the leg. It is here

that Percy notices the false bottom of Don Alvaro. Earlier in the jail, Percy

and Don Alvaro had debated the role of the law. And when Percy claimed

that civil laws could sometimes justifiably be disregarded in the interest of

moral laws and expedience, Don Alvaro defiantly repudiated the claim

and defended the inviolability of the civil law. Now, though, as Don

Alvaro stands over the dead Serafin and the bleeding Percy, Don Alvaro's

true motivations become clear: he had discovered the escape plan and

could, therefore, have thwarted it without violence. But he was angry that

he had not been offered money to assist in the escape, and in his rage, he

chose to ambush Serafin and Percy, killing the one and wounding the

other, merely out of corruption, pique, and greed: "Why, Don Percy," Don

Alvaro says, "did you never propose to *me* a little deal? Every man has his

price!" (44). Interestingly, when Don Alvaro makes this confession and

Percy recognizes the falseness of Don Alvaro, he doesn't condemn Don

Alvaro's hypocrisy as an attribute of the nationalists. Instead, he

recognizes a oneness of Don Alvaro and his own comrades, the

sindicalistas. And in Percy's imagination, all parties of the political

struggle get subsumed into nature and art:

[Don Alvaro] had the face of a sindicalista. Percy was damned if he

hadn't! – with apologies to the comrades and all that – for this was in fact

a murderous Civil Guard! But he was not the man he had taken him for.

And as [Percy] idly examined the stern traditional features under the

warder's cap they began to dissolve into the stars around them, and Don

Percy became one with that vast and beautiful neutral system, of the

objective universe of things, which cared nothing for the Social

Revolution but flattered him into thinking – upon moonlight nights – that he was a Beethoven who had been forced into politics by poverty. (45)

Again, the artistic sensibility gets aligned with disinterested nature, outside of ideology and outside of history; both the personal greed of Don Alvaro and the singular vision of the artist are traces of the individual in nature. The nationalists and sindicalistas are all one. In these moments of nature's seduction, Percy Hardcaster, who has no occupational connection to art—before becoming a revolutionary he was a laborer—is associated with art, with Beethoven and "dealings with bel canto, and oratorios" (40). The artistic sense is presented as constitutive of the natural human animal, the pre-civil state of nature where individual freedom is not subsumed by social demands. Outside the socially constructed systems is nature, and it is here that the novel places art and the artist. Art, of course, can be institutionalized, and its telling that *Revenge*'s most salient art institution is a forgery shop: a false bottom. But it is the "purer," pre-institutional form of art that *Revenge* advocates. The artist in *Revenge* is not one who practices art professionally or even as a hobby. Art, instead, is a condition not unlike nature itself, or a sensibility, one that everyone possesses (like Joyce's claim in "Day of the Rabblement," that art is spirit). Like nature, art is constitutive of humankind. Everyone is an artist or has access to the artistic.

In the vorticism manifesto from the first issue of *Blast*, in 1914, Lewis signs off on three propositions concerning art and nature: First,

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"The Art-instinct is permanently primitive" (293). Here Lewis is stating

that art isn't a skill or a craft but an instinct, a human drive. And calling art

at once an instinct and primitive suggests notions of pre-rational behavior

in a pre-civilized condition: the Hobbesian state of nature. And like all

instincts in the state of nature, art is given unfettered expression until

confronted with competing instincts. Importantly, Lewis claims that art is

"permanently primitive," which is to say that civilization doesn't abolish

or modify this instinct, only buries it. And the art instinct is poised to

manifest itself just as the involuntary and inevitable laugh bursting from

the Tyro. The second proposition of art and nature is this: "In a chaos of

imperfection, discord, etc., it [the art instinct] finds the same stimulus as in

Nature" (293). That the chaos of imperfection and discord is imagined

outside of nature suggests that this is Lewis's description of civilization.

The individual's art instinct is no longer in a natural free state; rather, it's

in a compromised social state: civilization. And while we typically

imagine a state of nature as chaotic and discordant, in the savage state

brought to order through civilization Lewis sees the reverse. He

emphasizes the freedom that is inevitably sacrificed in order to secure the

benefits of civilization as well as the disharmony that collective,

cooperative organization produces. Finally, Lewis connects art and nature

by describing the art instinct in modernity, when society is beyond chaotic

and discordant: "The artist of the modern movement is a savage…this

enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert of modern life serves him as

Nature did more technically primitive man" (293). The individual here retains the art instinct—as though he could do otherwise—and this savage instinct responds to modern life just as the art instinct in the state of nature responded to nature. However, the savage art instinct now finds itself in an alienated condition. Lewis's description of modernity—"the enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert"—suggests a sprawling, mechanistic hodgepodge that a tinkering demigod might have thrown together from spare parts salvaged from the garage. This is a far remove from the state of nature, the individual's natural—in every sense of the word "natural"—condition.

These three vorticist propositions precede *Revenge* by twenty years, yet taken together they prefigure *Revenge*'s instantiation of the nature-art connection: the painter Victor Stamp. Victor is the natural art instinct in civilization. He is Australian, and throughout the novel is characterized in terms of the natural, the untamed. For the communist art critic Peter Wallace, Victor is a "wild goat of the places of the wilderness" (153). The capitalist gunrunner Abershaw calls him "an out-of-door man" (282). And Victor himself, when apologizing to Margot, his girlfriend, for his unrefined behavior, blames his behavior on his being "a wild Australian" (74). At Sean O'Hara's party, which is attended by artists and upper-class communists, Victor is a conspicuous outsider. His ideas, manners, and disposition mark him as ill-suited for drawing-room company: "Australian Victor, becoming drunk, was finding his nation

returning to him out of the thick mists of the alcohol […] who felt the call

of the quarrelsome blood" (170). Victor is, at best, a mediocre painter, but

he maintains a serious devotion to the craft. Because of his inability to sell

his work, he is compelled, reluctantly, to work at Freddie Salmon's

forgery shop. Here a handful of painters have been recruited to forge more

famous painters' works—Victor is working on a Van Gogh. The other

forgers justify their crime in various ways: the great artists, too, were

forgers; capitalist art-for-profit is part and parcel of the problem of private

property. For Victor, though, the justification is simply financial necessity.

