

Genealogical Modernism: Family Structures, Identity, History, and Narrative in the 20th-Century
“Long” Novel

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Abstract

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“Genealogy” is a term which, in literary studies, is frequently associated with its philosophical context—a concept articulated by Nietzsche and Foucault—rather than with its more common usage, to describe the pursuit of particular family lines. However, I argue that the modernist authors I examine employ a “genealogical” method which combines an interest in the familial with a method that is theoretical. I examine six of the “long” novels of modernism—whose length typically precludes them from comparative study—and discuss the implications of their resistance to “official” histories, narratives, or concepts of identity. My first chapter considers Virginia Woolf’s *The Years* alongside Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks* and finds that they resist the “genealogical imperative” of a normative, apocalyptic family narrative by structuring their novels around gaps, discontinuities, and non-hierarchical relations. The consequence of these

aesthetic choices is an open, generative form; the novels undermine authoritative accounts of “History,” and focus instead on domestic, relational histories. The second chapter considers Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans* and Robert Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, two novels which quite literally resist completion; I argue that both authors insist on a radical contingency in their works—created through anti-teleological, democratic, and inclusive reading practices—in order to problematize the abstractions necessary for any “systematic,” and therefore normative, account of identity. I then consider William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County novels, which do *not* build one continuous narrative; I argue that his choice to fragment is one mode of genealogy, as he manages to interrogate both familial histories (through the Compsons or Sutpens) and social histories (of Jefferson), using a wide array of narrators to problematize the idea of a single, coherent moral standpoint. Finally, I turn to Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* to explore another mode of genealogy: stitching together disparate fragments into a composite narrative which does not do violence to their particularity. Proust’s method, I argue, generates endless possibilities for transformative readings; his comparisons, across time, space, and aesthetic mediums, emphasize the ability that *any* careful reader has to provide compelling, alternative genealogies of *any* familial or social context.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION: A STRAIGHT THEORY OF GENEALOGY, READING, AND MODERNISM

The basic premise of this dissertation could be stated as follows: genealogy allows for the generation of critical discourse from within the structures it studies. This auto-ethnographic function is easily overlooked in much of what passes for ‘genealogical’ research today, and yet the historic ties between family history and family narratives, as well as the theoretical implications of locating such histories within peculiar, local, and queer familial lines, compel me to argue for the particularity of the genealogical method in literature of the early 20th century. While much of queer theory treats family structures as by definition heteronormative, conservative, and repressive¹, my “straight theory” makes the modest observation that because all human coupling and reproduction requires at some level the inclusion of difference, we might as well begin thinking about how that difference functions and how it might allow us to read the family from ‘within.’ My method emphasizes, above all, the close juxtapositional readings of texts (as each family is composed, by definition, of at least two branches, multiplied into an untraceable plethora of originary strands), and I believe that the real intellectual work of this study cannot truly be introduced; it can only be read, on its own terms. And yet the genre in which this dissertation uneasily participates requires a theoretical framework. I will approach the issue and method of genealogy from a variety of theoretical perspectives, hoping to elucidate what should actually be obvious from the outset: that genealogy is always already and must be theoretical in order to function, but that it cannot and must not engage in the abstraction necessary to advertise itself as Theory.

¹ Judith Halberstrom, for example, in “Forgetting Family,” sees family as fundamentally opposed to difference, and demands its excision “in order to allow for the possibility of other modes of relating, belonging, caring, and so on” (317). Lee Edelman, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, claims that the child “marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism” (21).

GENEALOGY

The relation of the term “genealogy” to “Theory” has a fraught genealogy of its own; Nietzsche began it, with a simultaneous attempt to historicize philosophy and also purge philosophy of the demon of History. In his early grappling with history in “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben,” he uses the concept of striking a balance between monumental, antiquarian, and critical modes of history to argue for a new kind of history, one which would use it “zum Zwecke des Lebens” (110). While many seize on this as a practical and positive expression of ‘life’ philosophy², two questions seem to me to be raised by it: first, whose life is to be valued in the use of history?³, and second: can such a valuation be called *genealogical*, divorced as it is from any familial context? Nietzsche never refers to his earlier work as “genealogy,”⁴ and since his ultimate solution to the difficulty of actually fostering a critical history is to treat history as “ein Versuch sich gleichsam *a posteriori* eine Vergangenheit zu geben, aus der man stammen möchte, im Gegensatz zu der, aus der man stammt” (125), this usage cannot possibly be termed “genealogy,” as it rejects the difference of the past, subordinating it to present usage⁵. Through this formulation he ends up answering the “whose

² Allison Merrick, in “History in the Service of Life,” argues that Nietzsche’s life philosophy “seeks to destabilize our commitment to a particular system of purpose ... a cogent account of history written in the service of life should render intelligible the manner in which that history has the potential to serve therapeutic ends, which may include freeing us from our commitments to particularly pernicious systems of purposes” (255). While the effort is laudable, the characterization of Nietzsche as in any way “therapeutic” seems misplaced, to say the least.

³ The gender component of this is hardly negligible; Nietzsche calls for a (male) “deutsche Jugend” to enact his ideas, and he excoriates the “eunuchs” of history who, “scheint es doch fast, als wäre es die Aufgabe, die Geschichte zu bewachen, daß nichts aus ihr herauskomme als eben Geschichten, aber ja kein Geschehen!” (137). Yet he *relies* on these ‘antiquarian’ and ‘effeminate’ carriers of history to have access to the historical records he constantly cites.

⁴ He does, in a fragment from 1884, refer to a “philosophische” genealogy, which he ties to a Spinozian anti-teleological drive, although “daß ich alles Ausgehen von der Selbstbespiegelung des Geistes für unfruchtbar halte und ohne den Leitfaden des Leibes an keine gute Forschung glaube” (Online Werke). How this “guideline of the body” is supposed to be traced in exclusively male philosophers, and how that is a ‘genealogy,’ remains unclear.

⁵ Peter Zusi acknowledges a similar mechanism at work in Nietzsche as he examines how his characterization of history grows out of historicist traditions, but rejects specifically Herder’s emphasis on empathy: “For Herder, the historian sacrifices the present and makes contact with the past by forgetting the conceptual measures of his own epoch. For Nietzsche, the active subject sacrifices the past and makes contact with the present by forgetting the forms of previous epochs” (522).

life?” question as well: it is the *Übermensch*, the male-gendered theorist who can forget with impunity and construct his own morality without reference to the past. But Nietzsche runs into difficulty after difficulty as he attempts to separate his “chosen” examples from the “herd” of unthinking slaves; in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* even his beloved Greeks fail him in this respect⁶, and in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* he struggles to articulate an extra-familial sense of this method, strangely asserting that one who succeeded in making a ‘new’ and ‘gay’ science would be a “Beständig-Schaffender, eine ‘Mutter’ von Mensch, im großen Sinne des Wortes” (231). For Nietzsche, “im großen Sinne des Wortes” means that such a ‘mother’ would be neither female nor physically reproductive⁷; it would be a man, like Zarathustra, creating anti-historical and anti-teleological aphorisms. But Nietzsche cannot ever account for how such a criticism could arise *from its own context* and must inevitably represent a break from that continuity⁸. Thus when Nietzsche finally comes to his only “genealogy,” *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, it can only be a genealogy of a concept, without reference to individuals, despite his earlier intention to make history “livable.”

Nietzsche’s attempt to, in *Übermensch* fashion, wrest “genealogy” from a ‘herd’-like familial context and make it a tool for masculinist philosophy, leaves him unable to account for

⁶ “*Der Verwandte als der beste Freund.*—Die Griechen, die so gut wußten, was ein Freund sei – sie allein von allen Völkern haben eine tiefe, vielfache philosophische Erörterung der Freundschaft; so daß ihnen zuerst und bis jetzt zuletzt, der Freund als ein lösenswertes Problem erschienen ist – diese selben Griechen haben die *Verwandten* mit einem Ausdrucke bezeichnet, welcher der Superlativ des Wortes ‘Freund’ ist. Dies bleibt mir unerklärlich. (636)

⁷ Indeed, he exhibits an absolute terror of femininity; in *Ecce homo*, during a long description of “warum ich weise bin,” he ends up constructing an undocumented ‘Polish nobility’ for himself, in order to distance himself from his mother’s German vulgarity: “Wenn ich den tiefsten Gegensatz zu mir suche, die unausrechenbare Gemeinheit der Instinkte, so finde ich immer meine Mutter und Schwester, -- mit solcher canaille mich verwandt zu glauben wäre eine Lästerung auf meine Göttlichkeit. Die Behandlung, die ich von Seiten meiner Mutter und Schwester erfahre, bis auf diesen Augenblick, flösst mir ein unsägliches Grauen ein” (268). This terror, which Virginia Woolf would characterize as the “infantile fixation” (*Three Guineas* 127) of the 19th century, clearly underlies his homophilia.

⁸ He attempts to, unsuccessfully, account for this as he argues both for and against deterministic heritability of traits; in one section he argues that the “Herkunft der Gelehrten” can be traced back to the professions of their fathers (203), and in another he argues that “oft ist schon der Sohn der Verräter seines Vaters: dieser versteht sich selber besser, seit er seinen Sohn hat. Wir haben alle verborgene Gärten und Pflanzungen in uns; und, mit einem andern Gleichnisse, wir sind alle wachsende Vulkane, die ihre Stunde der Eruption haben werden” (40-41). Nietzsche can’t have it both ways; if the family were merely deterministic herd, how could *anyone* come to be an agent of change?

the simplest of genealogies: if the difference he searches for, the ‘new’ science, the ‘new’ morality, is in opposition to all social structures, *how can it arise from within those structures?*⁹ The answer would seem, most obviously, to be: because the social and the familial are at odds, and through the unequal and imperfect process of identification and socialization, the relativity and constructed-ness of all human structures can become obvious to the careful observer. This is what Nietzsche actually argues in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*: he argues against the correlation of ‘good’ to ‘useful’ and argues that the ‘new’ is always considered ‘evil’ because “sie weckten immer wieder den Sinn der Vergleichung, des Widerspruchs, der Lust am Neuen, Gewagten, Unerprobten, sie zwangen die Menschen, Meinungen gegen Meinungen, Musterbilder gegen Musterbilder zu stellen” (36). He speculates that logic has as its foundation the destruction of difference, with its “überwiegende Hang, das Ähnliche als gleich zu behandeln” (112), and that language and community arise at the same time because consciousness requires a social context for its articulation (210), but in neither case does he adequately examine how it is that *any* individual, imbedded as she or he is within a social context, can come to criticize it and resist its sculpting normativity?¹⁰ How is this transgressive “comparison” possible if the logic of sameness is what determines logic, community, and homosocial friendship? Nietzsche’s ‘science’ can provide no adequate answer¹¹, so we must supply our own: *through genealogy*. To take the

⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre poses a pertinent question in his discussion of the ‘subversive’ potential of genealogy in Nietzsche’s formulation: “it seems to be the case that the intelligibility of genealogy requires beliefs and allegiances of a kind precluded by the genealogical stance. Foucault’s carrying forward of Nietzsche’s enterprise has thus forced upon us two questions: Can the genealogical narrative find any place within itself for the genealogist? And can genealogy, as a systematic project, be made intelligible to the genealogist, as well as others, without some at least tacit recognition being accorded to just those standards and allegiances which it is its avowed aim to disrupt?” (55).

¹⁰ Throughout *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche again wants it both ways; he wants the ahistorical, universal “Wille zur Macht” which he sees as the active principle of all life, “ein Überwältigen, Herr-werden” (58), to wrest meaning from all terms and extinguish opposition through re-interpretation and forced forgetting, and yet he also becomes irate, when an un-egotistical morality is advocated, “dieser Ursprung soll *vergessen* worden sein – wie ist dies Vergessen auch nur *möglich*?” (14). Nietzsche does not want a genealogy, he wants justification for a dogma.

¹¹ Other than, intriguingly, through Nietzsche himself; in *Ecce homo*, he argues that he is the *only* person wise enough to stage his critique *because of his parents*: “diese doppelte Herkunft, gleichsam aus der obersten und der untersten Sprosse an der Leiter des Lebens, decadent zugleich und Anfang – dies, wenn irgend Etwas, erklärt jene

familial context seriously, and the constantly-unresolved and re-negotiated identity it presupposes, is to begin with an assumption that *difference is inherent rather than learned*. Genealogy then becomes the only antidote to either a normative socialization or a normative 'science' which similarly requires the suppression of difference for membership in its confines¹².

Thus it is oddly through a trained Marxist like Walter Benjamin that a critique of materialist history can occur. Benjamin's "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" interrogates this sense of a 'messianic' present which underlies Nietzsche's constant appeals to the 'Future.' He similarly acknowledges that the past cannot simply be 'recovered,' but rather than attempting to inseminate the past with a 'new' dogma, Benjamin argues that "Vergangenes historisch artikulieren heisst nicht, es erkennen 'wie es denn eigentlich gewesen ist.' Es heisst, sich einer Erinnerung bemächtigen, wie sie im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt.... In jeder Epoche muss versucht werden, die Ueberlieferung von neuem dem Konformismus abzugewinnen, der im Begriff steht, sie zu überwältigen" (33). To take 'possession' of the past is always to 'usurp' it; but not as a violation (which would be a "Wille zur Macht"), rather only as an attempt to make conditions *more livable* than they were; to save it from a 'new' conformity (such as Nietzsche's 'new' science). But this concern for livability does not mean to idealistically appeal to futurity as 'redeeming' the present; "die Vorstellung eines Fortschritts des Menschengeschlechts in der Geschichte ist von der Vorstellung ihres eine homogene and leere Zeit durchlaufenden Fortgangs nicht abzulösen. Die Kritik an der Vorstellung dieses Fortgangs muss die Grundlage der Kritik

Neutralität, jene Freiheit von Partei im Verhältniss zum Gesamtprobleme des Lebens, die mich vielleicht auszeichnet. Ich habe für die Zeichen von Anfang und Niedergang eine feinere Witterung als je ein Mensch gehabt hat, ich bin der Lehrer par excellence hierfür, -- ich kenne Beides, ich bin Beides" (264).

