A Critical Romance:

Modernism Rewrites Literary History

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INTRODUCTION

-The Trouble with Romance-

The relationship between the romance and the past has often been taken as the grounds for its incompatibility with modernism. For the romance is thought to participate, as Amy Kaplan writes, in the "anti-modern desire to retrieve primitive origins" (664). Since the eighteenth century, this perception of the romance as a genre stuck in, obsessed with, a distant past has motivated critiques that seek to relegate the form to the past. In 1750, Samuel Johnson contrasted the heroic romance to "the works of fiction with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted:"

> [A]lmost all the fictions of the last age will vanish, if you deprive them of a hermit and a wood, a battle and a shipwreck. Why this wild strain of imagination found reception so long, in polite and learned ages, it is not easy to conceive; but we cannot wonder that, while readers could be procured, the authors were willing to continue it: for when a man had by practice gained some fluency of language, he had no further care than to retire to his closet, let loose his invention, and heat his mind with incredibilities; a book was thus produced without fear of criticism, without the toil of study, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life. The task of our present writers is very different; it requires, together with that learning which is to be gained from books, that experience which can never be attained by solitary diligence, but must arise from general converse, and accurate observation of the living world. (*Gothic Documents* 176)

Johnson's predictive narrative describes the wild, isolated romance imagination as a residual form, an atavistic feature of the past from which, Johnson argues, authors of fiction have progressed. Fittingly, the writer of the romance is described as a-, or pre-,

social, as living an isolated, self-contained life. In contrast, the works of "present writers" are the products of the social world, of the author in contact and interaction with his surroundings. Johnson's narration of this progression is evolution writ small; the author emerges from his "closet" and joins civilization.

In the twentieth century, Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) described the relationship between the romance and the novel in similar terms, mapping an evolutionary logic onto literary history and writing, ""comparison between the novel and previous literary forms reveals an important difference: Defoe and Richardson are the first great writers who did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend or previous literature" (14). The "rise" of the novel therefore "involv[es] a break with the old-fashioned romances" (10). For both Johnson and Watt, *Northanger Abby*'s Catherine Morland allegorizes the romance; a process of maturation transforms the romance into the realist novel.

Even in the work that has been done on the relationship between modernism and the romance, and the synchrony of the two terms, critics have emphasized the discreteness of the two terms. Describing Jameson's reading of *Lord Jim* in *The Political Unconscious*, Nicholas Daly points out that Jameson takes great care not to collapse together modernism and the romance. Jameson attends closely to the relationship between the two forms, contending that their coexistence in Conrad's novel shows the divergent developments of modernism and mass culture genres; he suggests, however, that this relationship manifests as a "tangible break" in *Lord Jim*'s narrative. On opposite sides of this break are "the 'romance' or mass-cultural reading of Conrad as a writer of adventure tales, sea narratives, and 'popular' yarns" and, on the break's opposite side,

"the stylistic analysis of Conrad as a practitioner of … a properly 'impressionistic' will to style" (208). Although co-existing in *Lord Jim*, the modernism and romance are thought here to be fundamentally different—and, ultimately, incompatible—in the ways that they handle their "raw materials." Thus, Jameson figures the relationship between modernism and the romance, these "distinct … cultural 'spaces,'" in terms of tension, juxtaposition and fault lines (208).

Similarly, when Daly talks about late nineteenth-century adventure novelists like Wells, Stevenson, and Haggard, he devises a category of fiction that he calls popular modernism—a category that is, he asserts, "a sibling of modernism" (10). Arguing for popular modernism as a "distinctively *modern* phenomenon … [one that was] shaped in the same historical mould as literary modernism," Daly finds in popular modernism and modernism identical cultural work; both strive to register and respond to modernizing processes. The category of popular modernism, then, develops out of the late nineteenth-century romance's concern with the same material that preoccupies modernism rather than out of any formal similarities between the romance and modernism. Like Jameson, Daly sees fundamental differences in the ways that popular modernism and modernism work with their materials. Thus, while the concerns may be the same, modes of addresses these concerns vary.

At the same time that Daly appreciates Jameson's care not to collapse together romance and modernism, he also suggests that Jameson's discussion risks reifying the relationship between modernism and the romance—a relationship that is, Daly suggests, one of fluidity rather than juxtaposition. Although acknowledging this fluidity, Daly joins Jameson in insisting that modernism and romance remain discrete terms—that,

although related in some way or another and sometimes coming together in the form of hybrid texts, they are separate categories. This insistence forms the dominant mode of thinking about romance and modernism. The result has been a proliferation of terms, a demonstration of the fact that the romance is an endlessly divisible category. Rita Felski theorizes a category that she calls the popular sublime; writing about the adventure fantasy romances of Marie Corelli, she suggests, "[t]he 'magical fictions' of romantic fantasy should be seen less as an abandonment of the secularized, disenchanted perspective of modernity than as another recurring dimension of the modern itself" (131). Felski's popular sublime thus carves out a new literary form of modernity, one that bears a relationship to modernism but that is still a discrete form. In the same way, Laura Frost writes of an "interwar 'desert romance genre'" and describes the fashion in which this "bad" form "underpin[s] modernism's supposedly 'innovative' representations of sexuality and eroticism" (95, 98). While arguing for a relationship of influence, Frost's reading preserves the separateness of romance and modernism argued for by both Jameson and Daly. Pressing slightly upon this separateness, Jed Esty also finds in these interwar years a form of romance; the nation's "inward reorientation" produced a revitalized domestic romance, which worked, as Esty argues, "to rediscover magic and mystery in the [nation's] center" (41). Esty turns to E.M. Forster, whose writing of this period "dissolves [the] tension [between pastoral England and metropolitan modernity] into a wish-fulfilling (and non-narrative) evocation of insular tradition" (77). By suggesting that Forster "dissolves" that tension and by conceiving of Forster's work in terms of wish fulfillment—and therefore linking his writing to Frye's description of the romance as the closest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfillment dream—Esty comes

the closest of these authors to thinking about romance and modernism as integrated, or integratable, terms.

What is most interesting to me about many of the readings of modernism and romance is the claim that romance and modernism cannot, should not, be collapsed together. My project begins by wondering why this sort of integration seems impossible or out of bounds. Why must we think about romance as a strand within, subset of, or opposite to modernism? Looking to modernist texts, the relationship seems more intimate. Henry James's novels deploy the patterns and vocabularies of the late nineteenth-century adventure romance. The plots of Forster's fictions are structured by chance encounters and frustrated desire—tropes central to both the medieval and gothic romances. And in Virginia Woolf's work—and, especially, in Clarissa Dalloway's walk around London—we find both errancy and a gothic sensibility. Rather than thinking about modernism and romance as discrete terms, then, I want to suggest that we think about romance as always having been at work in the modernist novel—as constitutive as, say, stream-of-consciousness or impressionism.

The categorizing, historicizing ventures performed by Daly, Felski and Frost are not hospitable to thinking about the relationship between romance and modernism as one of mutual determination. For works by James, Forster and Woolf do not deploy historically specific categories of the romance—the quest, the gothic, or the adventure—but instead put to work forms present in all of these strands. Thus, Northrop Frye's conception of romance as an archetype and a narrative pattern driven by desire and aimed toward wish-fulfillment, rather than as a specific generic category, shifts us in a direction that can account for how I want to read modernism's relationship with the romance;

however, Frye's work, which claims that "the central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focused on the conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero," invites a way of thinking that positions the romance as the naïve, un-nuanced sibling to the novel (*Anatomy* 187). This is a problem similar to the one created by Jameson when he describes the difference between modernism and romance as a question of style; in contrast to modernism, the romance comes to look styleless, unliterary.

When it comes to thinking about romance and modernism, I want to take a different definitional route, one that, inspired by Barbara Fuchs's suggestion that "romance [is] … a literary and textual *strategy*. Under this definition, the term describes a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi" (*Romance* 9). Like Fuchs, I want to disorganize the romance—to think about it, not as a category, genre or, as Frye argues, mode, but instead as a way of describing a group of tropes: errancy, quests and adventure, the fantastic, desire, the counterfactual, progress and delay, and, finally, chance meetings—all or any of which may signify the romance at work in a literary text. In terms of the romance's work in modernism, I put less emphasis than Fuchs on the interconnectedness of these tropes, suggesting instead that the presence of any of these strategies signifies the romance at work in the modernist text. If thinking in terms of genre or mode posits romance as a noun, a thing, I'm interested in a grammatical turn, in thinking about how the romance functions in the modernist text as a verb. Given the status of a verb, "romance" becomes a much more flexible term, capable of engaging in theoretical work. Thus, if we are to think about the romance in Fuchs's terms, as a

strategy, we can think about the form as a critical, rather than narratological or literary, strategy.

The romance's interest in returns and retrievals of past and ideal states has been misread to signify the form's primitive, and always precedent, status. In my work here, however, I will argue that it is this interest in the return, its desire to retrieve a past state, that gives modernism a vocabulary and form for thinking about its own past and for conceptualizing of history. Central to this vocabulary are the subjunctive and past subjunctive verb moods; these grammatical figures, so expressive of desire, support the romance's nostalgia and give modernism a way of bringing political concerns—a desire to think about what *might* or *should* have been—to bear upon historical narrative. The romance's subjunctive mood, in other words, forms the grounds upon which modernist authors write historical narratives that ask: "what if?" Similarly, the medieval romance's knight errant gives James, Forster and Woolf a way of thinking about their own positions in literary history.

-A Romance Literary History-

My project centers upon the question that follows from the assertion that the romance does critical work in the modernist text: what, exactly, is the work that the romance does in and for literary modernism? In asking this question, I am not focused upon proving the presence of romance forms in modernist texts or thinking about modernism as the romance's final historical resting place. Instead, I want to suggest that modernism develops the romance into a methodological drive geared toward re-conceptualizing of

and re-narrating literary history. Romance tropes—errancy, chance meetings and the fantastic—thus perform theoretical work—work that is, I argue, concerned specifically with literary history. Modernism uses the forms of the romance to conceptualize of and plot its history; the romance is for literary modernism a historiographical strategy. Ultimately, I will argue that these strategies produce a literary history that comes to look like a romance.

I want to begin this discussion by thinking about how some of modernism's most well known statements about history participate in the development of a romance literary history. In the oft-cited eleventh chapter of Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson* (1911), the narrator pauses, breaking away from the plot in order to articulate his own relationship with Clio, the muse of history. He describes Clio's growing disenchantment with history, which is initiated by the death of Herodotus and also a particularly striking "remark of Aristotle's, that tragedy is *more philosophic* than history, insofar as it concerned itself with what might be, while history was concerned merely with what had been" (179). From this moment, though knowing that "it was wrong to mix up facts and fancies," Clio becomes a secret and addicted reader of fiction and novels: "It was only on the sly that she was an omnivorous reader of dramatic and lyric poetry. She watched with keen interest the earliest developments of the prose romance in southern Europe; and after the publication of 'Clarissa Harlowe' she spent practically all her time in reading novels" (180-1). Clio begs Zeus to "extend to the writers of history such privileges as are granted to novelists" (182). He refuses, but allows her to pick one event and one historian upon which and whom he will "confer invisibility, inevitability, and psychic penetration, with a flawless memory thrown in" (183). That historian is the narrator of *Zuleika Dobson*—

who, having received Zeus's gifts, finds himself "float[ing] all unseen … float[ing] all unhampered by any corporeal nonsense, up and down the platform. It was fun to watch the inmost thoughts of the station-master, of the porters, of the young person at the buffet" (184).

The narrator's description is, first and foremost, a digression, a shift away from the plot's primary thread. The previous chapter concludes with an account of Zuleika's actions: "She laughed shrilly as she leapt back, letting the empty jug roll over on the carpet. Then she stood tense, crouching, her hands to her mouth, her eyes askance, as much as to say "Now I've done it!" She listened hard, holding her breath. In the stillness of the night was a faint sound of dripping water, and presently of footsteps going away. Then stillness unbroken" (176). The eleventh chapter begins with the narrator asserting himself "Clio's servant" and declaring, "[l]et me make things clear to you" (179). By the end of the chapter, things—that is, Clio and the narrator's relationship with her—are made clear. And the twelfth chapter begins with a return to the novel's plot: "Not less averse than from dogging the Duke was I from remaining another instant in the presence of Miss Dobson. There seemed to be no possible excuse for her. This time she had gone too far. She was outrageous. As soon as the Duke had had time to get clear away, I floated out into the night" (192). This is a return so sudden that it is as if the eleventh chapter never happened. What is clear in Beerbohm's writing here, and what becomes even clearer in the writings discussed in this project, is that digression forms one of the central elements of modernism's narration of literary history as a romance.

Even more importantly, the content of these digressions is another of these central elements. Compare Beerbohm's eleventh chapter to another digression, this one in

Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918). In Part II of his chapter on Cardinal Manning, Strachey begins, "In the meantime a series of events was taking place in another part of England, which was to have a no less profound effect upon Manning's history than the merciful removal of his wife" (16) and goes on to briefly describe John Henry Newman's education. In the middle of this description, he takes a moment to consider what might have been:

> If Newman had never lived, or if his father, when the gig came round on the fatal morning, still undecided between the two Universities, had chanced to turn the horse's head in the direction of Cambridge, who can doubt that the Oxford Movement would have flickered out its little flame unobserved in the Common Room of Oriel? And how different, too, would have been the fate of Newman himself! He was a child of the Romantic Revival, a creature of emotion and of memory, a dreamer whose secret spirit dwelt apart in delectable mountains, an artist whose subtle senses caught, like a shower in the sunshine, the impalpable rainbow of the immaterial world. In other times, under other skies, his days would have been more fortunate. He might have helped to weave the garland of Meleager, or to mix the lapis lazuli of Fra Angelico, or to chase the delicate truth in the shade of an Athenian palæstra, or his hands might have fashioned those ethereal faces that smile in the niches of Chartres. Even in his own age he might, at Cambridge, whose cloisters have ever been consecrated to poetry and common sense, have followed quietly in Gray's footsteps and brought into flower those seeds of inspiration which now lie embedded amid the faded devotion of the Lyra Apostolica. At Oxford, he was doomed. He could not withstand the last enchantment of the Middle Age. (16)

A digression contained within a digression—the chapter begins, after all, with "in the meantime"—this passage is structured by one counterfactual event: Newman never went to Oxford. With this question, Strachey maps the "fanc[ies]" of fiction onto the "fact[s]" of history. Thus, within both Beerbohm and Strachey's digressions is located a concern with, or compulsion toward, the counterfactual. And, in both cases, these digressions do more than simply disrupt the progress of the texts. For while they certainly delay the development of the plot's primary storyline, they also provide meta-analyses that come to

look like discourses on historical method. Although, in Beerbohm's case, the intent is satirical, the call for bringing together fancy and fact can be taken seriously. And, for Strachey, this engagement with the counterfactual, this interest in what might have happened *if*, is a flight, on "the wings of Historic Imagination," into history as a literary discipline (19). In his preface to *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey asserts, "The history of the Victorian age will never be written: we know too much about it. For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian" (9). The counterfactual, then, offers a momentary reprieve—a way to imagine and simulate the ignorance that makes up, for Strachey, part of the foundation for a properly done history.

In Strachey's counterfactual narrative, an element of chance enables Newman's imagined life: "[what] if his father … had chanced to turn the horse's head in the direction of Cambridge, who can doubt that the Oxford Movement would have flickered out." The introduction of chance accomplishes two related things at once. First, it suggests the contingency of history; if not for the occurrence of a seemingly small event, which Strachey narrates as accidental and without meaning, a large event never would have happened. Thus, this counterfactual history exposes the contingency of history. At the same time, the assertion of the "chance" event works to suppress cause, a suppression that robs historical narrative of one of its structuring principles. The history that results from this contingency and suppression of cause is one of nearly unbearable possibility. The number of possibilities, the lives that Newman *might have* had, overwhelm, create the sense of being trapped in a wandering mind. The sentence structures enforce this sense of wandering. The sentences that narrate Newman's counterfactual life are significantly longer than those that describe his factual life; and each sentence wanders

through multiple possibilities, each linked to the next by "or," a word that enforces the sense of multiple and irresolvable narrative threads.

Beerbohm and Strachey's narratives provide several of the terms—digression, wandering, the counterfactual, and chance—and contribute to setting the stage for modernism's development of a romance literary history. However, where Beerbohm and Strachey's texts are explicit discussions of history and, in Strachey's case, non-fiction, my discussions revolve in large part around writings of fiction. I am interested in how non-historical fiction—rather than just non-fiction histories or historical fiction—plots literary history. How, in other words, might a work of fiction that has no overt concern with history talk about and conceptualize of history? When can non-historical discourse be historical discourse? This is where the forms of the romance become so important—for, as I will show, these forms come to signify the presence of both historical and historiographical discourse.

This use of romance tropes to narrate literary history has three primary results: first, this mode of thinking about and telling history constitutes a specifically modernist critical method, one based in what I want to call a romance epistemology. Second, the use of fictional conventions to plot literary history draws attention to the utopian or radical impulse at the heart of much of the modernist writings that deal, whether explicitly or implicitly, with history. Reading works by Henry James, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and Alan Hollinghurst, I will discuss the development of not only a "modernist romance," which is the particular form of the romance at work in modernist texts, but also a "romance of modernism," a way of thinking about modernism itself as a romance.

When these authors plot literary history through the forms of the romance, they deviate from, and provide an alternative to, the ways that literary history is often plotted—that is, through the conventions of literary realism. This realist mode of plotting creates a literary history driven by the desire for empirical certainty, the clarification of cause, and linearity. James, Forster, Woolf and Hollinghurst substitute for this realist literary history a romance historical epistemology. With this epistemology, history is disordered, no longer ruled by chronology or constrained by facts. Instead, history is understood, narrated, through figures of wandering, chance, the counterfactual, and desire. Associative logic, digression, and the question, "what if?" dominate this mode of history telling.

"What if?" articulates the utopian impulse at the heart of modernism's romance literary history. In *A Room of One's Own*, for example, the narrator wonders, "what if Shakespeare had had a sister?" and "what if Mrs. Seton's mother had gone into business?" These pondering narratives, which takes place as the narrator wanders from Oxbridge's campus to the nearby town, take up the problem of a female literary history, try to retrieve the moment at which history might have gone differently, and explore what could have happened to change the developmental narrative of a female intellectual tradition. The historical narrative offered up by *A Room of One's Own* is thus constituted by multiple tropes of the romance, all of which come together to create a narrative concerned with what *should have* happened.

-Aspects of the Romance-

Although each author discussed in chapters that follow contributes to the development of a romance literary history, it is particularly important to my project that James, Forster, Woolf, and Hollinghurst all deal with different tropes, aspects, of the romance. Forster's romance is not, in other words, recognizable in Woolf's romance. This multiplicity is, I think, a benefit more than a liability; the insistently multivalent quality of the romance allows us to explore the unique ways in which these authors developed wrote their romance literary histories.

My first chapter, entitled "A Hearty Sympathy: Stevenson, James, and the Style of the Romance," focuses on the friendship between R.L. Stevenson and Henry James, which began in 1884 with the publication of Stevenson's response to "The Art of Fiction" and lasted until Stevenson's death in 1894. The relationship, initiated by a public critical dialogue, grew into an intimate, theoretically rich correspondence. For ten years, the two men exchanged letters. They critiqued each other's writings and discussed the works of their contemporaries. They talked about their lives and described their feelings for each other.

One of the most notable elements of their letters is the manner in which the two men adopted a practice of stylistic exchange. James, for example, began to use the language of the adventure-romance in his letters to Stevenson. And, in one instance of this exchange, Stevenson wrote a short theory of literature that situated a Jamesian form of suppression at the center of literary composition. Considering the implications of the friendship between the two men for modernism's work with the romance, I argue that

modernism's development of a romance literary history is grounded in this practice of exchange, which I call "writing in a style not one's own." One of the products of the friendship, and the practice of exchange that developed from it, was "The Pupil" (1891), which James wrote in response to Stevenson's request for an adventure tale. I argue that the tale is an early attempt both to deploy practice of writing in a style not one's own and thematizes modernism's use of romance tropes to conceptualize of and narrate literary history.

When James and Stevenson engage in the practice of writing in a style not one's own, they develop a way of thinking about literary history that does not depend upon patterns of influence. In the same way, in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E.M. Forster collapses processes of influence, of cause-and-effect, by re-imagining literary history as a single scene that takes place in a circular room. Everyone, authors from all historical periods, write simultaneously. In my second chapter, "Forster's Chance: *A Room with a View*'s Romance Epistemology," I take this image as my cue for a reading of *A Room with a View* (1908) and think about the ways that Forster uses chance to think about both literary history and critical engagement as romances. Discussing the manner in which Forster's fiction expands upon this image of chance as an alternative to cause and effect historical narrative, I explore Forster's use of the concept of chance to create a particular mode of understanding the world, literature, and literary history, a mode that partially constitutes modernism's romance epistemology. At the same time that he uses chance to narrate a romance literary history, Forster also develops what I call a practice of "chancey reading," which is a mode of critical engagement that reads through the forms of the romance.

My third chapter, “Romance Wanderings: Woolf’s Counterfactual Histories,” reads modernism’s romance literary history alongside Virginia Woolf’s struggle to narrate a specifically female literary history and tradition. Engaging with the political capabilities of the romance, Woolf uses wandering and the counterfactual—those signifiers of the romance—to engage in a utopian rewriting of literary history. The utopian impulse at the center of these narratives transforms the telling of history from descriptive to prescriptive; “what if?” becomes “what should have been?” Literary history thus becomes responsive, not just to the socio-political needs of the present, but also to the perceived requirements of a desired future.

My discussion explores two explicit instances of the counterfactual, both of which are explicit and contained within works of non-fiction (“Jane Austen” [1925] and *A Room of One’s Own* [1929]). These instances of counterfactual history provide, I argue, a critical framework for *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)—a novel that, although rarely dealing explicitly with literary history, offers Woolf’s most thought-out and politically engaged version of the romance literary history. In my reading of the novel, I focus on the character Septimus Smith, a delusional, haunted figure who is, more than any other character in the novel, critically engaged with literary history. As his delusions grow more involved, Septimus becomes the means through which *Mrs. Dalloway* narrates a literary history driven by desire and wish-fulfillment fantasies. His wandering mind, which engages in striking moments of counterfactual thinking, produces a literary history that contains within itself the potential for a utopian revisioning of the past and that also stages Septimus as a romance hero, a knight errant on a quest to correct the mistakes of history.

My final chapter, "Hollinghurst's Scandal of Contact: Rewriting Modernism's Romance," jumps forward more than eighty years and considers the fate of modernism's work with romance. Focusing on Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004), I explore the manner in which this novel re-imagines and rewrites the work accomplished by James, Forster and Woolf and argue that Hollinghurst brings a queer historical intimacy to bear upon the romance literary history.

This form of intimacy is represented in the novel by moments of physical encounter and contact; these moments make clear that *The Line of Beauty* imagines the romance in terms different than how it has been thought about in previous chapters. For, in Hollinghurst's novel, "romance" connotes plots that deal with love; erotic desire, encounters or contacts; scandal and romantic pleasure. As often as these encounters take place between two people, they also occur between a person and a book. And so, in one instance, the novel's protagonist, Nick Guest, and his boyfriend snort lines of cocaine off the surface of a book entitled *Henry James and the Question of Romance*. In another scene, Nick imagines his lover's buttocks as the ideal realization of Hogarth's line of beauty. And in a third moment—a moment that combines the different energies of the previous instances—Nick hides an erection with a copy of James's memoir, *A Small Boy and Others*.

These encounters and contacts are historiographically articulate and deconstruct what Carolyn Dinshaw describes as the romance's "big *ostensible* task: to promote some version of heterosexuality against all odds" (*Getting Medieval* 295; emphasis mine). Ultimately, these encounters form the foundation for Hollinghurst's revision of modernism's romance literary history, offering a literary history that is structured neither

by reproduction or inheritance but is instead driven by forms of contact that collapse the heterosexual logic of those two terms.

Hollinghurst's work draws attention to one of the central facts of this project; all of the authors I discuss either self-identified or were later identified by others as gay. Although it is only in the final chapter that I explicitly address the connection between sexuality and the development of a romance literary history, the sexualities of these authors are, all the same, important and demand an interrogation of the relationship between non-normative sexuality and the interest in re-plotting literary history as a romance. I can deal with this issue only provisionally here and suggest that the heterosexist logic of many forms of historical narrative, its dependence upon patterns and assumptions of heterosexual life, demands alternatives. The romance literary histories produced by James, Forster, Woolf and Hollinghurst deconstruct those principles—linearity, causality, reproduction and inheritance—that are so sacred to historical narrative and, thus, offer alternatives based in tropes of the romance.

CHAPTER ONE

"A Hearty Sympathy": Stevenson, James and the Style of the Romance

-Introduction: The Quarrel and a Friendship-

Although James's "The Art of Fiction" (*Longman's Magazine* 1884) asserts impatience with a formalized theory of the novel, it is concerned with the manner in which a literary work communicates to the reader its "impression of life" and the fashion in which the reader receives this impression (Veeder 170). Considering the novel within this relational framework, James critiques Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883): "For myself (since it comes back in the last resort, as I say, to the preference of the individual), the picture of the child's experience has the advantage that I can at successive steps … say Yes or No, as it may be, to what the artist puts before me. I have been a child, but I have never been on quest for a buried treasure" (Smith 81). Only three months later, in the December 1884 issue of *Longman's Magazine*, Stevenson responded with "A Humble Remonstrance." He writes,

> In this book [*Treasure Island*] he misses what he calls the 'immense luxury' of being able to quarrel with his author. The luxury, to most of us, is to lay by our judgment, to be submerged by the tale as by a billow, and only to awake, and begin to distinguish and find fault, when the piece is over and the volume laid aside. Still more remarkable is Mr. James's reason. He cannot criticise the author, as he goes, "because," says he, comparing it with another work, "I have been a child, but I have never been on a quest for buried treasure." Here is, indeed, a willful paradox;

> for if he has never been on a quest for buried treasure, it can be demonstrated that he has never been a child. There never was a child (unless Master James) but has hunted gold, and been a pirate, and a military commander, and a bandit of the mountains; but has fought, and suffered shipwreck and poison, and imbrued its little hands in gore, and gallantly retrieved the lost battle, and triumphantly protected innocence and beauty. (Smith 93-4)[1]

The dispute between the two authors is a question of the extent to which imagined experience can be called experience. Stevenson's criticism builds upon one of James's own claims in "The Art of Fiction": "…It is … excellent … to say that one must write from experience … What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility … It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative … it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations" (Veeder 172). Here, then, in his "remonstrance," Stevenson asks James to give readerly experience the same breadth he has given writery experience. It is a testament to the strength of Stevenson's response that, when James edited "The Art of Fiction" four years later for *Partial Portraits* (1888), James rewrote his account of reading *Treasure Island*: "I have been a child in fact, but I have been on a quest for a buried treasure only *in*

[1] As Nicholas Daly writes, "The romance as Stevenson theorizes it is an attempt to move away from the contemplative pleasures of contemporary realism in order to recapture the immersive reading experience of childhood. Rather than offering us an exercise in analysis, reading should offer us a thoroughgoing holiday from our own intellectual nature" (18). See also Stevenson's "A Gossip on Romance" (1882), where he writes, "In anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance or images, incapable of sleep or of continuous thought. The words, if the book be eloquent, should run thence-forward in our ears like the noise of breakers, and the story, if it be a story, repeat itself in a thousand coloured pictures to the eye. It was for this last pleasure that we read so closely, and loved our books so dearly, in the bright, troubled period of boyhood."

supposition" (Veeder 180; italics mine). The tone of criticism is still present; but, by adding "in supposition," James has acknowledged, and in part agreed with, Stevenson's assertion of the formative relationship between imagination and experience.