He needs the money. So even here Victor stands apart from his peers. He

is

an animal amongst men, this young giant crouched doubled up where he

sat, his back eloquently presented to Freddie Salmon should [Salmon] turn

about to address him. A striking picture of the Odd Man Out. For better or

for worse these broad and hostile shoulders belonged to Nature, with her

big impulsive responses, with her violent freedom, with her animal

directness: unconservative, illogical, and true to her elemental self. He

subscribed therefore to the larger scheme: the smaller the watertight, the

theoretic, the planning of man's logic, he repudiated. Like a camel, he

must remain a creature of the wild, and never, like the horse wholly

submit to discipline. (258-9)

      Victor is described here as the creature of the state of nature, as

Lewis sees it: impulsive, violently free, direct, illogical, elemental. He is

all the qualities that the civilized men—not only the corrupt profiteers, but also the deluded artists—are not. He is, in short, of the state of nature but out of it; he's now in "civilized" society. And the civilized men are deceptive; they rationalize tortuous justifications for their deception, but the truth is that they've been coopted and corrupted by their various systems. Victor has his back to Salmon, who is part of the duplicitous-gunrunning-racketeering group that includes Abershaw and Sean O'Hara. They will dissemble, lie, and forge as a matter of course if there is a profit to be had. Victor has joined them, again, solely from financial desperation, but he roundly rejects their scheming. Ultimately, he quits the forgery shop in spectacular fashion, putting his foot through his "Van Gogh." Victor exemplifies two important ideas about art. First, art is an instinct. It is more than skill or technique. It is a human endowment of nature. Social pressures can repress the art instinct but not eliminate it. It will burst forth like the Tyro's laugh, irrepressible and authentic. The second is that the art instinct must always be resisting social pressure. The individual can never escape society—the Hobbesian state of nature is theoretical, not historic— but the individual must push against social influence to assert as much free and independent thought as possible. Art is the outlet for this resistance.

The artist counterpoint to Victor is his friend, the painter Tristram Phipps. Tristram is the more talented painter, but he's also a naïve fellow traveler. He dutifully, unquestioningly absorbs communist propaganda and

seems satisfied to let others explain the cause to him[31]. Whenever art and the cause come into conflict, Tristram becomes painfully uncomfortable. *Revenge* presents art and communism as largely at odds, and Tristram's inability to reconcile them distresses him. At Sean O'Hara's party, for example, the Marxist art critic Peter Wallace insists to Tristram that a Picasso painting, a print of which is on the wall beside them, "is bourgeois art all the same. Its values are capitalist" (151). Tristram tries to defend the painting, which he admires, but he's cowed by the Marxist argument. He struggles to maintain his individual artistic sense in the face of the intimidating Peter. His childlike obedience to Marxist thinkers butts up against his artistic instinct: "Tristy looked very miserable. He could not deny the justness of the description. The *orthodoxy* of the picture was not be questioned. And yet he was compelled to sustain an opposite opinion to all that he *knew* to be true, for the reason that there was another conscience, namely that of the pitiable thing, the artist. And conscientious at all costs he had to be!" (154). Tristram is compelled to maintain the artistic opinion because of its instinctual nature. The orthodoxy that he rationally knows is a social construct; the artistic conscience that he feels is natural. He himself is the pitiable artist, whose art instinct is being overrun by social theory. Tristram hasn't the will to reject Peter's ideas,

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[31] Tristram's name invokes, obviously, Sterne's equally innocent, naïve Tristram Shandy. This association gets tattooed to the reader's forehead when, in the second paragraph of chapter three, Tristram Phipps is referred to as "Mr. Shandy" (102). It's the only time in the novel that Tristram Phipps is denominated this way, and it reads less like free indirect discourse and more like a Lewis having a joke with the reader.

and that he is characterized as *having* to be artistically conscientious suggests the instinctual nature of art.

Tristram knows that Peter is re-stating what noted communist writer Carl Einstein says about Picasso, and this makes Tristram all the more depressed. Einstein is regarded as a brilliant communist thinker, so, Tristram believes, his ideas must be better informed than Tristram's. Victor, however, who is also part of the discussion, has no such political reservations, and he's not at all intimidated by Peter Wallace's invoking Einstein's arguments: "Carl Einstein's talking through his hat when he says that, Pete" (154). Victor advocates leaving Einstein and Karl Marx out of the discussion of art. Peter then accuses Victor of being a decadent and trying to avoid that which is unavoidable: "'You see, Vic, it's no good,' Pete said kindly. 'You *can't* regard painting as suspended in the ether, attached to nothing in heaven or on earth. That's art for art's sake. You can't do that" (155). Victor rejects the accusation, denying an adherence to art for art's sake, but he doesn't articulate a response, mostly because he's unable. It's clear that Victor sees art as something more than an object viewed through a theoretical lens, but he doesn't say what this something more is. And, of course, he can't. He's the wild, natural, illogical artist. To engage in this kind of theorizing is beyond him. He won't succumb to it as Tristram does, and he won't meet one theoretical reading with another.

Today we are, rightly, skeptical of this kind of objective truth, gleaned by the naturally free individual. It's at best naïve and at worst chauvinist. (Proponents of objective, a-historical, a-social "truth" often claim, probably not coincidentally, possession of this "truth.") But if we allow that the state of nature is more theory than history, and that the work toward individuality is really work toward authenticity, an authenticity that, like the perfectly free individual, is more theoretical than historical, then *Revenge*'s aesthetic claims seem less dated than they might otherwise. We see the theorizing of nature and art in *Revenge*'s presentation of Victor as the "natural man." A more "literal" reading of Victor might interpret him as *Revenge*'s nostalgic look back to a more rural time, a Wordsworthian celebration of nature. But it's not nature qua nature that *Revenge* celebrates. The vorticist manifesto says, "It cannot be said that the complication of the Jungle, dramatic tropic growths, the vastness of American trees, is not for us [the English]" (294). Lewis acknowledges that England may no longer possess a rural frontier as, say, the United States did. But such an absence isn't important. The artist's physical environment isn't at issue. The vorticists say, "For in the forms of machinery, Factories, new and vaster buildings, bridges and works, we have all that, naturally, around us" (294). The idea is that physical environment is physical environment. Art responds to what is. Victor presents a freer, more authentic response to the environment. Trees or

concrete are not important; the real work of art is to push back against what *Revenge* considers the corrupting influence of the social condition.

Revenge's position on art, that it needs to be an individual expression uncorrupted by institutions or social pressure begs this question: Why would *Revenge* advocate an anti-institutional, anti-social position for art, yet found this position on ideas presented in a manifesto in a literary magazine (*Blast*)? Tyrus Miller, in *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts between the World Wars* (1999), argues that Lewis underwent a significant theoretical "rebirth" around 1926. Miller quotes Lewis in *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937), Lewis's autobiography of the years 1914 to 1926: "I disinterred myself in 1926, the year of the General Strike" (70). Britain's General Strike of 1926, Miller argues, was a watershed moment for Lewis because it demonstrated "the moribund nature of British social institutions and revealed the unreadiness of Labor to offer an alternative" (70). The failure of social institutions, along with the bleak outlook for future institutions, indicts the social condition generally. It reveals the social condition itself to be inherently insufficient. I stated above that *Revenge* is the satirical novel that satirizes a satirical condition. Miller quotes Lewis, in *Men Without Art* (1934), as intimating just such a role for satire: "Satire in reality often is nothing but *the truth*, the truth, in fact, of Natural Science. That objective, non-emotional truth of the scientific intelligence sometimes takes on the exuberant sensuous quality of creative art: then it is very apt to be called 'Satire,' for it has

been bent not so much upon pleasing as upon being true" (97). It's significant that Lewis mentions not merely science but natural science. It's a claim for empiricism becoming art, yes, but what is the value of empiricism? Its value is its purported disinterested objectivity. The suggestion is that this disinterested objectivity is a fact of nature, our theoretical first condition. And nature, like natural science, isn't about "pleasing" anyone. Indeed, it's not *about* anything. It wants to be the objective investigation of what is. The social condition, on the other hand, is the condition that inherently requires such stooping (as Lewis would see it) to please.