¹² Nietzsche's description of the function of the ascetic ideal in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* closely resembles his own drive to articulate a transhistorical, metalinguistic genealogy of concepts: "das asketische Ideal hat ein Ziel – dasselbe ist allgemein genug, daß alle Interessen des menschlichen Daseins sonst, an ihm gemessen, kleinlich und eng erscheinen; es legt sich Zeiten, Völker, Menschen unerbittlich auf dieses einen Ziel hin aus, es läßt keine andre Auslegung, kein andres Ziel gelten, es verwirft, verneint, bejaht, bestätigt allein im Sinne *seiner* Interpretation" (126).

an der Vorstellung des Fortschritts überhaupt bilden” (39). To critique the past, the concept of ‘progress’ must be laid aside, and an accurate and self-effacing genealogy pursued instead¹³. This is an anti-teleological position that does *not* rely on a concept, a method, or a community for validation; instead, it will search for a “revolutionären Chance im Kampfe für die unterdrückte Vergangenheit. Er nimmt sie wahr, um eine bestimmte Epoche aus dem homogenen Verlauf der Geschichte herauszusprengen, so sprengt er ein bestimmtes Leben aus der Epoche, so ein bestimmtes Werk aus dem Lebenswerk” (42). Such a genealogy would look into the component lives and narratives of that which has gone before, rather than in the annals of history or the selective accounts given in particular disciplines. A genealogy of this sort combines an anti-teleological orientation with the recognition that only through individual lives and stories is anything resembling change possible, and that the only way to recognize that difference is through examination of the messy plethora of identities and histories which constitute the ‘subject.’ To proceed with such an investigation, the philosophical or critical-theoretical account of ‘genealogy’ must be abandoned, insufficient as it is to deal with the contingencies of which such a proceeding must consist.

Oddly enough, Foucault’s initial formulation of “genealogy” in *L’ordre du discours* aligns far more closely with Benjamin’s method than Nietzsche’s, although it is his later and more widely-publicized article on “Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire” that is seen as foundational for Foucault’s genealogy of “power”¹⁴. But in his inaugural lecture to the Collège

¹³ Peter Szondi seems to pick up on this aspect of Benjamin’s work in his comparative analysis of Benjamin and Proust; he argues that the similarities between the two are not a matter of ‘influence’ but rather “er scheint auf eine Wahlverwandtschaft hinzudeuten, ohne welche die Lektüre des fremden Werkes kaum fähig gewesen wäre, an die Stelle des eigenen zu treten” (80). Such a formulation relies on both “wahl,” choice, and “verwandtschaft,” relation, in which both works, distinct in time, but similar in method, critique their own historical periods.

¹⁴ Brad Elliot Stone’s entry on “Genealogy” in *Understanding Foucault* gives no account of this earlier formation; he argues that “the proper genealogy of something requires the analysis of power relations” (245). He seems to be drawing on Foucault’s language in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” when he explains “*Entstehung* and *Herkunft* are more exact than *Ursprung* in recording the true objective of genealogy; and, while they are ordinarily translated

de France, *L'ordre du discours*, Foucault acknowledges that his sense of the limitation of philosophic discourse is based on Jean Hippolyte's critique of the Hegelian universe; he sums the critique up with the question, "si la philosophie doit bien commencer comme discours absolu, qu'en est-il de l'histoire et qu'est-ce que ce commencement qui commence avec un individu singulier, dans une société, dans une classe sociale, et au milieu des luttes?" (79). In other words, he wants to isolate and explicate the discourse-function which produces and circulates this need for the absolute, the "volonté de vérité" he sees at work throughout the 19th century. Thus while he praises contemporary historians for attempting to dismantle the unified subject or history by reaching into the *longue durée*, because they must focus on abstractions like demography and ignore the individual, they cannot read 'against the grain.' Such a reading cannot be abstract; "il s'agit de césures qui brisent l'instant et dispersent le sujet en une pluralité de positions et de fonctions possibles. Une telle discontinuité frappe et invalide les plus petites unités traditionnellement reconnues ou les moins facilement contestées: l'instant et le sujet" (60). This is the essence of genealogical critique, and Foucault's first formulation of the problem; recognizing the inability of a genealogy of concepts to account for its own abstraction, a genealogy must work through these gaps, or 'caesuras,' in the political and social real; "l'ensemble 'généalogique' qui met en oeuvre les trois autres principes: comment se sont formées, au travers, en dépit ou avec l'appui de ces systèmes de contraintes, des séries de discours; quelle a été la norme spécifique de chacune, et quelles ont été leurs conditions

as 'origin,' we must attempt to reestablish their proper use" (80). Foucault, flattened into English, *seems* to be asserting a very deterministic and evaluative "true" and "proper" method for genealogy. However, to do a little genealogy of our own, we find that this is actually a result of poor translation. Foucault writes: "Des termes comme *Entstehung* ou *Herkunft* marquent mieux que *Ursprung* l'objet *propre* de la généalogie. On les traduit d'ordinaire par 'origine,' mais il faut essayer de restituer leur utilisation *propre*" (151, emphasis mine). The French "propre" is rendered as "true" and "proper," but "propre" here seems to indicate their "own"; genealogy's "own" object and the words' "own" use, placing the emphasis on a self-referential and critical usage of discourse rather than a sanctioned one. Perhaps if scholars of Foucault were as careful to trace the genealogy of *his* words as carefully as he does Nietzsche's, a more comprehensive understanding of his concept would be possible.

d'apparition, de croissance, de variation” (62-63). For Foucault, such a genealogy would, unlike philosophy, be able to account for the individual lives which go against the grain of totalizing transhistorical discourse¹⁵.

But for Foucault, genealogy remains a concept, one which he continually describes but never accomplishes. More attuned to the intricate interplay between history, language, and concepts than Nietzsche, Foucault nevertheless cannot arrive at a history of the ‘individual’ and instead attempts to make the concept itself go ‘against the grain.’ This is evident in “Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire,” where he argues that “si le généalogiste prend soin d’écouter l’histoire plutôt que d’ajouter foi à la métaphysique, qu’apprend-il? Que derrière les choses il y a ‘tout autre chose’: non point leur secret essential et sans date, mais le secret qu’elles sont sans essence, ou que leur essence fut construite pièce à pièce à partir des figures qui lui étaient étrangères” (148). Figured as a choice between ‘history’ and ‘metaphysics,’ the genealogical method seems to open up endless discursive possibility. But such a figuration ignores the earlier insight—is there ever a position ‘outside’ of history and metaphysics, such that ‘something altogether different’ can be recognized? This also raises the question: different from what? from whom? Foucault elevates the body as the unit of investigation, and implies that through looking at the body as the site of the interaction between discourse, social norms and individuals, a genealogist can resist both a transhistorical metaphysical account and a monumental or insignificant history. To him, the body is the ‘grain’ necessary to render sense into “contresens” (158); it becomes the ultimate “interstice” (156) through which a critique of the systems of discourse and power becomes possible. But the question remains: whose body? and how does the ‘genealogist’

¹⁵ And yet, as Jürgen Habermas points out, it is only through the language and appeal to the community of philosophical discourse that Foucault can stage this genealogy; “die genealogische Geschichtsschreibung kann die vernunftkritische Rolle einer Antiwissenschaft nur übernehmen, wenn sie aus dem Horizont eben jener geschichtlich orientierten Wissenschaften vom Menschen heraustritt, deren hohlen Humanismus Foucault machtheroetisch entlarven möchte” (*Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* 293).

encounter and represent that body, such that he or she does not immediately and irreparably reproduce the very conditions of power she or he is attempting to critique? Finally, how can an analysis of the body proceed without an investigation into the discourse and social practices which surround the reproduction of the body? In other words, how can genealogy proceed without examination of the family?¹⁶

Foucault gestures toward this in a 1976 lecture transcribed, translated, and reprinted as “Genealogy and Social Criticism”; he acknowledges that genealogy is by necessity a trans-disciplinary method, but that underlying all the separate pursuits is a similar sense that “it is not theory but life that matters, not knowledge but reality, not books but money etc.; but it also seems to me that over and above, and arising out of this thematic, there is something else to which we are witness, and which we might describe as an *insurrection of subjugated knowledges*” (41). These subjugated knowledges are omnipresent throughout his works, but here, he defines them as being of two kinds; that which is buried under a functionalist account of history, a systematization, and also

something else, something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity ... it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity. (41)

¹⁶ That it does seem to proceed in academic discourse without the family seems to be an effect of Foucault’s focus on abstractions like the political or social body; in *Pruning the Genealogical Tree*, Gian Balsamo locates the center of lineage not in biological reproduction, but taking a cue from Foucault, in the reproduction of discourse: “genealogical lineage does not find its normative sense exclusively in the natural events from which sprouts what Foucault has called *sanguinité*. In *La volonté de savoir*, Foucault argues that the normativity of the law is rooted as much in the rational paradigms of its intelligibility as in the violence of the instincts that make one’s death always imminent, and always precarious in the life of one’s bloodline” (43).

Thus genealogy seeks not only archival materials and primary documents, but *interrogates the systems of knowledge which value particular modes of discourse over others*. To Foucault this means that the nexus of will to power and will to knowledge can only be resisted by genealogy; “a genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse” (44). And it is at this point in his career that Foucault pivots to large-scale historical analysis, first of carceral systems, and then of sexuality. The question remains: are they genealogies? Do they pursue “something else entirely” or do they actually continue the same regime of academic discourse and postulate the same hierarchy of knowledge?¹⁷ Can they access something beyond the ‘social’ assumed as a given without interrogating the open wound of public vs. private which family represents?

For Foucault, the family remains something *around which discourse circulates*, rather than being a *producer* of discourse in its own right¹⁸. Thus he interrogates legal ramifications of biopolitics in *Surveiller et punir*, the representations of family through psychoanalysis in *Histoire de la sexualité I*, the metaphysical discussions of conjugal relations in Greece in *Histoire de la*

¹⁷ Maureen Cain, in “Foucault, Feminism, and Feeling,” acknowledges that his articulation of the importance of ‘subjugated’ knowledges is vital, as “the re-emergences of suppressed knowledges are the keys to a multi-faceted, postmodern politics of refusal at the sites of power” (87) and that genealogy is the method to examine this. However, she also expresses reservations about Foucault, especially as his only two analyses of ‘individuals,’ *Herculine Barbarin* and *Pierre Rivière* end up presenting them “as an almost banal account ... His introduction suggests an interest only in the discourses constituting the dossier, not a concern with either the subject of the memoir, of the ultimate fate of the psychiatrist ‘who went in his own manner towards his own madness’” (86).

¹⁸ Specifically, from *L’histoire de la sexualité*, he gives a long list of the ways in which the family has been the site of sexual discourse, and argues that it is “le cristal dans le dispositif de sexualité: elle semble diffuser une sexualité qu’en fait elle réfléchit et diffracte. Par sa pénétrabilité et par ce jeu de renvois vers l’extérieur, elle est pour ce dispositif un des éléments tactiques les plus précieux. Mais cela n’a pas été sans tension ni problème.” (147). Foucault clearly recognizes the centrality of family relations to an analysis of sexuality, and acknowledges that such a local, resistant knowledge of the ‘autres Victoriens’ may constitute a revolutionary approach to the otherwise clinical and theoretical approach that dominates discourse on sexuality. And yet he does not pursue this genealogy; instead, as Chloë Taylor argues in her discussion of his project, “for Foucault, the family became perverse and incestuous under biopower” (130) and acknowledges that “many readers of Foucault’s work who had appreciated his studies of modern power were disappointed by his leap back in history to Ancient Greece and Rome in his final texts, by his apparent turn from politics to (what he called) ethics, and by his focus in these last books on relations that privileged subjects had to themselves rather than power relations involving marginalized subjects” (131).

sexualité II, and in Rome, in the third volume, but the question remains—where is the “subjugated knowledge”?¹⁹ To follow Foucault’s example rather than his claims, it can only be located in the archives of universities and institutions; a genealogist, in this view, must conform to the very system of knowledge-power which maintains a normative ‘science’ in order to, theoretically, resist it. But if the resistance follows the same procedures and values of that system, indeed becomes a neophyte and producer of discourse *within* it, can such a ‘genealogy’ still be termed resistance at all?²⁰

Attractive as it may be to insert ‘genealogy’ into any number of academic articles or monographs in the social sciences or humanities, it seems to me that if they are based in part or entirely on Foucault or Nietzsche’s elaboration, they can only continue to fail²¹. Even studies that criticize Foucault, such as Sigrid Weigel’s *Genea-Logik*, in which he argues that Foucault’s genealogy cannot account for all of its moving parts; “die Genealogie unterscheidet sich vom Kontinuum genau durch die Möglichkeit derartiger Unterbrechungen und Sprünge bzw. durch die Kombination bekannter, sichtbarer, bestehender mit untergründigen, verborgenen, vorausgegangenen Verbindungslinien” (22); for all its finesse, Weigel’s study attempts a synthesis

¹⁹ Rudi Visker, in *Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique*, argues that “one of the problems of the analyses in *Discipline and Punish* concerns precisely this transition from conditions of emergence to conditions of possibility and impossibility, and we shall have to ask – particularly in relation to this latter step – whether it is not carried out on the basis of a residual, non-genealogical problematic” (54). Visker further argues that Foucault never claims that this work was a genealogy; genealogy is instead “a project for the future” (72). However, I would argue that he never arrived at that future; *Histoire de la sexualité* also never arrives at a genealogy outside of the institutional, academic, and disciplinary “non-genealogical problematic.”