After reading "A Humble Remonstrance," James wrote to Stevenson. In his letter, which initiated a friendship that lasted until Stevenson's death in December 1894, James described the "hearty sympathy" he felt for the author of *Treasure Island* (Smith 101). This declaration of sympathy set the tone for their relationship. By invoking the term—which is so important to lines like "the picture of the child's experience has the advantage that I can at successive steps … say Yes or No"—James situates his feelings toward Stevenson within the framework of the arguments of "The Art of Fiction" and "A Humble Remonstrance." Thus, while being, on the one hand, a transparent assertion of goodwill, James's statement also displaces the grounds of their theoretical disagreement—that is, the role of readerly sympathy—onto their personal relationship. This displacement set the terms for the friendship between Stevenson and James, a relationship that made indistinguishable the line between the personal and the theoretical and ultimately laid the groundwork for modernism's work with the romance.

A progressive intimacy can be traced through the letters and essays that, for ten years, James and Stevenson wrote to and about each other. This chapter is concerned with that written intimacy and its implication for modernism's work with the romance. By tracking the relationship between one of the most prominent late nineteenth-century writers of adventure-romance, on the one hand, and an author frequently described as the first modernist, on the other, we can, I think, come to understand the earliest moments of the modernist romance. The intimacy between the two men developed in several ways:

first, in the emotional closeness communicated in their letters; second, in the critiques, in both the letters and their other writings, of each other's work; and, third, in the subtle and often playful creation of a stylistic or formal routine of exchange.

I want to call this routine *writing in a style not one's own*. Across ten years of communication—whether this communication is in the form of the letter, poetry, the essay, or fiction—Stevenson and James develop a system in which they creatively co-opt each other's style. I am using "style" broadly; when James begins to talk to Stevenson in the language of the popular adventure-romance, this is an instance of writing in a style not one's own. When Stevenson describes his theory that suppression is a central element to fiction writing, or when the two authors use identical phrases to critique each other's work, these moments are also instances of writing in a style not one's own. "Style," then, includes vocabulary, genre, and ways of conceptualizing of literature.

A great deal of attention has been paid to James's grammar and its role in the development of a modernist syntax.[2] Mary Cross's assertion that modernism should be defined as a particular kind of syntax, as a way of putting language together, rather than as a type of plot is well supported by both James and criticism of his work. This approach is the basis for my work in this chapter. Looking at style rather than syntax, however, gives my discussion greater breadth, and more of an opportunity to explore the multitude of ways in which James and Stevenson worked or played within, and adopted, each other's formal and generic practices. Although James's syntax is understood as

[2] Ellipses, for example, signify what Eve Sedgwick identifies as "preterition" in James's work. Similarly, Lee Clark Mitchell argues that scare quotes in "The Jolly Corner" introduce into the story a "certain ghostly aspect … a secondary ironic connotation haunting the term" (225). When Brydon sees (or does not see) a ghost, the tale is "thematiz[ing] figuration" so that plot is suddenly secondary to—is the reinforcing aspect for—the newly primary grammar (224). See also Cohen, Moon and Ohi.

being formative in the development of a modernist syntax, it is difficult to think of syntax in terms other than individual artistic idiosyncrasy. Rather than thinking in these terms—thinking, in other words, about style as a product purely of the individual—I want to think of the matter in collaborative terms. The initiating moments of modernism's work with the romance cannot be located in the work of one author. It is, instead, to be found in the collaborative work of two authors.

The relationship between Stevenson and James shows us, then, that modernism's work with the romance is grounded in acts of writing in a style not one's own. It develops, in other words, out of practices of playful and self-conscious acts of exchange. While the relationship between the two authors offers a way to think about the early moments of modernism's work with the romance, it also provides an opportunity to think about how literary influence works. For, certainly, there is no room for Bloom's model of influence, rethought in synchronic terms, in the relationship between Stevenson and James. Stephen Guy-Bray's idea of "poetic influence as erotic," developed as an alternative to Bloom's model of anxiety, gets us closer to conceptualizing of the authors' relationship. Guy-Bray advocates thinking of historical influence in terms of "poetic penetration, rather than poetic inspiration … the idea of influence—in Latin, literally 'flowing in(to)'" (xi). Guy-Bray's formulation allows us to think of literary influence in terms of exchange and is, in this way, useful for thinking about Stevenson and James. Guy-Bray's use of "erotic" is, however, limiting. While the system of influence that developed between Stevenson and James certainly allows for this characterization, I want to leave room for alternate models. Nicholas Daly's description of modernism and the fin de siècle romance as "sibling" forms is—though not, strictly speaking, a model of

influence—a framework within which we might think of the way influence worked in the relationship between Stevenson and James; the metaphor of familial relationship is particularly apt as Stevenson and James grew to relate to each other as family.

The problem with applying any of these models to Stevenson and James is that the two authors tried to do something that makes it difficult to talk about influence. They sought to efface the difference, the line, between themselves. If influence depends upon a clear distinction between personalities, Stevenson and James used the practice of writing in a style not one's own to collapse this distinction, to make indistinguishable the boundary between individual authors. Stevenson and James cannot be discussed in the causal terms upon which influence depends; in their writings, the two authors sought to work within, rather than be influenced by, each other's style.

This chapter first discusses the literary cultural context within which the friendship between Stevenson and James developed. This is followed by a discussion of the letters of Stevenson and James, a discussion that focuses on the manner in which the two authors adopted the contents of the late nineteenth-century romance revival, and collaboratively reworked—through the practice of writing in a style not one's own—these plots into a theoretical dialogue between modernism and the romance. I conclude this chapter with a reading of James's "The Pupil" (1891), a story that I argue emplots the critical content of Stevenson and James's relationship and that offers a thematized account of the relationship between modernism and the romance.

-James, Stevenson and the Romancers-

The 1880s and 1890s in England witnessed a phenomenon that has since come to be called the romance revival. With male-driven plots, the absence of home scenes, and the lack of female protagonists, works by writers like H. Rider Haggard, H.G. Wells and Robert Louis Stevenson ensured that the romance was valorized as a masculine alternative to the feminine genre of domestic fiction.[3][4] In "A Gossip on Romance" (1883), a work that anticipates the later "A Humble Remonstrance," Stevenson distinguishes between character- and incident-driven fiction and articulates a theoretical framework for the romance revival:

> While we read a story, we sit wavering between two minds, now merely clapping our hands at the merit of the performance, now condescending to take an active part in fancy with the characters. The last is the triumph of romantic story-telling: when the reader consciously plays at being the hero, the scene is a good scene. Now in character-studies the pleasure that we take is critical; we watch, we approve, we smile at incongruities, we are moved to sudden heats of sympathy with courage, suffering or virtue. But the characters are still themselves, they are not us; the more clearly they are depicted, the more widely do they stand away from us, the more imperiously do they thrust us back into our place as a spectator … It is not character but incident that woos us out of our reserve. Something happens as we desire to have it happen to ourselves; some situation, that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realized in the story with enticing and appropriate details. Then we forget the characters; then we push the hero aside; then we plunge into the tale in our own person and bathe in fresh experience; and then, and then only, do we say we have been reading a romance … Fiction is to the grown man what play is to the child; it is there that he changes the atmosphere and tenor of his life; and when the game so chimes with his fancy that he can join in it with all his heart,

[3] See H. Rider Haggard: *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887); H.G. Wells: *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896); and Robert Louis Stevenson: *Treasure Island* (1883), *Kidnapped* (1886) and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886).
[4] For a discussion of the relationship between domestic fiction and the adventure-romance, see Showalter.

> when it pleases him with every turn, when he loves to recall it and dwells upon its recollection with entire delight, fiction is called romance. (6)

Stevenson prioritizes what he calls "sympathetic pleasure" (4), an idea that foreshadows both James's "The Art of Fiction" and "A Humble Remonstrance." Like James, Stevenson is concerned largely with the relationship between the reader and the text; he writes that, from the romance, the reader must receive the "*impression* of adventure" (5). A very specific sort of reading—a reading style that idealizes escapism and the full integration of reader and work—produces the romance. Stevenson elaborates upon the characteristics of this style, writing, "In anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our mind filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images, incapable of sleep or of continuous thought" (1). Asserting that the "luxury" of reading is to "lay by our judgment," this reading is necessarily uncritical. Critical pleasure is replaced by language that figures reading in terms of physical pleasure; reading the romance is "voluptuous," a process of "bath[ing] in fresh experience." And so, in the romance, critical reading is replaced in large part by sensual reading.

Stevenson's "impression of adventure" indicates that the romance is, for Stevenson as for many of the romancers in the final decades of the nineteenth century, inseparable from, and virtually synonymous with, the adventure story. Stevenson writes, however, that this adventure-romance form "reaches into the highest abstraction of the ideal; it does not refuse the most pedestrian realism" (5). The romance, then, exists as a process of generic incorporation. The literary work that successfully produces the

"impression of adventure" is, Stevenson suggests, transformed or absorbed into the genre of the romance.

The sense of generic inclusiveness produced by Stevenson's phenomenological approach to genre is not, however, reflected in the practices of writers like Haggard and critics like Andrew Lang. The romance revival's critical environment was, in fact, one of theatrical hostility. In addition to becoming the staging ground for acts of jingoism and other forms of racist and sexist nationalism, proponents of the revival condemned realism, a form perceived as effeminate in its subject matter, style and attention to detail as well as tainted by the literary influence of the United States and France.[5] While valorizing Stevenson, in other words, critics like Andrew Lang, George Saintsbury and Hall Caine castigated everything that James was perceived to represent.[6]

In 1886, Andrew Lang, one of the most vocal advocates for the romance revival, described his discomfort with realism: "the tendency of Realism in fiction is often to find the Unpleasant Real in character much more abundant than the Pleasant Real … Such analysis makes one uncomfortable in the reading, making one feel intrusive and unmanly. It is like overhearing a confession by accident" (102). Lang's formulation brings to mind the image of the gossipy spinster next door, the woman who listens at her wall to hear the

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[5] Appropriately, the term "jingoism" was coined in 1878, around the same time that the romance revival began.

[6] Notably, William Lyon Phelps describes Stevenson as the "ardent advocate of the gospel of romance" who "initiated a revolution in English fiction" (qtd Varinskaya 64). Of realism's status in England, Phelps wrote, "the giant Realism had got the spirit of English fiction safely locked into the dungeon" (qtd Daly 17). If the relationship between realism and romance is a battle, Stevenson is one of the most active, and powerful, soldiers. In contrast, Edmund Gosse, in a memorial article written after James's death, writes, "[h]e was a supreme artist; but what we must remember and repeat is that he was a *hero* … an English *hero* of whom England shall be proud" (emphasis added). James is described as the protagonist of a particular narrative, as the hero of English literary history.

daily dramas of those living nearby. Literary realism emasculates the reader; conversely, the romance masculates.[7] Lang's emphasis on discomfort—on the uncomfortable experience of reading the realist work—enforces this gendered imagery and hints at the violation enacted by realism. Realism forces itself upon the reader, producing a reader that is, like the text, "intrusive." "The tendency of Realism in fiction" introduces, in other words, the risk of contagion; it doubles itself in the reader, so that this reader becomes, like the work itself, feminine and intrusive.

In a letter sent to Haggard after the publication of *She* (1886-7), Walter Besant wrote, "[i]f the critic is a woman she will put down this book with the remark that it is impossible—almost all women have this feeling toward the marvelous" (4). Characterized by intolerant and unimaginative reading practices, the female critic represents here a dominant and oppressive British literary culture. In an 1890s essay, the author and journalist Eliza Lynn Linton reinforced Besant's assertion, describing the female reader: "The British Matron is the true censor of the Press, and exerts over fiction the repressive power she has tried to exert over Art. Hence, the subjects lying to the hand of the British novelist are woefully limited" (114). For both Besant and Linton, the female reader exerts a form of repression, constrains the practices of the male British

[7] In his introduction to *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship*, David McWhirter observes the presence in the prefaces of a dialogue "between masculine and feminine genderings of James's fictional and critical discourse … On the one hand, James figures his art through images drawn from … conventionally masculine spheres … [and] James offers images associated with femininity … in his attempt to define or describe his own artistic activity" (9). Thus, for the romancers, there is a gendered division between the masculine romance and feminine realism; for James, however, this difference translates into one between masculine fiction and feminine criticism.

author, and enforces the dominance, which is described by the romancers as a form of hegemony, of the realist—and, more specifically, the domestic—novel.

James's "Robert Louis Stevenson" (1888) describes Stevenson's work in a fashion similar to Besant's description of Haggard's *She*. In this essay, James writes, "[h]is books are for the most part books without women, and it is not women who fall most in love with them" (Smith 127).[8] Intriguingly, James also describes the relationship between Stevenson and style in gendered and eroticized terms: "Mr. Stevenson delights in a style, and his own has nothing accidental or diffident; it is eminently conscious of its responsibilities and meets them with a kind of gallantry—as if language were a pretty woman and a person who proposes to handle it had, of necessity, to be something of a Don Juan" (127). The author is thus not only masculine, but is also a masculine lover who "handles" a feminine language and transforms it into the style of the romance. Meeting this faminine language with "gallantry," the author also takes on elements of the romance hero.[9] In this sense, then, the very act of authoring—specifically, Stevenson's act of authoring—becomes a romance.

Located at the intersection of Lang's valorization of ignorance ("the unpleasant Real") and James's recognition of the romance's masculine managing of language and plot is the romance revival's practice of an aestheticized and specifically masculine ignorance. Writing in 1924, Joseph Conrad described the melancholy that descended upon him as he observed "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration. What an end to the idealized realities of

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[8] For a visual representation of this relationship between the romance revival—and, more specifically, Stevenson—and women, see John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of Robert Louis Stevenson and His Wife Fanny* (1885).

a boy's daydreams" (Conrad 4).[10] Mapping, understood by Conrad as a form of disfigurement and violence upon a specifically male imagination, is negated by the romance; the romance is thus palliative in nature. Lang describes, "[a]s the visible world is measured, mapped, tested, weighed, we seem to hope more and more than a world of invisible romance may not be far from us" ("The Supernatural in Fiction" 7). For both Conrad and Lang, the romance is an antidote to empiricism—to the drive to know, and document, the world absolutely. In the same way that the romance revival is driven by an imperial nostalgia, it is also motivated by an nostalgia that turns back to a mythical time when the world was experienced—geographically, historically, biologically—through imaginative speculation rather than empirical observation. This is, in short, a desire to experience a pre-mapped, pre-experienced world, an impulse to preserve, rather than negate, the unknown.

In his eulogy for the unmapped world, Conrad refers to a *boy's* daydreams. The ignorance central to the romance plot is thus a specifically *male* ignorance. Appropriately, Elaine Showalter has described the desire to remap the world through an ignorance of the mapped world as a "*penetration* into the imagined center of an exotic civilization, the core … or heart of darkness, which is a blank place on the map, a realism of the unexplored and unknown" (81). Not only is this a blank space, but it is also an anticipatory space—a place that waits to be plotted, or actualized, by the writings of the romancer. To penetrate the "heart of darkness" is to simulate sexual conquest, to engage in a masculine authoring of that "imagined center." Showalter's formulation echoes

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[10] Haggard, too, eulogized an unknown, unmapped world: "[s]oon the ancient mystery of Africa will have vanished … Where will the romance of future generations find a safe and secret place, unknown to the pestilent accuracy of the geographer, in which to lay their plots" (qtd Brantlinger 239).

James's description of Stevenson as a gallant handler of language. In both instance, the male writer of romances is seen as practicing a particularly masculine form of controlling, even determining, the material that is to be represented.

In the same way that the romance revival signaled a nostalgia for a pre-mapped world, it is also characterized by the romancers' desire for a return to an older—and, supposedly, more natural and humane—literary form.[11] This was a regressive movement aimed at a homecoming. Of this desire, Haggard writes,

> The love of romance is probably coeval with the existence of humanity. So far as we can follow the history of the world we find traces of it and its effects among every people, and those who are acquainted with the habits and ways of thought of savage races will know that it flourishes as strongly in the barbarians as in the cultured breast. In short, it is like the passions, an innate quality of mankind. In modern England this love is not by any means dying out. ("About Fiction" 379)

Literary history, as Haggard figures it, reenacts the plot conventions of the romance. Authors, or races, may stray into realism and naturalism; but to write the romance is to return to a natural artistic form, to the innate literary qualities of mankind.[12] It is, in other words, a return home.[13] In this, and in Haggard's claim that "good romance writing is perhaps the most difficult art practiced by the sons of men," we find an attempt to reverse the literary dominance of the female reader that is described by Besant and Linton (379).

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[11] Seeped in the rhetoric of empire, the romance revival also comes to represent, as Patrick Brantlinger argues, an imperial nostalgia and an anxiety toward the decline of the British Empire.
See Brantlinger's *Rule of Empire*. C.f. Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy*. Here, she writes, "boy's fiction was the primer of empire" (80).

[12] C.f. Kipling's observation that the literary world is torn between "the crocodile of Realism and the catawampus of Romance"—a formulation that conceives of the construction of the relationship between realism and romance as an opposition between a real animal, the crocodile, and a mythical one, the catawampus.

[13] Gillian Beer suggests, "the realistic novels of one age or audience have an *uncanny* way of becoming 'romances' in another setting." This is particularly interesting alongside Haggard's construction of romance as an innate, or homey, genre (5; italics mine).

By attempting to develop a genealogy of writers who generate and reproduce without contributions from female writers, Haggard's description of the romance offers an entirely restructured literary history. [14] In this genealogy, authors of the late-nineteenth century look back to the Greek and Medieval romances for evidence of literary ancestry—erasing, in the process, the literary work of women. With this delineation of the romance as a masculine sphere, authors like Lang, Besant and Haggard strived to author a new myth of masculine creativity, authorship and readership—a narrative that wrote the romance revival as a form of male liberation, or what Elaine Showalter has called a "man's literary revolution" (79).[15]

Just as the history of the romance comes to be structured by its own masculine, and masculinizing, plots, the relationship between realism and romance—a relationship that is described, by Andrew Lang, as a battle—is also narrated within the conventions of the romance. In 1886, Andrew Lang wrote:

> One may enter the lists where critical lances are broken and knights unsaddled; where authors and reviewers, like Malory's men, 'lash at each other marvelously.' The dispute is the old dispute about the two sides of the shield. Fiction is a shield with two sides, the silver and the golden: the study of manners and of characters, on the one hand; on the other, the description of adventure, the delight of romantic narrative. (100)[16]

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[14] Although it is possible that Haggard intended "sons" and "men" to signify simply "mankind," it is more likely that he is referring only to *men*.

[15] Of this revolution, Showalter writes, "fantasies of male self-creation and envy of the feminine aspects of generation … emerged with a peculiar virulence in the 1880s … In the male writing of the fin de siècle, celibate male creative generation was valorized, and female powers of creation and reproduction were denigrated" (78).

[16] Hall Caine goes a step further, framing the very relationship between the genres as a battle, rather than just a relationship structured by metaphors of battle. This battle is, Caine claims, one that the romance is destined to win. See Caine's "The New Watchwords of Fiction."

Lang's formulation echoes Stevenson's distinction between novels of character and novels of incident. This distinction is hyperbolically—and, perhaps, with a hint of satirical intent—organized, driven, by the content of those novels of incident. The violent force of the adventure-romance plot drives, in other words, the relationship between the two genres—though the battle is fought, not by the genres themselves, but by "authors and reviewers."[17] William Lyon Phelps's description of Stevenson—as the "ardent advocate of the gospel of romance" who "initiated a revolution in English fiction"—reinforces this claim and casts Stevenson as the protagonist of this literary battle (qtd Varinskaya 64). This battle is narrated as a rebellion of dominated subjects; of this rebellion, Phelps wrote, "the giant Realism had got the spirit of English fiction safely locked into the dungeon" (qtd Daly 17). Here, as is Linton's formulation, romance is a suppressed form that is buried and hidden from the British public and that needs rescue.

Stevenson, then, is conscripted, as one of the romance's most powerful "knights," into this battle between realism and romance.[18] At the same time that Stevenson was occupying, however unwillingly, the role of the hero of the "innate" romance, James's work was coming under attack for doing the exact opposite of the natural. In a review of *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), one critic complained that the story was "full of strain and effort, of words employed in forced and unnatural meanings, of artificiality" (Hayes 273). Imagined as enacting a violation against language, this image of James contrasts sharply to his own description, in 1888, of Stevenson's writing. Stevenson romances language;

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[17] See "The Art of Fiction" (Veeder175).

[18] The same sort of treatment is given to James, though with less frequency. In a memorial article published after James's death, Edmund Gosse wrote, "[h]e was a supreme artist; but what we must remember and repeat is that he was a *hero* … an English *hero* of whom England shall be proud" (emphasis added).

James, in contrast, is criticized by reviewers for forcing language. This critique of *The Spoils of Poynton* hints at a suspicion of style itself, a suspicion that propelled the romance revival's self-idealization as a masculine, innate and transparent alternative to realism. James's work is stylized to the point of "artificiality"; in contrast, the question of style is largely absent from discussion of the romancers' works of the romancers.

In the critique of *The Spoils of Poynton,* style—and, specifically, Jamesian style—denaturalizes the literary work. This focus on the unnaturalness of James's work is mirrored in an earlier criticism of "The Aspern Papers" (1888): "the impression produced is disagreeable, and there is nothing to show that this unpleasant and abrupt ending was, artistically or otherwise, necessary" (Hayes 213). This question of necessity, taken alongside a description of James's writing as "chronic periphrastic perversity," pathologizes James's work, transforming it into an unnatural deviation from the necessary, effortless forms of agreeable fiction. In both the treatments of *The Spoils of Poynton* and "The Aspern Papers," James's fiction is all artifice—is, in other words, somehow duplicitous.

The language of these attacks makes clear how advocates for the romance revival might have understood the relationship between authors like Stevenson and Haggard, on the one hand, and James, on the other. And regardless of his personal feelings toward reviews that characterized his work as unnatural and disagreeable, James did little in his writing to discourage these opinions. In the Preface (1901) to *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), for example, he described his ghost story as an "irresponsible little fiction" and wrote, "[*The Turn of the Screw*] is an excursion into chaos … while remaining … but an anecdote—though an anecdote amplified and highly emphasized and returning upon itself

… it is a piece of ingenuity pure and simply, of cold artistic calculation" (125). Echoing the criticism of his work, James places cleverness and calculation at the very center of his tale's composition. Everything about this description emphasizes the intellectual, artistic distance between the author and his story and rejects the characterization of the literary work as an organic, natural, growth.

That James characterizes *The Turn of the Screw* as a "sinister romance" further shades his turn away from the natural; between the novels of the romance revival and James's work, the romance takes on a double and conflicting association—to both the natural, for writers like Haggard and Lang, and the unnatural, for James. The possibility that "sinister romance" signifies "romance made sinister," rather than "romance with sinister elements," gives *The Turn of the Screw* the look of a meta-narrative, of a critical engagement with the forms of romance. The final result of James's description is that the novella—which, at the same time, dips into chaos, remains aloof from that chaos, and "return[s] upon itself"—comes to look like a work of genre criticism, a work of fiction that situates James in critical relationship with the work of the romance revival.

Although not entirely antagonistic, the relationship between James and the romance revival was fraught with both intellectual and, as we will see in James's complaints about Haggard, aesthetic tension. At the same time, however, James and Stevenson maintained a friendship that made theoretical use of this tension. While the critics of the romance revival emphasized the oppositional relationship between realism and romance, Stevenson and James transformed this opposition into a scene of play and experimentation. As their letters to each other vividly show, James often experimented

with the forms of Stevenson's romance; and Stevenson adopted James's "periphrastic perversity" as a mode through which to think about literature in Jamesian terms.

-"A Magic Mirror"-

From the very beginning of their correspondence, Stevenson and James strive to deconstruct patterns of influence. In his first letter to James after the publication of "A Humble Remonstrance," Stevenson wrote, "I took you paper merely as a pin to hang my own remarks upon; but, alas! what a thing is any paper! What fine remarks can you not hang on mine! How I have sinned against proportion … you are indeed a very acute reader to have divined the real attitude of my mind" (Smith 105). If this is, first, Stevenson's self-denigrating flattery of James, it is also the moment in which Stevenson removes the relationship between the two men from patterns of cause and effect, action and reaction. This "sinn[ing] against proportion" describes Stevenson's apparent failure to uphold the symmetry of intellectual exchange; "acute reader" gives James powers of critical presentiment. Although this description does not accurately portray how the relationship between the two authors comes to look over the next decade, it does serve to destabilize the directional logic of influence, a destabilization that grows into the practice of writing in a style not one's own.

The letters between Stevenson and James offer several routes into thinking about the fashion in which the two authors experimented with each other's style and how these experiments are implicated in the development of a modernist romance. These experiments range from James's use the forms of the romance to imagine Stevenson to

the two authors exchanging particular phrases and concepts as modes of encoding their intellectual intimacy. I want to suggest that these letters—and the style they produced—lays the foundation for James's "The Pupil" (1891), a work that dramatizes the theoretical dialogue between Stevenson and James and that is also the initiating textual moment of modernism's romance.

I want to begin by thinking about the way in which James experimented with forms of Stevenson's genre, the romance, to think about Stevenson. In 1890, James wrote to Stevenson, who was traveling through the Americas and Pacific. Describing Stevenson as "the wandering Wanton of the Pacific," James wrote, "[y]ou are indeed the male Cleopatra or buccaneering Pompadour of the Deep" (Smith 187).[19] Characterizing Stevenson as an adventure-romance hero, as a figure of errancy, James writes Stevenson as the hero of the adventure-romance tale, and, most importantly, as a character, the pirate, from Stevenson's own stories. Significantly, James deploys this description as he communicates his reaction to learning that Stevenson had delayed his return to England. "You swim," James's letter continued, "into our ken with every provocation and prospect—and we have only time to open our arms to receive you when your immortal back is turned to us in the act of still more provoking flight […] therefore when you come, if you ever do, which in my heart of hearts I doubt, I shall see you in all your strange exotic bloom, in all your paint and beads and feathers. May you grow a magnificent extra crop of all such things (as they will bring you a fortune here)" (Smith 187). The imagery of the romance is deployed, first, to register sentimental attachment

[19] In correspondence with Stevenson, James used similar language to talk about his venture into theater: "the *form* opens out before me as if there were a kingdom to conquer—a kingdom forsooth of ignorant brutes of manages and dense cabotins of actors" (Smith 204).

and, second, to narrate Stevenson's hypothetical return to England, a return desired passionately by James. The romance is thus here a mode of wish fulfillment, a rhetorical strategy through which James communicates his longing for Stevenson. James, in other words, works within Stevenson's form to imagine the author's utopic return home. What James imagines here is the end of errancy, the happy resolution of the romance plot.[20]

In the same way that James used the forms of the romance to imagine Stevenson's time abroad, he also used Stevenson and his travels to think about the form of the romance. Stevenson became, in other words, the site for theoretical engagement. Stevenson spent his final years traveling the Pacific and eventually settled in Samoa, where he died in December 1884. In a 1900 review of Stevenson's collected letters, James described these years as filled with "desperate gallantry, burning away, with a finer and finer fire, in a strange, alien air" (Smith 268). His description continues,

> [Stevenson] had, in a singular degree, got what he wanted, the life absolutely discockneyfied, the situation as romantically 'swagger' as if it had been an imagination made real; but his practical anxieties necessarily spin themselves finer, and it is just this production of the thing imagined that has more and more to meet them. It all hung, the situation, by that beautiful golden thread, the swinging of which in the wind, as he spins it in alternate doubt and elation, we watch with much of the suspense and pity with which we sit at the serious drama. (Smith 269)

The thread that James uses to describe the final years of Stevenson's life anticipates a central image in James's formulation of the romance. In his Preface (1907) to *The American* (1877), he writes, "the balloon of experience is in fact of course tied to the earth, and under that necessity we swing, thanks to a rope of remarkable length, in the more or less commodious car of the imagination; but it is by the rope that we know where

[20] In an 1887 letter, James described, "The succession of incidents and places in your [Stevenson's] career [as] ever romantic" (Smith 164).

we are, and from the moment the cable is cut we are at large and unrelated … the art of the romancer is … insidiously to cut the cable, to cut it without our detecting him" (281). The cutting of the cable or golden thread, that moment that represents the development of the romance, also describes Stevenson's death. The two collapse together and the line between James's relationship with Stevenson and his theoretical account of the romance becomes invisible.