Lewis's purported shift after 1926 was a shift towards greater pessimism about social possibilities. And in "Anti-Individualism and the Fictions of National Character in Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr*" (1994), Paul Peppis seems to support this. In fact, Peppis argues that Lewis's attitude toward individualism began earlier, starting to change over the course of the war: "In that tumultuous and disillusioning year of war, in fact, Lewis's attitudes regarding Individualism shifted radically" (234). Peppis argues that Lewis's *Tarr* (1917)*,* through its characterization of English and German characters, rejects nineteenth-century ideas of autonomous, independently-thinking individuals and, instead, proposes that people belong to national types. *Tarr* does so through it's almost allegorical presentation of national types (228). This would seem to corroborate Miller's, as well as Lewis's, assertion that after the General Strike of

1926, Lewis became disillusioned with social possibilities; perhaps, as Peppis argues, Lewis's disillusionment with social formations extended to complete annihilation of the individual, something akin to ideology: one is always already of his or her national type. I think, though, that Peppis overstates a bit Lewis's 1926 "conversion." I take Lewis at his word when he says the General Strike had a profound impact on his thinking. But I think he was always an individualist; it's only that his emphasis shifted from nationalist social pressures (*Tarr*) to more localized social pressures, e.g. bourgeois bohemians and unscrupulous profiteers (*Revenge*). Also, his later work (*Revenge*) seems more explicit about the natural individualism that social pressures repress. *Tarr*'s satire of nationalist "types" is not a rejection of individualism. It is, rather, a statement about the influence of nationalist pressures on individualism.

In fact, taken together, *Tarr* and *The Revenge for Love* present two approaches to the same issue: the damage of social pressures is emphasized in the earlier novel, and the romantic resistance to these pressures in the latter. Peppis argues that *Tarr* is a response to a literary trend in England at the time, a trend "that articulated and idealized the Individualist world view" (228). Indeed, Peppis argues that Lewis would have seen Stephen Dedalus as an instance of the Individualist world view, as Stephen claims to be liberating himself by breaking free from Ireland at that novel's end, and *Tarr* was serialized in *The Egoist* shortly after *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Peppis's says that *Tarr* can be read

as a response to *Portrait*. Such a liberation as Stephen's, *Tarr* argues, would not happen. Peppis acknowledges that Joyce viewed the ending of *Portrait* skeptically, but that Dora Marsden, then *The Egoist's* editor, would have taken Stephen's proclamation more sincerely, as she was a committed Individualist. Peppis argues that *The Egoist* was a "libertarian and anti-socialist journal that promoted the radical Individualist philosophy of the German nominalist Max Stirner" (228-9). Stirner, a mid-nineteenth century philosopher, is most notable for *The Ego and its Own* (1844), in which he argues for the kind of radical autonomy that *Revenge* suggests: "I am *owner* of my might, and I am so when I know myself as *unique*" (229). Stirner saw autonomy more as self-mastery, the recognition of social influence and the strongest possible resistance to it. Stirner infamously asserts that his obligation to express himself is wholly independent of social consequence, even if his free expression should cause the "bloodiest wars and the fall of many generations" (263). This position, confrontational to every social consequence, squares nicely with Lewis's self-styled position as "the Enemy." It seems far more likely that Stirner's ideas are not rejected by *Tarr* or *Revenge* but are, instead, introduced in the former and amplified through the latter. According to Peppis, many of the writers who contributed to *The Egoist* supported Stirner's individualist position in an important way. They resisted national character as a hereditary quality and recognized it as a social pressure: "Their distrust of the state and faith in the individual led the Egoists to

interpret 'national character' as another of the many repressive and conventionalizing external forces that persons should overcome in the struggle for egoistic liberation" (231). This, Peppis says, rejects the dominant nineteenth century idea of "nationality as a hereditary category" (231)[32]. The Egoists, on the other hand, "interpreted nationality as a culturally constructed category, the result of the institutional training that persons receive in particular national contexts. Such training was inherently anti-individual, in their view, because it aimed to conventionalize persons, to replace unique characteristics with 'national' traits validated by the state" (231). However, Peppis doesn't acknowledge that if, as the Egoists believed, national qualities are a matter of training and not hereditary, then the possibility of resistance would be more open. *Tarr*, then, may not be a rejection of individualism so much as regret for the individual's inability to retain individualist qualities.

Representation for Negotiation

If Individualism cannot hope to overcome national influence or the more local influences presented in *Revenge*, why wouldn't anarchism be an alternative? *Revenge* seems to take as given the untenable circumstance that anarchism presents. Never in the novel is there a suggestion for the abandonment of society and a "return" to a state of nature. Peppis, too, argues that despite Lewis's mistrust of national influence, he was not an

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[32] "Hereditary, Talent, and Character" (1865), by Sir Francis Galton, was an important source for this idea.

anarchist[33]. Peppis says, "In Lewis's dissident view anarchy is not, as the Egoists contended, a utopian form of social order that maximizes individual liberty, but the defining condition of human identity, a state of turbulent and destructive *dis*order" (241). Peppis argues that Lewis's rejection of anarchy was a break with other *Egoist* writers; however, he also acknowledges that Lewis sees anarchy as "the defining condition of human identity" (241). *Revenge* suggests that this essential aspect of human identity is not eliminated in the social formation. So what then is the individual's recourse in this corrupted but inevitable social condition? Peppis argues that, because Lewis has rejected individualism altogether, he "displaces the Individualist concept of the authentic self with that of the theatrical self" (241). Friedrich Tarr, he argues, is not an individualist, but wants to be one, so he performs the role (badly). I agree with Peppis's idea of the theatrical self, but I don't think Lewis means it as a replacement for the individual. Instead, *Revenge* presents representations as outlets for individualist behavior and ideas. Art, performance, and masks are social strategies. Art and representation are possible sites of individualist expression, reactions to what has been forced on the individual. According to Peppis, the writers who were published in *The Egoist* "were especially inclined toward individualism and resistant to restrictions on creativity and

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[33] While I agree with Peppis's conclusion that Lewis was not anarchist, the evidence he offers doesn't quite work. He says that the dance, in *Tarr*, in which Otto Kreisler violates every social decorum, disrupting the structure and order of the event, is evidence of *Tarr*'s rejection of anarchism. However, Otto's erratic, anti-social behavior is his alone; a truly anarchic situation would have all participants playing by the same (lack of) rules.

action" (231). Lewis retains this individualism while also rejecting a state of anarchy. Representation is a site for resistance to the inevitable social condition. Peppis says that for Lewis "the anarchist goal of a stateless society filled with independent egoists is nothing but an illusion" (241). *Revenge* suggests the same; however, it also suggests that everyone—including independent egoists asserting their individualism through art and representation, as well as sindicalistas, Civil Guards, fellow travelers, and gun-runners—uses masks and representation to negotiate the social condition.