²⁰ As Hayden White rather mordantly notes in *The Content of the Form*, because Foucault relies on neither evidence nor method but his style to promote his theories, “would it not be the height of irony for a scholar known for his idiosyncratic style in his early works to end his career by the composition of at least two books in which what was written was ‘straight’ history, in which the method used was the most conventional kind of philological analysis, and in which the manner of composition was so pedantic as to make of sex the most boring of subjects?” (140).

²¹ Colin Koopman’s *Genealogy as Critique* is an example of this; a remarkably sympathetic and intelligent synthesis and extension of Foucault’s ideas, he still remains trapped within a paradigmatic understanding of genealogy as inherently conceptual in nature. Thus even attempting to critique Foucault, he has to recuperate him as well, arguing that it “does not require that we find in his work an actually viable concept of normative reconstruction” (225); therefore anyone looking for a viable (livable) concept of genealogy must, like Koopman himself, search for endless links to other, more pragmatic, but equally conceptual, philosophies (in this case, Habermas’s critical theory).

of academic discourses with occasional recourse to familial notions of genealogy, and fails to attribute any discourse-making power to such ‘subjugated knowledges’ that exist outside of the traditional academic structure. On the other hand, intelligent studies such as Lee Quinby’s *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism*, which *does* attend to ‘subjected knowledge,’ can fail as his does because it attempts to recuperate this genealogy in the pursuit of philosophy, within the confines of a concept. The contortion required for this is obvious in his characterization of the project:

Nonapocalyptic or genealogical philosophy seeks to illuminate instances of social struggle at work precisely because such struggles rail against the circumscriptions of a presumed given truth and the existing power relations that operate to maintain that truth. Nonapocalyptic philosophy’s genealogical union of erudite and popular subjugated knowledges catalyzes the questioning of the determinants of its own thought; it wrestles philosophy loose from the constraints of apocalypse. (54)

In a similarly anti-disciplinary and questioning vein as Quinby, Weigel, Foucault, and Benjamin, the historian Joan Scott also acknowledges the need to reach outside of ‘sanctioned’ modes of investigation²²:

We need to scrutinize our methods of analysis, clarify our operative assumptions, and explain how we think change occurs. Instead of a search for single origins, we have to conceive of processes so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled. ... To pursue meaning, we need to deal with the individual subject as well as social organization and to

²² Peter Szondi, in “Hoffnung im Vergangenen: Über Walter Benjamin,” argues that for Benjamin, it is only through the apprehension of the individual life that a critique of fascism and the utilitarianism and dogma of its methods be leveled. He argues that “das Inventarisieren der Vergangenheit, mit dem die Allegorie des Barock ins Innere gewendet wird, ist für Benjamin zugleich das persönliche Korrelat zu der üblichen Geschichtsauffassung, gegen die sich seine *Geschichtsphilosophischen Thesen* auflehnen” (95). Szondi points to the personal inscription Benjamin gave to one of his books for his sister, characterizing it as an “Arche” (96) as indicative of the necessity of hoping for something which can live in the future through an active engagement with the past.

articulate the nature of their interrelationships, for both are crucial to understanding how gender works, how change occurs. (1067)

But at the point at which this call for difference becomes repeated enough to become a catechism, has it transformed the practice of academic discourse? How might such a mode of dealing with individuals as well as their social structure actually function? Of what must it take account, and what must it avoid?

Joan Scott's analysis is specifically a discussion of how gender and historical discourse should interact, and it is with regard to gender that an anti-Foucauldian genealogy must begin. Luce Irigaray's criticism of philosophy in this regard is telling; her *Éthique de la différence sexuelle* was published while Foucault was working on the second and third volumes of *Histoire* (the third volume of which tellingly includes a long section on "La Femme" which discusses exclusively male perspectives on marriage, and concludes that "le mariage lie l'homme à lui-même" (208)!). She begins by examining the way that discourse about identity acts to constantly reassure the 'masters' of that discourse that they are empowered by it: "Dieu serait le temps lui-même qui se prodigue ou s'exteriorise dans son acte en espace, en lieux. La philosophie va assurer la généalogie de la tâche des dieux, du Dieu" (15). Here genealogy is in the service of the (male) gods, philosophy a tool used to reassure themselves of their identity and centrality²³. But how then can 'la femme' or the Other of philosophy speak, from what position, since all available positions are discredited or circumvented? She asserts that the only method is to "renaître à partir de traces de culture, d'œuvres déjà produite par l'autre. Cherchant ce qui y est – ce qui n'y est pas. Ce qui les a permis, ce qui n'y est pas. Leurs conditions de possibilité, ce qui

²³ Elizabeth Grosz discusses Irigaray's strategy as being strategic rather than essentialist, and argues that she succeeds in "problematizing the self-identical, problematizing the ready separation between subject and object (which is most readily confirmed, as I have already argued in chapter 4, through the distance separating the seer from the seen). This is not a new "fact" of female or human existence but a different way of looking at subjectivity and corporeality, highlighting quite different facets and features" (204)

n'y est pas. La femme devrait se retrouver, entre autres, à travers les images d'elle déjà déposées dans l'histoire, et les conditions de production de l'œuvre de l'homme et non à partir de son œuvre, sa généalogie" (17). To resist *his* genealogy, she must produce an alternative genealogy, spanning the documents which are not given, the language which is not available, and the actions which are suppressed.

And yet such a formulation also relies on a theory of gender, an ontology of gender, which presupposes a certain stability and duration of sexual difference; this is precisely where Judith Butler's emphasis on the continual process of social transformation of gender becomes relevant to a discussion of 'alternative' genealogies. Impatient with proponents of sexual difference such as Irigaray and their attempts to carve out an 'outside' for women, Butler, beginning in *Gender Trouble*, asserts again and again; "there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices" (5)²⁴. For Butler, such a critical genealogy must give an account of the practices which seek to authorize certain gender expressions as valid and label others as mere copies; she insists on a genealogy rather than an ontology of gender; "the presumption here is that the 'being' of gender is *an effect*, an object of a genealogical investigation that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology" (32). In more Foucauldian terms, this would be a recognition that there is no 'origin' of gender, but rather endless possibilities and messy beginnings of discourse surrounding it, and therefore "if subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself" (93). This leads her quite naturally to "Imitation and Gender

²⁴ Silvia Stoller, in "Genealogy of Gender Theory? Genealogy of Gender Practise?," points out that Butler and other poststructuralists actually rely on the notion of difference, even while adamantly refuting it. Stoller expresses a frustration that the practice of gender theory should be so "strongly characterized by a Lagergedanken (i.e., partisan thinking, in-the-box-thinking) ... which always implies the strange assumption that there exists something like the 'very truth' about the world" (147). Her criticism is apt for a theory which would subvert the notion of 'truth.'

Insubordination” in which the subversion of the heterosexual/homosexual hierarchy and valuation becomes the ethical imperative for gender politics. But the nagging question of Irigaray remains, and is by no means put to rest by Butler’s semantic gyrations—is that which labels itself ‘queer’ or ‘troubled’ *the only means* by which subversion is possible?²⁵ If possibilities “emerge” from within the system itself and “spawn unexpected permutations,” is not the family itself the vehicle for unexpected permutations? Can it not be transgressive and normative, both?

Butler struggles with how to articulate her work, which is essentially theoretical but tries to resist the terms of Theory again and again; in “For a Careful Reading,” she argues against any who characterize her as articulating a ‘theory of self’; “on the contrary, gender performativity involves the difficult labor of deriving agency from the very power regimes which constitute us, and which we oppose. This is, oddly enough, *historical work*, reworking the historicity of the signifier, and no recourse to quasi-transcendental selfhood and inflated concepts of History will help us in this most concrete and paradoxical of struggles” (136). This “historical work” would be a continuation of the “critical genealogy” she articulates in *Gender Trouble*; and yet this is a work that Butler does *not* do. Even her attempt to reach back to antiquity and analyze kinship in *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* ends up becoming an extended argument with Hegel and Lacan over interpretations of Antigone’s position, and she only tangentially considers what a genealogy of the concept of kinship might produce. Indeed, Butler cannot seem to articulate any model of kinship which recuperates non-normativity; she concludes her account:

If kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less

²⁵ Butler’s own answer would, I surmise, be “no”; Jean-Michel Rabaté, in *The Future of Theory*, begins with an anecdote about Butler being troubled by people identifying her with Theory; “I do not understand the notion of ‘theory,’ and am hardly interested in being cast as its defender, much less in being signified as part of an elite gay/lesbian theory crowd that seeks to establish the legitimacy and domestication of gay/lesbian studies within the academy” (qtd. in Rabaté 1).

than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws. She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future. (82)

If one is able to decipher what is meant by this human and less-than-human speech, the point seems to be that Antigone represents a subversive subject, a new possibility for the human that is not bound by kinship (though somehow also representative of it ...). And yet, how can Antigone possibly be considered *new*? Butler does not pursue a historical or genealogical account of Antigone—which would surely need to consider precisely how Sophocles presented and interpreted the difficulties and tensions of subversion and conformity within kinship structures of his day—instead Antigone is “new” because Butler has found a new way to *use* her. The language of critical theory becomes a closed circuit in which its own postulation becomes the initiation and authorization for its discourse²⁶.

Yet in a perhaps typically paradoxical fashion, Butler’s emphasis in *Undoing Gender*, just four years later, is on dismantling (some) of the power structures which underlie critical theory, even gender theory. Thus her moral counterweight becomes the issue of livability, or “whose life” is valued according to any schema, with far more attention to the nuances of who might or might not qualify for that livability than Nietzsche’s poor attempt at life philosophy. Hers is a more personal appeal, and more visceral than her earlier works, but it is no more historical, nor genealogical. She acknowledges Foucault, and uses his characterization of power relations as foundational for what she views as the necessary method for examining gender:

²⁶ Stefani Engelstein, in *Sibling Action: The Genealogical Structure of Modernity*, takes Antigone as being paradigmatic for the impossibility for most concepts of ‘resistance’ to grapple with siblings, with ‘partial’ and not absolute others. She discusses Butler’s characterization of Antigone as an incomplete attempt to theorize ‘intersubjectivity’ because, discounting her status as sibling, this “binary logic forecloses potentials for theorizing differential relationships and collective identities not only in the imaginary but also within the symbolic order” (38)

What this means is that one looks *both* for the conditions by which the object field is constituted, and for *the limits* of those conditions. The limits are to be found where the reproducibility of the conditions is not secure, the site where conditions are contingent, transformable ... To intervene in the name of transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality, and to use, as it were, one's unreality to make an otherwise impossible or illegible claim. (27)

To disrupt “settled knowledge” is, in gender theory, a privileged term. But why should this be the purview of an ostensibly queer approach? Is the “queer” merely another identity which, in its now-entrenched and secure institutional position, ought to be unsettled?²⁷ Butler goes on to wonder whether kinship is “always already” heterosexual, and criticizes Levi-Strauss and psychoanalysts for studying structures of language along with social structures, which could only ever lead to the conclusion that heterosexual coupling is foundational: “these are positions that make possible the entry into language, and which, therefore, maintain an essential status with respect to language. They are, in other words, positions without which no signification could proceed, or, in different language, no cultural intelligibility can be secured” (45-46). The criticism is certainly warranted, but the question remains—how could a critique of such fundamentality proceed without *an equally problematic appeal to origins*? How could the argument about imitation and copy ever proceed without an already-stable basis of language against which it reacts?²⁸ To what ‘originary’ model must you resort to come up with a concept

²⁷ Rosi Braidotti, with whom Butler agrees and argues throughout her book, in her *Transpositions* attempts a more inclusive and less binary definition of kinship through her emphasis on “nomadic ethics”; she argues that an ethical system that retains kinship as a system but is willing to interrogate and reformulate the terms in which it is administered leaves an ‘open’ future; “what is at stake in nomadic ethics is a non-linear model of genealogy and hence of evolution that expresses a non-Oedipal kinship system. Evolution needs to be approached as a productive and creative force, in a way that demystifies the transcendental illusions of the subject” (275).

²⁸ It is in the realm of discourse that Foucault can circle back to offer a critique of Butler; as Jemima Repo notes in “*Herculine Barbin* and the Omission of Biopolitics from Judith Butler’s *Gender Genealogy*,” her attempts to critique sexuality and sex through gender lead to another privileging of terms which is ahistorical and not genealogical in

of the ‘social’ which does *not* include heterosexual coupling and the production of children within relational networks formed by exogamy? And how could such a genealogy proceed without recourse to the very structures which are being resisted?