James's experiments with the forms of romance are instances of writing in a style not one's own. There are, however, more explicit moments of exchange between the two authors. In a letter written in February 1890, Stevenson described James's story, "The Solution," as "an *exquisite art;* do not be troubled by the shadows of your French competitors: not one … could have done a thing more clean and fine; dry in touch, but the atmosphere … rich with colour and with perfume" (Smith 183-4). A month later, James's response focused on *The Master of Ballantrae*, which he described as the "intensest throb of my literary life" and about which he also writes, "[the novel is] a pure hard crystal … a work of ineffable and *exquisite art*" (Smith 185; italics mine). "Exquisite art" is a moment of intimacy—of gift, receipt and return. The exchange signifies the same thing, and in the same fashion, as a kiss. The trading of the phrase is an affectionate mirroring that reveals both emotional intimacy and the possibility for imagining stylistic exchange as a scene of gifting.

The clarity and detachment of Stevenson's reaction to "The Solution" is met by the emotion, the eroticism, of James's response. In this sense, James shifts the signification of "exquisite art" from critical note to passionate love letter. The tone and meaning of "exquisite art" are, in other words, mobile. This mobility is a characteristic

central to Stevenson and James's experimentation with each other's style—which is, here, a matter of vocabulary. Although trading in language, form and genre, neither author was interested in making the objects of those trades mean the same thing. Thus, if "exquisite art" indicates, as I have said, an affectionate mirroring, it becomes necessary to think about how, exactly, mirroring works in the relationship between Stevenson and James.

In 1885, Stevenson wrote, and eventually published, a poem entitled "Henry James."[21] Sending the poem to James, Stevenson's wife, Franny, wrote to James, "A magic mirror has come to us which seems to reflect not only our own plain faces, but the kindly one of a friend entwined in the midst of all sorts of pleasant memories. Louis felt that verse alone would fitly convey his sentiments concerning this beautiful present, but his muse, I believe, has not as yet responded to his call." Stevenson completed the letter, playfully writing, "As this stage, my wife was (or should have been) removed to an asylum. I have not fallen quite so low, for I reserve my verses. When they go, you will know that Skerrylore lies cold and smokeless, and the mirror represents only the walls and furniture. I scorn to try to express myself in prose. But there is no doubt you are a fine fellow and the mirror lovely" (Smith 111-12). When Stevenson signed the letter, he wrote, "Yours affectionately,†(Hen) Robert Louis Stevenson/ †You see my state of idiocy: I began to sign this 'Henry James': the asylum yawns for me" (112). The "magic mirror" refers to the drafted sections of *Princess Casamassima* that James sent to Stevenson in late 1885. Stevenson's response to these drafts was a poem, which

[21] "Henry James" was published in *Underwoods* in 1887.

addressed James's female characters as much as it did James himself.[22] Several weeks later, Stevenson wrote another letter to James. Written in verse, the letter was, in 1887, published in *Underwoods* with the title "The Mirror Speaks."[23]

Here, then, we have a multitude, a complexity, of mirrors. There is, first, the "magic mirror," *Princess Casamassima*, which reflects, not just its author, but also Stevenson. There is, second, the signature line of Stevenson's poem. Here, James's name is reflected back to him and the letter is momentarily made to look like a diary entry rather than a letter. And, finally, there is Stevenson's second poem, "The Mirror Speaks." Although the poem's title and first line explicitly assert a mirror as the speaker, the speaker is—in the poem's original, epistolary form—Stevenson. Transformed into the "speaking mirror," Stevenson describes himself in the same terms that he describes *Princess Casamassima* and, thus, rewrites himself as the content of James's fiction.

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[22] Who comes to-night? We ope the doors in vain./ Who comes? My bursting walls, can you contain/ The presences that now together throng/ Your narrow entry, as with flowers and song,/ As with the air of life, the breath of talk?/ Lo, how these fair immaculate women walk/ Behind their jocund maker; and we see/ Slighted *De Mauves*, and that far different she,/ *Gressie*, the trivial sphinx; and to our feast/ *Daisy* and *Barb* and *Chancellor* (she not the least!)/ With all their silken, all their airy kin,/ Do like unbidden angels enter in./ But he, attended by these shining names,/ Comes (best of all) himself—our welcome James" (Smith 108).

[23] "Henry James,/ This is what the glass says:/ Where the bells peal far at sea,/ Cunning fingers fashioned me./ There on palace walls I hung/ While that Consuelo sung;/ But I heard, thought I listened well,/ Never a note, never a trill,/ Never a beat of the chiming bell./ There I hung and looked; and there/ In my gray face, faces fair/ Shone from under shining hair./ Well I saw the poising head,/ But the lips moved and nothing said./ And when lights were in the hall,/ Silent moved the dancers all./ So awhile I glowed; and then/ Fell on dusty days and men./ Long I slumbered packed in straw,/ And no one but the dealers saw;/ Till before my silent eye/ One who Sees came passing by./ Now with an outlandish grace,/ To the sparkling fire I face/ In the blue room at Skerryvore;/ And I wait until the door/ Open, and the Prince of men,/ Henry James, shall come again" (Smith 114-5).

The "*magic* mirror"—a designation that encompasses, not just *Princess Casamassima*, but also Stevenson's miswritten subject line and his second poem—provides a means through which to reread the mirroring that takes place with the exchange of "exquisite art." With the proliferation of mirrors that produces the final magic mirror, the difference between original and reflection—which, itself, is transformed into a speaking subject—becomes confused and ultimately lost. This loss describes the way in which Stevenson and James work together and how they experiment with each other's styles. The system of writing in a style not one's own—which we've seen with the exchange of "exquisite art"—demands the deconstruction of causal relationships.

This deconstruction becomes clear as early as 1884. In one of his first letters to James, Stevenson can be seen engaging in what was later described as James's "chronic periphrastic perversity." This wandering, indirect style is matched by Stevenson's privileging of "painful suppressions" in literature:

> Seriously, from the dearth of information and thoughtful interest in the art of literature, those who try to practice it with any deliberate purpose run the risk of finding no fit audience. People suppose it is "the stuff" that interests them; they think, for instance, that the prodigious fine thoughts and sentiments in Shakespeare impress by their own weight, not understanding that the unpolished diamond is but a stone. They think that striking situations, or good dialogue, are got by studying life; they will not rise to understand that they are prepared by deliberate artifice and set off by painful suppressions. (Smith 103)

Stevenson's argument, that the reader is "prepared by deliberate artifice and set off by painful suppressions," is, first, avoided and, second, circled again and again as Stevenson wanders his way toward his final assertion. This wandering, this avoidance of thesis, is propelled by a series of negative statements: "no fit audience," "not understanding," "but a stone," and "they will not rise." This is a particularly Jamesian style; form—

wandering, suppression, negative statements—mirrors Stevenson's eventual assertion that fiction is formed from omission and suppression.

Less then two years later, James reintroduces the theme of suppression—in his letter, written as the "unspeakable"—into the correspondence between the two men. Writing of the "unspeakable Haggard," James described his "unholy indignation" upon reading *She* and *King Solomon's Mines*:

> It isn't nice that anything so vulgarly brutal should be the thing that succeeds most with the English of today. More even that with the contemptible inexpressiveness of the whole thing I am struck with the beastly *bloodiness* of it—or it comes back to the same thing—the cheapness of the hecatombs with which the genial narrative is bestrewn … Such perpetual killing and perpetual ugliness … Quel genre! They seem to me works in which our race and our age make a very vile figure. (128)[24]

The unspeakable, which becomes dramatically and ironically speakable as James launches his attack upon Haggard's work, is as much a prescriptive statement as a complaint. In this diatribe, James asserts suppression as a literary, social and historical ideal. James's logic of suppression expands from the beginning of the passage, where he declares Haggard "unspeakable," to the passage's conclusion, where he claims that Haggard's genre makes a "vile figure" of the late-nineteenth century. This expansion means that, by the end of the passage, James's imagery posits a literary history structured by acts of suppression, acts that make authors like Haggard unspeakable.[25]

These problems with representation, expressiveness and suppression are linked to, and reinforced by, James's vivid description of "the cheapness of the hecatombs with

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[24] James addresses these concerns in "The Future of the Novel" (1899). He writes, "The high prosperity of fiction has marched, very directly, with another 'sign of the times,' the demoralisation, the vulgarisation of literature in general" (Veeder 245).
[25] Three years later James describes Haggard in the following terms: "Rider Haggard is frequent, but has ceased to be importunate; his actuality has gone" (256).

which the genial narrative is bestrewn." Here, James distinguishes sharply between narrative and plot, figuring the narrative as a victim against which crimes of plot are committed. With his description of these plots as "hecatombs," James co-opts and turns on its head the romance revival's allusive privileging of the ancient. Once the historical location for the romance's production of themes of heroism, wandering and quests, the ancient is transformed in James's description into a scene of bloody violence, sacrifice and death. The vocabulary and images of romance are used against the genre, reformed into a central strategy for the discourse that condemns the romance revival.

-"Unrecorded Adventure"-

In 1884, Stevenson wrote to James, "could you not, and might you not, cast your characters in a mold a little more abstract and academic (dear Mrs. Pennyman had already, among your other work, a taste of what I mean), and pitch the incidents, I do not say in any stronger, but in a slightly more emphatic key—as it were an episode from one of the old (so-called) novels of adventure? I fear you will not" (Smith 104).[26] The result of Stevenson's request is "The Pupil" (1891), which, in 1891, Stevenson described reading with "great joy" (Smith 210). However, when James submitted the novella to *Atlantic Monthly*, the magazine's editor, Horace Scudder, quickly rejected the submission, writing, "my reluctant judgment insists upon regarding the story as lacking in interest, in precision and in effectiveness … At any rate I find the structure of the story so weak for carrying the sentiment that I am afraid other readers will be equally dissatisfied,

[26] Mrs. Pennyman (Penniman) is a character in *Washington Square* (1880).

and say hastily—‘vague’—‘unformed’” (Qtd Horne 465).[27] Scudder’s complaint can be reduced to a question of identification; in its vagueness, in its failure to be fully formed, “The Pupil” cannot, at a very basic level, be identified. The question that Scudder cannot answer is: “what is this story?” It cannot be identified as *anything*, and thus lacks interest, precision and effectiveness.

Certainly, James’s story does not look like a response to Stevenson’s request; it does not seem, in other words, like an adventure tale. That “The Pupil” is not, in any discernible way, an adventure story draws attention to the importance of thinking about the story as a critical, rather than purely compliant, answer to Stevenson’s request for an adventure. “The Pupil” should be approached, I think, as a continuation—and, in some sense, the culmination—of the theoretical dialogue that takes place in “The Art of Fiction,” “A Humble Remonstrance” and the correspondence between Stevenson and James. As I have argued, the two authors used the practice of writing in a style not one’s own to develop a method for thinking about, writing, and putting to theoretical use, the romance. I want to think of “The Pupil” as an early attempt to deploy this method—as, in other words, an initial experiment in modernism’s work with the romance.

Past work on “The Pupil” has capitalized, with valuable results, upon Horace Scudder’s anxiety. If, for Scudder, the absence of a clear answer to the question “what, exactly, is this?” makes the story “vague” and “unformed,” it has signified, for twentieth-century critics, a space hospitable to a multitude of different readings and reading styles. Critics like Eve Sedgwick, Fred Kaplan and Leland Persons, for example, have explored

[27] “The Pupil” was instead published in *Longman’s Magazine*.

the eroticism of the relationship between Morgan Moreen and Pemberton.[28] Critics have also explored the relationship between "The Pupil" and twentieth-century cinematic representations of homoeroticism. Michael Moon's work on "The Pupil" discusses the story alongside David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. And Lynda Zwinger takes "The Pupil" as a tutor text for the 1991 Tony Scott film, *The Last Boy Scout*.

Significantly, and in a fashion that speaks to Stevenson and James's privileging of suppression and the unspeakable, scholars like Sedgwick, Zwinger, and Helen Hoy have suggested that "The Pupil" is a work structured by omission and the unspoken. Zwinger suggests that "a full readerly openness to what is not there to speak of might point us to the pervasive presence of the mechanism of disavowal in "The Pupil" … James's tale insidiously suggests to the contrary that disavowal is all there is--that it is a fundamental component of not only sexualities per se but also of the policing mechanism of compulsory heterosexuality as a cultural formation" (669). Zwinger's assertion that the text is "produced by that which isn't there" is supported by Sedgwick's conceptualization of preterition in James's work. "The Pupil," then is a narrative structured by disavowal, by preterition and by the unspeakable.

I want to suggest that running parallel to this kind of disavowal is another, possibly related, form of disavowal; this is the disavowal of the genre of the adventure-romance. For, in this story, adventure is set up as that which cannot be directly spoken. Located at the very margins of the tale, it is a quality to which the narrative constantly refers but never explicitly represents or plots. It is referred to both in temporal terms, as events that take place before or after the time of the story's narrative, and in spatial terms,

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[28] C.f. Philip Horne.

as incidents that occur away from, though often close to, the scenes and settings of "The Pupil." Thus, while not an adventure, James's story is significant in its construction of proximity to the form. This proximity allows the story to take a position of critique. From this position, "The Pupil" sets itself up as both a response to Stevenson's request for an adventure and a consideration of the relationship between James's writings and the late nineteenth-century adventure romance.

In the story's first scene, the narrative introduces Pemberton, a man who "was coming because he had to go somewhere, thanks to the collapse of his fortune at the end of a year abroad, spent on the system of putting his tiny patrimony into a single wave of experience. He had had his full wave, but he couldn't pay his hotel bill" (135). On the subject of this "wave of experience," the text is silent. Pemberton's past, and the adventures "The Pupil" suggests it may contain, is relevant only in its financial implications: he has run out of money and must tutor Morgan Moreen. This oblique reference is met, however, by a refusal to narrate the contents of these adventures. In the story's first lines, then, the adventure tale is constructed as that which can exist only on a narrative horizon. It is made possible at this moment by being unspoken.

This moment is reproduced only moments later, when Pemberton is introduced to Mr. Moreen:

> Mr. Moreen had a white mustache, a confiding manner and, in his buttonhole, the ribbon of a foreign order—bestowed, as Pemberton eventually learned, for services. For what services he never clearly ascertained: that was a point—one of a large number—that Mr. Moreen's manner never confided. What is emphatically did confide was that he was a man of the world. (136)

In the same way that the reader will never discover the precise contents of Pemberton's post-university adventures, Pemberton is unable to discover the nature of Mr. Moreen's

"services," a designation that gestures toward the imperial romances of the 1880s. With the absence of this information, the story's suppression of the adventure, which begins by withholding information from only the reader, expands into the story's plot. In this moment, as Pemberton's lack of knowledge mirrors the reader's, the protagonist comes to stand in for the reader's experience of the adventures contained on the margins of "The Pupil."

Having met Mr. and Mrs. Moreen, Pemberton comes to understand the difficulty of his situation: "he had simply given himself away to a band of adventurers. The idea, the word itself, had a sort of romantic horror for him—he had always lived on such safe lines. Later it assumed a more interesting, almost a soothing, sense: it painted a moral, and Pemberton could enjoy a moral. The Moreens were adventurers not merely because they didn't pay their debts, because they lived on society, but because their whole view of life, dim and confused and instinctive, like that of clever colour-blind animals, was speculative and rapacious and mean" (146). The Moreens, described as "dim" and "confused," refuse clarification and certainty. Pemberton's reaction to "the word itself" deflects the substance of the adventure onto the word. Here, then, the adventure becomes purely, but only vaguely, impressionistic, dramatizing Stevenson's claim that the romance is characterized by "the *impression* of adventure." This impression, though, is, in "The Pupil," of an absent subject.

The sense of having "given himself away to a band of adventurers" accompanies another sense, a feeling that these adventurers, and their adventures, described by Pemberton as "this baffled sojourn," are somehow unknowable and inexplicable:

> A year after Pemberton had come to live with them Mr. and Mrs. Moreen suddenly gave up the villa at Nice. Pemberton had got used to

> suddenness, having seen it practiced on a considerable scale during two jerky little tours—one in Switzerland the first summer, and the other late in the winter, when they all ran down to Florence and then, at the end of ten days, liking it much less than they had intended, straggled back in mysterious depression. They had returned to Nice "for ever," as they said; but this didn't prevent them from squeezing one rainy, muggy May night, into a second-class railway carriage—you could never tell by which class they would travel—where Pemberton helped them to stow away a wonderful collection of bundles and bags. The explanation of this manoeuvre was that they had determined to spend the summer "in some bracing place;" but in Paris they dropped into a small furnished apartment—a fourth floor in a third-rate avenue, where there was a smell on the staircase and the *portier* was hateful—and passed the next four months in blank indigence" (142-3).

Both Pemberton and the reader witness the family's dashes from city to city; any details about the plots that propel these events are, however, absent from the text. The clarification offered by the "explanation of this manoeuvre"—a trip from Nice to Paris—is negated by "but," and Pemberton is left with no sense of the family's motives. The particulars of these adventures—their cause, content and effects—are left "mysterious" and without plot; the family's motives are made completely "blank."[29]

As the Moreens represent through their unknowability the very genre of adventure, it becomes significant that Pemberton's relationship with the family is described in textual, literary terms: "Morgan had been as puzzling as a page in an unknown language—altogether different from the obvious little Anglo-Saxons who had misrepresented childhood to Pemberton. Indeed the whole mystic volume in which the boy had been bound demanded some practice in translation. Today, after a considerable interval, there is something phantasmagoric, like a prismatic reflection or a serial novel, in Pemberton's memory of the queerness of the Moreens" (137). The family, figured

[29] Blanks in James's work have been the subject of significant critical work. See Cohen, Dupee, Felman, Matheson, Ohi, Robbins and Sedgwick. See also James's own assertion in his Preface to *The Turn of the Screw*: "my values are all blanks."

both as a "mystic volume" and a "serial novel," "demand[s]" translation. Equally important, though, is that the family is textualized—and not just textualized, but textualized as a serial novel.[30] Helen Hoy has argued that the significance of the serial novel is in the impossibility of "read[ing] [it] directly or read[ing] [it] whole" (36). And, certainly, hermeneutic practice is frustrated, if not blocked entirely, by the fragmented form of the serial novel—a fact that speaks to Pemberton's inability to comprehend fully the family for which he works. What is most significant about the use of the serial novel here, though, is that the format produces a reading style structured by delay and absence. This is important, not just because the work cannot be read whole, but because it *is* read under exaggerated conditions of deferment. Resolution and explanation exist in a space or time outside the reader's control. Pemberton, then, has little authority over his own knowledge—over what he comes to know of, and understand about, the Moreens.[31]

The family's position as an unknown language or serial novel is reinforced, made literal, by their use of a private language: "they communicated with each other in an ingenious dialect of their own—a sort of spoken cipher, which Pemberton at first took for Volapuk, but which he learned to understand as he would not have understood Volapuk [...] 'It's the family language—Ultramoreen,' Morgan explained to him drolly enough; but the boy rarely condescended to use it himself, though he attempted colloquial Latin as if he had been a little prelate" (138). The family language is at first described as one of the family's "romantic initiations [that] gave their new inmate ... an almost dazzling sense of culture" (138). This "dazzling sense" soon fades and Ultramoreen comes to

[30] See Helen Hoy.
[31] The comparison between the Moreens and the serial novel is emphasized when Pemberton is described as "finding them [the Moreens] out month by month" (139).

represent even more dramatically the Moreen's incomprehensibility and the impassible distance between the family, on the one hand, and Pemberton and the reader, on the other. Here, Morgan serves as the only agent of disclosure, mediating between the family, with their unknown language and adventures, and Pemberton.

Morgan, who from the beginning "appear[s] … to be under the influence of curious intuitions and knowledge," acts as a mode of translation. Although the rest of the Moreen family refuses to confide in Pemberton—and, for that matter, in the reader—Morgan becomes compensatory, claiming to "know all about everything" and "[making] the facts so vivid and so droll, and at the same time so bald and so ugly, that there was fascination in talking them over with him" (156). At the same time that Morgan communicates "facts" to Pemberton, he also comes to play the role of surrogate for both Pemberton and the reader. Discussing with Pemberton the "never confided" facts of his family's existence, Pemberton bursts out, "I don't know what they live on, or how they live, or *why* they live! What have they got and how did they get it? Are they rich, are they poor, or have they a modeste aisance? What are they always chiveying about—living one year like ambassadors and the next like paupers? Who are they, any way, and what are they?" (154) These are the reader's questions, the ones that demand that the contents of the Moreen's adventures be revealed. The answers to these questions give plot, content, to the adventures to which the story frequently refers. Morgan's anticipation and articulation of both the reader and Pemberton's questions situates him as a mediating force, as the figure that translates adventure into a recognizable form for Pemberton and the reader. It is only through Morgan, then, that "The Pupil" confronts, and communicates to the reader, the genre of the adventure.

In his reading of “The Pupil,” Michael Moon describes Morgan as “the most mixed quantity in the story, the figure in it who is neither entirely innocent of the shabbiness or willful moral abjectness of the rest of the Moreen family, nor entirely guilty of it, but rather only tainted or ‘soiled’ with it by unavoidable association” (26). Discussing Morgan’s death, Moon writes, “When Morgan dies at the story’s climax, his body doesn’t end up simply in his tutor’s arms, as it might if the story were just a pederastic idyll …nor does his body end up in his mother’s arms, in the kind of vignette that would anticipate the similar death of little Miles in the arms of his governess at the climax of *The Turn of the Screw*. Rather, the body of the dead boys ends up suspended between his tutor and his mother” (26). If Morgan occupies, as I have argued, the role of translator between the adventure, on the one hand, and Pemberton and the reader, on the other, then what, precisely, happens in the moment and location of his death?

Although Morgan’s death represents the dead of translation, it does not symbolize the death of the adventure in “The Pupil.” Instead, it asserts the incommunicability of the form.

But the adventure itself is never entirely suppressed in James’s story. It is, instead, the not-quite-fully-absent quality, or cause, that enables the narrative. It exists as the object of allusion rather than representation.

James’s interest on the adventure as an untranslatable form is reflected in his Preface (1908) to “The Pupil:”

> We were, all together, of a better romantic age and faith; we referred ourselves, with out highest complacency, to the classic year of the great American-European legend; the years of limited communication, of monstrous and unattenuated contrast, of prodigious and unrecorded adventure. The comparatively brief but infinitely rich ‘cycle’ of romance embedded in the earlier, the very early American reactions and returns …

> what does it resemble today but a gold-mine overgrown and smothered, dislocated, and no longer workable? … The most extraordinary things appear to have happened, during that golden age, in the 'old' countries … to the candid children of the West, things admirably incongruous and incredible; but no story of all the list was to find its just interpreter, and nothing is now more probable than that every key to interpretation has been lost. The modern reporter's big brushes, attached to broom-handles that match the height of his sky-scrapers, would sadly besmear the fine parchment of our missing record. We were to lose, clearly, at any rate, a vast body of precious anecdotes, a long gallery of wonderful portraits, an array of the oddest possible figures in the oddest possible attitudes. The Moreens were of the family then of the great unstudied precursors … I don't pretend really to have 'done' them; all I have given in 'The Pupil' is little Morgan's troubled vision of them as reflected in the vision, also troubled enough, of his devoted friend. (411)

Morgan's death enforces the simulation of unrecorded adventure, and returns "The Pupil" to the "limited communication" upon which the adventure depends. James's assertion, "I don't pretend really to have 'done' them," clarifies his treatment of adventure and, at the same time, responds to Horace Scudder's criticism. The story, rather than *doing* the subject, represents one set of impressions, the "troubled vision," reflected in another set of impressions. For James, it seems, adventure can only be accounted for through reference and impression. The contents of the genre exist, however, on the text's margins—always informing the narrative but never becoming explicit.

In critical work on "The Pupil," Morgan is nearly always discussed in a fashion that makes him, and the meaning he offers, dependent upon, secondary to, or deriving from, Pemberton. In other words, Morgan Moreen is thought of as a "pupil" only relative to Pemberton's existence as the tutor. What if, though, we think of him as a pupil in a more general and critical sense? What if we think of him as a fictional participant in the dialogue between Stevenson and James? James's discussion of adventure in "The Art of Fiction" is helpful here. Taking issue with Walter Besant's assertion that "a story must,

under penalty of not being a story, consist of 'adventures,'" James writes, "This [argument] seems to me to bring the novel back to the hapless little *role* of being an artificial, ingenious thing—bring it down from its large, free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life. And what *is* adventure, when it comes to that, and by what sign is the listening pupil to recognise it?" (Veeder 179) Morgan, then, is that "listening pupil." He embodies the story's relationship with the genre of the adventure, its assertion of the untranslatability of the form. He is thus the critical figure that inhabits "The Pupil," the representative, and fictional deployment, of the dialogue between Stevenson and James.

-Conclusion-

The dialogue between Stevenson and James took place during what is often described as a transitional moment for literature—a moment that sees the rise and fall of the adventure-romance alongside the early developmental moments of modernism. As I discussed in this project's introduction, the critical work that has been done on the relationship between the two forms nearly universally asserts their discreteness. The relationship between Stevenson and James, however, places significant pressure on this division, suggesting instead that modernism and the late-nineteenth century romance were not only mutually constitutive, but were also entirely dependent upon each other for the development of the critical narratives that explained their literary histories.

These critical narratives developed in part from Stevenson and James's practice of writing in a style not one's own. The implications of that practice radiated forward into

the twentieth century, playing a significant role in the work done by E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and, nearly a century later, Alan Hollinghurst. Stevenson and James are ultimately responsible for setting the stage for modernism's work with the romance—or, perhaps, the romance's work in modernism—and for creating the style with which modernism wrote its romance literary history.