Revenge presents many instances of art and representation as a site of resistance. Victor, for instance, is struggling financially, and he has sent three paintings to The People's Art League, a communist group that seeks to promote art – a certain kind of art, anyway – to the working masses. The League, however, passes on all of Victor's paintings. The suggestion is that Victor's art doesn't hew to the party's idea of art. The League wants propaganda, not individualist expression. The League wants art that it can use instructionally (ironically a kind of Althusserian ISA) not the individualist expression of "the wild goat" from Australia. Tristram Phipps, on the other hand, is having more financial success as an artist. Tristram supports his more serious art through advertising – specifically, doing drawings of "ladies and gents' underwear" (96). Tristram produces a kind of art that capitalist financial systems require, but he also produces more individualist work. On his way to the zoo to paint a toucan, for

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example, Tristram stops by Victor's house. He makes clear to Victor that no one has commissioned a painting of a toucan, but that it's something he's doing solely for himself: "It's not in my *professional* capacity that I'm going to draw the bird. It's merely as an artist!" (87). Tristram is a fervid and sincere communist, and he seems, here, to be acknowledging that he's an artist in a capitalist system. Capitalism obliges him and Victor to sell paintings (to sell their labor), but Tristram also sees himself as something outside the capitalist system: he is an artist. It's this latter activity that *Revenge* suggests as place for individualism. The difficulty of reconciling his art and politics is sometimes difficult for Tristram, as we see in the discussion about Picasso with Peter Wallace. Victor doesn't have this difficulty, but he also can't succeed institutionally: The People's League rejects his work, and Freddie Salmon's forgery shop is as skeptical of him as he is of it.

Ironically, the communist Tristram has more financial success in the capitalist system than the a-political Victor. At Victor's house, on his way to paint the toucan, Tristram stands for some time admiring one of Victor's paintings. However, when the topic of conversation shifts to a party being thrown for Percy Hardcaster, Tristram's interest in the painting vanishes, and Hardcaster and the revolutionary cause take precedence: "[Tristram] did not look at the picture again. Hardcaster had taken its place in the centre of his consciousness. It was after all only a thing of paint and canvas. It had, as a matter of fact, shrunk into relative

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unimportance the moment Hardcaster's name had passed his lips" (89-90).

Tristram, who is not from the "wilds" of Australia and is not associated

with nature, feels that the social revolution is more important than art.

Although they are friends and fellow painters, Victor and Tristram are

differentiated in this way: Victor is associated with natural wildness and

sentimentality; Tristram is associated with constructed civil law and

revolution. Victor refuses to relinquish the freedom of expression that art

can provide. However, it's Tristram's willingness to conform his free

expression to social pressures that helps him get on the world. He can

paint a toucan when he likes, but he can also succeed at Freddie Salmon's

forgery shop and draw lingerie ads when he must. This is the mask on

which social living insists, the false bottom required to get on in the world.

Tristram wears a mask, Victor won't. Freddie Salmon himself,

orchestrator of forgery, is described as having "a really enormous false

bottom to his face" (253). Sean O'Hara throws lavish caviar parties from

the profits gained by being "a thief and an informer" (140)[34]. The Fenians

O'Hara betrayed are described as "a bunch of false-bottoms one and all if

ever there were" (153). When Percy disabuses Tristram's wife, Gillian,

about the political realities of communism—the lies and propaganda he

attaches to his escape are necessary, he tells her, to promote change—he is

acknowledging the false bottom underlying all social formations, even the

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[34] Sean's parties and his favorite sobriquet for his colleagues ("old man") echo Gatsby's lavish parties and favorite sobriquet ("old sport"). Gatsby, of course, is one of American literature's most famous mask-wearers and false bottoms.

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one to which he has dedicated his life. There is, Percy concludes, a "false bottom underlying the spectacle of this universe" (272). The spectacle of the universe, of course, is the social formations that have been created in the otherwise neutral universe. These formations require representations and masks; however, individualist art is the representation that doesn't necessarily comply with the institutions. The false bottoms and masks are the representations designed for social compliance.

The social mask becomes most explicit in the last two sections of the book, and it reveals itself in the growing awareness of Margot, who sees herself and Victor as the targets of the revenge for love. Margot is a romantic in two important senses of the word: she's devoted to Victor, her common-law husband, and to Wordsworth and the powers of nature. She believes in fate—Victor's inability to find success as an artist is fate's revenge for the love she bestows on him—and in nature's physical space as benevolent and restorative. She is by turns naïve and canny, losing a good deal of naiveté and her romantic view of nature in these last two sections. The penultimate section, "The Fakers," begins not at Freddie Salmon's forgery shop—where one might expect a section called "The Fakers" to begin, and where, in fact, the section ends—but at the manor of Agnes Irons[35], Margot's friend whom Margot is meeting for lunch. Agnes

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[35] The park next to Agnes's home is described as "a well of perfect loneliness" (229), and the allusion is quite possibly to Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), a novel of the lesbian Stephen Gordon's struggles against a sexually repressive society. Agnes Irons is unmarried, masculine, and athletic. *Revenge* emphasizes her imperialist positions, but Agnes would also be a productive site for a study of gender in Lewis's work. She appears and disappears in the novel so abruptly that she feels more like a statement than a character.

is practically British imperialism incarnate: she has just returned from British Malaya, where she participated in a golf tournament; she sprinkles Hindi phrases throughout her speech and is continually referenced in the context of a white man's burden. She belongs to an old, wealthy family, is thoroughly self-absorbed, and steamrolls Margot with a relentless, forceful show of bonhomie. "The Fakers" makes clear that British colonialism is the false bottom writ large, the national manifestation of the false bottom. Discussing with Margot the fact that Agnes's skin is brownish, made darker by golf in Malaya, Agnes sees this as a joke of nature. In an aside of free indirect discourse, the narrator identifies that the source of the joke is "that nature is, well, not exactly *white*—but a jolly old sportsman nevertheless" (237). Of course, saying nature is "not exactly white" is saying that it is white. The claim that social hierarchies of race are natural is the false bottom of imperialism. It takes the neutral, meaningless instances of nature and imbues them with the biases of social condition. Margot indulges Agnes's imperialism, but doesn't quite acquiesce. Margot identifies herself as more of a "cosmopolitan," as opposed to an "Empire girl" (242). And when they discuss which nationalities make better artists—Agnes feels that "the Britisher can leave art to the foreigners, since they seem to be cut out for it"—Margot says, "I don't think it matters, Agnes, really who are artists or who are not" (242-3). Margot demonstrates, here, a growing awareness of empire's false bottoms. She's

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cowed by Agnes, as she's cowed by most people, but she clearly senses a system built on a number of false assumptions and self-serving lies.