A familial context to the genealogical method certainly runs the risk of reifying heteronormativity and foreclosing alternatives. But, to me, it also has the potential to allow for a radically democratic methodology; it suggests that there is no privileged oligarchy, no absolute standard in regard to wealth, prestige, intellect, effort, race, gender, religion, age, nationality, or ability, but rather suggests that each of those is constructed within relative ‘oligarchies,’ the boundaries of which are negotiable between individuals in the present and mutable as to their continued efficacy and meaning when discussed from the past. Michael Shapiro acknowledges this ability in *For Moral Ambiguity: National Culture and the Politics of the Family*, when he defines his project as exploring a wide range of genres “which contain counterpolitical articulations by diverse family members to the dominant discourses on such primary attachments as the nation and/or the state” (3). Such a reconceptualization of what constitutes a “primary” identity allows Shapiro to “treat the ways in which family space, historically protean though it is, serves as a critical locus of enunciation, as a space from which diverse family personae challenge the relationships and historical narratives that support dominant structures of power and authority and offer ways to renegotiate the problem of the political” (3). Shapiro also emphasizes the radical democratization that such attendance to unheard and marginalized voices represents. In my own, related, terms, the value in such a genealogy is that the condition for participation is simply birth; the negotiation of the meaning of the absence or presence of anyone to that birth,

nature. Repo writes, of Butler: “While she destabilised ‘sex’ in order to radically reconceptualise gender, she did so at the expense of the biopolitical genealogy of ‘sex’, which led to the resorting to frameworks like the kinship theory of psychoanalysis to explain why and how sexual difference is produced. Gender as a discourse in itself was not subject to proper genealogical inquiry” (87). Note, however, Repo’s reliance, like Stone’s, on an evaluative sense of what is “proper” to genealogy.

and to the history of its accomplishment, is the first drama of identity available to anyone, and can be reinscribed and revisited throughout a lifetime and within different formulations of family structures (as child, friend, spouse, parent, grandparent, etc.). Such a familial context suggests that vital questions of identity are not the purview of Critical Theory and its attendant taxonomies, hierarchies, and value systems. It suggests that the construction of reality that goes on within all life stages in intimate social relations is not separate from theoretical discourse, but rather is the precondition for any critical self- and other-examination to occur.

The fact that this negotiation and exchange has always already been occurring within families is obvious to those working in the field of family studies, but because their insights generally lie outside the purview of literary studies²⁹, I will cite a few relevant points. The first is simply that there is a durability to networks of kinships throughout time and across cultures that renders much of the passionate argument about the irrelevance of familial structures merely semantic; intimate relationships persist in human societies, whatever they may be called³⁰. Like Shapiro's recognition that the family always already forms a conceptual counterweight to normative and vague institutions, Carol Smart, in her discussion of the role of secrets in family identity, also suggests that when these intrafamilial 'secrets' are shared in different contexts, it "troubles the smooth façade of ordinary family life – not in order to decry family life as if some other form would be above such practices – but in order to demonstrate how complex family practices can be and how entangled they are with matters as conceptually distinct as public values and the personal construction of the self" (551). Rather than attempting an outsider's

²⁹ This is not to say that more or less successful 'marriages' of family studies and literary studies have not been attempted; John Knapp's two edited collections, *Reading the Family Dance: Family Systems Therapy and Literary Studies* and *Critical Insights: Family*, both make it their explicit point. However, I would argue that collections like these only further highlight the irrelevance of 'thematic' studies of the family to literary studies.

³⁰ There is a whole gamut of alternative nomenclature, discarded as such generally is; take Linda Burton and Carol Stack's 1993 rebranding *Kinscripts* as representative. It exists within an esoteric group of scholars as a vocabulary term describing the entirely quotidian and comprehensible relation between agency and obligation in family roles.

perspective, and regarding the family as a concept to be studied, this perspective acknowledges the primacy of family relationships in constructing any perspective on the world.

This is the crux of David Reiss' argument in *The Family's Construction of Reality*: "we will argue that the family has come to play a central role in providing understanding and meaning of the stimulus universe for each of its members. The family has come to offer a set of explanations of the world to each of its members that serves as the primary organizer of internal and external experience" (155). Using examples from psychology and family systems theory, he explains that the perceptual world is always subject to manipulation or questioning, but that it is a relatively rare condition for any individual outside of a family to grant another person the vulnerable position of questioning their own framing assumptions:

Personal explanatory systems are severely challenged when one individual engages in a sustained face-to-face encounter with another. By 'face-to-face' we mean those encounters between two or more individuals in which there is relative freedom in each person's experience of the other: freedom from convention, freedom from stereotypes, freedom from highly simplified conceptions. In a face-to-face encounter, each individual has an immediate, emotionally charged sense of uniqueness of the other. (161)

Reiss explains that the family is uniquely situated within the social field to grant the "power of independent regard" (162) required to initiate self-questioning. That is because, he argues, in an increasingly mechanized society, the bewildering array of individuals we are confronted with daily requires us to make the strategic move of separating most of those we encounter as "technically functioning objects" (161) and that only in intimate, known and recognized—but not highly structured and role-dominated—settings can this 'independent regard' be established. And while he admits that many families do not operate according to such a schema, the fact that

originary thought *can* emerge from such a context proves that in such a family “each member’s construction of social and physical reality must be coordinated with the others’. In other words, membership in families of this kind depends on collaborative engagement by all its members in the joint construction of reality” (170).

Carlfred Broderick, in *Understanding Family Process*, expands on Reiss’ thesis and articulates more specifically the necessary structures which undergird it; because exogamy requires the negotiation of at least two different families and thereby paradigms of experience, and the entry of children complicates and undermines any attempt to create an ‘eternal’ identity; based on constantly-changing dynamics, “the process is bidirectional from the beginning” (189). He also discusses the naïveté of views of the family which make it simply a passive and heterogenous unit of society, and argues that “the chief mechanisms for limiting the superimposition of family members’ realities upon one another are the separate ties each has with the world outside the family, including school, media, informal networks of strong and weak ties, and so on. Paradoxically, these very outside connections also may be utilized by families to facilitate the establishment of shared and coordinated realities” (192). Thus the complex interaction between intra-familial ties and extra-familial ties is not simply a matter of sociological concern; rather, it shapes the traffic between culture and reception, and situates the social context of reading practices at the forefront of the formation of the sense of self within the world. Koerner and Fitzpatrick articulate this as well in their “Toward a Theory of Family Communication”: “these interactions not only allow children to develop the ability for self-regulation, but also force parents and children explicitly to acknowledge, discuss, and renegotiate the rules and norms that govern their interactions and relationships, which for most other social relationships remain largely unspoken” (89).

While these insights from sociology and other disciplines can embellish our understanding of the transformative potential of genealogy (understood as the investigation of familial realities rather than philosophical concepts), a recent turn toward narrative has many questioning how distinct a study of the family can be from the study of narrative itself³¹. John Demos acknowledges the limitations of traditional methods of studying the family as a historical unit, and questions the disciplinary apparatuses which keep them separate: “to raise these questions is to spotlight the unceasing traffic between our past, our present, and our future. And it is also to conjure up another kind of traffic, one that crosses the borders of academic disciplines and finally confronts personal experience. From such imaginative journeys we may all hope to profit” (19)³². Michael Bamberg, in “Narrative Practices Versus Capital-*D* Discourses: Ways of Investigating Family,” argues that to come to an understanding of how discourse functions in society, an understanding of the function of narrative must be the foundation:

The goal of such studies is to scrape out the implicit worldviews that individuals propagate through the stories they tell about their lives. A narrative practice approach, in contrast, focuses on how people interactively navigate a sense of who-they-are. This navigation process is discursively brought off in terms of how they differentiate themselves as the same, similar to, or different from others; how they present themselves as continuous or discontinuous across time; and how they navigate the two directions of

³¹ There is also a prevalent and related trend to use narrative *as a method* of research; Patricia Leavy, in *Fiction as Research Practice*, argues that “the work of the researcher and of the novelist aren’t as disparate as some may claim...Fiction, more than any other research practice, directly challenges the fact/fiction dichotomy and forces us to renegotiate the boundaries between the two” (20-21). This is relevant to my next section on fiction as theory, but I mention it here because the trend is on the part of social scientists rather than literary theorists.

³² Such glowing and enthusiastic language should also be taken with a grain of salt, as Laura Lovett implicitly criticizes Demos for participating in a ‘nostalgia’ for a lost paradise of unity and simplicity. In *Conceiving the Future*, she examines the close proximity of modernist innovation and paranoid pronatalism; “modernist social reformers and politicians attempted to create a sense of order by directing the process of the continual construction of modern society” (10). That an unwarranted ‘nostalgia’ may underlie any genealogy is certainly a risk to consider.

fit: the world-to-person direction of fit, positioning themselves as undergoer, patient, or victim on one end of the continuum, and the person-to-world direction of fit, by use of which they position a sense of self as agentive, on the other end of the continuum. (135)

To make such investigations possible, a radical reorientation of the apparatus of ‘knowing’ and ‘reading’ is required; the position of the observer must be relativized and incorporated within the structure it seeks to understand³³. Thus the surprising element of family stories is not that they are told—stories are told in most social contexts—but that along with them, an entire apparatus, a method even, of history-making and an imbedded social system of critique comes into existence, giving rise to the possibility of levelling rather than asserting power in discourse. Fivush notes this in her study on “Remembering and Reminiscing”; in contrast to the elicited stories according to set topics which her researchers asked, they were surprised to find the most enriched and spontaneous conversations happened at the dinner table:

Narratives emerge frequently (about once every five minutes), with multiple family members contributing across several conversational turns in co-constructing the story.

Not surprising, the majority of narratives are about events that happened that day.

Perhaps more surprising, many families also tell stories about more remote events, events shared by the family in the past, and stories of the parent’s childhood and other extended family members. These stories are often long and embellished, with all family members participating in the retelling, indicating that these stories are often told and enjoyed.

Provocatively, families that tell more of these kinds of family stories over the dinner table have adolescents who know more of their family history, and also display higher self-

³³ This is the value of autoethnography, or the study of the proximate, ‘self’ community, as Heewon Chang describes in *Autoethnography as Method*: “Self- transformation may also take place as educators seek to reach out to unfamiliar others and pursue a new learning of unfamiliar cultures. As their understanding of others increases, unfamiliarity diminishes and perspectives on others change. As a result, others of difference and of opposition may be reframed to be included in their notion of community” (53)

esteem and lower levels of internalizing (anxiety, depression) and externalizing (aggression, acting out) behavior problems. (55)

In other words, complex narratives are *inextricable from the family* and they are some of the only narratives capable of *questioning their own framing assumptions*. Kate McLean, in *The Co-Authoring Self*, also argues that many psychological studies account for only one-sided narratives, whereas in familial contexts, “the stories our families tell constitute a narrative of each of us, not a complete narrative necessarily, but certainly a narrative with which we must reckon” (36). The emergence of contested and fractured narratives within families may be the purview of family studies, but the insights are also relevant to the development of the ‘family’ novel. The reading practice required to approach these, I will argue, also emerges from a context in which such conversations were the norm rather than the exception; to read the “long novel,” a genealogical reading practice is required.

READING

To introduce such a term as the “long” novel is immediately to invite criticism for its vagueness—is this a designation of a genre? Merely a descriptor of word count? Some incoherent appeal to content? The “long novel,” in this study, is a placeholder³⁴; it does not attempt to define a genre (as many have quite unsuccessfully tried to do; with Woolf and Mann one sees them constantly defined and redefined as the “family novel,” the “family saga,” the “multigenerational epic,” among others), nor is it particularly descriptive in terms of actual page number (Proust is nearly ten times longer than any given Faulkner novel), or the actual historical scope of the novels themselves (Gertrude Stein’s family extends in an almost eternal

³⁴ This to distinguish it in particular from the usage by Scott McCracken and Jo Winning in their article “The Long Modernist Novel: An Introduction” in *Modernist Cultures*. They provide a specific list of what “counts” as a “long modernist novel,” a taxonomic tendency I hope to resist throughout this study of “long” “modernist” “novels.”

past/present, whereas Musil's entire narrative stalls in roughly one single year). The "long novel" is a placeholder of necessity, and for the transgressive purpose of comparison: to argue that these novels, created at very different times and places, in different languages and contexts, nevertheless share particular concerns which I will term "theoretical" and in each case require a reading practice which takes them on their own terms, without reference to constructed categories such as genre, period, or method.

To argue that these novelists are each employing a method already theoretical is not to discount the great deal of actually theoretical (that is, explicitly non-narrative) writing that most of them did produce. Nor does it disregard their contemporaries who certainly proffered more or less salient opinions on these "long novels" as they emerged³⁵. I will examine a few instances of both in order to frame what essentially must be a reading *practice*, and not a *theory* (while maintaining all the while that it is only through this practice that the theoretical implications of these texts become obvious)³⁶. And one of the characteristics that each of these novelists emphasize in regards to their own work is that it defies *ending* as much as it defies characterization. The end-less reading required for these works has had the institutional effect of their often not being read at all, and the epithets that are applied to modernist novels of such encyclopedic lengths, such as "totalitarian" or "universal," are easy terms to assert, much harder to prove³⁷. Gertrude Stein, never one to mince words, at least not without also garnishing them, makes this 'total' history her explicit intention in *The Making of Americans*, as she explains in a

³⁵ It does however *not* look at social science studies of the modernist era, such as William Beveridge's 1932 *Changes in Family Life* or Bess Cunningham's 1936 *Family Behavior*. While they make fascinating intertexts for these 'family' novels, they do not share what I have termed a 'genealogical' interest in undermining the disciplinary expectations of the genres in which they write, and they are firmly entrenched in a self-defined 'objectivity.'

³⁶ John Mowitt comments on this in *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*: "finishing the text's theorization means radicalizing the significance of the disciplinary disruption animating its core. Or, put another way, the text must be made to oppose the discipline(s) that made it" (14).