CHAPTER TWO

Forster's Chance: *A Room with a View*'s Romance Epistemology

-Introduction: The Circular Room-

In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), Forster imagines literary history as one, synchronic scene. He writes,

> Now for a more important proviso, that of "period or periods." This idea of a period of a development in time, with its consequent emphasis on influences and schools, happens to be exactly what I am hoping to avoid during out brief survey, and I believe that the author of *Gazpacho* would be lenient. Time, all the way through, is to be our enemy. We are to visualize the English novelists not as floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful, but as seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room—all writing their novels spontaneously. They do not, as they sit there, think, "I think under Queen Victoria, I under Anne, I carry on the tradition of Trollope, I am reacting against Aldous Huxley." The fact that their pens are in their hands is far more vivid to them. They are half-mesmerized, their sorrows and joys are pouring out through the ink, they are approximated by the act of creation. (9)

Narratives of cause-and-effect hold no interest for Forster as he thinks about how literature works. Causality is for him a runaway train, a sui generis force that robs individuals of their artistic agency. Forster links history and influence to this loss of agency; if one thinks about literature, Forster argues, in terms of history, author are left "floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful."

Chance, in its meaning as coincidence, is set up as an alternative to this disenfranchising narrative of history. Having rejected outright the historicity of

literature, progress, development, influence and reaction are transformed into simultaneity. The entirety of literary history is compacted, flattened, into one physical space occupied by all authors. This is a space of dramatized chance. In this scene of communal and a-historic artistic action, we might imagine Shakespeare working elbow-to-elbow with Conrad, who borrows a sheet of paper from, and directs a nasty, jealous glare toward, Austen.

Later, in a critique of Eliot's writing on tradition, Forster writes,

> Let me quote here for our comfort from my immediate predecessor in this lectureship, Mr. T.S. Eliot. Mr. Eliot enumerates, in the introduction to *The Sacred Wood*, the duties of the critic. "It is part of his business to preserve tradition—where a good tradition exists. It is part of his business to see literature steadily and to see it whole; and this is eminently to see it *not* as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time." The first duty we cannot perform, the second we must try to perform. We can neither examine nor preserve tradition. But we can visualize the novelists as sitting in one room, and force them, by our very ignorance, from the limitations of date and place. I think that this is worth doing, or I should not have ventured to undertake this course. (23; italics in original)

Taken together, these two descriptions lend chance a double valence. It is, first, a compositional quality, an ideal way for authors to imagine themselves, their works and their relationships with other authors. Chance is, second, a critical property; Forster asks his readers to read through chance, to privilege that element that is normally suppressed or abjected from critical-historical discourse.

In Forster's work, the romance operates through chance. In early forms of the romance, chance comes with a significant, almost negating, caveat: the divine or fate. Chance may look like just chance in the romance narrative, but it is underwritten by a metanarrative of the divine, an element that transforms chance into sacred chance. Forster, however, removes the explanatory framework offered by the sacred and

remodels chance into a *secular* chance. By replacing plots of sacred chance with plots of secular chance, Forster secularizes the romance. This secular romance engages in two projects in Forster's work: first, it constructs a romance literary history and, second, it theorizes a style of reading structured by the forms of the romance. Together, these two projects combine to create a romance epistemology. Broadly, the term comes to mean a way of thinking about the world, literature and history that is grounded in the forms of the romance—forms traditionally regarded as anathema to critical engagement. For Forster, this epistemology is characterized by using the figure of chance to understand literary texts and histories.

Forster's work with chance can be positioned in relationship to Lukács's claim that, "without chance all narration is dead and abstract. No writer can portray life if he eliminates the fortuitous. On the other hand, in his representation of life he must go beyond crass accident and elevate chance to the inevitable" (112). Chance, if left to chance, comes to look like "crass accident." Thus, the transformation of chance into the inevitable, which is also a shift from description to narration, addresses issues of priority and significance; thus, the erasure of chance is, for Lukács, one of the means through which a literary work goes about its production of meaning. It is also the repressed, or abjected, other to critical engagement. Barbara Johnson's oft used, and frequently co-opted, phrase, "surely it is no coincidence" speaks to this perceived necessity for chance's expulsion. The very premise of a critical engagement ruled by a hermeneutics of suspicion demands that chance never be simply chance; instead, there must always be something happening beneath the text's surface, some hidden motivation or explanatory principle that allows insight into the text.

Forster, however, is disinterested in the elevation or erasure of chance. He wants instead to think of chance, as *just* chance, as meaningful, as possessing the ability to engage in critical work. He is invested, in other words, in transforming chance from a critical liability to an asset, a term through which we might think about literature and literary history. I am interested in how this term plays out in Forster's fiction—how, in other words, his novels expand upon the theory of literature he offers in *Aspects of the Novel*. To think about Forster's use of chance to theorize both literary history and critical reading as romances, this chapter focuses on *A Room with a View* (1911) and explores Forster's use of chance to think about how literature works. In addition to considering several instances of chance, and how they work in the novel, I discuss two texts contained within the novel and argue that these works provide scripts for a theoretically rigorous account of chance. In my conclusion, I argue that Forster uses chance to negotiate two of the oppositions central to literary criticism: surface/depth and distance/proximity and develops what I want to call "chancey reading," a mode of critical engagement that reads literature through the forms of the romance.

-Moments of Chance-

By focusing on *A Room with a View*, this chapter turns away from the more obvious choice, *A Passage to India*—the text most often considered within the framework of the romance and, more specifically, the imperial romance. In readings of Forster's 1924 novel, critics suggest that the imperial romance is set up as an object of desire. Maria Davidis describes Adela Quested's longing to discover the "real India" as a "desire for

imperial romance," but suggests that the plot of *A Passage to India* represents the frustration of that desire. Similarly, Jed Esty refers to "the epistemological obstacles of imperialism that lead to muffled fantasies and thwarted romance" (78). For Davidis, the frustration of the romance is the means through which Forster critiques the colonial relationship between Britain and India. These terms might just as easily be reversed, though, so that *A Passage to India*'s account of British India may be read as a means of rethinking and rewriting the romance.

While *A Passage to India* certainly engages with the romance, this engagement is in service, as Davidis points out, of social critique. I am more interested in thinking about how Forster uses the forms of the romance—namely, chance—to think about literature itself. In this regard, *A Room with a View* offers a much more sustained account of the romance. This account begins with several chance events. The first of these involves Lucy Honeychurch, who, while taking part in an expedition into the Italian countryside, escapes from her tour group and directs the Italian guide to lead her to Reverend Beebe. Here, in a novel filled with accidental meetings and chance events, occurs one of the novel's most substantial and meaningful accidents. Lucy's search for Beebe is interrupted when she slips and falls, landing on a grassy ledge several feet below:

> The view was forming at last; she could discern the river, the golden plain, other hills.
>
> "Eccolo!" he [the guide] exclaimed.
>
> At the same moment the ground gave way, and with a cry she fell out of the wood. Light and beauty enveloped her. She had fallen to a little open terrace, which was covered with violets from end to end.
>
> "Courage!" cried her companion, now standing some six feet above. "Courage and love."

> She did not answer. From her feet the ground sloped sharply into view … this terrace was the well-head, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth.
>
> Standing at its brink, like a swimmer who prepares, was the good man. But he was not the good man she had expected, and he was alone.
>
> George had turned at the sound of her arrival. For a moment he contemplated her, as one who had fallen out of heaven. He saw radiant joy in her face, he saw the flowers beat against her dress in blue waves. The bush above them closed. He stepped quickly forward and kissed her.
>
> Before she could speak, almost before she could feel, a voice called, "Lucy! Lucy! Lucy!" The silence of life had been broken by Miss Bartlett, who stood brown against the view. (73)

Lucy's physical fall marks the presence of the romance. The ledge onto which Lucy falls is a space of concentrated plot, a moment that both delays and accelerates the plot's movement. Lucy falls; George spots her and, suddenly, a kiss. On the ledge, plot is accelerated. The novel rushes to become fully expressive, to communicate to the reader everything about the relationship between Lucy and George—to attempt, in other words, to say everything at once. Fittingly, the scene's language and imagery also strives toward the communication of complete meaning. For Lucy's descent designates a plunge into a space of overdetermined meaning. George stands at the "brink" of the terrace, which is, itself, described as a "well-head, [a] primal source." The language suffused the kiss with erotic meaning that positions it—although not explicitly, still clearly—as the initiating moment of a narrative of sexual development.

In the same way that the terrace is a "well-head," this scene also operates as the primal source for the plot of *A Room with a View*, the material from which the rest of the novel develops. The physical environment in which George and Lucy meet is, in other words, analogous to how the scene works in the novel. It sets the stage for the novel's plot, producing a moment, a space, of origins. The deployment, a priori, of the terms of psychoanalysis transforms the scene into *A Room with a View*'s subconscious. The

guide's call, "Eccolo," justifies this scene as a source, or subconscious, for the rest of the novel; for "lo" identifies both "he" and "it." The guide's exclamation, then, means both "here it is"—an assertion that characterizes, we assume, the view, and "here he is"—which points to George rather than the view. Translated less literally, "eccolo" becomes a directive: "look!" or "pay attention!" With this call, the shift from the descriptive to the prescriptive hails both Lucy and the reader, demands close attention, and, with the reference both to "he" and "it," conflates objects of attention.

Lucy's fall and the kiss she exchanges with George: this moment mirrors, inverts, an earlier scene. Exploring the Piazza Signoria, Lucy's wandering are interrupted by a murder:

> Two Italians by the Loggia had been bickering about a debt. "Cinque lire," they had cried, "cinque lire!" They sparred at each other, and one of them was hit lightly upon the chest. He frowned; he bent towards Lucy with a look of interest, as if he had an important message for her. He opened his lips to deliver it, and a stream of red came out between them and trickledown his unshaven chin. (48)

This moment prompts the first substantial meeting between George and Lucy. Upon seeing the dying Italian, Lucy faints. "George Emerson happened to be a few paces away," and Lucy falls into George's arms (48). As if anticipating the weight of their later meeting, Lucy's reaction to the murder simulates the death of that unfortunate Italian. For the very moment the victim is stabbed, a "crowd rose out of the dusk. It hid this extraordinary man from her, and bore him away to the fountain" (48). Although the Italian's death is hidden from both Lucy and the reader, Lucy's collapse imagines and reconstructs that death: "the palace itself grew dim, swayed above her, fell on to her softly, slowly, noiselessly, and the sky fell with it" (48). Her fall initiates physical and intimate contact; for when she opens her eyes, George is holding her. In both this scene

and the scene of the kiss, a physical fall sets the stage for a "descent" into melodrama. The erotic gesture of the kiss reflects, speaks back to, the only half-witnessed violence of the murder.

After everyone has returned to England, Reverend Beebe, George and Freddy Honeychurch bathe together in a pond. Walking to the pond, the men first "climb down a slippery bank of pine needles" (148). This scene plays out as one of risk, as a space that straddles the divide between chaos and control. Their climb down to the pond also produces a scene of "play" (150). Here, in the water, George becomes unbound: "then all the forces of youth burst out. He smiled, flung himself at them, splashed them, ducked them, kicked them, muddied them, and drove them out of the pool" (150). The men get out of the pond and are discovered by Lucy, Mrs. Honeychurch and Cecil Vyse. George reacts by "scud[ing] away down the path to the pond," a gesture that reproduces the move that initiated the scene (151).

These scenes of falling and descent offer a space within which to examine Forster's fascination and engagement with the idea of chance. For, in each of these scenes, Forster represents the playing out of different forms of chance. When Lucy slips into her romantic meeting with George, causality and individual agency separate from each other, producing a scene that is a chance encounter. Here, the loss of agency that characterizes chance is figured in terms and images of sexual risk. Lucy chances (she falls) into a situation and then must take a chance (she takes a risk). Similarly, when Beebe, George and Freddy bathe together, chance is risk and, more importantly, erotically-charged risk. Forster's brand of chance insists on remaining a multivalent term, signifying, at the same time, an apparent lack of cause, an opportunity that "comes

in one's way (here conceived of as either an accident or a moment of luck), and the presence of risk ("to take a chance").

The word "chance" derives from the Latin, "cadentia," and denotes a fall. Through these falls, these moments of chance, Forster forms narratives that are structured by the suppression of causality and driven by risk and the instability of individual agency. In these moments, chance comes to do the work of the romance. As much as the romance is structured by the quest narrative, it is, also and as importantly, driven by the disruption of these narratives. The romance hero chances upon adventures that interrupt, or divert him from, the original and intended quest. Forster's description of Florence in *A Room with a View* offers a way to think about this narrative pattern: "the well-known world had broken up, and there emerged Florence, a magic city where people thought and did the most extraordinary things" (64). This breaking up of the expected is precisely how chance operates in the romance. Chance is that which explicitly combines progress and delay into one event or figure. Lucy's fall onto the ledge, for example, interrupts her tour of the Italian countryside. But it takes another interruption—"Miss Bartlett stood brown against the view"—to obstruct the disruption, the kiss, produced by chance.

-Rewriting *A Room with a View*-

A Room with a View represents two texts: the first, which remains only a potential work, is Reverend Beebe's *History of Coincidence*. The second, which is published and popular, is Miss Lavish's *Under the Loggia*. Both of these texts offer mediations on chance, are meta-texts though which we can read the work of chance in *A Room with a*

View, and ultimately contribute in important ways to Forster's description of the circular room. Being entirely different sort of works, these two fictional texts rewrite *A Room with a View* in very different ways. Beebe's work produces a discourse that debates the relationship between coincidence, or chance, and fate. Miss Lavish's novel steals form the "real" world of Forster's novel and represents in fictionalized—and, most significantly, melodramatic—terms the relationship between Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson. While *History of Coincidence* reformulates in explicitly theoretical terms the work being done with chance in *A Room with a View*, *Under the Loggia* dramatizes this work. In this sense, both Beebe and Lavish's works are mirror texts, re-presenting Forster's novel and telling us quite a bit about the ways in which chance is being defined and deployed.

Beebe's *History of Coincidence* provokes the following conversation between Beebe and George Emerson:

> "When I was a young man, I always meant to write a 'History of Coincidence'."
>
> No enthusiasm.
>
> "Though, as a matter of fact, coincidences are much rarer than we suppose. For example, it isn't purely coincidentality that you are here now, when one comes to reflect."
>
> To his relief, George began to talk.
>
> "It is. I have reflected. It is Fate. Everything is Fate. We are flung together by Fate, drawn apart by Fate—flung together, drawn apart. The twelve winds blow us—we settle nothing—"
>
> "You have not reflected at all," rapped the clergyman. "Let me give you a useful tip, Emerson: attribute nothing to fate. Don't say, 'I didn't do this," for you did it, ten to one. Now I'll cross-question you. Where did you first meet Miss Honeychurch and myself?"
>
> "Italy."
>
> "And where did you meet Mr. Vyse, who is going to marry Miss Honeychurch?"
>
> "National Gallery."
>
> "Looking at Italian art. There you are, and yet you talk of coincidence and fate! You naturally seek out things Italian, and so do we

> and our friends. This narrows the field immeasurably, and we meet again in it."
>
> "It is fate that I am here," persisted George. "But you can call it Italy if it makes you less unhappy."
>
> Mr. Beebe slid away from such heavy treatment of the subject. […]
>
> "And so for this and for other reasons my 'History of Coincidence' is still to write." (147)

On the matter of coincidence, George Emerson and Reverend Beebe disagree with each other. The terms of that disagreement are, however, unclear. Reverend Beebe does not believe in coincidence or, by extension, it seems, fate. But George's initial assertion—"it is"—connotes a belief in coincidentality. His next statement, "[i]t is Fate," confuses the situation. For fate—significantly, "Fate" rather than "fate"—suggests the opposite of coincidence. On the one hand, fate represents order and predetermination. It is the imposition of an organizing structure; events are laid out, organized, according to a greater, transcendent, principle. Fate is, in other words, the projection of an explicit and immoveable teleology onto a series of events.

Coincidence, on the other hand, is, as a form of chance, accidental and unintended. Like chance, it derives from a Latin word "incidere," which means "to fall." In contrast to George's formulation, for Beebe, coincidental events, unlike events produced by fate, do not occur within a single causal system. There is no transcendent principle. Coincidence cannot prove anything; it is definitionally incapable of being evidence of anything and is a purely negative state. The only commonality between coincidence and fate is in both terms' denial of individual agency. With fate, a larger force is responsible for flinging people together and drawing them apart. With coincidence, it is accident—and, ultimately, chaos—that does the flinging and drawing. In neither case does the individual have any determinative power. Wholly passive and

powerless, the individual is transformed from an active subject into an object upon which action is enacted.

Despite all of these differences, George conflates coincidentality and fate, so that the appearance of coincidence, of chance events, is a sign of fate. But this is a modified fate—one that establishes coincidence as part of a causal system and, most importantly, makes it narratable and explicable. Coincidence is proof of a greater pattern, of the guiding logic of fate or, even, of a guiding logic. Chaos is replaced. We might think of George's bringing together of fate and coincidence as an imaginary response to Leland Monk's assertion that chance marks the limits of literary narrative. With George's reformulation, chance is no longer an outer boundary, or impassable obstacle, for literary narrative. Instead, it becomes another strategy, a form that can be put to use in the development of these literary narratives.

Although Mr. Beebe takes the opposite position, his figuration of coincidence is as interesting, and productive, as George's. When Beebe imagines that coincidence is rare "when one comes to reflect," he frames a belief in coincidence in terms of reflex and an unwillingness to reflect or think critically. Here, then, chance and coincidence represent the failures of both imagination and logic. Coincidence cannot stand up to the pressure of logical thinking, the lack of which Beebe accuses George when he "cross-question[s]" the young man. This cross-examination—done in a procedural, nearly Socratic form—strives to show George that the events he marks as coincidence/chance/fate can be accounted for by processes of deductive thought. The events that George describes are, in other words, part of a logical chain of occurrence: *if* both George Emerson and Reverend Beebe enjoy Italian things, *then* they are likely to

meet in Italy. And *if* both George Emerson and Cecil Vyse appreciate Italian art and both of them happen to be in London, *then* they are likely to meet in the National Gallery. This is, according to Beebe, what replaces chance: a process of logical deduction—a series of "if's" and "then's"—a process of cause and consequence.

But, in the end, and in a particularly Fosterian move, Reverend Beebe "slid[es] away from such heavy treatment of the subject." The passage deals directly with coincidence, provides some of the novel's most explicit thinking on the subject, and then backs away from the discussion, undermining the work accomplished by the conversation between the two men. This inclination toward undermining his own ideas is clear from the beginning of the conversation, when Beebe offers up the title of his unwritten work and then says, "[t]hough, as a matter for fact, coincidences are much rarer than we suppose." Beebe undercuts his own project, transforming a history of coincidence into a non-history of coincidence—a gesture that reflects the paradoxical *appearance* of a history of coincidence. For how can coincidence, a term for simultaneity, be fully historicized? However much Beebe may undermine his own work, the very idea of a "history of coincidence" is enough to suggest that coincidence *does not* make impossible the existence of historical narrative; instead, Beebe's text suggests the possibility for romance history—one that rejects patterns of influence and effect but that is capable of accommodating coincidence and chance.

Reverend Beebe's *History of Coincidence*, and the discussion it produces, is a sort of mirror text in, and of, *A Room with a View*. And, for a moment, Forster's novel is transformed into an interpretive text. As Beebe and George Emerson debate coincidence, *A Room with a View* becomes the text that analyzes, or critiques, the fictional text that

exists within it. Conversely, Beebe's work offers up a particular interpretive path that might be taken in and with Forster's novel. And so Beebe's work provides both the theoretical structure for chance and coincidence in the novel and a reading of this structure, formalizing much of what occurs in the novel's plot. *History of Coincidence* develops the foundation for the work that is done in, and with, *A Room with a View*'s second rewriting, or mirror, text, Miss Lavish's *Under the Loggia*.

Miss Lavish has been witness to, and complicating participant of, many of Lucy Honeychurch's experiences in Florence. She is there when Lucy and George meet for the first time. She accompanies the group on their trip into the Italian countryside. And after their return to England, Lucy, Charlotte Bartlett—who has been funneling information to Miss Lavish—and George Emerson discover that Miss Lavish has written a novel about these experiences. The discovery is gradual and building, a sort of drama in its own right.

> The sun rose higher on its journey … Its rays fell on the ladies … on Mr. Beebe down at Summer Street as he smiled over a letter from Miss Catherine Alan; on George Emerson cleaning his father's boots; and lastly, to complete the catalogue of memorable things, on the red book mentioned previously. The ladies move, Mr. Beebe moves, George moves, and movement may engender shadow. But this book lies motionless, to be caressed all the morning by the sun and to raise its covers slightly, as though acknowledging the caress.
> [...]
> Lucy picked up the book and glanced at the title listlessly, *Under the Loggia*. She no longer read novels herself, devoting all her spare time to solid literature in the hope of catching Cecil up.
> […]
> [T]he novel that [Cecil] was reading was so bad that he was obliged to read it aloud to others. He would stroll round to the precincts of the court and call out: "I say, listen to this, Lucy. Three split infinitives."
> "Dreadful!" said Lucy … When they had finished their set, he still went

> on reading; there was some murder scene, and really everyone must listen to it. (171, 180)

The inclusion of a copy of *Under the Loggia* into this montage transforms the melodramatic novel, however momentarily, into a character. The book's position is narrated alongside, and in contrast to, the position of other characters. This montage brings into one narrative moment all of the novel's primary characters. This cinematic moment, this montage, represents the strategic narrative deployment of coincidence, in the way that Beebe defines the term.

At the same time, the book is immediately set off from the novel's characters, its difference asserted with the word "but." Lucy, George, Beebe: all of these character move; they are in action. But the book is motionless, creating a particularly cinematic moment. The characters—whose movement engenders shadow and who, therefore, exist in the margins of this scene—are simply contextualizing figures for the book. This complete focus on *Under the Loggia* sets the book up as an object of attention and, by extension, an object of *critical* attention.

Under the Loggia is a melodramatic re-reading of Forster's novel. *A Room with a View* possesses an inclination toward melodrama, an inclination expressed in the scenes of the murder and the murder. *Under the Loggia*, however, expands upon this impulse, nurturing, rather than obstructing, the inclination toward this sort of drama. Even the author's name supports this way of thinking; "Lavish" suggests, of course, excess and the baroque—qualities that constitute the melodramatic imagination. Lavish's pseudonym, "Joseph Emery Prank," explicitly admits to fraudulence and trickery and shadows the relationship between *A Room with a View* and *Under the Loggia*. For, with both

“Lavish” and “Prank,” *Under the Loggia* becomes a convoluted and frivolous re-reading of *A Room with a View*.

When Cecil reads a passage of *Under the Loggia*, Lucy realizes immediately that the novel—published, appropriately, under the pseudonym “Joseph Emery Prank”—is written by Miss Lavish and is about Lucy’s experiences in Florence. The title of Lavish’s novel re-reads and consequently restructures a reading of *A Room with a View*. Both titles refer to locations and to specific scenes in Forster’s novel. “A room with a view” refers to the room that Lucy inhabits in Italy. During her time staying in this room, Lucy gazes from the windows, engaging in tourism from afar. The key word here is “afar.” The title suggests a perspective of distance—both physical and intellectual—in relationship to the novel’s plot. The title of Miss Lavish’s novel, however, shifts the perspective to one of proximity and involvement. For “under the loggia” describes the scene of the murder that facilitates Lucy and George’s first significant meeting. And so, if the title of Forster’s novel signifies a sort of narrative remove, than the title of Miss Lavish’s novel negates this distance, re-orienting the novel, from the outset, around one of the novel’s most dramatic and violent moments. In its transformation of distance into proximity, *Under the Loggia* lays the groundwork for *A Room with a View*’s development of a method of “chancey reading”—that is, a mode of reading structured by the forms of the romance.

-Chancey Reading-or A Romance of Reading-

Of E.M. Forster, Katherine Mansfield claimed, "E.M. Forster never gets any further than warming the teapot … He's a rare fine hand at that. Feel this teapot. Is it not beautifully warm? Yes, but there ain't going to be no tea." Similarly, P.N. Furbank described Forster as "the great simplifier." Moderating these claims, Zadie Smith writes, "to love Forster is to reconcile oneself to the admixture of banality and brilliance." In these descriptions, we find the impression that Forster is all surface, that he is incapable of reaching "the heart of the matter." I am interested in how these complaints might form the basis for Forster's critical brilliance, rather than uselessness. I want to suggest that Forster uses chance to flatten two oppositions that are central to critical discourse: distance/proximity and surface/depth. By making chance central to his mode of critical reading, Forster formulates a romance of reading, a form of reading structured by accidents, intimate encounters, and risk.

Given Forster's unapologetic drive to make it seem as if there is nothing concealed beneath the surfaces of his novels, critics are left with a choice: we may read suspiciously or we may take the opposite approach and, in Sharon Marcus's words "just read." Do we pay close attention to the text's surface, or are we motivated by the Jamesonian ideal of retrieving the absent-cause that resides beneath a text's surface? Do we read with or against the grain? And are we paranoid readers? Or should we take a cue from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and strive for practices of reparative readins?

On the whole, critics have chosen to read suspiciously and to focus on the depths of Forster's work. Attention is turned toward what goes unsaid and undone. The critic

attends vigilantly to the text's absences, gaps and silences. To read Forster in this fashion is, in part, to engage in a recuperative project. For his novels may seem, at first reading, simple things. And although we know that his novels are not in fact simple, they maintain a quality of approachability, friendliness—creating the appearance, in other words, of a dialogue between friends.

In their introduction to *Queer Forster* (1997)—a collection that has most evocatively illustrated the hermeneutics of suspicion applied to Forster's novels—Robert Martin and George Piggford describe the period following the publication of *A Passage to India* (1924) as a time of "fictional silence" (16). This phrase is particularly apt when considering the suspicion, the desire to retrieve what is concealed beneath the text's surface, with which we most often confront Forster's work. For the phrase suggests, appropriately, two things at once and also introduces us to the discursive framework within which Forster is most often considered. This "fictional silence" refers, first and most literally, to the period during which Forster does not publish fiction; he is, in other words, silent in regards to literature. Second, this "fictional silence" signifies the artifice, the duplicity—and, most importantly, the theoretical significance, of what Forster *does not* write. There is something essentially false about this silence. There is a message to be deciphered from what Forster does not do; his lack of writing can be read in the same way that his writing can be read; there is meaning in absence.

All of this suspicion situates criticism of Forster's work at the center of what Rita Felski calls "the animating spirit" of modern criticism: "the conviction that appearances deceive and that texts do not willingly surrender their secrets. Instead of being emblazoned in the words on the page, meaning lies beneath or to the side of these

words, encrypted in what the literary work cannot or will not say, in its eloquent stuttering and recalcitrant silences" (28). This focus on silence is the basis of the procedure of suspicious reading. And this type of reading begins with a moment of doubt (Ricouer 30). This is to approach the literary text in negative terms and with a critical wariness.

This style of reading has been, as Michael Warner points out, completely naturalized into critical discourse. Warner describes this critical discourse as being defined by "the clear opposition between the text object and the reading subject [and] … a text that must be objectified as a benchmark of distanciation" (15). Critical reading is thus underwritten by two sets of opposites: proximity/distance and surface/depth, with distance and suspicion characterizing critical reading.

Recently, there has been quite a bit of discussion about the alternatives to symptomatic—or, as Sedgwick calls it, paranoid—reading. The assertion of a need for an alternative is not recent; in 1966, Susan Sontag called for a type of reading that is something other than a process of deciphering. Her final suggestion—that an "erotics of art" should replace "a hermeneutics"—is a prefatory statement to what is happening now. In *Between Women* (2007), Marcus opts out of symptomatic reading, choosing instead to develop a method she calls "just reading." This style of reading "attends to what texts make manifest on their surface." Similarly, and earlier, Sedgwick calls for a "reparative reading" that would replace paranoid reading.