The brief scene in Agnes's manor—Agnes is introduced, presented, and exits the novel in fifteen pages—starkly contrasts Agnes's imperialism with the natural setting of the park just outside her home. While she waits for Agnes to arrive, Margot gazes at the park below from an upstairs window. The park is partially occluded by the large houses, "the late Victorian terraces – irrelevantly vast, and of course sepulchrally-basemented, for staffs of vanished domestics" (229). The park is the near-vanished state of nature that has been steamrolled every bit as much as Margot is about to be, and the way the rigid social stratification was more slowly giving way. The park is described as the sacrificed state of nature with its "hecatombs of leaves" (229). From the window, Margot imagines an elaborate fantasy in which she's under a park tree, reading *A Room of One's Own* and then, with Virginia Woolf at her side, reading Tennyson (Woolf is doing the reading aloud) and discussing literature with the dons at Oxford, to where this imaginative scene shifts. This richly imaginative moment is spurred by nature and filled with art. Agnes ends the chapter by giving a cursory look out the same window and saying, "These mangy old trees give me the hump" (245). Agnes is so thoroughly inscribed by social strictures, rules, and empire that nature's freedom is physically

unsettling[36]. The false bottom of imperialism is alienated from the freedom of artistic expression and nature and seeks to obliterate it.

In *Revenge*'s last section, Margot has joined Victor on his gun-running errand. She lies by a French river bank, near the French and Spanish border and gets disabused of the Wordsworthian sense of nature. Her London life had afforded her little contact with actual nature; she knew it only as she had read it in books. Now, though, she chooses "not to participate in its sunny dream" (305). She now recognizes nature as "a senseless agitation of unfeeling things" (305). Nature is no longer mysterious, spiritual, secretive. She sees nature, finally, as indifferent, a startling contrast to the business with which she and Victor are engaged: "all would have passed off quite differently had her mind not been obsessed with the actors, for whom these pastoral sets were the incongruous backgrounds, and if she had not been part of this agony of men" (305). She has long harbored suspicion at the men for whom Victor is working, and, of course, her suspicions are confirmed later: Unwitting Victor has been set-up as a decoy; he will draw the attention of the authorities so that the real gun shipment can be made into Spain. The duplicity and false bottom of the gun runners sharply contrasts with her newfound appreciation of neutral, disinterested nature. Victor and Percy,

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[36] Again, *Revenge* repeatedly alludes to Agnes's masculine, possibly lesbian presence, yet she is presented as the voice of empire and the political and social status quo. There is no suggestion that she's an outsider, which she would undoubtedly be.

who has come as the Spanish "expert," are oblivious to the duplicity that Margot has early on suspected.

From the riverbank Margot, as well as Victor, goes to an outdoor café in a plaza on the Spanish side of the border, where Margot explicitly wears a mask of social negotiation. Among the plaza patrons is a dwarf, and the dwarf is performing an impromptu public show. He's stomping about, crying and whining loudly as though he were a toddler having a tantrum. It's unclear if he is a busker, but the novel suggests that Spanish attitudes toward dwarfism are different from English attitudes. Spanish culture, the novel says, permits dwarfs to transgress social customs and conventions with impunity, even indulgence, a kind of compensation for the physical difficulties dwarfism occasions. When the dwarf targets Margot as part of his performance, attempting to draw her into the role of the toddler's mother, Margot is horrified. She is unaware of the cultural sensibility that the dwarf and other patrons of the plaza expect, but she senses that she is completely alien to what's happening, a humiliated target of the crowd. When the dwarf positions himself directly in front of Margot, she finds herself responding, maternally consoling him. Importantly, though, a grin has involuntarily fixed itself on her face, and she defiantly directs this grin at the café's patrons. Margot grins "straight into their faces without a blink, but totally unaware of their presence" (296). The grin unsettles the other patrons because it "had acquired a malignant look" (296). Here, Margot has involuntarily been forced to wear

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a mask, to become a representation of something she is not. The grin is an unconscious response to her situation. When the dwarf's performance first targeted Margot, she made "an effort to be natural" (293), but that has become impossible. She has been forced to repress the natural and to adopt the malignant, vacuous mask. Margot has become a Tyro.

The grimace implants itself on Margot's face, an "idiot fixity" (296). Victor notices it and immediately becomes concerned. He no longer recognizes his "honey angel." The narrator describes her condition thus: "She had passed out, poor darling, and just pushed down—or had had pushed down for her—her rational self, and allowed this evil Madonna to come up grinning to the surface of things, where we are all on our best behavior, and go about to smile and to be polite" (297). She hasn't, of course, literally passed out, but she has lost her individuality, and it's an involuntary reaction: it's been "pushed down for her." The reaction is the unavoidable repression and subsequent mask that social formations oblige. It's the mask of good behavior and polite society, the substitution of vacuous social performance for individualist expression[37]. It's not until she and Victor are well clear of the dwarf, the crowd, and the Spanish plaza that Margot's stupefied trance is broken and she bursts into tears. Tellingly, though, the mask returns when suspicions first surface that Victor might be the dupe of the gunrunners. She, Percy, and Victor are

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[37] Lewis's self-identification as "the enemy" is often characterized as persona. He, however, no doubt saw it as more authentic. Social life masks the authentic individual expression. To be the enemy of such a life is not persona. It's authenticity.

looking at a forged letter, complete with Victor's forged signature, in which "Victor" confesses to being the leader of the gunrunners: "Margot's eyes were staring more than was natural for a person in a brown study, and her lips had got a smile on them that no joke, however much of a scream, would entirely account for. In fact, it was the identical grimace that Victor first had encountered at the café invested by the performing dwarf" (316). This is the moment when Margot, not Victor and not Percy, first connects this forgery to the gunrunners, Abershaw and Sean O'Hara. In order to catch them at their false bottom game, Margot must, after a fashion, become a false bottom herself. The mask is the involuntary representation that the social condition creates in order to negotiate the social condition. It takes the more malicious form of propaganda, forgeries, and lies and the more benign forms of manners, social customs, and the rules of polite society.