³⁷ Frederic Jameson bandies it around quite handily in "Poetics of Totality" in which he argues that modernist writers doubly fail, calling them "constitutively self-defeating and unconsciously self-undermining objects" (4) for their attempts to narrate totality. That his own reading is an attempt at "totality" seems to escape his sense of irony.

1934 lecture, “I wanted to find out if you could make a history of the whole world, if you could know the whole life history of everyone in the world, their slight resemblances and lack of resemblances” (492). In focusing on “The Progress of a Family” in her analysis of “kinds” and “resemblances,” Stein does pursue a kind of totality, but she does it in an intentionally incomplete and anti-disciplinary way by staunchly resisting any identifiable ending. In another lecture, “What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them,” she asserts this quality as a necessary component of “master-pieces,” because they

do not exist because of their identity, that is what any one remembering then remembered then, they do not exist by human nature because everybody always knows everything there is to know about human nature, they exist because they came to be as something that is an end in itself and in that respect it is opposed to the business of living which is relation and necessity. That is what a master-piece is not although it may easily be what a master-piece talks about. It is another one of the curious difficulties a master-piece has that is to begin and end, because actually a master-piece does not do that it does not begin and end. (498)

Stein defines a master-piece not as related to specific content or particular forms but above all a *methodology*, a mode of proceeding which resists taxonomy and teleology³⁸. This would be impossible in a philosophical sense but of course Stein is not writing philosophy, she is writing narrative. Her texts resist the temptation to paraphrase, to summarize, to encapsulate, and they insist on being *read*, word by word. Robert Musil also asserts the ironic incompatibility of the

³⁸ As a side-note to the way in which Stein’s style or rhetoric resists teleology is provided by John Bender’s *Ends of the Enlightenment*; he argues that the Enlightenment novel enshrines an alternative practice of “knowledge” (25) which was revolutionary but became codified over time. He argues that modernism productively breaks this paradigm again by asserting “rhetoricity,” which “manifests the groundless, infinitely ramifying character of discourse in the modern world. For this reason, it allows for no explanatory metadiscourse that is not itself already rhetorical” (223). Though he characterizes it as characteristic of Modernism as a whole, which is vague, it seems applicable as a specific strategy Stein engages in to defamiliarize supposedly ‘neutral’ metadiscourse.

imaginative work with the philosophical, when in *Skizzen zu einer Autobiographie*, he writes of obtaining the “Erkenntnis, daß ein Dichter nicht bis zum philosophischen System vordringen soll (und kann)” (132). *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, despite being taken up as “philosophical fiction,” resists that classification on the same grounds that Stein resists it: treating the imaginative work as a “system” ignores the “facts” of human lives.

In terms of encyclopedic and ostensibly “philosophical” works of unmanageable length, along with Stein and Musil, certainly ranks Proust. His commentary in *Contre Saint-Beuve* is targeted at defining what he believes to be essential about literature, in preparation for his work:

Il est si personnel, si unique, le principe qui agit en nous quand nous écrivons et crée au fur et à mesure notre oeuvre, que dans la même génération les esprits de même sorte, de même famille, de même culture, de même inspiration, de même milieu, de même condition, prennent la plume pour écrire presque de la même manière la même chose décrite et ajoutent chacun la broderie particulière qui n'est qu'à lui, et qui fait de la même chose une chose toute nouvelle, où toutes les proportions des qualités des autres sont déplacées. (362-63)

Here Proust subordinates content, style, form, background, and almost everything else that would categorically divide authors (or rather, that which *critics* would use to separate them into discrete ‘objects’ of study), and focuses instead on the “embroidery” which makes of the same material a new art object. In an era of increasing mechanization, the focus on a domestic, feminine, and painstakingly time-consuming art is telling; Proust emphasizes the everyday material, handled, examined, and ornamented. We could tentatively place this in line with Stein’s comment that the masterpiece is an “end in itself,” and postulate that without the necessary relation to particular experience, art is not possible; but without the labor of hands stitching together the materials and

ornamenting them imaginatively, human nature remains cut out of the same cloth, indistinguishable.

Another practicing novelist of the early 20th century, Edwin Muir, in his 1928 study *The Structure of the Novel*, also highlights the transgressive and potentially revolutionary pursuit that his contemporary novelists were undertaking. Although he engages in a great deal of taxonomy as he goes to great lengths distinguishing between novels of “character” and “dramatic” novels, he then discusses the recent trend to what he terms the “chronicle”; that is, novels which set out to describe a totality of human life and society through the focus on particular characters over large stretches of time;

The imagination desires to see the whole unity, or an image of it; and it seems that that image can only be conceived when the imagination accepts certain limitations, or finds itself spontaneously working within them ... This withdrawal, this escape, is by the criteria of living an arbitrary act, and brings with it a long train of arbitrary effects, the “limitations” which we have been considering. But it is at the same time a creative act, justified not only negatively by necessity, but positively in the evocation of a world which could not have been born in any other way. (113-14)

The necessity of a widened scope of both narrative time and social scope becomes clear in the ‘world’-making ambitions of such projects. And yet Muir recognizes that it is not simply an element of “style,” or a particular “technique” which novelists like Woolf or Joyce are utilizing; it is a fundamentally different conception of the work that narrative can perform.

Another critic of the era with an interest in characterizing the particularity of its output, Georg Lukács, in his later writings on realism, also defends such projects as would fit under Muir’s designation of “chronicle” against the charges of conservatism levelled by the avant-

garde³⁹. Lukács argues that authors of such monumental works, such as Romain Rolland and Thomas Mann, are with respect to the avant-gardists far more representative of real progress because they demonstrate and require close reading; speaking of Mann, he says, “er weiß, wie Denken und Empfinden aus dem gesellschaftlichen Sein herauswachsen, wie Erlebnisse und Empfindungen Teile eines Gesamtkomplexes der Wirklichkeit sind. Dabei zeigt er als Realist, wohin dieser Teil im Gesamtcomplex des Lebens gehört, woher er aus dem gesellschaftlichen Leben kommt, wohin er geht usw.” (139). Mikail Bakhtin, in his essay “Epic and the Novel,” written just three years later, also examines what he characterizes as the astonishing ability of the novel to criticize itself and other genres: “the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the opened present)” (72). Like Lukács, Bakhtin also sees the revolutionary potential of such narratives, and recognizes that the ‘theories of the novel’ which accompany them are rarely able to do more than describe isolated and idiosyncratic tendencies, whereas the novels themselves represent a theory “that is both critical and self-critical, one fated to revise the fundamental concepts of literariness and poeticalness dominant at the time” (75).

With such extraordinary accounts of the potential within “long” and self-reflective novels for theorizing and shaping the meaning of both literature and the ‘world,’ a cynical observer such as myself might wonder out loud how it is that courses on literary theory regularly feature, say Freud instead of Mann, Saussure instead of Proust, or *A Room of One’s Own* instead of *The Years*. The historical and institutional circumstances which have given rise to the reign of

³⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, these same charges continue to be levelled, and in more or less the same terms; Philip Thody, in his article, “The Politics of the Family Novel: Is Conservatism Inevitable?” argues that authors such as Mann or Galsworthy “all end up by giving a sympathetic portrait of the middle-class family, and this when some of the most interesting and original thinkers—Gide, D. H. Lawrence, Sartre—are trying to destroy the very idea of the family on which middle-class civilisation has traditionally rested” (88). The vapidness of this evaluation is evident in even a cursory reading of Lukács or Bakhtin.

abstract and decontextualized Theory are far too complex and broad to characterize here, but specifically in terms of narrative, it is worth noting that the charges of unproblematic assertions of “universality” and being “totalitarian” in method seem to apply far more aptly to the *studies of the novel* than they ever do to *novels themselves*. One calls to mind the monumental aspirations of Paul Ricœur, or the transhistorical claims of Ian Watt, or the totalizing characterizations of René Girard, even the graphs and trees of Franco Moretti, and one must wonder whether these same novels, read by Lukács, Muir, or Bakhtin, are in fact being read at all.

However, in the last twenty or thirty years, many critics have recognized the extraordinary problems with Theory, especially in regards to complex world-building narratives such as those the placeholder of “long novel” would cover. Resisting such ahistorical accounts of narrative inherent in such expansive theories, Hayden White wonders,

Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see ‘the end’ in every beginning? Or does it present itself more in the forms that the annals and chronicle suggest, either as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude? (24)

Harkening back to Muir’s discussion of the modernist long novel as a “chronicle,” White’s questions urge us to reconsider the evaluative judgment that such ‘endless’ narratives are merely deficient in regards to more easily-analyzed and –anthologized novels. Lynette Felber, in her discussion of the *roman-fleuve*, discusses how “some of the distinguishing features of the *roman-fleuve* might be considered defects in a conventional novel, and readers at times seem alienated by the ways in which the subgenre differs from its species. The traditional novel, for example, privileges closure...the *roman-fleuve* inherently deprivileges closure” (3). The implicit

argument, carried further than merely the *roman-fleuve* genre, is that such insistent openness itself presents a problem for theories of the “long” novel, and would thus seem to require a practice which reads them on their own terms⁴⁰.

This is what Jeffrey Williams argues in *Theory and the Novel* as well: “I would call for a *reflexive* criticism, in a broad sense, that examines more explicitly the ways in which critical narratives reflexively thematize their mode and institution of production” (20). Formal analyses and generic explanations do little to explain the queerness and inconsistencies of novels which so constantly reference and deconstruct themselves, a fact which Catherine Gallagher discusses in “Formalism and Time.” She argues that the least-interrogated component of novels is “length,” but that their presentation of temporality itself requires an anti-formalist approach. She discusses Virginia Woolf’s “Death of the Moth” and characterizes it as paradigmatic for the way that narrative presents duration while formal analysis wishes to kill temporality and fix it into a stable, singular image:

The narratives’ return to the chronotope of the mundane, to sequence, to plot, certainly emphasizes the tension between the linear-temporal narrative genre and the atemporal self-reflective formal moments, but it should also underscore the partialness and inadequacy of stop-action formal analyses. If we are ever to develop a concept of length that includes analytic insights into the temporal nature of narrative, we will have to be a little less mothlike ourselves, a little less enamored of the end. (251)

The constant desire to get to the ‘end,’ both literally, as well as to the ‘point,’ is reminiscent of the teleological trap that Nietzsche and Foucault discuss; Theory fails when it cannot account for

⁴⁰ This is not to suggest that studies of long novels are not equally plagued with problematic assertions and normative judgments. Yi-Ling Ru, in *The Family Novel: Toward a Generic Definition* (1992), although drawing on an impressive comparative range of novels, ends up subordinating their content to an extremely rigid and pre-determined set of themes and values.

emergent things, cannot attend to the details of their components and the purpose to which they are being provisionally used (rather than a final purpose, or teleology)⁴¹. This is what Valentine Cunningham argues in *Reading After Theory*, namely that Theory has been misunderstood as primarily dogmatic rather than theoretical, and that therefore “the Theoretical keeps looking way beyond the textual particular. No wonder particularity suffers. And this heedlessness – or this heeding differently – sets a terribly bad example to people whose prime business is reading. It’s a bad example reinforced by doctrines – to some extent, by the whole doctrine – promoting a sort of heedlessness as a principle for reading” (89). While Cunningham is attempting what I would characterize as a wrong-headed attempt to ‘recuperate’ Theory as a reading practice, the point remains that the practice of literary criticism has for too long not accomplished its only real aim—to *read* literary texts.

The ‘mimetic’ model of narrative, in which literary works are seen as mere ‘reflections’ and ‘examples’ of somehow ‘real’ world events and ideas, seems to be tumbling, and along with it, the reign of Theory⁴². The recognition that theory itself depends upon narrative in each stage—thought as a socially-inflected, linguistic phenomenon; articulation within social forms and according to sadly normative models; stories as the currency for explanation; and circulation and criticism regulated by narratives such as reviews, rebuttals, and citations—also relativizes the adequacy of a one-directional power dynamic between reading and theorizing. Indeed, Eike Marten, in her *Genealogies and Conceptual Belonging*, argues that only through a genealogical

⁴¹ This is where many philosophical studies of the novel fail; they require their novels, like all objects of inquiry, to be essentially dead, in a final form, before they are able to give an account of it. And what a dry account! Alan Goldman’s *Philosophy and the Novel* ends up advocating precisely such a banal account of a one-directional ‘purpose’ for literature: “we interpret a work as a whole by explaining those representational, thematic, formal, and expressive qualities that make it artistically valuable, or by explaining its place in the history of the genre or in the broader culture” (41). In other words, it can do anything *but* move from its designated file in the catalogue. Or *live*.

⁴² John Gibson, in *Fiction and the Weave of Life*, examines this as well: “the humanist can argue that literature’s relation to the world is better understood as *foundational* rather than representational, consisting in literature’s ability to bring before us narratives that hold in place and give structure to our understanding of large expanses of cultural reality” (10). This seems to be part of a larger trend to place the “human” back in “humanities.”

reading practice can the inconsistencies and blind spots within the narratives that are seen as paradigmatic for social theories be exposed. Specifically within diversity studies, she argues that close scrutiny of narrative can allow for truly self-critical thought: “through defamiliarizing their seemingly common sense content, and minutely scrutinizing line by line what central story-lines emerge in the texts, and how the story-lines come to make sense, how they ‘work,’ their content emerges as contestable and as interested, as following a specific perspective rather than telling the ‘facts.’” (16). Close reading, or what I might call “exact” reading, according to this account, is the only possible antidote to a myopic and teleologically-dogmatic Theory.