These various and isolated arguments culminate in a special issue of *Representations* in 2009, entitled "How We Read Now." In the issue's introduction, Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best describe the state of affairs: "[i]n the last decade or so,

we have been drawn to modes of reading that attend to the surfaces of texts rather than plumb their depth. Perhaps this is because, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, so much seems to be on the surface" (1-2). Arguing for the critical salience of "surfaces," Best and Marcus summarize one of the goals of the special issue with the question: "what [might it] mean to stay close to our objects of study" (15)? And, in the epilogue to the volume, Elaine Freedgood and Emily Apter describe the transformation that they see taking place: "the recalcitrant, mystified, out-of-control, and conflicted text of Marxist-psychoanalytic reading has been replaced by texts that are friendly, frank, generous, self-conscious, autocritiquing and unguarded" (139). The latter text here—the friendly, frank, generous text—sounds precisely like one of Forster's novels. The rejection of coincidence is central to the critical enterprise of symptomatic reading. We might go so far as to say that the endeavor of literary criticism is grounded in the rejection of coincidence and chance. Barbara Johnson's phrase—"surely it is no coincidence"—is once again useful. Critical inquiry develops from the realization that coincidence is not actually coincidence. But here is the question that Forster's work poses: what if it is a coincidence? But what if a coincidence is not *just* a coincidence? What if chance and coincidence are not qualities to be ignored or bracketed away from critical procedure? What if they're an important and determinative part of that critical practice?

Forster's novels, however, insist in part upon what Michael Warner calls "uncritical reading" and trouble the distinctions between proximity/distance and surface/depth. His novels invite, instead, forms of the uncritical: "identification, self-forgetfulness, reverie, sentimentality, enthusiasm, literalism, aversion, distraction" (15).

The way Forster approaches Jane Austen is useful here. He writes, “She is my favorite author! I read and re-read, the mouth open and the mind closed” (*Abinger* 148). The intimacy of this passage is striking. Forster strives to connect, both emotionally and intellectually, with Austen. There is, in other words, a kind of sentimentality to Forster’s approach to the authors of whom he writes.

If, as Warner asserts, critical reading takes place within the discursive framework of subject formation, then Forster’s work—that work which actively and unapologetically encourages uncritical reading—promotes the formation of a different sort of reading subject. By putting pressure upon the value, the utility, of critical distance, Forster argues for a relationship between reader and text that is grounded upon the ideals of proximity and intimacy. The reader that Forster wants is not, perhaps, the reader that modernism, as a generalized body of literature, wants. Forster’s work seeks to produce a very particular kind of subjectivity out of the reader. This is a subjectivity that strives to negate the distance between reader and text and that feels the experience of reading as well as *thinking* that experience.

I want to suggest that Forster does important work with chance. He theorizes chance as an alternative hermeneutic—one that negotiates the opposing claims of distance/proximity and surface/depth. *A Room with a View* is particularly active in this project. The novel uses the concept of chance to deconstruct this assumed difference between critical and uncritical reading. It offers an alternative third term—so that engagement with a literary work is no longer a choice between critical and uncritical. This third term—this alternative mode of reading—is a practice I want to call “chancy reading.”

Judith Scherer Hertz's work gives insight into this mode of reading. In "The Double Nature of Forster's Fiction: *A Room with a View* and *The Longest Journey*" (1978), Hertz discusses the suppressed sexual energies in Forster's work and the extent to which he is "able to control and manipulate the tensions generated by the collision of surface plot and under plot" (85). Hertz's image of collision suggests that the relationship between surface plot and under plot is ultimately irresolvable, that Forster is able only to control that tension. I would suggest, however, that chance allows for the resolution of that tension, that scenes of accidents, risk, and the absence of agency give us a way of collapsing together both surface and depth and distance and proximity.

Suspicious reading practices see multiple textual layers and liken interpretation to excavation. Surface reading sees the text as a single layer and, meaningfully, seems to have no metaphor for interpretation. Chancy reading, however, treats the text as a space of co-existent threads. It occupies the space between surface and depth, distance and proximity. The particular way in which Forster develops this concept of chancy reading makes it similar to suspicious reading insofar as it is a genred practice. Suspicious reading exists within the conventions of the mystery or drama; and chancy reading works within the patterns of the literary romance, so that the practice can be thought of also as a sort of romance of reading. A chancy reading wanders its way through the text; it is wistful and driven by desire. Chancy reading does not demand revelation or closure. It treats both the text and its own practices as necessarily incomplete. Reading with, and for, chance allows for critical reading without mastery. With this giving up of mastery

over the literary work, chancy reading also recognizes the inconclusiveness of both that work and any interpretive project.

CHAPTER THREE

Romance Wanderings: Woolf's Counterfactual Histories

-Introduction-

Woolf's "Phases of Fiction," published the same year as *A Room of One's Own*, introduces the dilemma articulated by a Woolfian history. In the essay's opening lines, Woolf describes the reader's mind: "It was allowed to read what it liked. It was not, that is to say, asked to read historically, nor was it asked to read critically. It was asked to read only for interest and pleasure … It went its way … independent of time and reputation. It read Trollope before it read Jane Austen and skipped, by chance or negligence, some of the most celebrated books in English fiction" (*E5*: 40-1). In the stead of a historical narrative, "Phases of Fiction" develops a system of classification—dividing literature into "the truth-tellers," "the romantics," "the character-mongers and comedians," "the psychologists," "the satirists and fantastics," and "the poets"—but denies or ignores the historicity of these categories. The independence of the reader's mind depends upon the absence of historical constraints. The title's historical,

developmental claim is challenged, therefore, by the text of the essay, which idealizes a radically and defiantly *non*-historical engagement with literature.[32]

With the title and text's competing assertions, Woolf's essay asks: can the claims of subjectivity be reconciled to the requirements of historical narrative? How can individual consciousness—whether that individual is the reader, the historian, or the object of historical study—be accounted for by history? How, in other words, can historical practice record that which can be only partially—if, in fact, at all—recorded? "Phases of Fiction" is a preliminary response to the problem that historical practice poses for Woolf's life-long investment in developing ways to represent subjectivity. The essay offers neither an answer nor a clear foundation for the development of an answer. If anything, by refusing to address the conflict between title and text, "Phases of Fiction" suggests the impossibility of, or the lack of necessity for, reconciliation.

Feminist critics of Woolf's work have discussed at length this tension between Woolf's investment in subjectivity, on the one hand, and the constraints of traditional historical practice, on the other.[33] The tension has most often been framed as a social and political problem. I want to approach the same question via a different, though complementary, route and think about Woolf's work with subjectivity and historical practice in formal terms, paying close attention to the narrative forms that correspond to the dilemma articulated by "Phases of Fiction." Of these forms, the counterfactual, as a figure that dominates Woolf's non-fiction, offers the best insight into Woolf's

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[32] See Anne Fernald's "Pleasure and Belief in 'Phases of Fiction'." Fernald suggests that "Phases of Fiction" "proposes a theory of the novel based on the pleasure of reading" (192). See also Beth Carole Rosenberg's reading of "Phases" in "Virginia Woolf's Postmodern Literary." History"

[33] See Cuddy-Keane, Hotho-Jackson, Rosenberg and Showalter, among many others.

conceptualization of historical practice. Woolf's counterfactual is structured by wandering, associative logic and the subjunctive verb form—all forms central to the literary romance. I want to suggest that, with the counterfactual and the forms that underwrite it, Woolf transforms historical narrative into romance narrative. To put it another way, Woolf deploys the forms of the literary romance to rewrite history.

Woolf's counterfactual is a way of conceiving of and narrating history, a method that offers an alternative to historical study's expected question, "what was?" Instead, the counterfactual asks: "what if?" This question makes no claims to objectivity and flatly rejects the scientific, empirical method valorized by nineteenth and early-twentieth-century historians.[34] Woolf's use of the counterfactual is guided by a utopian impulse, so that "what if?" becomes equivalent to "what should have been?" From this utopian impulse emerges an orientation toward the future; Woolf's histories respond to the social, political and aesthetic needs of the present. The past, then, becomes the site for an ideal future projected backwards. When Woolf imagines, for example, what would have happened if the counterfactual figure of Judith Shakespeare had had a room of her own, she inscribes her hopes for women in the twentieth century onto the sixteenth century.

Woolf's counterfactual signifies a particular kind of movement away from what *is*. In works like "Jane Austen," *A Room of One's Own* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, this movement takes the form of digression and wandering. From an initial moment of straying away from the actual, wandering emerges as the style of the counterfactual. Wandering produces an associative, rather than linear, logic and rejects any explicit teleology. This structure is modeled in "Phases of Fiction," where the reader's choices

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[34] See, most notably, Leopold von Ranke.

are guided by desire rather than an over-arching raison d'être. Ruled by desire, the grammar of the counterfactual is the subjunctive, the verb form that expresses conditions of possibility and wish fulfillment and that articulates an interest in "if only." By positing "if only," the counterfactual, and the wandering form it takes, circumnavigates the questions: "what actually happened? Where is the line between what did and did not happen?" and asserts the critical salience of imagining things otherwise.

For critics working on the counterfactual, these "what if?" narratives are a way to track literature's political, historical and moral potential. Catherine Gallagher frames her discussion of "undoing plots" within the legal discourse of the Civil Rights Movement, describing them as a form of "judicial historical vision" ("Undoing" 24). In his study of the nineteenth-century realist novel, Andrew Miller discusses the "moral psychology" of what he terms the "optative imagination"—that is, the "counterfactual lives each character [in a novel] is pointedly not living" (119). And Wai Chee Dimock calls for the development of a literary history structured by the counterfactual ("Three Wars" 6). Certainly, there are, in these works, dramatic differences in scale of approach; where Andrew Miller is interested in the optative imagination in the lives of fictional characters, Gallagher and Dimock talk about the counterfactual as a genre synonymous with alternate histories.

Despite these differences in scale, these critics all see the counterfactual as the property of realism. Gallagher suggests, "realist fiction … tends to dwell on the unactualized possibilities in a character's history, for exploring hypothetical conditionals creates both suspense and the simulacrum of personhood" ("Napoleon" 330). Similarly, Miller asserts, "such counterfactual imaginings were built into the realistic novel as a part

of its very structure" (120). Finally, when Dimock calls for a counterfactual literary history, it is a specifically "counterfactual realism" that underwrites that history.

Rather than orienting the counterfactual within literary realism, I want to suggest a link between these "what if?" narratives and the literary romance. Woolf's work articulates this link, using the counterfactual to revitalize the romance as a critical institution in literary modernism and to bring the forms of the romance to bear upon modernism's historical thinking. Woolf transforms the romance from a genre, or object of study, into a critical mode; it—and the forms, like the counterfactual, that underwrite it—becoming a way of theoretically engaging with literature. The romance is, in other words, the theoretical framework within which Woolf thinks about modernism, literary history, and, finally, modernism's position within that history.[35]

In "On Not Knowing Greek" (1925), Woolf describes the encounter between the modern reader and the literary past: [W]hen we read Chaucer, we are floated up to him insensibly on the current of our ancestors' lives, and later, as records increase and memoirs lengthen, there is scarcely a figure which has not its nimbus of associations, its life and letters, its wife and family, its house, it character, its happy or dismal catastrophe […] are we not … [l]osing our sharp sight in the haze of associations? Reading into Greek poetry not what they have but what we lack" (*E*4: 48). Woolf suggests here, and in "Phases of Fiction," that the reader encounters literary history through the forms of the romance: associative sight, mental wandering, and fantasizing desire. It is from the reader's "lack," and her desire to compensate for that lack, that both these forms and the counterfactual emerge.

[35] See Scott Black's "Quixotic Realism and the Romance of the Novel."

The romance and the counterfactual have long been linked. In 1785, Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance* connects the two through a description of the relationship between the novel and the romance: "[the novel] gives a familiar relation of such things as pass everyday before our eyes, such as may happen to our friends, or to ourselves …[while the romance] is heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things … The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen." More than a century later, Henry James supplements this formulation in his preface to *The American*, which characterizes the romance as that which "with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never can directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and desire" (31). And, like James, Northrop Frye suggests the proximity of the romance to the wish-fulfillment dream (*Anatomy* 186). While both James and Frye are relatively unconcerned with the political orientation of these desires and wish-fulfillment dreams, Woolf suggests that the counterfactual articulates this orientation. The political work of the romance resides, in other words, in its use of the counterfactual as a means of dealing with political and historical desire.

The nebulousness of the term "romance" makes it difficult to discuss. The term means several things at once, denoting, first, historical categories: the medieval romance, the gothic, the late-nineteenth-century adventure romance, or the twentieth-century Harlequin. It also describes, in contrast, an a-, or trans-historical category, designating, for example, works that represent quests or adventures. Although Woolf frequently writes about the romance as a historical category, she most frequently uses the forms—

like the counterfactual, wandering, digression, progress and delay, and the subjunctive—as rhetorical strategies.[36] Operating within both Woolf's fiction and nonfiction, the romance is as much impulse as a hardened generic category.[37]

By offering a particular version of history, Woolf's romance is a source of enormous critical possibility; thus, the scarcity of criticism dealing with modernism and the forms of the romance is striking.[38] Certainly, critics like Fredric Jameson and Nicholas Daly have done valuable work on modernism and the romance. Jameson explores the co-existence of, and tangible break between, modernism and romance in *Lord Jim* (1899), arguing that the "juxtaposition" of these two forms in the novel represents the emergence of, on the one hand, "contemporary modernism," and, on the other, "popular culture." (*Unconscious* 206). Similarly, through readings of novels by Stoker, Stevenson, and Haggard, Daly designates a category of late-nineteenth-century

[36] See, for example, Woolf's 1921 essay, "Gothic Romance." She writes humorously: "It would be a fine exercise in discrimination to decide the precise point at which romance becomes Gothic and imagination moonshine" (*Essays* 3: 306).

[37] See Barbara Fuchs's *Romance*, where she suggests, Romance [is] … a literary and textual *strategy*. Under this definition, the term describes a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealization, the marvelous, narrative delay, and wandering, and obscured identity that both pose a quest and complicate it. I find this the most useful notion of romance because it accounts for the greatest number of instances, allowing us to address the occurrence of romance within texts that are clearly classified as some other genre and incorporating the hybridization and malleability that … are such key elements of romance. (*Romance* 9; italics in original). See also Margaret Anne Doody: *The True Story of the Novel*. Doody contends, "romance and the novel are one. The separation between them is part of the problem, not part of the solution" (15). And in *Inescapable Romance* (1979), Patricia Parker describes the romance as "a form that simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object" (4). Romance, then, is a formal strategy that occurs within the individual text.

[38] There is, however, a substantial body of work that deals with the romance in the last decades of the nineteenth century. See Brantlinger and Showalter, among others.

romances called "popular modernism."[39] These romance texts provide, Daly suggests, "narratives and figures that enabled late Victorian middleclass culture to successfully accommodate certain historical changes, notably modernizing procedures" (24). Both Jameson and Daly treat the romance as a subset of, a strand within, or a category opposite, and often antagonistic to, modernism. In her development of the romance as a critically and historically viable term, however, Woolf suggests that the form has always been at work in the modernist novel—as constitutive as, say, stream-of-consciousness or that ambiguous designation, impressionism.

In service of her work with the romance, Woolf is modernism's most prolific user of the historical counterfactual. Although she offers the most rigorous conceptualization of the term, Woolf was surrounded by authors who were also fascinated by these "what if?" narratives. In his chapter on Cardinal Manning in *Eminent Victorians* (1918), for example, Lytton Strachey digresses into a short description of John Henry Newman's education. Strachey asks,

> If Newman had never lived, or if his father when the gig came round on the fatal morning, still undecided between the two Universities, had chanced to turn the horse's head in the direction of Cambridge, who can doubt that the Oxford Movement would have flickered out its little flame unobserved in the Common Room of Oriel? … In other times, under other skies, his days would have been more fortunate … At Oxford, he was doomed. He could not withstand the last enchantment of the Middle Ages. (23)[40]

Strachey's engagement with the counterfactual, this interest in what might have happened *if*, is a flight, on "the wings of Historic Imagination," and writes history as a literary

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[39] See also John Paul Riquelme, who, like Daly, discusses authors like Stoker and Stevenson (though within the rubric of "modern gothic") and explores the manner in which modernist authors "drew upon" the forms of the gothic.
[40] For additional instances of the counterfactual in modernist writing, see Beerbohm, Sackville-West, and Leonard Woolf.

discipline. In his preface to *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey asserts, "The history of the Victorian age will never be written: we know too much about it. For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian" (9). The counterfactual offers a reprieve—a way to imagine and simulate the ignorance that makes up, for Strachey, part of the foundation for a properly done history. "Phases of Fiction" echoes Strachey's neat reversal of traditional views of historical method. Woolf suggests, "if the critic and the historian speak a more universal language, a more learned language, they are also likely to miss the centre and lose their way for the simple reason that they know so many things about a writer that a writer does not know about himself" (41).

As is evident in Strachey's narration of Newman's life, modernist writers—including Sackville-West, Leonard Woolf, and Beerbohm—sometimes use the counterfactual to think about history. Woolf builds upon this occasional use, transforming the counterfactual from a peripheral device into a narrative structure that dominates both her fiction and nonfiction. She develops, in other words, a counterfactual imaginary. And this counterfactual imaginary is deployed, not just for narratives of history, but specifically for *literary* history. By using a form that comes to represent in her work the romance, Woolf produces a literary history is at once a history of literature and a history that is literary.

There are three questions that we might ask about Woolf's counterfactual: first, how and to what effect does Woolf use the counterfactual to theorize literary history and, more importantly, a specifically female literary history? Second, how does Woolf's fiction offer insight into the counterfactual and its use in Woolf's literary histories? Third, in what ways does all of Woolf's work with the counterfactual recover the

category of the romance itself and influence the notion, so prevalent during her lifetime, of the romance as historically and aesthetically regressive? To think about these questions, I want to focus on three of Woolf's writings: "Jane Austen" (1925), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). In these works, Woolf develops a counterfactual imaginary and puts it to work in her project of re-narrating and re-conceptualizing of history as a romance. A comparative reading of these works also makes clear a shifting relationship between wandering and "what if?" narratives; from Woolf's nonfiction to her fiction, we see an intensifying integration of the two. In "Jane Austen," Woolf's counterfactual is a direct, argumentative form. In *A Room of One's Own*, however, wandering emerges as the site of the counterfactual. And, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, wandering and the counterfactual are entirely entwined, transforming the counterfactual into a suggestive rather than explicitly argumentative, figure.

-If Only-

Nowhere is the argumentative work of Woolf's interest in imagining things otherwise clearer than in her conclusion to "Jane Austen" (1925). Although the essay is written as a friendly critical analysis of Austen's work, the conclusion transforms it into a polemic that asserts the use and political stakes of the counterfactual. Here, she formulates a literary history grounded in Jane Austen's having "lived a few more years":

> Had she lived a few more years only, all that would have been altered. She would have stayed in London, dined out, lunched out, met famous people, made new friends, read, traveled, and carried back to the quiet country cottage a hoard of observations to feast upon at leisure.
> And what effect would all this have had upon the six novels that Jane Austen did not write? She would not have written of crime, of passion, or

> of adventure. She would not have been rushed … by publishers … But she would have known more. Her sense of security would have been shaken. Her comedy would have suffered. She would have trusted less (this is already perceptible in *Persuasion*) to dialogue and more to reflection to give us knowledge of her characters. Those marvelous little speeches which sum up, in a few minutes' chatter, all we need to know in order to know an Admiral Croft or a Mrs. Musgrove for ever, that shorthand, hit-or-miss method which contains chapters of analysis and psychology, would have become too crude to hold all that she now perceived of the complexity of human nature. She would have devised a method, clear and composed as ever, but deeper and more suggestive, for conveying not only what people say, but what they leave unsaid; not only what they are, but what life is. She would have stood further away from her characters, and seen them more as a group, less as individuals. Her satire, while it played less incessantly, would have been stringent and severe. She would have been the forerunner of Henry James and of Proust—but enough. Vain are these speculations. (145)

This passage, which offers one of the most explicit, forceful instances of Woolf's use of the "what if?" narrative to engage with literary history, signals an intense preoccupation with historical spaces marked by unfulfilled potential and missed opportunities. The counterfactual is designed to correct, to compensate for the mistakes of history and to supplement the undone with what *should* have been done.[41] Here, then, is a narrative mode that re-views and re-plots history through the demands of a desire produced by the counterfactual historian's corrective vision.

In her re-narration of Austen's career, Woolf is preoccupied with the unsaid and the undone. This is a concern with the method Austen never perfected, the complexity she never grasped, and the six novels she never had a chance to write. And just like these "nevers," Austen's imaginary, personal literary history is one guided partially by the negative. "She would not," "she would not," she would not." Importantly, however, these negatives are temporary; after outlining what Austen would not have done, Woolf

[41] Steven Monte describes Woolf's conclusion to "Jane Austen" as "a necessary revisionary fantasy" (601).

lists what she would have done had the counterfactual—if "she lived a few more years"—become the factual. As Woolf narrates the effects of Austen having lived a few more years, the entirety of literary history is re-imagined within a shift from absence to presence and from the unsaid to the said.

Woolf imagines the style that Austen would have developed: "a method, clear and composed as ever, but deeper and more suggestive, for conveying not only what people say, but what they leave unsaid." Encoded within the style that Woolf prescribes for Austen is Woolf's own mode of historical practice. If Austen had had more time and more practice, she would have focused in her novels on the unsaid. That unsaid mirrors Woolf's method of literary history, which is characterized by an engagement with the undone. Here, then, Woolf asserts her preoccupation with the unsaid and undone as both aesthetic and methodological ideals. The unsaid and the counterfactual are the ways that one *should* go about thinking about literary history. This passage is, in other words, a prescriptive statement disguised as a hypothetical statement.

It is one of Woolf's final assertions—"she would have been the forerunner of Henry James and of Proust"—that most clearly asserts the prescriptive function of the conclusion to "Jane Austen." In this counterfactual universe, Austen has been socialized into a different sort of author. She has "stayed in London, dined out, lunched out, met famous people, made new friends, read, traveled, and carried back to the quiet country cottage a hoard of observations." The final effect of this entry into an urban social world is Austen's insertion into a male—though, pointedly, not masculine—literary lineage. She is also transformed into a proto-modernist, the new ancestor of two authors who are, themselves, read as proto- or archetypal modernists. With this transformation, a chain

reaction of influence is sparked and the reader is left asking questions that produce a proliferation of counterfactual narratives. Now that Austen has had more time to develop, what happens to the female authors—Eliot, Gaskell, the Brontës—of the nineteenth century? In more general terms, what happens to the literature of the Victorian period now that it is bridged by the relationship between Austen, on one side of the nineteenth century, and James and Proust, on the other? With this new relationship, the Victorians appear to be punted from the field of literary history, tradition and influence. Once Austen becomes a different sort of "forerunner," and a different sort of influence, the entirety of literary history becomes susceptible to, and even welcoming of, modification.

Woolf concludes—or, to reflect the spirit of her final words, cancels—her counterfactual history with the qualification: "[v]ain are these speculations." "Vain" is doubly significant. Read as synonymous with "pointless," Woolf's final assertion seems at first to undermine the work of "Jane Austen" and also to negate, more broadly, the significance of, or necessity for, Woolf's counterfactual history. That Woolf's final gesture might be a dismissive shrug of her shoulders—"what's the point?"—does not, however, make her "what if?" narrative irrelevant. Instead, this history becomes an instructive tale, a way of acknowledging and addressing the needs of the present—and, ultimately, of engaging in a political critique of that present—through a re-narration of the past. When Woolf gives Austen a few more years, or when, in *A Room of One's Own*, she creates Shakespeare's sister, Judith, she gestures toward the need for an origin story, a starting point to a literary lineage that accommodates women as much as men. Woolf's dismissal acts, then, as a challenge and, specifically, a challenge directed toward her

female readers.[42] Rather than simply concluding her own work, this final assertion introduces another work: the actual work that Woolf's counterfactual history inspires in her readers. Woolf's suggestion that the narration of Austen's unlived life has been in vain demands a particular response from the reader and, even more, a negative response: "no, it has not been in vain." Austen cannot be brought back to life and set down at her writing table; but the female reader of Woolf's essay can write. The counterfactual is deployed in service of a future literary tradition or history.

The trajectory of "Jane Austen" shifts when "vain" is read as "prideful" or "narcissistic" rather than as pointless. With this shift, the orientation of the final assertion shifts from the future (prescriptive) to the present (descriptive). Importantly, this is not a broadly conceived present; instead, it is Woolf's present. It is about the individual artist rather than the category of the female artist. What happens, then, when the conclusion to the essay is treated as a self-interested narrative? The essay's final assertion is, in this case, symptomatic of a profound personal anxiety on Woolf's part. This anxiety became evident the year before the publication of "Jane Austen," when Woolf reacted to Katherine Mansfield's death with nervousness about her own literary career: "If she'd lived, she'd have written on, and people would have seen that I was the more gifted" (*D*2 317). This is the counterfactual in service of desire or a wish, a narrative with personal stakes, which personalizes the motive behind all of Woolf's counterfactual narratives. Mansfield's counterfactual path inverts Austen's; had Mansfield lived, she would not have become more suggestive, she would not have devised new methods, and, most

[42] Catherine Gallagher suggests that the counterfactual is particularly demanding of readerly involvement, writing, "the alternate-history genre … solicits our participation in the creation of alternative world … [but] we do not normally do these things when reading ordinary novels" ("Napoleon" 333).

importantly, she would not have become a forerunner. Mansfield's unlived life is a process of exclusion, a strategy through which Woolf exiles her from literary history.

Woolf's expression of personal desire in her reaction to Mansfield's death checks our understandable impulse toward reading her counterfactual narratives as entirely inclusive, as exercises in openness or acceptance. Mansfield's exclusion from a particular narrative of literary history introduces an element of ambivalence into Woolf's counterfactual and speaks to the difficulty of reconciling Woolf's liberalism with her frequently expressed snobbery. The counterfactual is not a purely egalitarian form; it is not, in other words, a literary-historical Herland. Woolf's inclination toward exclusion, her interest in competition and self-promotion, suggests the centrality of a single protagonist in her counterfactual narrative. Woolf, then, introduces into her histories another element of the romance, the hero "I."[43] In "Jane Austen"—and, even more, in *A Room of One's Own*—Woolf's counterfactual narratives orbit around the individual figure of the female artist, a figure narrated as a wandering hero of women's literary history. This becomes strikingly clear in *A Room of One's Own*, where Woolf's "what if?" literary history revolves around the solitary, digressive, wandering female hero/protagonist.

-A Wrong Turning-

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf continues her consideration of Austen and acknowledges, "we have lives enough of Jane Austen" (45). This assertion echoes

[43] As Beth Carole Rosenberg asserts, Woolf "reformulates the nature of literary history by shifting the genre toward autobiography" (1115).

Strachey's ascription of aesthetic value to ignorance. There are iterations enough of what has actually happened; what has not been adequately thought of, however, is what Jane Austen *could have*, *would have*, and *should have* done, had the conditions been different. The imperative of "Jane Austen" is: know less; speculate more. Treat what *didn't* happen, the counterfactual, as a critically and historically active, articulate category. Replace historical narrative's dependence on assertion with fiction's interest in suggestion. Make, in other words, a suggestive history.