Conclusion

In Ian Patterson's essay titled, simply, "*The Revenge for Love*" (2015), he says that Lewis "draws on the props and plots of popular fiction, whether parodically or seriously, and on the many forms of pretence and counterfeit to be encountered in social, artistic, and political life" (145). Patterson is arguing here that Lewis used the conventions of popular fiction and the dissimulations of social life to structure his novels. However, Patterson pushes this further to say that Lewis didn't simply use "the many of forms of pretence and counterfeit" as plot devices or

narrative structure; he says also that Lewis saw real conspiracy directed toward himself. The counterfeits of social life were more than armature for a novel; they were Lewis's reality, and he was the victim: "he also sees actual plots all around him, with people plotting against him, conspiring against him as a professional artist, and conspiring to obfuscate the true nature and aims of political interests" (Patterson 145). It may be that Lewis had paranoid ideas (or even well-founded ideas) of plots against him; but I think *Revenge* presents a condition that goes beyond personal suspicions of machinations, malfeasance, or bad actors. While *Revenge* certainly has its share of machinations and bad actors, the novel describes a social condition that transcends the values of unscrupulous people. It presents an unavoidable condition of repressed individuality and inauthentic, distorted artistic expression. Lewis may have felt excluded from the kind of success and acclaim that he felt other (lesser) artists were achieving, and he may have felt institutions were responsible. But *Revenge* doesn't present the individual kicking down a door to be let in; it presents the individual kicking down the door to let others out.

Revenge is satire, a genre Lewis seems unable to resist. Even his essays and philosophy (*Time and Western Man*, for instance) have many polemical moments, and polemic, too, has the hyperbolic tone of satire. He seems to have found absurdity everywhere, and this might be another way to think about the conspiracies that Patterson describes. It might be less paranoia and more absurdist philosophy. However, unlike the

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absurdism of, say, Camus, *Revenge* doesn't see suicide as the philosophical question, nor is it meaningless existence that is absurd. The absurdity seems to be our social condition, which is also the unavoidable condition. In Stephen Sicari's *Modernist Humanism and the Men of 1914: Joyce, Lewis, Pound, and Eliot* (2011), Sicari quotes Tobin Siebers on the insufficiency of skepticism: "Skepticism can never be the philosophical basis of a politics, and when skeptics strip themselves of founding beliefs they deprive themselves of political direction" (xi). One could replace "skepticism" with "satire," here, and come to a similar conclusion: humor/satire, like skepticism, is a "negative genre," a negative position. It identifies flaws, shortcomings, lapses; it deals in exaggerations and distortions. But it doesn't put forth anything positive. *Revenge*, though, places a site of resistance next to the absurd: individualist expression, as much as this is possible, should push against the influence of social formation. And this, again, might be a broader way to think about Lewis: positioning oneself as the "enemy," calling everyone to account, is another way of asserting individualism, or at least attempting to. The individualist can tell him- or herself that incessant contradiction and combativeness is a result of not being coopted by the social norms

The individualist's position is reinforced toward *Revenge*'s end, when the novel works at completing a circle: It begins with jail, debate, and attempted escape, and it ends the same way. In the beginning, Percy is imprisoned in a Spanish jail, debating politics with Don Alvaro, and

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attempting escape. It ends with Percy debating politics with Margot, being re-imprisoned in a Spanish jail, and reading about Victor and Margot's attempted escape. Percy didn't understand why Margot, out of her love for Victor, didn't support communism more actively. "At present," he tells her, "Victor stands outside of life altogether" (326). Victor's ostracism is more than being unable to professionally succeed in the capitalist system; he is outside of life. He is, Percy says, "the perfect outcast—more than any tramp" (326). Why? It's not because he's an artist. It's because Victor is the wild, natural individual. The tramp is a social failure, perhaps, but still social. The natural individual is asocial and, thus, thoroughly outcast. Social formations require representation—propaganda, masks, lies, dissimulations, rationalizations—and Victor pushes against this, retaining what the novel characterizes as authentic, natural. Victor's representations are in his art. His lack of success is more than just his seemingly mediocre talent: his art won't present what The People's League wants or what Freddie Salmon's forgery shop wants. It represents Victor's free expression, and selling art means creating what someone else wants. Percy and Margot's debate turns from nature's wild individual outcast to artistic dessication in a capitalist system. When Percy tells Margot that art is dead, she asks, "Can art die?" (326). Percy concedes that it cannot, but that art today belongs to a "system that is in dissolution" (326). Margot holds her own in this colloquy, and Percy shows his surprise by accusing her of being a politician. "My politics are art," she replies. (327). Here we see

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Margot as more than just Victor's devoted lover. She has developed from a naïve, imaginative romantic to a staunch defender of individual expression. She is defending her husband, yes, but she's also a defender of art and a canny observer of the social forces working against Victor. When the subterfuge is revealed, Percy finds himself back in jail, where he adopts "the mask of the injured party" (377). It's a role he plays as prisoner in order to negotiate better treatment and, perhaps, release. He reads in the paper about Margot's and Victor's deaths. In their attempt to escape through the mountains back to France, they fell from a precipice, a false bottom, as it were. The article falsely reports the forged letters that claim Victor was a gun-running ringleader. The novel ends with Percy crying, a tear "rolling down the front of the mask" (377). The layers of dissimulation are many, and the suggestion is that Percy is weeping for more than the deaths of Margot and Victor, whom he genuinely liked. We're told early on that "Percy liked playing the artist," indeed that "Percy the gunman insisted on Percy the artist" (40). And Percy's final tear, as authentic as the laugh bursting from the Tyro, seems to be a recognition of the larger prison of social distortion that comprises Percy the artist.

"We stand on the last promontory of the centuries!...Time and space died
        yesterday."

The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism (1909)

"I appreciate an old work for its novelty. It is only contrast that links us to the
        past."

Dada Manifesto (1918)

"Let us together desire, conceive and create the new building of the
future…which will one day rise towards the heavens from the hands of a
million workers as the crystalline symbol of a new and coming faith."

Manifesto of the Bauhaus (1919)

"I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality,
which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a
surreality, if one may so speak."

Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)

Every modernist manifesto is a reckoning with the past. In the

examples above, the Bauhaus and surrealism manifestos are less stridently

"new" than are the futurist and dada manifestos, but even these propose,

respectively, a stark shift into new forms and consciousness. Modernist

manifestos don't stake out positions that build on the past so much as

assert a break with the past and propose invention of the new. In this way,

the manifestos of the first decades of the twentieth century are tonally

revolutionary. The change is foundational: the futurists announce the death

of time and space; the Bauhaus proposes a new faith; the surrealists, a new

reality. These manifestos prescribe conditions for building, but they first insist on some level of rejection. The manifesto is, in many ways, the defining genre of the modernist period, a period defined by "isms." In a moment when fundamental aesthetic conventions—linearity, representation, unity, for example—are being tested, manifestos serve as apologias. But the changes are more than formal. The late nineteenth/early-twentieth century, as noted above, was a time characterized by "the loss of belief in religion, the rise of our dependence on science and technology, the expansion of markets and the commodification brought about by capitalism, the growth of mass culture and its influence, the invasion of bureaucracy into private life, and changing beliefs about relationships between the sexes" (Butler 1-2). The unease and sense of loss created by these foundational cultural changes opened a space for manifestos to acknowledge the loss (sometimes celebrate it, as the futurists do) and then start anew.