So how does a reading which assumes that literary texts are always already theoretical, a “genealogical” reading (exact, endless, and non-exclusionary), in other words, function? It begins by discarding two assumptions about long narratives; the first I have already discussed, namely that their length is a deficiency, and the second is that because of their length, they must be studied in isolation. The practice of the first leads to appalling practices (if they can be termed ‘practices’ in earnest) like “distant readings,” incapable of accounting for any particularity of a narrative or accounting for why it is that its language is meaningful rather than merely representative. The second leads to the single-study monograph, and can therefore never do precisely what the “long novel” itself does—that is, to work comparatively and genealogically. Genealogy and comparison are inherently linked; they proceed without the assumption that the object at hand is stable or entirely comprehensible on its own terms; rather, through a procedure of close and careful examination, and especially through constant reference to productively “related” but essentially different objects, they construct an account of the meaning and purpose of that object. This is how I have approached each pair of “long novels” in my study.

MODERNISM

The coincidence or non-coincidence of the term “modernism” with the 20th century is not a debate into which I wish to wade, but as I am strategically treating them as basically interchangeable, I will discuss what it is I find compelling about the 20th-century “long” novel, as opposed to long narratives of other eras. The 19th-century especially would seem to lend itself most readily to examination of both family structures and novels of extreme length, and indeed, there are a number of thoughtful studies about the family, its salience, and its influence on narratives from the Victorian era⁴³. There are also several monographs of varying lucidity and relevance which chart the social, cultural, and literary developments of the 19th century *into* modernism, such as Christine van Boheemen’s *The Novel as Family Romance: Language, Gender, and Authority from Fielding to Joyce* (1987), Mary Jean Corbett’s *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (2008), Barry McCrea’s *In the Company of Strangers: Family and Narrative in Dickens, Conan Doyle, Joyce, and Proust* (2011), or the German/English collection *Zwischen Demontage Und Sakralisierung: Revisionen Des Familienmodells in Der Europäischen Moderne (1880-1945)* (2015). Even larger cultural historical studies of the bourgeoisie and its effect on modernist discourse such as Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* or Franco Moretti’s *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* have relevant contributions. The difficulty with all these studies, relevant as they may be to a cultural, social or literary history of the family as a theme, structure, or touchstone for novelists, is that they do not proceed genealogically; that is, they set out with a more or less stable idea of genre, periodicity, form,

⁴³ A sampling of some would include Janet Beizer’s *Family Plots: Balzac’s Narrative Generations* (1986), Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987), Karen Chase and Michael Levenson’s *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (2000), James Kilroy’s *The Nineteenth-Century English Novel: Family Ideology and Narrative Form* (2007), and Sarah Eldridge’s *Novel Affinities: Composing the Family in the German Novel, 1795-1830* (2016).

and history and proceed with an examination of works which are relevant to it, rather than allowing the novels themselves to interrogate those ideas⁴⁴.

My intent is to do just the opposite: to begin with the works themselves and allow the juxtapositional collision to generate productive and textually-grounded discourse about the interconnected issues of family structures, identity, history, and narrative. While I do believe this particular approach is unique, and in regards to the comparisons I am attempting, it truly is, I do recognize that it takes place within a larger discourse on modernism, and I do see some useful corollaries. Michael Levenson interests me in this respect; his first book, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908-1922* (1986), sets out “to identify within modernist thought certain root constituents - values, concepts, attitudes, beliefs - and to establish relations between them: relations of priority, mutual dependence, incompatibility, contradiction” (37). In doing so he provides a very Foucauldian/Nietzschean (and appropriately masculinist) ‘genealogy’ of concepts relevant to modernism, with almost constant reference to philosophers and cultural theorists and only passing references to the practitioners of modernism. However, it seems that the limitations of this mode of proceeding must have become obvious to Levenson, as his next book, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (1991), abandons commentary altogether and proceeds with comparative readings of the texts at hand, making far more interesting interventions along the way. In his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), Levenson questions the stability of the framing assumptions about modernism that surely shaped his initial work: “our contemporary imperative to declare a new period and to declare ourselves citizens of a liberated

⁴⁴ For example, Lynne Hapgood, in “Transforming the Victorian,” argues that the modernists only experimented with “form” while remaining in the “Victorian realist tradition” (32); Chris Baldick argues for a continuity of intent, modernism was “inflected by new psychological emphases, but still dedicated to puncturing false idealisms” (401), and Simon Joyce argues that the biological fact of their being born in the Victorian era means that the Bloomsbury group critiques “from within the conventional social and familial structures that helped to form [them]” (17).

postmodernism has badly distorted and sadly simplified the moment it means to surpass” (1). And in his most recent book⁴⁵, *The Humanities and Everyday Life* (2017), Levenson proceeds with the discursive training of Foucault, and the iconoclasm of Nietzsche, but with an entirely human focus on how the “everyday experts” so little-discussed in academia (referenced by Foucault, but discarded in practice) are able to work as “domestic genealogists” to “examine themselves and their historical moment as they proceed, interrogating assumptions, methods, and values” (2). This trajectory is, to me, laudable and necessary for any invigoration of the modes and methods of inquiry in the humanities, and it is what I believe I am attempting as well; a method which approaches its objects with sympathy and humility rather than an attempt to ‘master’ them. I do not think Michael Levenson is alone in this approach, but I think that authors, especially of that most vulnerable of genres, the dissertation, are often obliged to disingenuously advertise themselves according to known academic paradigms and thereby end up negating the anti-hierarchical or anti-theoretical intent they might espouse.

A case in point is the so-called “New Modernist Studies” so gleefully called into existence by Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz in their 2008 article of the same name in *PMLA*. The pivot from “Bad” Modernisms to “New” Modernist Studies seems significant, as it demonstrates a desire to replace the negatory aspect of “bad” modernism with a positivistic, progressive and institutionally-pleasing “new” re-branding. A comparison of their introduction to *Bad Modernisms* to “New Modernist Studies” reveals that what they originally called for—namely a recognition that modernists texts have an “invitation to misunderstanding that we call ‘difficulty’” (15)—is replaced by a euphemistic “we”-narrative in which the authors of modernism are entirely elided in favor of hagiographies of the ‘saints’ of New Modernist

⁴⁵ I have passed over his 2011 monograph *Modernism*, which is intelligent, and certainly improves on his first study, but which shares a similarly problematic concept-based structure, beholden in particular to genre and period.

Studies. This is precisely what Charles Altieri criticizes about their position in his 2012 article in *Textual Practice*; he argues, “I am convinced that the closer we can get to the actual thinking of the major modernists, the more likely it is that we will make significant contributions to understanding how art that stays art might still engage social concerns” (765). However, Walkowitz and Mao’s concluding comments in *Bad Modernisms* are actually quite similar to Alteri’s view; “encounters with ‘difficult’ artifacts or performances, whatever elation or frustration they may otherwise engender, hold always a capacity to hearten inasmuch as they seem to confirm how intelligence, complexity, and curiosity have been alive in the world (and draw life again from just such confrontations between perplexed audience and elusive object)” (15-16). The curiosity of this sequence might bring about some probing questions as to the role ‘sanctioned’ publication venues such as *PMLA* have in codifying banal and uninteresting practices, but the immediate point is that the institutional pressure applied to Pound’s maxim “make it new” will never allow the sort of sustained close readings asked for explicitly by Altieri and implicitly by Mao and Walkowitz. Even in the case in both of Jed Esty’s monographs, *A Shrinking Island* (2004) and *Unseasonable Youth* (2012), which lead through impressive readings of the novels, they always end up subordinating the questions they pursue to abstract arguments for national identity and literary period rather than allowing close readings to stand on their own, sufficient in themselves⁴⁶.

A few illustrations of what I find to be compelling comparisons of critical practices in modernist studies will suffice. Two studies examine the intersections of science and literature in

⁴⁶ For example, in *A Shrinking Island*, Esty argues that “Eliot and Woolf exemplify the last ‘major’ generation of English writers but their late works offer some interesting and unexplored parallels, particularly insofar as both writers produce texts whose layered construction inscribes all the complexity of a massive historical transition in which metropolitan modernism gives way to the *petit recits* of national culture” (5). Not only is the recourse to “generational” logic problematic, but the characterization of Woolf’s late work as *petit recit* is only possible if he had never read or heard of *The Years*. But it ‘fits’ the bill of arguing for a return to national consciousness, which is why he asserts it.

modernism: William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture, and the Novel*, and Paul Peppis' *Sciences of Modernism*. Both examine a wide variety of contemporary scientific texts and in that way they both proceed somewhat genealogically. However, what is immediately apparent is that Peppis understands his work primarily as a search for "origins" and especially an originary "marriage" of science and literature (which has a teleology, of course, in the vision of a brave new world of harmony between them); he claims that his book "seeks in part to restore to understandings of modernism in literature and science the centrality of these literary sources, especially during modernism's early formation" (5). It sounds fine enough, but compared to Greenslade's examination, the focus is entirely on the *period* and the *genre* and not at all on the authors themselves. Greenslade writes: "I believe there is evidence enough to claim for the novelist, in this period, a role as critical, combative humanist – in the sense of having the insight to place certain values over others; of witnessing to the complex right of individuals to be themselves without having recourse to publically available labelling strategies with their simplistic appeal" (10). Greenslade's characterization allows for examination of the actual texts and what they actually say, whereas Peppis is reading according to contemporary understandings of divisions between science and literature and seeking to 'restore' something he believes was lost through his conceptual account. But is a conceptual account ever sufficient? The limitations of this are obvious in the number of studies which study not generations themselves, but the "concept" of generation. Such studies inevitably think briefly about the familial context for the term "generation" and move on to the concept, so popularized during and after modernism, of the "generation" of the artist⁴⁷. In Michael Soto's *Modernist Nation*, he argues that the generational model "functions both as an index of the cultural constructedness of nationalist

⁴⁷ Astrid Erll's article "Generation in Literary History: Three Constellations of Generationality, Genealogy, and Memory" promises a genealogical engagement, but ends up merely conceptual and cultural history, without looking at literary texts from the "literary history" with more than a brief glance.

discourse and as an instrument with which the national community is naturalized” (55). Yet what does the compulsory list of contemporary critics and studies in every introduction of every monograph do but reify the ‘present generation’ of critics as singularly valid and vaguely connected? Is his critique of generational rhetoric able to account for its *own* generational rhetoric? Hardly.

A similar critique can be levelled at the encyclopedic texts of modernist studies which acknowledge the way that modernism transgresses generic or thematic boundaries and then *proceed to reify those very boundaries*. Stephen Kern’s study of *The Modernist Novel* is a case in point. He begins by asserting that “the thesis of this book about the substantive history of this period is that it involved a subversion and reworking of the master narratives... Woolf’s impassioned questions about popular realist novels of her time – ‘Is life like this? Must novels be like this?’ – I hear behind all modernists’ efforts to capture what life is like and how novels ought to be written” (5). And yet how does Kern proceed with his own investigation? *By organizing it around master narratives* (character, time, space, etc.). Against this I would place Gregory Castle’s thoughtful discussion of the relation of the modernist novel to the *Bildungsroman*; like Greenslade, he grants a great deal of autonomy and agency to the authors themselves: “modernist writers were aware of these alternatives to bourgeois socialization and that their experimental Bildungsromane modeled both the possibilities of nonidentity and the failure of the Bildungsroman form to represent these possibilities adequately... the failure of form leads to its rehabilitation under new conditions of engagement” (251-52). While Castle restrains his analysis to the *Bildungsroman* and I think thereby unnecessarily limits the scope of his inquiry (related again to extrinsic motivations, and not to the limitations of the novels themselves), the point is clear: to adequately interrogate modernism we must be prepared to

adequately interrogate ourselves, especially in our penchant for conceptual paradigms which the modernists themselves resisted so intensely. But again, the institutional pressure to produce a ‘generic’ study leaves Castle in the unenviable position of editor of another collection of essays reifying generic boundaries: *A History of the Modernist Novel*, of which he admits he was “wary” (xv) of its intent, but nevertheless assented to its creation.

The purpose of this seeming aside is to illustrate that I believe the question of “why modernism?” must be answered by something *intrinsic to the novels themselves* and not by *reference to some exterior factor*. The pitfalls of the cultural argument seem evident—if an entire monograph on modernism is devoted to questioning the very periodicity and designation of modernism, what has it taught us about either the supposed ‘culture’ it deconstructs, or the texts it examines (or sometimes, does *not* examine)? This is what I admire about Gabriel Josipovici’s book *What Ever Happened to Modernism?* (2010), in which he outlines a number of academic, personal, or politico-cultural responses to modernism that he has observed, and then concludes that viewing the inherently painful and often incomplete products of modernism through the various settled lenses of contemporary prejudices and theories is flawed:

It feels simply impertinent to condescend to them, as all these responses do, as though *we* understood what was wrong with *them* and could set them right with a remark or two.