"Jane Austen" provides a conceptual foundation for *A Room of One's Own*, which in turn provides a way of thinking about what happens when the historical counterfactual is transformed from a strategy into a narrative structure that is available to and usable in fiction. "Jane Austen" makes explicit, straightforward use of the counterfactual; *A Room of One's Own* takes a different tack, becoming significantly less direct and more suggestive. This suggestiveness is made apparent by thematic and formal wandering. The narrator's circuitous mental wanderings, which are often accompanied by an equally circuitous physical wandering, frame discussions of Mary Seton and Judith Shakespeare and become the sites for Woolf's counterfactual women's literary history.

A Room of One's Own is "Jane Austen" writ large, replicating the literary history narrated in the essay's conclusion: [l]et us imagine, since facts are so hard to come by, what would have happened had Shakespeare had a wonderfully gifted sister, called Judith, let us say … his extraordinarily gifted sister, let us suppose, remained at home. She was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was" (46-7). In this introduction to Judith's unlived life, the verbs shift from the past conditional ("would have") to the past ("was"). With this move from the hypothetical to the actual, Woolf's

counterfactual history transforms, at least grammatically, into a factual history. From this initial shift from one verb form to another, there is then a rapid vacillation between tenses: from "they [Judith's parents] would have spoken sharply" to "she was the apple of her father's eye" (47). The incorporation of multiple verb forms into one plot destabilizes the boundary between the actual and the counterfactual and is key, I think, to understanding Woolf's conceptualization of literary history as both a history of literature and a history that is literary.

Peggy Kamuf describes Woolf's work in *A Room of One's Own* as "a self-raveling text [that] blurs the line between historical prerogatives and fictional pretensions, always deferring the promised end of its labor, unraveling clear historical pattern at its fictional border" (9-10). This raveling is marked for Kamuf by moments of interruption, so that the "narrative sets out from a doubling back, or a crossing out in which a meaning, a sense of direction, gets lost" (6). Rather than necessarily constituting just a loss of meaning, this "doubling back" actually produces meaning and is, in fact, one of the primary sites, or enabling conditions, for the counterfactual and the work it does. Kamuf describes the work of *A Room of One's Own* as "penelopian labor." Reading Woolf's essay alongside the imagery of Penelope's weaving and unweaving, the counterfactual narrative comes to be structured, like Penelope's labor, by simultaneous progress and delay.[44] Digressions and interruptions become opportunities for the text to turn back upon itself and examine its own unfulfilled potential. The counterfactual transforms history into a stylized narrative deeply aware of its own formal structure.

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[44] See Patricia Parker's *Inescapable Romance* (1979).

The counterfactual is everywhere in *A Room of One's Own*: from the way Woolf thinks about women's literary history to her consideration of everyday acts, from the dramas of history to the quotidian narratives of mundane acts. Take, for instance, Woolf's semi-fictional description of herself/the narrator sitting in a college dining-hall:

> [I]f by good luck there had been an ash-tray handy, if one had not knocked the ask out of the window in default, if things had been a little different from what they were, one would not have seen, presumably, a cat without a tail. The sight of that abrupt and truncated animal padding softly across the quadrangle changed by some fluke of the subconscious intelligence the emotional light for me. It was as if someone had let fall a shade. Certainly … something seemed lacking, something seemed different. But what was lacking, what was different, I asked myself, listening to the talk. And to answer that question I had to think myself out of the room, back into the past, before the war indeed. (11-12)

This moment, propelled by the counterfactual, provides entry into the narration of a historical shift and historical memory. In the same way that Woolf introduces her description of Austen's unlived life, *A Room of One's Own*'s slip into the past is initiated by a series of negatives: what if one *had not* flicked one's ash out the window? What if one *had not* seen the "truncated animal" strolling across the quadrangle? What if something *had not* been lacking? The past conditional writes the grounds for the counterfactual and offers a transition into narratives structured by "what if?" Rather than diving immediately into the counterfactual, the scene narrates it as a possibility, a direction that the text *might* take. The time spent in the dining hall might be thought of, then, as an invitation to shift from "what was?" to "what if?", an invitation that will be accepted only a few pages later. But these negative statements, and the narration of the everyday, are interrupted abruptly by the appearance of the Manx cat strolling past the window. This truncated animal introduces a consideration of historical difference, the observance of a seismic shift form one Zeitgeist to another.

It is the mutually enabling relationship between physical and mental wandering that creates a space for considerations of historical difference and the counterfactual. Wandering is figured in *A Room of One's Own* as a strategy for coyly circumnavigating the obstacles placed before the female writer. As the narrator leaves the college and begins the walk toward Fernham, she encounters a scene that literalizes these political and historical obstacles:

> The beautiful October day was fading and the leaves were falling from the trees in the avenue as I walked through it. Gate after gate seemed to close with gentle finality behind me. Innumerable beadles were fitting innumerable keys into well-oiled lock; the treasure-house was being made secure for another night. After the avenue one comes out upon a road—I forget its name—which leads you, if you take the right turning, along to Fernham. But there was plenty of time. (13)

It is unclear whether the initial "right turning" signifies the direction or is instead the opposite of wrong. What *is* clear, however, is that by taking the wrong, or left, turn, the narrator strays away from the straight road that leads to her destination.[45] This wandering that begins with the wrong/left turn is instigated by a series of exclusions: "gate after gate seemed to close," "beadles were fitting keys into well-oiled locks," "the treasure-house was being made secure." The narrator's decision to stray away from the "right turning" is itself an act of resistance, a way of sabotaging the "finality" of the locks that refuse the female writer a position within literary history and tradition.

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[45] Of Woolf's wandering in *A Room of One's Own*, Rachel Bowlby writes, "[The] imaginary ramble (through 'Oxbridge,' London and the British Museum, and through many byways of bookish history), leading up to the point at which the narrator represents herself sitting down to start writing what she has just recounted. The literal and the recorded walk thus overlay one another so as to play upon the difficulty of differentiating them … the circling sentence is such that the end sends you straight back to the beginning" (16-17).

The chain of small events and decisions that lead to both the analysis of historical difference and the posing of critical questions are structured by deviation and error. Both the absence of the ashtray and the narrator's straying away from the "right turning," though not errors in the usual sense, are errors in their deviation from the expected. That the narrator's wandering is linked to error makes "errancy" doubly applicable by incorporating two connotations of the term: error and wandering. Here, Woolf continues to develop the role of the protagonist-hero in her counterfactual histories and, at the same time, invests that protagonist with the significance of the romance's most important figure: the knight-errant.

The narrator's wandering enables the development of a counterfactual historical narrative. Mary Seton and her mother emerge as the central figures of a literary history structured by "what if?" Theses imagined lives historicize the narrator's earlier circumnavigation of obstacles. For, here, "if" is the means through which Woolf writes over history's exclusion of the female writer:

> Now if she [Mary Seton's mother] had gone into business; had become a manufacturer of artificial silk or a magnate on the Stock Exchange; if she had left two or three thousand pounds to Fernham, we could have been sitting at our ease tonight and the subject of our talk might have been archaeology, botany, anthropology, physics, the nature of the atom, mathematics, astronomy, relativity, geography. If only Mrs. Seton and her mother and her mother before her had learnt the great art of making money and had left their money, like their father and grandfathers before them, to found fellowships and lectureships and prizes and scholarships … We might have been exploring or writing. (21)

Woolf's wandering, her wrong turn away from Fernham, enables this digression, so that wandering and the counterfactual become critically linked. In *A Room of One's Own*, wandering frames the counterfactual narrative, to such an extent that "what if?" becomes

unthinkable without the accompaniment of physical, mental and intellectual wandering. The counterfactual, in other words, needs the forms of the romance to write its histories.

Wandering and the counterfactual are not, however, simply means by which to gain entrance to the locked doors and secured treasure houses described by the narrator in her walk away from Oxbridge. Instead, *A Room of One's Own* develops a method, or narrative, that resists exclusion by deviating away from, and producing alternatives to, the scenes and means of that exclusion. Rather than remaining at the scene of the locked doors, the narrator continues on, straying away from the road that leads to Fernham. This wandering produces a method of critical and historical engagement—an intellectually associative process that eventually seeks to account for "the difficulties of modern poetry" (14). In other words, rather than striving to jimmy the locks that prevent the female writer entrance into a male literary history, *A Room of One's Own* develops the counterfactual narrative as a way to re-conceive of the form and function of history. The "what if?" narratives that produce figures like Judith Shakespeare and Mary Seton are acts of political opposition through their absolute refusal to work within the constraints of factual historical narrative.

Expressing anxiety toward the reception of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf wrote in her diary: "[I] suspect that there is a shrill feminine tone in it which my intimate friends will dislike" (*D*3: 262). This tone should be located, not just in the work's attention to a female literary tradition, but in the very forms deployed by the text. This tone is linked, I want to suggest, to the essay's engagement with the romance. When Woolf refers to the "feminine tone" of *A Room of One's Own*, she involves herself, in two ways at once, in the gendered discourse surrounding the romance. On the one hand,

her description echoes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century characterizations of the novel, especially the gothic novel, as a feminine form. At the same time, her "feminine tone" turns on its head the late-nineteenth-century model of the romance as a masculine, and politically articulate, alternative to the realist novel.[46]

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf draws upon both of these formulations, using the romance as a strategy for making her female literary history both feminine and politically articulate.[47] Woolf, then, insists upon both the political and formal utility of the feminine, or romance, tone. She develops the romance as a feminist strategy. The romance's feminine tone—that tone *A Room of One's Own* creates through the counterfactual—signifies political and social engagement and strives to re-narrate, and re-conceptualize of, literary history.

-What Septimus Saw; or, Wandering about the Counterfactual-

Mrs. Dalloway (1925) puts to work many of the same forms as *A Room of One's Own*: wandering, associative logic, progress and delay—all in service of an imagined account of literary history. Woolf's 1925 novel, however, does not explicitly address the subjects—literary history and historical practice—that are, in her nonfiction, so intimately connected to these forms. *Mrs. Dalloway* is so valuable to a discussion of Woolf's counterfactual because it illuminates the manner in which wandering and the counterfactual come to signify an engagement with literary history and historical practice,

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[46] See Brantlinger, Daly and Showalter. Daly suggests that the late-nineteenth-century romance was understood by critics and readers as "a more healthily masculine form than realism" (18).
[47] See Heller's *The Feminization of Quest-Romance* (1990).

even when unrelated to a content that speaks explicitly of these things. The forms of the romance come to operate independent of its content; wandering and the counterfactual are historicizing tropes, modes of being in critical relationship with literary history.

In her composition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf carefully thought about the historical connections between literary texts.[48] The novel enunciates an intimate relationship with Joyce's *Ulysses*, a novel that is, of course, deeply engaged with *The Odyssey*. Thus, the very premise of *Mrs. Dalloway* argues for the determinative role of literary history. In his discussion of the source work that went into the composition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Steven Monte describes how the novel's work with both ancient and modern sources theorizes a literary history that seeks to "avoid" conceiving of literary history simply in terms of "continuity and revision" (589). With the deployment of "an unusual number of similes that draw on epic language and imagery," Woolf goes "back to the Greek to rewrite Joyce's modern epic" (589, 591).[49] With the back-and-forth movement described by Monte, the author is transformed into a pendulum, swinging, with no permanent or dominant orientation, across centuries of literary creation. Monte's claim that Woolf goes "back to the Greek" is reminiscent of Woolf's suggestion in "On Not Knowing Greek" (1925): "When we read Chaucer […] are we not … [l]osing our sharp sight in the haze of associations? Reading into Greek poetry not what they have but what we lack"

[48] This concern with history is evident throughout Woolf's work and, especially, in *Orlando*. I am focusing on *Mrs. Dalloway* because it most clearly uses metaphors of wandering to structure its engagement with history.
[49] C.f. Jean Wyatt, who writes, "by pervading present events with echoes of the entire span of western culture, preliterary as well as literary, allusion and mythopoetic images reinforce the novel's underlying theme: continuity between past and present" (440). For Wyatt, literary allusion supplies to *Mrs. Dalloway* its very structure and coherence; the novel gives to literary history a similar coherence and structure—one of cause and effect or, as Monte describes it, "continuity and revision."

(?). Monte's assertion can be filtered through this claim, so that *Mrs. Dalloway* comes to look like a text written through a "haze of associations." In its very composition, then, Woolf's novel is engaged in the associations that are, we know, so intimately linked to mental wandering.

Mrs. Dalloway is all about wandering, thematizing the form that is so important to *A Room of One's Own*'s development of a female literary history. Clarissa Dalloway wanders physically through London and mentally through her own past, all in preparation for a party she is hosting. Just back from India, Clarissa's friend Peter Walsh also wanders, imagining himself as a "solitary traveler." Clarissa's daughter, Elizabeth, engages in a tentative and incomplete wandering, riding a bus and then walking to St. Paul's but turning back toward home right before reaching her destination. The narrative itself takes a wandering form, moving associatively and digressively from one point or perspective to another. Wandering is, for the characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* as for Woolf herself, the site for creation. In one instance, Peter Walsh's dream of physical wandering leads to a scene of mental wandering that, finally, offers the opportunity for revelation; as his mind wanders between past and present, Peter has "a sudden revelation" (248). Wandering, then, is triply constitutive, producing Woolf's narration, and characters' storytelling and revelation.

Mrs. Dalloway suggests that wandering models a particular way of thinking. Rachel Bowlby's thinks about this when she discusses the significance of Clarissa's name: "What else, after all, would Clarissa's surname have led us to expect than the woman who likes to dally along the way" (16). Dallying is here a resistance to moving forward. It is playful, trifling, and idle. In the novel, however, Woolf links dallying to

superficiality: "(Hugh Whitbread ruminated, dallying there in front of the store window) … so he ruminated. It was his habit. He did not go deeply. He brushed surfaces" (286). Clarissa Dalloway, then, is no dallier; she is a wanderer. For, in contrast to Woolf's characterization of Whitbread's dallying, wandering insists on thinking and moving deeply. It rejects the link that dallying asserts between aimlessness and meaningless. Meaning resides, in fact, in aimlessness. This meaning emerges in the imagination of what has not happened, in the narratives propelled by the question: "what if?"

There is one character in *Mrs. Dalloway* who offers a particularly suggestive account of the relationship between wandering and the counterfactual. This is the delusional, fantasizing figure of Septimus Smith, a character who is, by many critical accounts, the pathological other to either Clarissa Dalloway or Virginia Woolf herself.[50] Most often read as the site for mourning or trauma, as a figure that enables catharsis, Septimus becomes a surrogate for Clarissa, for Woolf, and, even, for the reader.[51] Septimus himself articulates the logic of this surrogacy: "Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord had come to renew society … the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer" (443). By taking on the role of surrogate, Septimus becomes a counterfactual version of Clarissa, who she might have been if she had been a "he" and had been sent to war.

The relationship between Septimus and Clarissa actualizes, within the category of the modernist novel, Andrew Miller's description of the counterfactual in nineteenth-century realist fiction. Miller asserts the centrality of "[the] counterfactual lives each character is pointedly not living, defining mirror existences that have branched off along

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[50] In her diary, Woolf describes *Mrs. Dalloway* in the following terms: "I adumbrate here a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side."
[51] See Froula, North, Saint-Amour.

other lines than that down which he or she is, in fact, traveling" (119). There are, Miller suggests, characters that "give full play to the optative imagination of counterfactual lives" (123). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, this optative imagination is a readerly activity. Clarissa and Septimus are unaware of each other, until, of course, the novel's final scene, when Clarissa learns of Septimus's suicide. But the reader engages in optative fantasies on both their behalves, imagining what Septimus and Clarissa's lives would have been like if lived under the conditions of the other. With these two, Woolf "shadow[s] forth lives," to use Miller's words (122). In this formulation, the counterfactual is at the very heart of *Mrs. Dalloway*. But where Miller's focus is on the moral work of the "optative imagination," Woolf's novel focuses on the literary critical work of these narratives. Septimus's role as a counterfactual version of Clarissa is involved with the novel's work on literary history as much as it is with Clarissa herself. Ultimately, then, these "what if?" narratives are the means through which *Mrs. Dalloway* asserts itself as a theoretical text.

Septimus Smith is the means through which the counterfactual and wandering re-imagine literary history in *Mrs. Dalloway*. More than any other character in the novel, Septimus is engaged, deeply and expansively, with literature and literary history. Miss Isabel Pole—the woman who was, for a time, Septimus's tutor—imagines him "finishing a masterpiece at three o'clock in the morning, and running out to pace the streets, and visiting churches, and fasting one day, drinking another, devouring Shakespeare, Darwin, *The History of Civilization*, and Bernard Shaw" (271). And she asks herself, "was he not like Keats?" (271) These figures—Shakespeare, Darwin, Shaw, and Keats—are Septimus's only stable points of reference. Everything in his life is anchored to literature

and a literary lineage of which Septimus is desperate to be a part. Even when he explains his reasons for becoming a soldier, Septimus invokes literature: "He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays" (271). Literature stands in for nation and becomes the motive for Septimus's utopian longings. And while everything else in his life changes as his mind wanders between sanity and insanity, his relationship with literature remains unchanging.

The more fragmented Septimus's mind becomes, the more intimate his relationship with literature grows. He incorporates himself into a historical lineage that is dominated by literary figures: "He, Septimus, was alone, called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning, which now at last, after all the toils of civilization—Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin and now himself—was to be given whole to" (254). The desire for a whole gestures toward Septimus's own mental fragmentation and the connection between that state and his relationship with literature. Jane Wyatt has described Septimus's mental disintegration as a process by which he "becomes little more than a compilation of literary fragments rather than complete, coherent works" (440). As a figure created by literary allusion, Septimus's literary history ("Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin") re-imagines, re-plots and, finally, makes things whole. As a figure of literariness, delusion and wandering, Septimus struggles to formulate a narrative of literary history driven, first, by desire and wish fulfillment rather than description and, second, by the possibility for a utopian resolution.[52] This utopian resolution works to harmonize literary history into a unified system of communication and to enable the individual—in this case, Septimus—to

[52] Molly Hite describes Septimus as in part "an agent of defamiliarization" ("Affect and Ethics" 261). In this sense, then, he becomes an agent of literariness.

receive and work with the entirety of that history's content. In this sense, Septimus's work is reminiscent of Woolf's project in "Jane Austen" and *A Room of One's Own*. His aim, like Woolf's, is corrective; through his literary history, he strives to transform a fragmented literary history into one unified, organic narrative that develops according to the conventions of fiction: a beginning, a middle, and an end marked by revelation and resolution.

These corrective, utopian narratives of literary history are acted out by Septimus's mental wanderings. More than any other character in *Mrs. Dalloway*, he is a figure of errancy. Although Clarissa, Peter and Elizabeth all engage in forms of wandering, Septimus is bound, necessarily and permanently, to errancy. Recently returned from the war, he is deeply traumatized; he hallucinates—lengthy, involved visions structured by the stammerings, interruptions and associative logic that make up his fragmented psyche. With these visions, he engages in a peculiar, and pathologized, mode of wandering that hyperbolizes Clarissa's style of moving around London.

One of Septimus's visions deserves particularly close attention. In its engagement with what is not actually there, this hallucination enters into conversation with the counterfactual histories of "Jane Austen" and *A Room of One's Own*. The hallucination thus produces a historical narrative that imagines both the past, its object of study, and itself as a romance. The hallucination begins as Septimus and his wife sit in St. James Park. Peter Walsh walks toward them. In a disturbing and disturbingly ambiguous scene, Septimus confuses Peter for Evans, a comrade killed in battle.

> But the branches parted. A man in grey was actually walking toward them. It was Evans! But no mud was on him; no wounds; she was not changed. I must tell the world, Septimus cried, raising his hand (as the dead man in grey came nearer), raising his hand like some colossal figure

> who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone with his hands pressed to his forehead, furrows of despair on his cheeks, and now sees light on the desert's edge which broadens and strikes the iron-black figure (and Septimus half rose from his chair), and with legions of men prostrate behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole. (257)

Septimus's hallucination is a corrective fantasy, a desire- and need-driven rewriting of history—an attempt, in other words, to re-plot the events and re-imagine the figures of World War One. It is this initial centrality of a counterfactual vision produced by the desire for something else that begins to transform Septimus's engagement with history into a romance.

But Septimus's single, delusional conflation of Peter and Evans does not initiate, as one may expect, a chain of delusions. Instead, his hallucination originates a different form of counterfactuality, producing a metaphor in the text. Septimus sees Evans, realizes that he "must tell the world" and then "raises his hand" *like* "some colossal figure." The rest of his vision describes this colossal figure, which is the content of the text's metaphor rather than Septimus's delusion. That this scene takes place entirely within a delusional mind obscures the figurative function of metaphor, disguising it to look like the content of hallucination.

Northrop Frye has discussed the relationship between metaphor and romance, arguing that the romance uses metaphor to displace myth in a human direction. He writes, "In a myth we can have a sun-god or tree-god [and] in a romance we may have a person who is significantly associated with the sun or trees" (136). By signifying a continued drive away from the actual toward fantasies of what has not happened, the displacement created by metaphor of the colossal figure intensifies, rather than tempers, the counterfactuality of Septimus's vision. With the deployment of metaphor within the

narration of Septimus's delusion, the counterfactual comes to occupy two spaces at once: Septimus's psyche and the novel's very narrative. To put it another way, the use of metaphor here makes the "what if?" narrative something more than just the quality of a fragmented psyche; it becomes a textual quality, a form built into the very structure of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

The "like" that introduces metaphor produces a another kind of the counterfactual. When Septimus stands in the desert, "with legions of men prostrate behind him [and], the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole; there is an abrupt assertion of generic potential. For here, there is, for however brief a moment, the introduction of the epic. Septimus receives the whole and, in this moment, reminds the reader of the question posed by Lukács in his description of the age of the epic: [t]here is not yet any interiority, for there is not yet any exterior, any 'otherness] for the soul […] life and essence are then identical concepts. For the question which engenders the formal question of the epic is: how can life become essence?" (30) When Septimus receives the whole, the epic becomes an object of desire, a generic state toward which Septimus—and, momentarily, *Mrs. Dalloway* as a whole—strives. This is a genre fantasy, the novel's expression of desire for a genre that it is, in fact, not. The momentary assertion of the epic follows, in other words, the script of the "what if?" narrative: "what if this novel were an epic?" Becoming a strategy with which the text articulates generic desire, the romance is presented here as a critical mode, as a way for the novel to consider its own structure and work.

By expressing a fantasy for something else—whether that something is a different genre, a different historical outcome to World War One, or the reception of a whole—

Septimus's hallucination can be read alongside Woolf's assertion that "history must be written all over again" (*D*2 115). "Over again" suggests both revision (written again) and covering (written on top of). Revision ("history must be [revised]") assumes that rewriting produces a historical narrative that, while modified, remains a historical narrative—that, in other words, the work is generically stable. But when we read Woolf's "over again" as "covering," the "writ[ing] over" becomes generically open; history may be written over as, for example, fiction, or, more specifically, the romance.[53]

The double meaning of Woolf's assertion clarifies *Mrs. Dalloway*'s work with the counterfactual. For when Septimus sees Evans rather than Peter, he is not simply revising history; instead, he is writing over that history. He transforms it into a literary form structured by conventions like revelation, climax and reconciliation. The counterfactual is revisionary history made radical. It seeks generic transformation and locates the integration of fiction and history as the site for the production of knowledge and meaning. For Septimus, rethinking history within the patterns of fiction introduces the possibility of understanding what has been, to this point, incomprehensible—that is, the war.

With its interest in "writing over," Septimus's hallucination is embedded in the past, and revises history, but is, at the same time, deeply concerned with the future. This is a future born from contact between a historical past and a utopian, corrective impulse. By working to locate itself in both the past and future, Septimus's transformation of Peter into Evans speaks to Jameson's characterization of the romance as expressive of "a

[53] Woolf's idea of "writing over" echoes Benjamin Hrushovsky's description of counterfactual narrative, which suggests, as Kathleen Singles summarizes, that "in counterfactual history, history is 'overwritten' with an alternative version" (184).

transitional moment, yet one of a special type: its contemporaries must feel their society torn between past and future" ("Magical Narratives" 158). In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the experience of being torn is represented in the way Septimus rethinks Peter, the colonialist, into Evans, the soldier. This is more than a transformation from one individual to another. Instead, it is a shift between types, one that articulates a radical change in modes of confronting history.

While, in the first decades of the twentieth century, the sun may be setting on the British Empire, it is surely rising on the soldier. The symbolic weight of the colonial figure, representative in the nineteenth century of socio-historical progress and potency, wanes. Following the First World War, while the colonial figure comes to signify an increasingly outmoded model of history, the figure of the soldier gains social, moral, and historical weight. The Great Man theory of history—pushed to its heights by writers like Macaulay, Carlyle and Froude—is staged perfectly by Empire and its representatives. Narratives of progress and victory—in other words, developmental and linear modes of historical narrative—shape the model of history represented by the colonial figure.

But these Great Man narratives fail when confronted by the slaughter of soldiers on battlefields hundreds of miles away from home, places where death in groups is the most likely kind of death. And so, while the colonialist suggests narratives of progress and individual might, the soldier, especially the dead or shell-shocked soldier threatens the opposite. The figure of the soldier signifies narratives of decline, individual powerlessness, and failure or abandonment on the part of nation. By transforming Peter into Evans—by engaging, in other words, in this dramatic act of counterfactual

imagination—Septimus's vision replaces a Victorian historiography with this new, modern model of decline and de-individuation.

The realization of a historiographic shift contained within Septimus's hallucination must also account for the final assertion of revelation, even if that revelation is the content of metaphor rather than Septimus's psyche: his reception of "the whole" and the consequent reassertion of that originally lost individual. The climax to this scene recalls that earlier appearance of "the whole," the moment in which Septimus is "called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning, which now, at last, after all the toils of civilization—Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin, and now himself—was to be given whole to" (254). Septimus's hallucinations strive to actualize desire, to produce an organic connection between the individual and the surrounding world. Septimus's utopian desire, which manifests as a desire for the whole, is inextricably linked to his perception of himself as the culmination of a particular literary lineage: Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin, and Septimus Smith. With his mental and physical wanderings, his deep immersion in the counterfactual, and his desire-driven narration of history, Septimus is the hero of romance.

I have suggested that, of all the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus Smith offers the most sustained account of wandering, the counterfactual and, as a result, the romance. To conclude my discussion of the relationship between Septimus's vision and the way that *Mrs. Dalloway* conceptualizes of literary history as a romance, I want to turn for a moment to another scene of wandering and discuss how it provides a lens through which to continue thinking about Septimus's hallucination. In this scene, Elizabeth Dalloway is wandering the streets around St. Paul's:

> She looked up Fleet Street. She walked just a little way towards St. Paul's. Shyly, like someone penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business, nor did she dare wander off into queer alleys, tempting bye-streets, anymore than in a strange house open doors which might be bedroom doors, or sitting-room doors, or lead straight to the larder. For no Dalloways came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting. (318)

Septimus's hallucination inspires the question, "what if this novel were an epic?" and allows for a moment of generic counterfactuality. In the same way, the "like" that frames Elizabeth's experiences ask: "what if this novel were a gothic romance?" Elizabeth's hesitant stroll down Fleet Street—the penetration of this unknown space—is figured alongside, or perhaps *as*, a generic penetration. Her cautious steps, reminiscent of Emily St. Aubert's experiences in Udolpho, are linked metaphorically to the exploration of "a strange house by night with a candle."[54]

When compared to Septimus, Elizabeth is a tentative wanderer. And she engages only in abbreviated fashion with the counterfactual before she turns away. She lacks the daring required to wander down these "queer alleys" and "tempting bye-streets." Septimus, however, does dare. As a result, he allows for the formation of a sustained counterfactual narrative in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the hallucination in which he confuses Peter Walsh for Evans, Septimus engages in a narration of history driven by desire, one that allows for the possibility of reconciliation, for the realization of utopian vision. He imagines himself as the hero of this history. Thus, Septimus represents, more than any

[54] In her work on strangeness and affective uncertainty in the fiction of Woolf's middle period, Molly Hite discusses a similar scene, in which Septimus and Rezia walk around Portland Place, "looking at this, that and the other, as if Portland Place were a room he had come into when the family are away" (qtd "How Strange" 95). The metaphor of the empty house becomes, Hite suggests, one of the sites for an "uncanny exploration … of figurative language" (ibid).

other character in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the plots and forms of the romance and, projecting these forms onto his narration of history, posits history itself, and an encounter with that history, as a romance.