Manifestos were the medium for the moment. They were the expository genre that proposed and defined new concepts, perspectives, and rules. In *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos* (2008), Laura Winkiel says, "Straddling the boundary between theory and practice, the manifesto communicates an experience of crisis and a conceptual break with the past" (1). Winkiel's description of the manifesto as both theory and practice is especially apt for a manifesto of a revolutionary moment. The manifesto is a call to action but also, for its creators, a performative

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document of identity. In a revolutionary moment, a manifesto is always potentially determining the social context that creates action:

This history-making self-consciousness reached its apogee in the first part of the twentieth century, when hundreds of political and aesthetic manifestos circulated throughout the world as part of an immense cultural and geopolitical shift. As these manifestos declare a series of breaks from traditional aesthetic, cultural, and political forms, they enact the quintessential gesture of modernity: they proclaim themselves the arbiters of the new and the 'now' and reject the past. (Winkiel 1)

Winkiel's book explores the manifesto and colonial literatures, but her assertion of the

valence of the modernist manifesto suggests its potential influence on other genres: If the "quintessential gesture of modernity" is the manifesto, then one might expect to identify this gesture in other genres. Manifestos, she says, "provide a useful framework for rereading other modernist forms (anthologies, experimental literature, protest novels, and essays) in terms of their shared attempts to interrupt received meanings" (2). The modernist *kunstlerroman*, as a self-referential ekphrastic object of this period, would fit nicely on this list, perhaps somewhere between experimental literature and protest novels.

Regarding political and aesthetic (avant-garde) manifestos, Martin Puchner's *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* argues that all manifestos are informed by the twin characteristics

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of performativity and theatricality (5). Puchner argues that political manifestos are "ideal instances of performative speech" because they are "invested in doing things with words" (5). While this overstates a bit the manifestos performative agency—performativity is *doing* things linguistically, not merely being invested in doing things—it identifies manifestos as being, as Winkiel says, poised "between theory and practice," tending toward performativity. Puchner says that political manifestos will "frequently overcompensate for the actual powerlessness of their position with theatrical exaggerations," and, likewise, avant-garde manifestos employ the same theatricality, which is often characterized by "over-the-top statements and shrill pronouncements" (5). The idea here is that both political and avant-garde manifestos are performative and theatrical, but in different proportions: the political are more performative, the avant-garde more theatrical. If we think of over-the-top theatricality as a kind of fiction—a persona, a role, a mask—that is employed as a rhetorical strategy, then we can see another opening for the modernist *kunstlerroman* to enter the discourse of the manifesto: it, too, is a fiction that employs its theatricality to theorize aesthetics. Likewise, the modernist *kunstlerroman*'s ekphrastic essence—the artist-novel is the art object about art—is itself a rhetorical strategy. In "What Is Ekphrasis For?" (2007), Simon Goldhill emphasizes ekphrasis as an under-acknowledged rhetorical strategy, specifically an appeal to emotion designed to persuade: "It seems to me that the connection between

ekphrasis, rhetoric, and the power of emotion needs underlining" (7). The modernist *kunstlerroman's* affective quality contributes to its ability to persuade. The emotional appeal of the art object makes it, like the theatricality of the avant-garde manifesto, a productive site for aesthetic theorizing. Insofar as ekphrastic texts "speak out," as the word's etymology suggests, the *kunstlerroman* becomes not only a site of theorizing and speaking out, but a trope variously equipped for persuasively theorizing.

Situated in this context, *The Tragic Muse*, A *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *The Revenge for Love* can be read as novel-manifestos, modernist texts that reckon with the past and propose aesthetic values going forward. These three novels span much of the modernist period—the first was published in 1890, the last in 1937—and like the manifestos of the period, each proposes a revolutionary aesthetic for the future. This is evident in the way that each novel attempts to reimagine the foundational aspect of aesthetics: perception. As mentioned above, revolution is a foundational upheaval—time, space, faith, and reality are all up for grabs—and perception is the foundation upon which representation and expression are built. Each of these three *kunstlerromane*, in its own way, reinterprets what it means to perceive the world in the modern moment. *Muse*, for example, opens at an art exhibition, at which the three artists of the novel are introduced. Importantly, they are at the exhibition as viewers, not as artists or

exhibitors. However, their acute perceptions are contrasted with the generalizing perceptions of others, and throughout the novel, such acute perception remains a hallmark of the artist. *Portrait*, too, reimagines perception, but here it is reimagined as just that: imagination. *Portrait* coalesces the ineluctable modalities of sight and sound with the imagination, creating a network of sense perception. By shutting his eyes, for example, on Sandymount strand, in *Ulysses*, Stephen engages his imagination and connects the imagination to sense perception: one sense (imagination) is more engaged when the other (vision) is blunted. In *Ulysses,* Stephen famously says that history is a nightmare from which he is trying to awaken, and *Portrait* presents the imagination as the site best suited for an attempted escape from history. Finally, *Revenge,* too, advocates for the recognition that the social condition is immanently distorted. The novel doesn't promote a methodology of perception in the way *Muse* and *Portrait* do; rather, *Revenge* promotes a new consciousness, one that is aware of the invariable falseness of the social condition and recognizes the artistic instinct as the best defense against this condition. The title of Lewis's *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) should be read literally: Being ruled is inevitable, and art is how one resists.

The inflections on perception that *Muse*, *Portrait*, and *Revenge* present trace two perceptive shifts in the modernist moment: the emphasis on reader-response interpretations of art, and the embodiment of perception more generally. Regarding reader-response criticism, Jane

Tompkins, in "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response" (1992), says that the significant shift toward reader-centered criticism did not occur in the 1960s and 1970s as is commonly held. Rather, it happened during the critical turn toward Formalism/New Criticism in the early part of the twentieth century. Reader-centered criticism, she says, is not, as is often claimed, a rejection of formalism; rather, it's formalism in "a new key" (201). An important first step in reader-centered criticism, she says, is Eliot's definition of the objective correlative, first articulated 1919. Tompkins argues that in defining the objective correlative, Eliot expresses the first argument for what is today called reader-response criticism. Tompkins says that by Eliot's insisting "that there is no one-to-one correlation between the emotions of the poet and the emotions of the poem he creates" (220), what Eliot did was to sever "the tie between the poem and its origins more completely than has ever been done before by denying that there is any direct relationship between the life of the work and the life of its maker" (220). The emotion of the poem, Eliot argues, is created in the text, either well (*Macbeth*) or poorly (*Hamlet*). It is not produced by an expression of the author's emotions. Tompkins says that with this emphasis on the structure of the poem, "the issues that had occupied literary critics from Plato onwards simply drop from sight" (221). What the Formalists/New Critics began, and what was carried forth by Reader-Response critics, is to recast the critic's project to one of interpretation. Until the emergence of the

Formalist/New Critic approach ("from Plato onwards") critics concerned themselves with literary effect; now they were producing meaning. Effect became interpretation.