They laid their lives on the line, after all, and though we might feel that they were misguided we should think twice before presuming to tell them they were wrong. In order to understand that there are good reasons for the difficulties they encountered in getting their work not just published but written, and that these difficulties are part and parcel of what makes them rewarding to read, we have to try and see Modernism not from without ... but from within. (8)

To see modernism “from within” requires above all a genealogical reading practice, as I have already argued. For genealogy is not investigative or diagnostic; it means being open to transformation, placing your own values, assumptions, and perspectives into productive friction with elements of the past. In the case of modernism, Jean-Michel Rabaté argues,

There are indeed moments when the knowledge imparted by a novel bypasses the cumbersome dialect of the intellectual meta-language. The quest for a “theory of the novel” provided by novels themselves, the search for a theory of literature immanent to literature, has led us to a dilemma: Theory aims at the most general questions, at a philosophical questions of ‘totalities’ positing, as Broch thought, a “Platonic logos,” but it cannot avoid being enmeshed in the letter of the text, in partly untranslatable signifiers, in the intractably entangled network of private and historical allusions without which literature would not open up on to *mathesis singularis*, in other words, to theorizing in particular. (140)

To create not another theory *of* the novel, but to assert the novel *as* always already theoretical means to acknowledge that the particularities of the text will always exceed the critical discourse about them. It means examining the texts comparatively and genealogically, taking into account how they structure their universe and using that exteriorization as an instrument of critique by which we can also come to see our own social universe, and our own reading practices, as similarly constructed. The task remains to find a way to describe the ethical function of such a reading without devolving into a search for origins or teleology. The task is to articulate a critical practice from within, and to examine that articulation as emergent from that context and not outside of it. Only through such a method can resonances between the texts come to surprise us, unsettle us, and, ultimately, teach us something about ourselves.

Chapter 2. RESISTING THE GENEALOGICAL IMPERATIVE: *THE YEARS* AND *BUDDENBROOKS*

To set Virginia Woolf next to Thomas Mann is a difficult, transgressive, and willful act of criticism, but it may be a necessary one. The danger in troubling the mostly separate spheres in which they revolve is that they could collide, and messily, or miss each other completely. There are reasons not to attempt the comparison, or only to attempt it from the safe distance of separate chapters in a monograph on European modernism; each tends to show the other in the worst possible light, as Mann's massive novels and their doggedly realist mode of presentation⁴⁸ tend to look like the heaviest bludgeons of patriarchal prose next to Woolf's experimental forays, while the insecurities which plagued Woolf throughout her career tend to be drawn into uncomfortable focus by the deftness of Mann's philosophical rhetoric. Both prolific essayists and reviewers, they could hardly be said to proceed in more distinct directions in terms of the works they valued, the projects they pursued, and the stands they took. They moved in different social and aesthetic circles in their day, and move in different circles and different disciplines now. And yet, to pull their novels from the shelves and open them is to discover queer threads and unopened pages between them. In particular, the first novel published by Mann, *Buddenbrooks: Verfall einer Familie* and the final novel published by Woolf, *The Years*, stand out from the others, partly in their size, and certainly in their content. Both novels are split into eleven distinct sections, each covering a specific time period and distinct from the others, separated by empty spaces in narrative time. They both have a distinct and explicit narrative range: from 1835-1877 for *Buddenbrooks*, and 1880-Present Day (likely 1932) for Woolf; 42 and 52 years, respectively.

⁴⁸ Patricia Tobin, from whose monograph *Time and the Novel: The Genealogical Imperative* I have borrowed a phrase for the title of this chapter, calls Mann "that apostle of linearity" (26), arguing that among modernists Mann stands out as an entrenched realist, and a paternalistic one at that. She emphasizes *Buddenbrooks* as a primary example of the patriarchal logic of the "genealogical imperative" to order events, people, and language in a vertical hierarchy granting privilege to the anterior, 'originary' event or figure.

Both narratives are, or could be termed, “family sagas” or “chronicles,” focusing as they do on events and perspectives of multiple members of the same family over the course of generations⁴⁹.

Woolf’s conceptualization of the form of her novel as “a curiously uneven time sequence—a series of great balloons, linked by straight narrow passages of narrative” (*Diaries IV*: 142) applies to Mann’s novel as well. In particular, the first section of *Buddenbrooks* conforms almost precisely to the method Woolf employed, that of narrating a single day in a single year, in isolation. And in an odd convergence of style, both employ extensive use of ellipses, in both cases far surpassing the usage in their other novels, and to the extent that these breaks in thought occur on nearly every page of each novel.

Though these make compelling structural and thematic corollaries between the novels, they can hardly be said to dispel the ideological tension existing between Woolf and Mann. Indeed, as the only other sustained comparison of the two novels⁵⁰, a single article by Liisu Saariluoma, polemically enough titled “Virginia Woolf’s *The Years*: Identity and Time in an Anti-Family Novel,” makes clear, to set them next to each other is to make easy target practice. Saariluoma uses Mann as a straw man to set up a binary opposition between his quickly-flattened patriarchal narration and Woolf’s dialectically opposed “rejection of the received mode of the family novel as a generic type, on the basis of the author’s critique of the patriarchal family as an institution” (279). Within this simplistic characterization, the abstracted qualities from each

⁴⁹ As said in my introduction, these novels resist generic classification. Yet some, like Richard Humphrey, insist on attempting it; for a reductive and categorical definition of the “family chronicle,” see his article “The Caravan Crossing the Desert: The Family Chronicle as Family Re-Memberer in Modernism and Post-Modernism,” which begins with the cute nod to Tolstoy, “all epic genres resemble one another in being related to memory, but all family epics are related to memory in their own special ways” (383), and then proceeds to list twelve characteristics for defining any family chronicle, along with taxonomies separating modernist and post-modernist variations.

⁵⁰ Though monographs ostensibly comparing Woolf and Mann exist, none link together these novels, and rarely is the work actually comparative. Martin Price, in *Forms of Life*, for example, whose characterization of experience through forms of art in the novel does examine Woolf and Mann in the same chapter, nevertheless treats them in isolation from each other, granting only one single paragraph of consideration to the relation in which they might stand to each other (340). Anthony Cuda’s *The Passions of Modernism*, too, advertises a synthetic third section: “Woolf and Mann,” though they are discussed entirely in isolation, without even an attempt at transition between the two separate chapters.

novel, the “moral ethos” of family in the *Buddenbrooks* on the one hand, and the “critique” of patriarchy on the other, come to define the novels as a whole and they are easily set into, unsurprisingly, discrete and opposing categories⁵¹. This sort of comparative work seems, in the context of both the disciplines to which they have been relegated, as well as for the authors themselves, reductive in the extreme.

So what might it mean to consider the two novels as occupying a common ground of comparison, without digging disciplinary and ideological trenches around them? These two novels, precisely because of their engagement with family narratives, and the methods they employ in explicating the past in its particular iterations without imposing a “theory” of the past on them, beg to be read carefully and not polemically. Indeed, in her diaries preceding and during the composition of *The Years*, Woolf resists again and again the temptation to abstract, or to preach. Only a week before her initial, furious, nine-week composition of *The Pargiters*, she remarks, of D.H. Lawrence:

To me Lawrence is airless, confined: I dont want this, I go on saying. And the repetition of one idea. I dont want that either. I dont want ‘a philosophy’ in the least; I dont believe in other people’s reading of riddles. ... But it’s the preaching that rasps me. Like a person delivering judgment when only half the facts are there; & clinging to the rails & beating the cushion. Come out & see whats up here—I want to say. I mean its so barren; so easy; giving advice on a system. (*Diaries IV*: 126)

This is also, interestingly, what Mann seemed to push for, at least in his later characterizations of *Buddenbrooks*, after his own “preaching” or “philosophy” novels had come and gone. In “Der Künstler und die Gesellschaft” he reflects back on his surprise at finding *Buddenbrooks* to be the

⁵¹ Rudolf Glitz, in *Writing the Victorians*, notices this as well, calling Saariluoma’s comparison a “barely questioned opposition” (211), which he links to Thody’s accusation of the ‘inevitable’ conservatism of the novel (discussed in my introduction); he says that “Thody’s generalization is still questionable” (210).

decisive factor in his winning the Nobel, as it was for him a “Familienangelegenheit und – unterhaltung,” without the “überpersönlich” moral or political character of what he terms more mature art (342). He remarks how important and enduring this personal quality is, because he finds that “der Künstler ‘verbessere’ die Welt auf eine ganz andere Weise als durch moralische Lehre, nämlich indem er sein Leben – und auf eine stellvertretende Weise das Leben überhaupt – im Wort, im Bild, im Gedanken befestige, ihm Sinn und Form verleihe und die Erscheinung durchsichtig mache” (340). Although the characterization of *Buddenbrooks* as a sort of family joke runs counter to his great ambitions for the novel when he wrote it⁵², Mann wishes to emphasize the familial nature of the novel, and its inability to “preach” in a pedagogical or moral way, and instead to elevate the engagement with personal relations.

This is not to suggest that Woolf and Mann make any sort of a harmonious synthesis; their novels, though both methodologically interested in pursuing the general historical through the particular familial, are at cross purposes as to what value lies in the accumulation of “facts.” To borrow from Foucault’s terminology, Mann’s motive seems to be much closer to a “search for origins” than Woolf’s, which is to explore the messy plethora of beginnings and the process of descent. This division seems to apply to the methods pursued by the families in the novels themselves: the Buddenbrooks have an obsessive need to continually author and authorize their past, writing a singular family history with the illusion of multiple authors, but which cuts out any dissenting or contradictory voices, whereas the Pargiters, always already dispersed in space, are equally dispersed in time, and co-construct both the past and present through their relations with each other. While Mann is certainly critical of the Buddenbrooks’ paralyzing grand narrative of their own pedigree, his own pursuit of the “origin” of the *Verfall* is likewise dogged

⁵² James Northcote-Bade, in his discussion of Mann’s various statements about *Buddenbrooks* throughout his life in the *Buddenbrooks Handbuch*, calls attention to the stress Mann laid on its “literarischer Erfolg” (354) long before its publication success; only after its best-seller status did Mann begin to try to characterize it as a private family affair.

by a diagnostic method which must fit the narrative into a tight network of rational and irrational choices, begotten by heredity and environment, but in the end totally explicable within a careful “historian’s” narrative. Woolf is not remotely interested in diagnostics and remains suspicious of the unacknowledged totalitarianism behind such a method; her interest in the past is relational and fragmentary, and quickly moves away from explicability and into plurality. In her 1932 description of her “Novel-Essay” to be entitled *The Pargiters*, Woolf explains that she intends to give a “faithful and detailed account” of the family, spanning nearly 250 years and running “into many volumes”; she explains that this novel is “not a novel of vision, but a novel of fact” (9). However, this original conceptual fusion is *itself* pluralized by the eventual split of narrative and essay portions into *The Years* and *Three Guineas*. Her novel completely loses the authoritative and didactic narrative voice⁵³, interested in explicating and diagnosing the “ills” of the society it considers, while her seemingly polemical political essay ends up championing not the fact-gatherers, diagnosers and prognosticators, but rather the “marvelous, perpetually renewed” resource of autobiography, biography, and daily newspapers, “history in the raw,” which expands both the temporal view as well as shakes our conviction in our own ability to understand and master our own “history” (*Three Guineas* 7).

In terming Woolf’s method “genealogical,” I wish to directly critique the philosophical associations and pretensions of Foucault as well as Mann for their gender bigotry; it is precisely her outsider’s status which affords Woolf the conceptual flexibility to escape both the philosophical and historical man’s scrutiny and appeal to rigor which can only ever end up replicating and confirming the methods it employs. This is not to suggest that Woolf’s method is

⁵³ This is what many have designated the “failure” of the novel; the 1977 *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* which publishes deleted sections of *The Years* along with critical assessments of it; most resort to various types of name-calling; from Mitchell Leaska’s “she seemed no longer to have dominion over it” (172), to Sallie Sears’ “fumbling effort” (211), Joanna Lipking’s “a book full of symmetries that is at war with shape” (142). In each of these cases, some effort is made to ‘recuperate’ the failure of the novel by forcing into a conceptual paradigm.

“superior” to Mann’s or is somehow a critique of Foucault’s concept, both of which would only serve to create yet more binary oppositions—rather, her presence and difference throw into relief some of the unexpected nuances of both men’s work. The work of comparison is not dialectical in nature, but relational, identifying and expanding through metonymy and synthesis⁵⁴; in truth, the methods Mann and Woolf employ inform each other, and the value systems at work in the worlds of both novels, as well as in the narrative framework within which they operate, interact in complex and unexpected ways. The value in the comparison may well be in the fact that the incommensurable differences between the texts allow for productive analysis to begin where isolated studies of either text must by necessity leave off, that is, where resemblances surface. For Woolf and Mann, despite their obvious ideological differences, come to some surprisingly similar conclusions about what epistemological value family narratives have in the pursuit of human understanding, and what method best allows these domestic narratives to theorize experience without preaching, without philosophy.

Buddenbrooks and *The Years* both stand in uneasy relation to the genre they most closely resemble—that of the family saga, or family chronicle⁵⁵. Indeed, both authors seem to be at odds with family structures, and push against its normative influence at the same time that they bring it into being; Mann’s emphasis on *Verfall*, and his particular interest in Hanno as an alter-ego, drives the force of the narrative away from the Buddenbrook belief in their own destiny and identity, and shows how their own “family narrative” disintegrates with time, and Woolf’s

⁵⁴ I use the terms metonymy and metaphor throughout this chapter to characterize the move to synthesize and connect, rather than in the rather binary usage of the terms offered by Lacan or Jakobson. Tony Jackson, in *The Subject of Modernism*, also acknowledges that there is a great deal of slippage between the terms, and adds, “if Woolf’s notion of narrative resists the implicit violence of the metonymic, it also resists precisely that which it puts forth as most desired: metaphoric totality” (121).