-Conclusion-

Anticipating Catherine Gallagher's description of the counterfactual as a type of "judicial historical vision," Woolf is concerned with the political work of the counterfactual; her counterfactual imaginary produces corrective histories. Fiction, in the form of the romance, enters history to perform a judicial function, transforming accounts of the past from description to prescription. When Woolf transforms history into a romance narrative, she asks her readers to reconsider the ways in which they define and read historical writing and how they think about the relationship between history and truth. She challenges the realist epistemology that traditionally forms the grounds upon which historical writing is read, critiquing the privilege given to transparency and certainty. Woolf creates a romance epistemology, a system that demands that historical writing be read according to a different set of requirements.[55] What, then, does Woolf's romance epistemology demand of historical writing's reader? It asks, first, for the deconstruction of the relationship between truth and certainty, flatly rejects certainty as an indicator of

[55] For a discussion of romance epistemology, see Ian Duncan's "Authenticity Effects: The Work of Fiction in Romantic Scotland" (2003).

truth, and, ultimately, critiques the assumption of the primacy of truth in historical writing.

Woolf's romance epistemology replaces certainty with uncertainty. This is a willful and aestheticized uncertainty, a creative response on the part of the reader to the integration of the forms of the romance with historical narrative. In the same way that Woolf's comment at the end of "Jane Austen—"vain are these speculations"—asks the reader to think of the essay's narration of Austen's unlived life as politically useful, the uncertainty produced by the counterfactual demands political engagement on the part of the reader—demands, in other words, that the reader think about how things might have been different (and, by implication, better). This political engagement is modified by the readerly pleasure that accompanies the romance. The reader's mind replicates the very form of Woolf's counterfactual narrative, becoming wandering, associative, and desire-driven. Out of the uncertainty produced by Woolf's historical narratives, the reader thinks about history and imagines things otherwise.

Woolf's use of the forms of romance to re-theorize and re-narrate literary history asserts the romance as a critical, rather than simply generic, category. Through the forms of romance, Woolf's works reflect upon their own historical and formal practices. Woolf resuscitates the romance not just to deploy it as a plot structure; instead, she asserts its use as a particularly modernist mode of thinking about both literature and history.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hollinghurst's Scandal of Contact: Rewriting Modernism's Romance

-Introduction: The Scandal of James-

This chapter returns to Henry James and deals with Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, a work that offers a consideration of, and postscript to, modernism's work with the romance. I will argue that Hollinghurst uses Henry James as a critical figure, as a means to narrate literary history as a romance. In Hollinghurst's hands, however, the category of the romance is remodeled, so that, at the end of his work, we are left with a very different sort of romance than the one developed by James, Forster and Woolf.

Time and again, Alan Hollinghurst has been asked about his relationship with Henry James. In an interview after the publication of *The Line of Beauty* (2004), he referred to James as "a good sort of presiding spirit to invoke." And, asked in more general terms about his feelings toward James, he described his relationship with the author in the language of romantic encounter: "It was like an affair. Everything seemed to feed into it, be illuminated by it … I love everything about James; his rhythms, his ironies and his idiosyncracies." Hollinghurst is, there is no doubt, a writer profoundly engaged with James. It is the nature of this engagement—and, especially, how it is represented in *The Line of Beauty*—that offers, I think, a contribution to and commentary

on James's work, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, to reconceptualize of literary history as a romance.

In 2004, when *The Line of Beauty* was published, two other novels that dealt with James were also released: Colm Toibin's *The Master* and David Lodge's *Author, Author*. Of this coincidence, Peter Kemp wrote, in a review of *Author, Author*, "If anyone deserves to win this year's Man Booker Prize, it's Henry James. During 2004, he has been the originator of no fewer than three outstanding novels."[56] *The Master* was, in fact, shortlisted for the Booker; *The Line of Beauty* won the prize.[57] For Kemp, as for critics like Julie Rivkin, these novels represented nostalgia for literary personhood and James's immunity to the death of the author ("Afterlife" 4). By conceiving of James as the active subject, the originator, of these works, Kemp transforms James into an icon of personhood, a personality that refuses to be effaced into textual marginalia.[58]

Of these novels, critics ask, "what does it mean for the contemporary gay male author when Henry James is made available as a gay precursor, a literary father, a model for emulation, appropriation, or something else" (Rivkin "Writing" 282)? Other critics re-orient the question: "What is it about Henry James, his life and his work, that seems to have offered such currency for British and Irish writers at this moment" (Hannah 71)? This shift from gender and sexuality to nation makes visible James's critical mobility, his

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[56] Kemp omits, as Lodge later points out, other neo-Jamesian novels that were published either the year before or after 2004: Emma Tennant's *Felony* (2003), Michiel Heyns's *The Typewriter's Tale* (2005) and Toby Litt's *Ghost Story* (2005)

[57] And Lodge's *Author, Author* inspired a thoughtful, though defensive, analysis of that year, written by Lodge and published in *The Year of Henry James: The Story of a Novel* (2008).

[58] Cf. Colm Tóibín, who asserts, "James is my character and I want him haunted."

availability to multiple communities for multiple purposes.[59] Whether he is the figure through which authors think about the relationship between biography and fiction or represents the opportunity to rescue the author from the "deconstruction of the subject," James announces the possibility, or responds to the desire, for historical intimacy.

While also using James to establish a form of historical intimacy, Hollinghurst's relationship with the neo-Jamesian novels of the last decade is an uneasy one. Works like *The Master* and *Author, Author* are historical fiction and deal explicitly with James; these novels are, in other words, *about* James. *The Line of Beauty*, however, transforms James from subject to device and uses him as a signifier of historical intimacy. Hollinghurst rewrites that intimacy so central to neo-Jamesian fiction—making it scandalous and erotic—and grafts it onto modernism's romance literary history. Hollinghurst's work in *The Line of Beauty* creates a uniquely twenty-first century re-reading of, and conclusion to, modernism's romance project.

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[59] Rivkin explains that her "re-reading of [*The Ambassadors*] confirmed that Henry James had written my autobiography" ("Afterlife" 3). Ozick describes a nearly identical experience: "I read 'The Beast in the Jungle' and creepily thought: here, here is my autobiography" (?). This placement of abnormality at the center of the relationship between the modern author and James is echoed by Toibin, who writes, "James is my character and I want him haunted" (?). Reversing this logic is Hollinghurst, who, in an interview about *The Line of Beauty*, described James as "a good sort of presiding spirit to invoke." Denis Flannery suggests that fiction on James is essentially apostrophic, and argues that authors "draw on James to explore the boundaries of mourning" (305). And Daniel Hannah writes, What I would like to suggest is that what each of these authors has, in quite different ways, turned to is precisely this unstable, ambivalent play with the constructs of private and public, this queering of the tenuous demarcations of private and public space … While movement between celebration and a sense of loss, in various forms, permeates Tóibín's, Lodge's, and Hollinghurst's works, it is the passing between public performance and private withdrawal, between the stage and the study, the drawing-room and the bedroom, the expensive party and an impossible domestic privacy, that motivates and structures these novels" (72).

In *The Line of Beauty*, it is most often the physical book, rather than James or his plots, which matters the most. Hollinghurst thinks about historical intimacy in terms of scandalous and erotic physical contact; thus, books by and about James become the sites for these contacts. The novel's protagonist, Nick Guest, uses James's memoir, *A Small Boy and Others*, to hide an embarrassing erection. Nick and a friend cut and snort lines of cocaine upon a critical work titled *Henry James and the Question of Romance*. Henry James's novels also structure the plot of *The Line of Beauty*; Nick is writing a thesis on James's style and he and a friend struggle—and, importantly, fail—to adapt *The Spoils of Poynton* into a movie. Hollinghurst uses allusion to James and his works to create a literary history that is framed in terms of pleasure—specifically, physical pleasure—and scandal.

By describing these encounters as the foundation for a literary historical narrative, *The Line of Beauty* expresses what Carolyn Dinshaw has described as a "queer historical impulse." This is, she writes, "an impulse toward making connections across time between, on the one hand, lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then and, on the other, those left out of current sexual categories now" (1). With its attention to physical and scandalous contact, *The Line of Beauty*'s performs Dinshaw's description of queer history as "bodies touch[ing] across time" (3); Hollinghurst's allusions to James and his books enact this touching. Allusion, as a way of making the connection across time that Dinshaw discusses, exerts a historical energy—and, specifically, a queer historical energy.[60] Most importantly, *The Line of Beauty* offers a response to Elizabeth Freeman's question: "how might queer practices of

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[60] An example of this "touching" is, for Dinshaw as for Barthes, citation.

pleasure, specifically, the bodily enjoyments that travel under the sign of queer sex, be thought of as temporal practices, even as portals to historical thinking" (*Time Binds* 59)? Allusion is the site for these "bodily enjoyments," which structure Hollinghurst's model of literary history as a romance.[61] Allusion is, in other words, transformed into a space for physical, erotic pleasure and is, at the same time, the means through which the novel narrates and conceptualizes of literary history.

Allusion is, then, a mode of historical thinking—one that narrates literary history as a romance. And with allusion, Hollinghurst lays bare the structures of the romance, transforming it from a practice that underwrites the form to a central, determinative, and often explicit, component of that work. The romance depends, as Barbara Fuchs has pointed out, upon allusion, the textual manifestation of source work.[62] The Vulgate Cycle, for example, provides source material for *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which is, in turn, a central source for *The Once and Future King* and even *Dude, Where's My Car?* Allusion exists, in these cases, for the reader rather than the plot's characters; the characters in *Dude, Where's My Car?* do not, in other words, sit down to read *The Once and Future King*. In contrast, Hollinghurst makes the practice of allusion overt and central to *The Line of Beauty*'s plot; Nick Guest does sit down to read works by Henry James.

Hollinghurst uses allusion to lend the romance a double valence in *The Line of Beauty*. "Romance" refers, first, to the centrality of wandering, delay and wish fulfillment in the novel. Nick Guest is, as his name suggests, a stranger, an outsider-observer who confronts Thatcher-era London in much the same way the knight-errant

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[61] While scholars like Freeman and Dinshaw think of the "queer historical impulse" as a space of pleasure and even ecstasy, others, like Heather Love, conceptualize of queer relationships with the past in terms of alienation, shame and ambivalence.
[62] See *Romance* 10.

approaches the adventures that act as obstacles to his return home. Nick's attempt to adapt *The Spoils of Poynton* into a film becomes, for example, a quest—one that is structured by both the forward movement and frustration of desire. At the same time, *The Line of Beauty* also thinks about the romance in more popular terms—as a story of romantic encounter. Romantic encounter signifies, not necessarily love—for the novel is ambivalent on the subject of emotions this clear and absolute—but attraction and erotic pleasure.

The Line of Beauty might be read as a failed romance, or a romance in reverse. After all, the novel begins with a homecoming and concludes with an exile rather than a return; Nick's homosexuality is discovered, he is misrecognized as a sexual and political villain, and he is forced to leave his home. In general, everything in the novel fails. *The Spoils of Poynton* never becomes a movie; Ogee, the company Nick establishes with a friend, fails; and his lover, Wani, dies of AIDS. These narratives of failure do not, however, transform the novel into a failed romance; they, and allusion, are, instead, the means through which Hollinghurst points to the essential queerness of the romance. Dinshaw writes of the romance: "the romance narrative genre … has a big ostensible task: to promote some version of heterosexuality against all odds" (*Getting Medieval* 295).[63] For Hollinghurst, as for Dinshaw and other critics, "ostensible" is key.[64] For Hollinghurst's romance is a masculine space, which has little room for women, and

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[63] The meaningfulness of "odds" is not lost. Thinking of oddness as that which connotes queerness, we are left with a definition of the romance as a form that must defend heterosexuality against all queers.

[64] See also: Dinshaw, Carolyn. "A Kiss Is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and Its Consolations in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Diacritics. Vol. 24 No. 2/3 (Summer 1994) pp. 204–226 and Zeikowitz, Richard E. "Befriending the Medieval Queer: A Pedagogy for Literature Classes." College English: Special Issue: Lesbian and Gay Studies/Queer Pedagogies. Vol. 65 No. 1 (Sep 2002) pp. 67–80

which plays host to erotic, scandalous, historiographically articulate encounters between men. *The Line of Beauty* rewrites the romance by using allusion to deconstruct the central conventions of the romance—heterosexual love and progress from exile to return—and using the resulting disorientation to produce a new way of thinking about literary history. This chapter will pay close attention to Hollinghurst's allusions and will explore the fashion in which they offer a commentary on, and conclusion to, the work that Henry James began in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

I want to introduce my reading of *The Line of Beauty* through a brief discussion of David Leavitt, a novelist who, though not a neo-Jamesian in the fashion of Tóibín or Lodge, also uses erotic allusion to think about literary history. Like Hollinghurst, Leavitt depends heavily on James in the formulation of these allusions; unlike Hollinghurst, however, Leavitt's work more explicitly deals with the relationship among three terms: first, literature and literary influence; second, allusion; and, third, scandal and eroticism. Thus, his work offers a framework within which we might begin to think about *The Line of Beauty*.

In 1993, David Leavitt published *While England Sleeps*. The novel's release became a literary scandal. In the introductory pages of a novella published four years later, Leavitt writes, "I was in trouble. An English poet (now dead) had sued me over a novel I had written because it was based in part on an episode from his life. Worse, my publishers in the United States and England had capitulated to the poet, pulling the novel out of bookstores and pulping several thousand copies. Why should I have been surprised? My publishers were once Salman Rushdie's publishers too" (*Arkansas* 3). *While England Sleeps* is the story of the relationship between a wealthy novelist and a

young working-class Underground worker. Shortly after the publication of the novel, Stephen Spender threatened a lawsuit, claiming that *While England Sleeps* borrowed heavily, and within acknowledgement, from Spender's memoir, *World Within World*. When asked in an interview about the sources for his novel, Leavitt defended his choice not to mention Spender's autobiography:

> I mentioned several—histories of the Spanish Civil War, Christopher Isherwood's memoir. I did not mention the book's most crucial source—Sir Stephen Spender's 1951 autobiography *World Within World*—for the simple reason that a year before, Spender had loudly protested the publication of Hugh David's unauthorized and unflattering biography of him. Given Spender's apparent irascibility, I saw no sense in stirring up trouble unless it was absolutely necessary.

In the same interview, Leavitt described Spender's reaction to *While England Sleeps*: "Spender attack[ed] the novel in the most vituperative language, accusing me not only of stealing from him but of grafting onto his life 'pornographic' sex scenes that he found repellent."

Spender's attack on Leavitt problematizes the workings of literary influence and, even more, the very category of the historical novel/romance. With the conflict between the two authors, literary influence and source work is transformed into plagiarism—is made, in other words, profoundly scandalous. And given that Spender's primary complaint is Leavitt's explicit representations of two men having sex—which, as Leavitt points out, makes him no more a pornographer than John Updike—erotic encounter is also tied up with the problem, so that scandal, influence and eroticism become three parts of the same issue.

Two years after the 1995 republication of a substantially edited *While England Sleeps*, Leavitt published "The Term Paper Artist," a first-person fictional narrative about

a disgraced author, named David Leavitt, who returns home to Los Angeles after being sued for plagiarism by that "now dead" English poet (who, for simplicity's sake, I will refer to in this discussion as "Stephen Spender"). Aimless, David Leavitt wanders around Los Angeles and ends up in the UCLA library, where he reads reviews of *While England Sleeps* and autographs his own books. Eventually, he begins to write papers for male UCLA students, trading works of academic writing for blowjobs. Leavitt's first dip into the world of academic plagiarism is initiated by a moment in which the sexual gives way to, or is circumnavigated by, the intellectual. Leavitt visits Eric, a family friend who attends UCLA. After discussing the sex scenes in Leavitt's *Family Dancing*, Leavitt offers:

> "You want me to show you my dick?"
> "Not really."
> "You want me to give you a really great blowjob, Eric?"
> "Actually, I had something else in mind." (20)

That "something else" is a paper on *Daisy Miller*. The first paper that Leavitt writes, exchanged for a blowjob, is a response to the prompt: "Compare and contrast Lucy's and Daisy's responses to Italy in Forster's *A Room with a View* and James's *Daisy Miller*" (21). Significantly, the assignment asks for a comparative approach to literature, enforcing the notion that literature can be read only through the relationship, similarities and differences between individual authors and texts. Eric's attempt to skirt the problem of plagiarism reinforces the critical method demanded by the assignment. He defensively says to Leavitt, "You can use *my* ideas. I'm just asking you to put the sentences together" (22). In the same way that Leavitt is accused of "grafting" sex scenes onto Spender's life, Eric asks that the fictional Leavitt graft a particular style onto his

thoughts. This attempts to rethink plagiarism as collaboration and also enforces the conflation of sexual and intellectual energies.

Leavitt's final objection—his assertion that "I'm a famous writer. I have a novel under contract with Viking Penguin. You know, Viking Penguin, that gigantic publisher, the same one that published *Daisy Miller*"—fails and the two men finalize their oral contract to trade an academic essay for a sexual encounter (21-2). In this final moment of resistance, however, Leavitt strives to reestablish a legitimate, non-scandalous relationship with James; he fights to situate, or resituate, himself into a literary history. His position in this literary history is initially destabilized by his conflict with Stephen Spender; this destabilization is made complete by his decision to write a paper on James and Forster for Eric. He also voluntarily places himself in the position that Spender perceived himself as occupying—that of the copies author.

Before Leavitt agrees to become a "paper artist," the reader is treated to a description of Leavitt's first glimpse of Eric's bedroom: "In the space where a side table might have been, a copy of *Family Dancing* lay splayed over the Vintage edition of *A Room with a View*" (17). The split halves of the book, this splaying, invokes the image of a physical relationship between bodies. In this sense, then, the two books offer a literalized account of Stephen Guy-Bray's suggestion that literary influence develops through an erotic or romantic relationship and his assertion of the "homosexuality of textuality" (xii, xvi). This description of Leavitt's novel spread over Forster's novel—which, importantly, shares a scene with discussions of blowjobs and penises—provides a literary history that is physical and, even more, intensely erotic.

There are three elements to Leavitt's imagining of literary history and influence. First, there is the backstory for "The Term Paper Artist": the plagiarism scandal of *While England Sleeps* and the antagonistic dialogue between Spender and Leavitt. Second, we have the fictional Leavitt's decision to write academic papers for students, a move that reverses the original plagiarism scandal and places Leavitt in a modified version of Spender's role. And, finally, there is the physical relationship between *Family Dancing* and *A Room with a View*, a relationship that imagines Leavitt's dealings with Forster in a very particular and explicit fashion. There three terms—scandal/plagiarism, influence, and physicality/eroticism—become virtually indistinguishable in Leavitt's novella.

Through plagiarism, then, influence is transformed into scandal—a scandal that is, at once, sexual and intellectual; literary history is thus transformed into a process of erotic, scandalous contact. The novella's very title "The Term Paper *Artist*" seeks to obscure the boundary between plagiarism and artistic production. If Spender argues, in his attacks on Leavitt, for a causal model of influence, Leavitt argues the opposite, asserting the need for an influence borne of scandal and erotic encounter. Although *The Line of Beauty* does not deal with plagiarism, it does, like "The Term Paper Artist," think about scandal and erotic contact as the bases for literary history and influence. Both Leavitt and Hollinghurst develop narratives of literary history grounded in queer historical intimacy and the forms of the romance. And both author use allusion and physical books to signify intimate, erotic relationships—to form, in other words, intensely personal and productive relationships with past, and modernist, author like James and Forster.

-The Matter of Books-

Like "The Term Paper Artist," *The Line of Beauty* replots literary history in terms of physical, eroticized and scandalous, or scandalized, relationships. And in the same way that Leavitt structures his ideas on literary history, influence and scandal around a group of books, Hollinghurst also anchors his description of romance and literary history in a network of allusions: first, the novel's allusive title, *The Line of Beauty*; second, a critical work contained within Hollinghurst's novel, *Henry James and the Question of Romance*; third, James's memoir, *A Small Boy and Others*; and, finally, another of James's novels, *The Spoils of Poynton*, which serves as the text upon which the plot of *The Line of Beauty* pivots.

Together, the Jamesian texts to which Hollinghurst alludes form a network in, and of, *The Line of Beauty*. They are important for their physical presences in particular scenes and plots. Taken as a group, the titles wind their way through Hollinghurst's novel, forming an interpretive framework within which we might read *The Line of Beauty*. The novel's very title, for instance, offers a model of literary influence and inheritance, one in which Hogarth's line of beauty, the ogee, is resignified into a symbol of erotic encounter and the consumption of drugs. And a copy of *Henry James and the Question of Romance*, upon which lines of cocaine are cut, literalizes Hollinghurst's treatment of romance as a space of scandal and erotic encounter. Similarly, *A Small Boy and Others*—James's developmental narrative that is, appropriately, often read as a queer coming of age story—hides an erection prompted by a young man in a swimming suit.[65]

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[65] See Michael Moon, *A Small Boy and Others*.

And through an extended allusion to *The Spoils of Poynton*, Hollinghurst engages in a critique of systems of inheritance (as well as the forms of literary history suggested by these systems). Through these titles and texts, Hollinghurst articulates his own, specifically twenty-first century, mode of thinking about literary history as a romance.

My reading of *The Line of Beauty* is concerned with three areas: first, the novel's work with physical books and, second, characters' engagements with projects related to James. Together, these two areas—and, more broadly, allusion in the novel—come to suggest style as an alternative to, and critique of, particular forms of reproduction and inheritance. Throughout the novel, style is, as I will show, that which frustrates transmission, inheritance and reproduction. Of this tension between reproduction/inheritance and style, *The Line of Beauty* asks: can there be queer historical intimacy without reproduction and inheritance? As Sara Ahmed has shown, inheritance is hostile toward queerness.[66] When narrating a queer literary history—which is, in the case of Hollinghurst's novel, a romance literary history—what is the alternative to these queer-hostile forms of inheritance?[67] As my discussion will show, Hollinghurst uses style to carve out a space for a queer-friendly system of inheritance, a system that helps Hollinghurst to narrate literary history as a romance. Thus, this dramatization of the conflict between reproduction/inheritance and style is one of the means through which allusion challenges the romance's supposed "promot[ion] [of] some version of heterosexuality against all odds."

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[66] See *The Promise of Happiness* 110.
[67] See also Heather Love, who describes the way in which "reproduction itself is signaled as the culprit for linear history [and] the notion of the great refusal has been linked to a queer tradition of the refusal of reproduction and the future" (*Feeling Backward* 36).

Hollinghurst's romance literary history is grounded in erotic contact and in scandalous, relationships between books and people; it is a pleasurable literary history. The novel's conclusion, which is this chapter's third area of focus, puts pressure on this pleasure, however; for, at first blush, these final pages are decidedly unpleasurable. They seem, in fact, terrifyingly pessimistic. As Nick leaves his home and imagines what he thinks is his inevitable death from AIDS, *The Line of Beauty* seems to offer no future for the queer figure and, thus, no future for a literary history narrated as a romance. The question that must be asked of the novel's conclusion is: does it reject the queer historical intimacy that Hollinghurst has proposed? Does it undo, in other words, the work of the rest of the novel? The answer is no; the sacrifice of a future contributes, I will show, to Hollinghurst's work—supports, in other words, his use of allusion, scandal and eroticism to create a queer historical intimacy and romance literary history.

I want to begin my discussion of *The Line of Beauty* with an early moment in the novel, a moment that sets up the terms for Nick's relationship with James and also the novel's work with style and reproduction. Nick has just graduated from Cambridge. Rather than returning to his family's home—a small, sparsely populated village represented in the House of Commons by Gerald Fedden—he moves to London and stays with Toby Fedden, with whom Nick attended college, and his family. Nick becomes a permanent guest in the household of the conservative MP and, while there, takes up graduate study in English at University College London. His dissertation, as Nick phrases it,

> "[W]ant[s] to look at *style*."
> […]

> It all sounded perfectly pointless, or at least a way of wasting two years, and Nick blushed because he really was interested in it and didn't yet know—not having done the research—what he was going to prove.
>
> "Ah," said Lord Kessler intelligently: "style as an obstacle."
>
> Nick smiled. "Exactly … Or perhaps style that hides things and reveals things at the same time." For some reason this seemed rather near the knuckle, as though he were suggesting Lord Kessler had a secret. (49-50)

Triply significant, style is, first, connected to a "kind of coming out"—a defiant feeling experienced by Nick as he asserts his connection to James and Jamesian style (50). This coming out is reinforced by Nick's sense that "he [was] suggesting Lord Kessler had a secret." For Lord Kessler is certainly gay; and so, in the same moment that Nick engages in a stylistic coming out (shyly revealing his interest in Jamesian style and also admiting "why he wasn't and never would be married to Trollope" [50]), he also worries that he has referred to what Lord Kessler is hiding. In the same way that style suggests a coming out, it also operates, in this passage and the novel as a whole, as an obstacle. Signifying both obstacle and coming out, style both "hides things and reveals things." Third, style is connected to pointlessness and waste is opposed to an inability to *prove*. Here, then, style is immune to empirical analysis. It is that which cannot be proven or pinned down by a thesis and analysis. It frustrates coherent transmission and, in Nick's inability to finish, much less to begin his research, completion.

Style, then, signifies secret—though a secret that is, at the same time it is hidden, is also revealed—sexuality, obstacles, and the frustration of completion. It also signals the nature of Nick's relationship with James. Beginning during Nick's conversation with Lord Kessler, the figure of James loses its status as Nick's object of academic study and acquires a different sort of importance in *The Line of Beauty*. It becomes a signifier of

scandalous and erotic aesthetic and social style. During a party, Nick and his lover, Wani, hide in Nick's bedroom to snort cocaine:

> Wani pulled out the chair and sat down at the desk, little clouds and gleams of possible rejoinders across his features. He peered at the stack of library books and selected *Henry James and the Question of Romance* by Mildred R. Pullman, which had a sleek Mylar cover protecting its dust jacket. "This should do," he said. He had never been in Nick's room before, and it was clear that it held no magic for him of the kind Nick had felt in Wani's room at Lowndes Square [...] Wani was working painstakingly and a little defensively with his gold card, making rapid hatching movements to and fro across the partially visible features of Henry James—not the great bald Master but the quick-eyed, tender, brilliant twenty-year-old, with an irrepressible kink in his dark hair [...] [Wani] raised his hands as if he's balanced something. "Now there's a line of beauty for you!" (222-4)[68]

Daniel Hannah has read this scene as one instance of "lines of varying forms proliferat[ing] in the novel" (89). This reading is well in line with James's transformation into a signifier of something other than the literary in *The Line of Beauty*. This transformation is an exemplary instance of something we see throughout the novel: it central terms and images go through processes of resignification. *Henry James and the Question of Romance*, for example, is removed from its original status as the signifier of critical thought and becomes instead an object that connotes decadence. Where, before, *Henry James and the Question of Romance* would have been the medium, both physically and generically, for Mildred Pullman's discussion of James and romance, it in this scene transformed into a medium of a different sort. It becomes the surface upon which one of the text's central symbols is etched: it is now the physical medium for the line of beauty. The line of beauty is also transformed, from the tame ogee that Hogarth describes in *Analysis of Beauty* into a line of cocaine. "The question of romance" becomes the site for

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[68] For a discussion of how portraits and images of James relate to his literary style, see Moon (31-65).

a scandalous act, an act that is contained within the scene of an erotically charged encounter between Wani and Nick. In this moment, Hollinghurst posits literary history as a romance—but a romance made scandalous, erotic and shocking.