The second perceptual was the relocation of perception from idea to the body. In *Modernism*, Tim Armstrong says that one "reason for the centrality of sensation to modernism is that the senses themselves are reconceived" (90). Armstrong argues that late-nineteenth/early twentieth-century conceptions of time and space become embodied and, thus, a source of anxiety: "As a result, many fundamental categories—space, time—become physiological rather than ideal, analyzable in terms of the machinery of the body…rather than abstract categories" (91). The Futurist quotation at the above is instructive: "time and space died yesterday." Armstrong's suggestion seems to be that time and space as external concepts died yesterday, and time and space as felt sensations emerged.

These twin developments in perception—the emergence of interpretation and embodied abstractions—are theorized by the three novel-manifestos. *Muse*, for example, was published in the period when post-impressionist painters were seeking "to rediscover the objects they [impressionists] had dissolved" (Jay 158). Post-impressionists reacted against the unmediated "impressions" of the impressionists and focused instead on the relationship between subject and object. This "rediscovered" mode of perception is presented throughout *Muse* by its three artists. To be, as James says, one of the people on whom nothing is

lost is to invigorate the relationship between subject and object and to interpret. In Timothy Vincent's "From Sympathy to Empathy: Baudelaire, Vischer, and Early Modernism" (2012), Vincent argues that an important marker of the elision into what we call modernism can be seen in the shift in literary perception, a shift from sympathy to empathy. Vincent says that Baudelaire (1821-1867) is, rightly, judged to be one of the "fathers" of modernism, largely by turning his perception away from feeling *about* an object to feeling *into* the object: "Baudelaire and other early modernists had now created a loose but recognizable ethos that was consistently beginning to replace mimetic representation and idealism with expressive gestures of sensory and historical experience" (4). Throughout *Muse* we see the three artists repeatedly able to empathize with characters, to look into them—Nick into Julia, for example; Miriam into Madame Carre; and Nash into everyone.

   Portrait's title, too, suggests a painterly perception, and in "The *Portrait* as Portrait: Joyce and Impressionism" (1980), Maurice Beebe suggests there are impressionistic descriptions throughout the novel, "the fusion of the observer with what he sees" (145). While this analysis seems apt for much of the description in *Portrait*, it misses the crucial notion of perception in the novel, which is to heighten the "sixth sense," the imagination. In Garry Leonard's "Soul Survivor: Stephen Dedalus as the Priest of the Eternal Imagination" (2015), Leonard argues that Joyce's shift from a Roman Catholic belief system to a more secular one was less

a rejection of faith and more a transformation of Catholic concepts into a secular understanding: "To pick up on Taylor's point, it is possible to 'unbelieve' in Religion, and still believe you have a soul. The soul you believe in, however, will not be the same one recognized by the faith that you have left, and yet it may still serve a similar function: that which allows you to generate meaning in your life such that you can achieve something imperishable beyond your individual life" (11). The secular soul described here is the imagination. It's the perceptive sense that generates meaning. It is the artistic sense that Joyce describes in "Day of the Rabblement." Like the concept of the religious soul, it exists in everyone. However, *Portrait* insists that for the artist this soul (the imagination) must do more than exist. It must be, as much as it can, outside of historical pressures in order to express itself. Stephen's aesthetic theory, which we see more clearly in *Ulysses*, is largely about locating history (the author) inside the fiction (Shakespeare in *Hamlet*). *Portrait* turns this on its head. History, in this case an almost-autobiography, gets called a novel. And instead of finding the history in the fiction, readers read the history as fiction. All the work, historical and fictional, is forged in the smithy of the imagination.

If *Portrait* presents the imagination as the smithy of art and history, *Revenge* might see imagination as the weapon against the absurd. Neil Cornwell, in *The Absurd in Literature* (2006), defines the absurd as "a term derived from the existentialism of Albert Camus and often applied

to the modern sense of human purposelessness in a universe without meaning or value" (3). The usual suspects are adduced as examples—Kierkegaard, Kafka, Becket, Ionesco, et al—and Cornwell provides moments of absurdity in otherwise non-absurdist texts (the colonial behavior in *Heart of Darkness*, for example.) Absurdity requires a context of meaninglessness, and the lengthy sequence of false bottoms in *Revenge* certainly creates a context of meaninglessness. Likewise, *Revenge* presents a universe without meaning or value, a disinterested universe. However, the novel divides these two concepts in a way that discourages an absurdist reading. Because the disinterested universe is a site of absolute freedom, the individual doesn't experience it as absurd. The absurdity in *Revenge* emerges with social formation. Certainly, there are moments in the novel that can be read as absurdist, just as Cornwell reads the colonial guns firing on a deserted shoreline in *Heart of Darkness* as absurd: Don Alvaro's unnecessary murder of Serafin, Jack's assault on Percy, and Victor and Marge's violent deaths over a load of bricks are a few. *Revenge*, though, lacks the hopelessness that absurdity requires. Purpose exists. It's in Percy's tear at the end; it is in the difficult but individualist life that Victor leads; it's in Tristy's painting of a toucan, which is not in his "professional" capacity as an artist; and it's in the love that Margot has for Victor. These instances of individualist resistance to the oftentimes absurd quality of social life provide *Revenge* with a sense of purpose: the assertion of individuality.

Muse, *Portrait*, and *Revenge* reflect the modernist shift to interpretation and embodied perception. *Muse*, as mentioned earlier, presents many more scenes of viewership than scenes of art or performance. It's the audience response that is emphasized. *Portrait*, too, in the gestation of an artist, shows little of Stephen's writing (the villanelle is an exception) and more of his theory, his responses. He exiles himself at the end of *Portrait*, having published next to nothing. And in *Revenge*, the conversations about art—is Picasso bourgeois? did Van Gogh produce forgeries? Margot and Virginia Woolf in a scene of reading—are more central to the novel's theme than is art production. Perhaps it's not surprising that in a novel-manifesto—a work of art that declares aesthetic principles—one common principle would be perception. How the artist perceives is fundamental to what the artist does, and in this culturally turbulent time, with a host of changing foundational ideas, it follows that novel-manifestos would, on some level, address the recasting of perception.

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