Two aspects of Pullman's title, *Henry James and the Question of Romance*, structure the work that the book does in *The Line of Beauty*: first, the very mention of romance and, second, romance's status as a "question." Pullman's title is the novel's only explicit reference to romance; it is notable, then, that the title comes to suggest two things at once. For although we can assume that the title connotes James's characterization of romance, Nick's reaction to the book introduces a new possibility, a different way of reading the term "romance." When Nick looks down at the book's cover, he sees "not the great bald Master but the quick-eyed, tender, brilliant twenty-year-old, with an irrepressible kink in his dark hair." Here, then, is a moment of love-romance, a scene of adoration. And the image of James—with the "irrepressible *kink*" that adds an erotic charge to the image—declares its hospitality to this form of romance. In its flexibility—in its accommodation, in other words, of multiple meanings—*Henry James and the Question of Romance* introduces a central characteristic of Hollinghurst's type of romance. This is its refusal of generic categories, its desire to decategorize the romance, and its ability to go through processes of resignification and reformation—its insistence, in other words, that one term, "romance," mean multiple things at once. Here, then, we see the setting up of part of *The Line of Beauty*'s theoretical framework; by describing Wani cutting lines of cocaine on an edition of Pullman's work, Hollinghurst lays out how, precisely, he wants to treat the romance.

In the same way that the particular image of "romance" in Pullman's title sets the terms for the work *The Line of Beauty* does with the romance, the title's interrogative, "question," determines how the text begins to approach romance. Here is a lack, or refusal, of sureness; romance is always a question posed to, rather than a straightforward fact of, the text. It imports into the novel an interrogative spirit, so that the question, and questioning, becomes the novel's central critical mode. When "the question of romance" is first introduced, it is a critical prompt directed toward James's literary work. That question asks us to consider: is Henry James's work romance? What is the relationship between James's writing and the forms of romance?

As *The Line of Beauty* progresses, however, it becomes clear that the question is being posed in several directions at once—so that both the novel's protagonist and Hollinghurst himself are being asked "the question of romance." By the novel's end, the title could be read *Nick Guest and the Question of Romance* or *Alan Hollinghurst and the Question of Romance*.

Just as Leavitt's *Family Dancing* is "splayed" over a copy of *A Room with a View* in "The Term Paper Artist," Wani's line of beauty is "hatch[ed]" onto the surface of a book about Henry James and the romance. As is also the case in Leavitt's novella, literary relationships are figured through the physical relationship between individual books. Leavitt's "splaying" suggests an erotic, layering sort of relationship; Hollinghurst's "hatching," however, imagines a move active relationship—one that includes processes of modification (rather than simply the inclusion suggested by "splaying"). Wani's line of beauty is a dramatic revision of Hogarth's line of beauty.

Wani's line is cocaine, making the relationship between *Henry James and the Question of Romance* and Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* scandalous and criminal.

That a modified version of Hogarth's line is hatched onto a critical work about James—in other words, that James and Hogarth are imagined as being in intimate and physical relationship with each other—suggests that the line of beauty influences Hollinghurst's conception of literary influence and history. As Hogarth tells us in *The Analysis of Beauty*, the line of beauty is one form in a hierarchy of lines. A straight line, though practical, is "least ornamental" (41). Privileging function over style, the straight line links the un-stylized form to reproducibility. The second form of line supplements the first by adding, "circular lines, and … lines partly straight, and partly circular" (41). More "productive of beauty" than straight or circular lines is the waving line, which Hogarth identifies as the line of beauty (41). This line of beauty is represented, for Hogarth, by "the ogee member" and requires precision in its composition ("by bulging too much in their curvature [they] becom[e] … gross and clumsy; and, on the contrary … as they straighten, [they] becom[e] … mean and pure" (48). The distinction here between the reproducibility of the straight line and the productivity of the waving line is telling; where the straight line is passive, the waving line is active.

The line of beauty refuses straightness. In a fashion that suggests Hollinghurst's enjoyment of a good pun, the line of beauty is linked in the novel to the erotic male figure. Nick sees male buttocks as the embodiment of the line of beauty. This is a fascinating reversal of Hogarth's imagery; for him, the line of beauty is represented best by the stays of a corset on a "well-form'd woman" (49). It is clear from Hogarth's writing that the line of beauty is guided by the logic of gender—a logic that Hollinghurst

quickly reverses. In a moment that echoes Wani's use of cocaine to produce a new form of the line of beauty, Nick looks at Wani's naked, post-coital body and sees, "the double curve [that was] Hogarth's 'line of beauty,' the snakelike flicker of an instinct, of two compulsions held in one unfolding movement. He ran his hand down Wani's back. He didn't think Hogarth had illustrated this best example of it, the dip and swell—he had chosen harps and branches, bones rather than flesh. Really it was time for a new *Analysis of Beauty*" (176).

Nick is, of course, wrong. Hogarth, in fact, does use flesh to illustrate the line of beauty. It is simply female, rather than male flesh and it is also flesh adjusted by the mold of a corset; Nick omits the female, or feminine, from his reiteration of Hogarth's examples. But, articulating the need for a new *Analysis of Beauty*, Nick engages in important editing, re-gendering and re-sexualizing the line by mobilizing the male form as its most appropriate representative. And not only is the line located by the Nick on the male body; but it is also the male, *post-coital* body. Hogarth's aesthetic rule is thus made profoundly and essentially erotic and, more importantly, homoerotic. Hollinghurst highlights the queerness that was, from the beginning, exhibited by the line. The always-already status of the line of beauty's queerness is reinforced by Hogarth's phrasing when he introduces the ogee curve. He refers to it, not as a curve, but instead as a "member," language that leads the reader, not to the curves of a corset or woman's hips, but instead to the penis.[69] The language of the line of beauty is thus already hospitable to the aesthetic of male erotic encounter.

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[69] By the time Hogarth wrote *The Analysis of Beauty* in 1753, "member" had been a term for penis for several centuries.

Nick conceives of the “ogee curve” as “pure expression, decorative not structural; a structure could be made from it, but it supported nothing more than a boss or the cross that topped an onion dome” (176). The ogee curve, then, is pure style—a design, or shape, that puts pressure on the relationship between structure, and utility, and form. It is useless, providing nothing more, or less, than a beautiful form. The ogee curve is, in other words, the architectural manifestation of the decadent. It is in excess to necessity; it is elegant. The figure of the ogee embodies the way that Nick thinks, during his conversation with Lord Kessler, about James’s style. Both the ogee and James’s style present the threat, or promise, of pointlessness and waste. The pointlessness of the ogee curve represents, however, a form of purity, suggesting that use, rather than style, is a corrupting influence. *The Line of Beauty* does not, therefore, defend style on the basis of its usefulness; instead, style is valorized by virtue of its complete usefulness or, more accurately, it deconstruction of the very idea of use, a deconstruction that further dissociates the line of beauty from that paradigm of use, reproduction.

The uselessness of the ogee curve contributes to one of the central concerns of Hollinghurst’s novel; this is the attention to use, uselessness, and the related problem of reproduction. As often as Nick embraces and aestheticizes his status as political, social and class outsider, he also experiences a real fear regarding the utility of the witty, decadent observer and commentator. Acquaintances often ask of Nick, “what do you *do*?” Nick meets the question with cleverness, mentions of Henry James and “wanderings away from the strict truth” (?). However, the reader asks a similar question: what use is Nick in the hyper-conservative world of Thatcherite politics? At the same time that both Nick and the reader fetishize his uselessness, Nick also strives to be of use

to the Fedden family. He tries—and, the majority of the time, fails—to be a caretaker to Catherine Fedden, the bi-polar young daughter of Gerald Fedden. Entering into a business partnership with Wani—forming a company that they call "Ogee"—Nick tries to produce a film adaptation of *The Spoils of Poynton* and publish a magazine, which is also titled "Ogee." And, finally, mirroring his attempt to care for Catherine, Nick attempts, in the last part of the novel, to help Wani after he contracts and begins to die of AIDS. Ultimately, however, what seems important here is Nick's failure. All of these attempts to be of use—to meet, in other words, to meet the criteria for usefulness that are set by those around him and, to some extent, even himself—implode dramatically. Failure becomes, within the context of Nick's life, the opposite of use.

That the ogee curve signifies an anxiety toward use and value returns us to the image of Wani's back and Nick's use of "the line of beauty" as code for the eroticized male body. In that moment, Nick also conflates the body and the need for that body by linking together "the double curve" with "instinct" and "two compulsions." The act or sensation of sexual need is thus built into the very aesthetics of the erotic body. This is not simply a matter of that erotic body, and its particular aesthetic, provoking sexual need; instead, compulsion and instinct are contained within that aesthetic. Nick is struck, overwhelmed, by his need for Wani. Wani's body provokes Nick's physical and emotional need and desire. Much is made, however, of Wani's refusal to need Nick. And so, even though they are in a sexual relationship—a relationship that develops around physical need and use—Wani repudiates Nick's usefulness.

In the relationship between Nick and Wani, the ogee curve comes to occupy two spaces at once: first, the space of the sexual, as seen in the figuration of Wani's buttocks

as the embodiment of the line of beauty; and, second, the economic, as Wani and Nick found a company, appropriately called "Ogee." This partnering constitutes a sanitized and socially acceptable enunciation of their sexual partnering. The company is vague in its goals. It is, ultimately, engaged in some indefinable cultural project; it produces a magazine, which is also called "Ogee." Wani and Nick work on the magazine for years. But only one issue is successfully completed and published. Nick receives the boxes of the magazines, ready for distribution, after he has seen Wani, who is very quickly dying, for the last time.

As a gesture toward Nick's academic interests, the company also seeks, but fails, to develop a film adaptation of *The Spoils of Poynton*. Wani and Nick work on the adaptation inconsistently; and, eventually, their work is aborted when Wani develops AIDS. The coexistence of AIDS and *The Spoils of Poynton* introduce into *The Line of Beauty* two equally disastrous models of reproduction and inheritance. The novel's treatment James's novella and AIDS dramatizes the problems with which Hollinghurst is preoccupied: how do novels engage with and theorize literary history? How can literary history be thought of as something other than a straightforward, or straight, narrative?[70] What does a queer literary history look like? And how can particular forms, genres and plots be put to use when an author attempts to work through, via a fictional work, his relationship with previous authors? *The Spoils of Poynton* and AIDS begin to answer these questions by exposing the devastating, catastrophic qualities inherent to systems of reproduction and inheritance. *The Spoils of Poynton* does this by critiquing the ethics and

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[70] See Jennifer Terry's "Theorizing Defiant Historiography" and Carolyn Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval*.

narrating the failure of inheritance. By medicalizing and pathologizing inheritance, AIDS engages in the same project.

Nick describes his interest in *The Spoils of Poynton* in the following terms: “I’ve always rather wanted to make a film of *The Spoils of Poynton* … I think it would be rather marvelous, don’t you. You know Ezra Pound said it was just a novel about furniture, meaning to dismiss it of course, but that was really what made me like the sound of it” (187). From its introduction, then, James’s novel and its adaptation are both linked to an aestheticized banality, to a superficiality that produces, rather than stunts, artistic production. Nick is drawn to the novel by its perceived frivolity. It is, coincidentally, this superficiality that has been blamed for the critical marginalization of *The Spoils of Poynton*. Stephanie Foote writes, “critics of …[the novel] keep bumping up against the furniture” (41). At the same time, however, this furniture is the site for the novella’s critique of systems of inheritance and, thus, one of its most meaningful elements. The furniture of James’s novella is, then, the literalization of Jamesian style; it is the thing that both obstructs and produces meaning. But the furniture is James’s style made, not just material, but also frivolous. Appropriately, Nick embraces this frivolity. *The Spoils of Poynton*, as well as its attempted film adaptation, is, at the same time, entirely pointless and a forcible producer of meaning.

The Spoils of Poynton is about systems of inheritance. Adela Gereth’s son, Owen, is about to be married (significantly, to a tacky, superficial American). Upon his marriage, Adela’s house, along with all that is contained within it, will become Owen’s property. The novel details the battle between Owen and Adela; finally, though, Adela relinquishes her moral, if not legal, claim and Owen inherits all of the furniture. In a

striking instance of poetic justice, however, the Owen's house burns and everything contained within it is destroyed. *The Spoils of Poynton*, then, is also about the necessary failure and destruction of these systems of inheritance. What makes James's novella central to *The Line of Beauty* is this failure, this condemnation of inheritance as an invalid form of transmission.

In James's novella, inheritance's failure is caused by the reproductive impulse, by the desire to recreate and transmit one's self or one's possession, that resides at its center. In fact, inheritance is produced, and perpetuated, by a fantasy of reproduction, by a desire to see the self projected—via the things that symbolize that self—into the future. In *The Spoils of Poynton*, inheritance is represented as an attempt to transform reproduction into a completely neutral act, into a process that exerts no influence over the object of inheritance or the inheritor. Owen Gereth wants the things that Adela Gereth owns; he mistakenly assumes that the process of inheritance exerts no influence over the objects that are transmitted from mother to son. Once Owen inherits the goods, however, they made to mean something that they did not mean when owned by Adela. Where, for Adela, the pieces of furniture signify the pleasures of collection and beauty, they are, in Owen's possession, symbolic of the greed of collection and familial dissent. Inheritance, in other words, corrupts the objects of inheritance. Ultimately, James's point is that inheritance always includes—or, perhaps more simply, *is*—an act of de- and/or re-formation. There is always a mutative act in inheritance and this is, James asserts, what condemns it. James's belief that a process of mutation accompanies systems of inheritance is reinforced by *The Line of Beauty*'s parallel representations of AIDS and *The Spoils of Poynton*. For AIDS, like James's novella, reveals inheritance as a sign, a

process, of devastation. The AIDS virus enters the body and mutates to overcome the body's defenses. And then, after intimate contact—whether sex or a shared needle—the virus is transmitted to, inherited by, another body.

The two kinds of inheritance, which we might calls familiar and medical, and which are dealt with through Hollinghurst's engagement with *The Spoils of Poynton* and AIDS, become conflated as Wani's illness grows worse and Nick and Wani continue to try to produce a film version of *The Spoils of Poynton*. In this respect, there is one moment that it particularly important; here, the terrible reality of Wani's is made evident in a meeting between Nick and Wani, on the one hand, and two American producers, on the other:

> Wani's face, gaunt and blotched, had taken on new possibilities of expression—the repertoire of someone not only older but quite different, someone passed unknown in the street, was unexpectedly his. He must have looked at himself in the mirror, winced and raised his eyebrows, and seen this unbearable stranger mugging back at him. Clearly he couldn't be held responsibly for the latest ironies and startlements of his face, though there were moments when he seemed to exploit them [...] Nick said, "You know Wani's father's been made a lord," not sure whom he was pandering to.
>
> "Oh wow," said Brad. "Does that mean you'll be a lord one day too?"
>
> There were several seconds of silence till Wani said, "It's not hereditary." (376)

Momentarily conflated with the image of pathological transmission, inheritance is made pathological. When Wani answers Brad's question, he might as well be answering a question about AIDS. Questions about inheritance are collapsed together with the questions (silently asked by characters and readers alike): " how did you get AIDS? Have you given it to anyone else?" In other words, anxiety about AIDS is diverted into a

gossipy curiosity about British peerage. This pathologizing of inheritance can be read back into Hollinghurst's use of *The Spoils of Poynton*. James's "spoils" carry the double meaning of valuables, on the one hand, and diminished quality, on the other. Imported into Hollinghurst's novel, the significance of "spoils" is tripled, acquiring, through the figure of Wani, the meaning of a specifically *physical* degradation. Now, then, "spoils" is the mode through which Hollinghurst engages in a historical revision of James's social concerns.

The cynicism of Hollinghurst's use of *The Spoils of Poynton* is belied by the novel's final allusion to James's work. This allusion is organized around a moment of physical attraction—a moment in which Nick watches a friend, who is Catherine Fedden's boyfriend, swim in a pool. In this moment, Nick's attention is pulled in two directions. At the same time, he is watching his friend and reading James's memoir, *A Small Boy and Others*.

> He was reading Henry James's memoir of his childhood … and feeling crazily horny, after three days without as much as a peck from Wani. It was a hopeless combination. The book showed James at his most elderly and elusive, and demanded a pure commitment unlikely in a reader who was worrying excitedly about his boyfriend and semi-spying, through dark glasses, on another boy who was showing off in front of him and clearly trying to excite him. From time to time the book tilted and wobbled in his lap, and the weight of the deckle-edged pages pressed on his erection through the sleek black nylon. (273)

The scene by the pool enacts a critical reading of *A Small Boy and Others*. Writing about James's initiation into style, Michael Moon describes James's work in the memoir as "haunted by … [the] rich, primarily visual and corporeal discourse of male-male eros … James acknowledges the primacy of the visual representation of the desirable male body for his artistic formation" (32-3). Nick is, too, struck by the primacy of the "desirable

male body" as he reads *A Small Boy and Others*. The same figure that haunts James's writing haunts Nick's reading, a fact that collapses the scene of writing together with the scene of reading. This collapse is compounded by the book's use to contain Nick's arousal; importantly, however, the language of this containment speaks more to alleviation than disguise. The book is described as a hand, "press[ing] on his erection." Nick wants to be touched by Catherine's boyfriend; instead, he is touched by James's memoir. The book becomes both that which disguises, or blocks, arousal and that which acts as a sexual surrogate, a space onto which wished-for erotic contact can be displaced.

In the same way that Hollinghurst imagines *Henry James and the Question of Romance* as the site for figuring literary historical relationships as scandalous and deviant, *A Small Boy and Others* is the means through which *The Line of Beauty* thinks about these relationships as erotically charged. Taken together these two works, as well as *The Spoils of Poynton* seek to interrogate—and, ultimately, re-write—narratives of literary history and influence. In this project, Hollinghurst undercuts the way that the relationship between twentieth- and twenty-first century authors and James has been read in recent criticism. Take, for example, Julie Rivkin's query: "[w]hat does it mean for the contemporary gay male author when Henry James is made available as a gay precursor, a literary father, a model for emulation, appropriation, or something else?" (282) While implicitly considering the possibility of a queer literary history, she is, at the same time, simply reinscribing the very language and forms that a queer literary history—theorized, at least, by authors like Hollinghurst—seeks to evade. To put it another way, *The Line of Beauty* demands an alternative to the notions of the "precursor," the "literary father" and the "model." It wants, not simply a different way of thinking about influence but an

alternative to influence itself.[71] Hollinghurst's form of allusion, which prioritizes scandal and erotic contact, removes literary history from structures of influence, from histories that move causally or even forward.[72] Like Leavitt's *Family Dancing* is splayed over *A Room with a View* and Wani's cocaine is hatched onto *Henry James and the Question of Romance*, *The Line of Beauty* seeks a literary history made up of moments of collapsed time, moments defined by the erotic energy or scandal that they produce.

-The Final Confrontation-

After Nick's sexuality (and the fact of his sexual activity) becomes explicitly public, rather than simply an open secret, he is exiled from the Fedden household. Before he leaves, he hears a conversation between Gerard and a friend—a conversation in which the friend, Barry Groom, criticizes Gerald for having let Nick live in the house. Barry's complaints continue:

> "I never trusted him. I can tell you that, unequivocally. I know the type. Never says anything—always nursing his little criticisms. I remember sitting next to him after dinner here, years ago, and thinking, you don't fit in here, do you, you little cocksucker, you're out of your depth. And I'll tell you something else: he knew that. I could see he wished he was upstairs with the women […] So *fucking* superior …" (416)

Barry's vitriolic attack upon Nick is characterized, first, by a renunciation of Jamesian style. With his emphasis on a refusal to equivocate, Barry's hyper-masculine diatribe

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[71] See Bloom and Guy-Bray. See also Robert K. Martin *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* (1979), which describes literary tradition in terms of fraternal relations.
[72] Christopher Nealon has pointed out that the scholar most known for models of literary influence, Harold Bloom, already "fit[s] quite well into what we're currently calling 'queer temporality': a kind of time that is not linear or progressive … these conservative, paternalist literary theories are themselves queer" ("Queer Tradition" 618).

asserts a dramatic and conservative opposite to Nick's—and, ultimately, Hollinghurst's—privileging of Jamesian vagueness. Nick's memory of that dinner and his characterization of Barry is equally negative—though significantly less vitriolic: "Barry Groom swore harshly and humourlessly, as if swearing were the guarantee of some unpalatable truth. It was just what he'd done that night, after dinner, with an effect Nick could still remember, of having absolutely no style" (416). Upon Nick's silent self-defense, Barry continues his attack: "[t]hey hate us, you know, they can't breed themselves" (416). Here, in the plot's climax, is also the climax of the relationship between style and reproduction. Barry insults Nick by pointing to the non-productive nature of male-male sex (in other words: "you can't reproduce!"). And Nick defends himself by linking equivocation to style and pointing to Barry's stylelessness ("you have no style!").

Barry and Nick do not meet in this scene. Their confrontation is more conceptual than actual, a way to stage a truly dramatic altercation between reproduction and style. Significantly, reproduction, as represented by Barry, is characterized by a refusal to equivocate, political conservatism and a verbal brutality that hints at willingness to engage in acts of physical brutality. Central to Barry's attack is also a fear of communicability or transmissibility. While he is asserting the inability of Nick to reproduce biologically ("they can't breed themselves"), Barry is also registering a fear of another sort of reproduction. When he ask Gerard "[w]hy have you got a little ponce hanging round your house the whole fucking time?" (416), Barry is, in fact, asking: "how could you allow your family to be exposed to this? How could you allow the chance of

corruption—or the mental, as distinct from physical or biological, reproduction of perversity?" Gerald's response is to exile Nick from the house.[73]

In a moment that returns *The Line of Beauty* again to the question of allusion, the final, hostile conversation between Gerard and Nick skirts allusion and treats it as symptomatic of moral risk. Gerald is vocalizing his sympathy for Wani's parents and says, "To lose *one* child …" But both Gerard and Nick "heard a touch of Lady Bracknell in this, and Gerard turned promptly away from the danger of a joke" (418). In this moment—the moment that precedes Nick's exile from the Fedden house—the novel sees allusion and the potential for this allusion to be transformed into a reproduction of Wilde's comedy. But the allusion is refused. It is significant that this refusal, an act that might read as the exile of allusion from *The Line of Beauty*, parallels Nick's exile, which represents, itself, an attempt to de-queer the Fedden house.

-The Future-

When, in the final pages of *The Line of Beauty*, Nick leaves the Fedden house, he is left homeless. He has lost many of his friends, his lover is dying of AIDS, and he is

[73] One optic through which we might view this confrontation is the conversation between Lee Edelman and Judith Halberstam that took place in a forum discussing the antisocial thesis in queer theory. Although Halberstam seems to agree with Edelman's conclusions (i.e. reproductive futurism), she critiques *No Future*'s "narrow vision of an archive of negativity" (824). She urges, "If we want to make the antisocial turn in queer theory, we must be willing to turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange to embrace a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate, and to abandon the neat, clever, chiasmic, punning emphasis on style and stylistic order that characterizes both the gay male archive and the theoretical writing about it" (824). Here, then, a disagreement about the antisocial thesis pivots upon a question of style.

convinced that he too has contracted AIDS. His final sentiment, expressed as he looks back to the house from which he has just been exiled, is bewilderment. He imagines the effects—and, significantly the social effects—of his death. And then he "drift[s] on" from the Fedden house.

> None of his friends could save him. The time came, and they learned the news in the room they were in, at a certain moment in their planned and continuing day. They woke the next morning, and after a while it came back to them. Nick searched their faces as they explored their feelings. He seemed to fade pretty quickly. He found himself yearning to know of their affairs, their successes, the novels and the new ideas that the few who remembered him might say he never knew, he never lived to find out. It was the morning's vision of the empty street, but projected far forward, into afternoons like this one decades hence, in the absent hum of their own business. The emotion was startling. It was a sort of terror, made up of emotions from every stage of his short life, weaning, homesickness, envy and self-pity; but he felt that the self-pity belonged to a larger pity. It was a love of the world that was shockingly unconditional. He stared back at the house, and then turned and drifted on. He looked in bewilderment at number 24, the final house with its regalia of stucco swags and bows. It wasn't just this street corner but the fact of a street corner at all that seemed, in the light of the moment, so beautiful. (437-8)

This final moment is the novel's first direct confrontation with the notion or the actuality of a future. The future that Nick imagines—with his friends going about their lives and thinking, only occasionally, of him—exists only for Nick not being in it. The initiating moment of this future is his own hypothetical death from AIDS. These concluding moments are, then, a sacrificial act. Any future—however hypothetical or fanciful it might be—depends upon the absence of what has been, up until this point, the guiding consciousness of *The Line of Beauty*. The protagonist must die for the sake of this momentary, projected future. That Nick projects a future from which he is necessarily absent—in other words, a future from which the figure of the gay male is not only absent but is, more dramatically, killed off—poses a problem for the way the rest of the novel

has narrated literary history as a romance grounded in scandalous, pleasurable and erotic allusion. What, we might ask, does this conclusion mean for Hollinghurst's assertion of a queer historical intimacy? Does Nick's exile exclude the possibility of queer historical intimacy? Is this, in other words, also an exile of the romance literary history, a declaration of its impossibility or ill-fatedness at the end of the twentieth century? The question is, ultimately, whether the apparent pessimism of the novel's conclusion undoes the centrality, the critical power that *The Line of Beauty* has, to this point, given to pleasure, scandal and allusion.

I want to suggest that what we in fact have in the novel's conclusion is a history of the future, a projection of both queer historical intimacy and the romance literary history into a speculative and nebulously defined future world. The reactions of Nick's friends to his death are narrated in the past, rather than future, tense. This future, which is only speculative, is made to look like the past, is grammatically relegated to the category of history. Jill Dolan's formulation of "a backward glance that enacts a future vision" is especially helpful here. For the conclusion to *The Line of Beauty* offers the inversion of this term, creating a forward glance that enacts a past vision.

Even more striking is the ironic fashion in which Nick's hypothetical death emerges as an empowering transformation for him. Until the conclusion, Nick has been prevented from becoming absolutely intimate with the world in which he lives—has been trapped, in other words, in the role of outsider-observer. This conclusion transforms that partial, and ultimately unsatisfying, intimacy into the absolute intimacy of the omniscient narrator. From the hypothetical death of the character, a narrator emerges. Not only does Hollinghurst *not* negate the historiographical work accomplished by the rest of *The Line*

of Beauty, but he also carves out a space in the future for literary history to continue to be written as a romance.

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