⁵⁵ Rudolph Glitz notes that the ‘genre’ itself can provide a counterpoint to the normative weight of what constitutes modernism itself: “It is symptomatic that a bestseller widely regarded as Woolf’s masterpiece, *The Years* has come to figure among the least read and valued of her works ... [the genre’s] most formative early twentieth-century examples were notoriously located outside the so-called ‘modernist’ movement” (56).

choice of narrators certainly elides the possibility of continuation of the family narrative—almost without exception they are the unmarried, the spinsters, bachelors, scholars, or career women, not the parents of the next generation. And yet in both cases the anxiety about the form and identity of the family becomes a metonymic anxiety about the relation of particular familial “worlds” to *the* world, the relation of individual identity to collective identity, and how the sense of family (that is, the recognition of contingent relations) interacts with expectations and forms of social relation outside of its small network of meaning. The importance of the “family” in the family saga seems for both to reside not in its content, but in the possibilities of its form, the possibilities of the family’s construction of identity through experience and narrative interaction, and how those alternative perspectives, set alongside one another, can inform our perception of reality⁵⁶. The family becomes a vehicle for analyzing how we structure experience, not in isolation, but in relation to those around us.

How this sense of family comes to be constructed is a main concern of both novels, especially the negotiation of ownership, and the recognition of a collective will or identity within the family. Jean’s first concern at the founding of the family estate is that “es sollte kein heimlicher Riß durch das Gebäude laufen, das wir mit Gottes gnädiger Hilfe errichtet haben . . . Eine Familie muß einig sein, muß zusammenhalten, Vater, sonst klopft das Übel an die Tür . . .” (40). He says this to his father Johann, to encourage reconciliation with the cast-off Gotthold, and his emphasis on the structural aspect places their family identity in opposition to Verfall; they will be preserved from decay only through their tight unity, collective identity. But Jean speaks from a privileged position, as heir of the family business and estate, and he is incapable of recognizing how his emphasis on unity restricts the agency of others. This is precisely what

⁵⁶ This complex network of differentiated perspectives leads me to reject Jed Etsy’s simplistic claim in *Unseasonable Youth* that Woolf, among other modernists, crafts novels “in which the marriage plot is marginalized” (23); perhaps in *The Voyage Out* this may be the case, but her *The Years* displays a wide array of trajectories.

Woolf shows in her exposition in *The Years*; in 1880 the family is required to, compelled to “zusammenhalten,” but only because their mother is dying. Delia in particular bitterly resents the restriction that this family unity in the face of “tragedy” represents, thinking, as she fulfills her role as dutiful daughter, that her mother is merely “an obstacle, a prevention, an impediment to all life” (21). And yet it is Delia herself in the Present Day section who comes to represent, to Peggy, the suffocation of family meetings, family identity:

When my Aunt Delia comes to town, Peggy continued the story of Eleanor that she was telling her friend at the hospital, she says, We must have a party. Then they all flock together. They love it. As for herself, she hated it. She would far rather have stayed at home or gone to the pictures. It’s the sense of the family, she added, glancing at Eleanor as if to collect another little fact about her to add to her portrait of a Victorian spinster. (316)

Peggy’s resentment here is undercut by her willful characterization of the multidimensional Eleanor as a stock “Victorian spinster.” While Woolf’s point is hardly to sentimentalize family relations, through these moments of unity and resentment she allows the “sense of the family” to be a negotiated, rather than an assumed, quality, mutable over time and according to need.

For Thomas Buddenbrook, the “sense of the family” is how he justifies his existence and comes to terms with the threat of death and destruction: “sein Familiensinn, dieses ererbte und anerzogene, rückwärts sowohl wie vorwärts gewandte, pietätvolle Interesse für die intime Historie seines Hauses” (526). But this makes a dangerous self-inclosing circle of values, in which the future of his family is tied to the inherited business, to the preservation of a particular social ranking, of political and religious beliefs, pitted against the outward-spinning centripetal force of family, which through the vagaries of reproduction cannot control the identities of its

members, though it tries to control their destinies; this circle is in many ways the pressure which constricts him more and more, the outward pressure he needs, the tight clothing he wears, simply to feel alive and mobile. This later, darker Familiensinn contrasts with his earlier, more light-hearted belief in the Buddenbrook identity. As a teenager, on an afternoon where the family is sitting together in the garden, reading (itself a commentary on the outward form, the social practice of reading, instead of an intense individual engagement), Tony is criticized by her mother, “Tony, deine Haltung ist nicht comme il faut” (77), a reminder, even linguistically, that her body must be brought into accord with a foreign dictate. Much like the garden in which she sits—which was originally a “großer, verwilderte Garten” (24), or as Jean expresses it, “schöne, freie Natur” (25), but the enlightened, rational Johann requires the native growth to be checked and “beschnitten” (24)—so too is Tony required to present herself for constant display. But Tom recognizes that the “verwilderte” aspect of a space, or a person, can be equally cultivated as an aesthetic ideal, and that the essential thing is the ownership of the representative power to dictate which forms are acceptable, which power the Buddenbrooks currently possess: “Das schadet nichts’, sagte Tom. ‘Sie kann sitzen, wie sie will, sie bleibt immer Tony Buddenbrook.’” (77). Although this is said in ironic praise (and with an undertone of pride in ownership), it ultimately becomes what she is unable to escape, in both her marriages—she remains a Buddenbrook, and like her brother, is unable to conceptualize a future without the pre-eminence of *that* family identity, *that* family narrative.⁵⁷

It is the omnipresent need to preserve an outward appearance for the sake of the family identity which leads both Tony and Tom into their marriages. As Tom remarks to Tony when he

⁵⁷ Judith Ryan, in “*Buddenbrooks*: Between Realism and Aestheticism,” argues that Mann’s choice of the family narrative allows him conceptual flexibility, a balance between the social real and the mythic/philosophical which he did *not* achieve in his later, heavier works: “it does not simply transpose historical reality into narrative form; it shows this reality being created in human minds as they interact with others” (184).

tells her of his engagement to Gerda, “das rechte Vertrauen der Welt gewinnt man erst, wenn man Hausherr und Familienvater ist” (256). His desire to marry Gerda is a political and economic move, an assumption of a static role, like the earning of a degree, that of “Hausherr” and “Familienvater,” both of which demonstrate the patriarchal ownership of sexuality; the father who legitimizes his children, the “master” of the house who exercises dominion over the children he produces. This prerogative comes to Tom as the “owner” of the family name, and allows him to delegitimize Christian’s relations which do not conform to the “Hausherr” expectation. After their mother’s death, Christian accuses him of forgetting their horizontal relation as siblings, and that Tom’s conception of life is not the only possible one:

Aber so bist du, Thomas ... Du hast dir einen Platz im Leben erobert, eine geehrte Stellung, und da stehst du nun und weisest kalt und mit Bewußtsein alles zurück, was dich einen Augenblick beirren und dein Gleichgewicht stören könnte, denn das Gleichgewicht, das ist dir das Wichtigste. ... Wie satt ich das alles habe, dies Taktgefühl und Feingefühl und Gleichgewicht, diese Haltung und Würde . . . wie sterbenssatt . . . ‘Ich bin geworden, wie ich bin,’ sagte er endlich, und seine Stimme klang bewegt, ‘weil ich nicht werden wollte wie du. (492-93)

The simple observation, “so bist du, Thomas,” seems to be the thing that disturbs Tom most, because it suggests that his own position is relative, within the family, and perhaps within the company as well; the realization that those who are *not* “Familienväter” and “Hausherrn” are also able to mobilize critique and speak from particular positions threatens the stability of his universalized privilege. And this is why he in turn uses everything in his power to keep Christian queer and degenerate, to cut him off from access to the Name of the Father, from the ability to speak as a rational and legitimate man: “Du hast der Familie genug der Blâme zugefügt, Mensch,

als daß es noch nötig wäre, uns mit einer Kurtisane zu verschwägern und ihren Kindern unseren Namen zu geben. Ich verbiete es dir, hörst du? ich verbiete es dir!” (494). The “Verbot” of the father, which was used against Gotthold in the beginning of the novel, is now being used against the brother, and to delegitimize and ostracize him.

Martin, Woolf’s closest approximation to the eternal dilettante Christian, for all his railings against “possessiveness” (232) and the “abominable system” (211) of family life, also sees and values Maggie over Sara for her decision to marry and have children. When he meets the debutante Ann at Kitty’s party in 1914, he is amazed at her naiveté: “purely virginal, he said to himself; and only an hour ago I was lying stark naked in my bath in Ebury Street, he thought” (237). Considering his own nudity in relation to her, he finds her purely virginal, presumably in opposition to his experience; by this account, virginity is not so much a biological as a social condition, and is exclusively feminine. Martin considers through Ann the larger question of the value of social relations, specifically whether the frivolity and superficiality of the upper class is worth continuing. He keeps trying to ‘place’ Ann and she him; when she begins speaking to someone of her own ‘set,’ he feels that she gives herself away:

And what’s your world, Martin thought, as she rapped out her slender stock of adjectives—‘heavenly,’ ‘amazing,’ ‘marvelous,’ and so on. Is it ‘*the*’ world? he mused. He looked down the table. Anyhow no other world had a chance against it, he thought. And it’s a good world too, he added; large; generous; hospitable. And very nice-looking. He glanced from face to face. Dinner was drawing to an end. They all looked as if they had been rubbed with wash leather, like precious stones; yet the bloom seemed ingrained; it went through the stone. And the stone was clear-cut; there was no blur, no indecision. (240-41)

While Martin's position as "outsider" is obviously untenable⁵⁸—he hails from a "world" of his own, which Kitty demonstrates in her conversation with him—it is a central question which nearly every character in both novels must confront. To what extent does the "world" of the family, of the extremely local set of relations to which they belong, fit and correspond to "the" world, shared with others? At the beginning of the ninth section of *Buddenbrooks*, Tom is discussing politics with an associate: "Geld im Lande . . . Und frische Stimmung weit und breit . . ." Und der Senator stimmte dem halb und halb bei" (474). The half-way agreement is how Tom perceives himself—halfway connected to "the" world, and halfway detached from it, and as is evident, also above it. This is the unacknowledged distance of Martin's observation as well, that he stands over and apart from "the" world.

Peggy, continuing from her earlier resentment of the family party, criticizes the family for its detachment from "the" world, and Eleanor's human-centered perspective as she hears the far-away sounds, the suggestion they brought in of other worlds, indifferent to this world, of people toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkness, in the depths of night, made her say over Eleanor's words, Happy in this world, happy with living people. But how can one be 'happy,' she asked herself, in a world bursting with misery? On every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse—tyranny; brutality; torture; the fall of civilization; the end of freedom. We here, she thought, are only sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed. (368)

But even Peggy has to reconsider the privileged position she has constructed for herself in this diatribe, as she later reflects, "when in face, she thought, I do not love my kind." (369). She

⁵⁸ I would argue that this untenability is thematized more clearly in *The Years* than Woolf's other novels. Ruth Gruber, who wrote her dissertation on Woolf's fiction in 1935, before its publication, notices how often her earlier novels allow for the detached observer, standing in a window or a door: "the characters of Virginia Woolf's novels might be divided into those who fit into the room, who have found themselves in life, and those who stand at windows, the dreamers, the anchorites" (144). Martin and Kitty seem to undercut this simple division.

realizes that if she cannot love her own “kind,” her own family, how could she pretend to care for humanity as a whole? She becomes frustrated because instead of talking about world politics, “it was family gossip, and they were enjoying it. But how can I enjoy it?” (369). Peggy maintains an untenable distinction between the “artificial” family gossip and the “real” news of the world which she sees as more fundamental than the frivolity of the family party. And yet the boundary between them is extremely fluid, as family parties even in the course of the novel form the basis of political decisions, marriages, business connections, and more. The reverse is also true; events from the outside world (such as the death of Parnell, or the King) propel and animate actions and choices within the family. The division between “the” world and the worlds of the family is untenable and collapses in the face of the complex reality of family life, like Peggy’s own cardboard cutout of the “spinster” Eleanor itself⁵⁹.

Another manifestation of the untenable division between public and domestic worlds is in the perception of the passage of time, which plays a large role in both novels. Throughout both narratives, there is a general movement towards greater anxiety about or awareness of time, especially as empty, homogenous, public time conflicts with personal, familial experiences. When Tony is sent to Travemünde to reconsider her rejection of Grünlich, she recognizes quickly that the Schwarzkopf family runs on a different schedule than her own. She anticipates unbounded freedom and vacation, but when she carefully gets up at her appointed time on the first morning there, she realizes the family has already been awake for a while. “Sie müssen nicht glauben, daß ich immer so lange schlafe. Ich habe ein sehr böses Gewissen” (105). Her conscience teaches her to regiment her life, as does Morten: to see her present as imbued with

⁵⁹ Rudolph Glitz, in his discussion of Peggy’s attempts to fit Eleanor into a “generational” model, points to her ultimate inability to render a cogent ‘portrait’: “Peggy’s frustration serves as yet another reminder of the unreliability of historiography – of historiography as a part of language in general that is – when it comes to rendering the individual” (143).

political meaning, instead of being merely a social network of relations. The tolling of the bell which wakens Tony is also what cuts off Eugénie's moment with her daughters in 1907. Having danced to a song from her earlier years for them, Sara and Maggie beg for her to tell them the "true story" of a note in a bouquet. "Listen—there's the clock striking!" Since the Abbey was so near, the sound of the hour filled the room; softly, tumultuously, as if it were a flurry of soft sighs hurrying one on top of another, yet concealing something hard. Lady Pargiter counted. It was very late. 'I'll tell you the true story one of these days" (134-35). She dies before fulfilling this promise, and the intimate moment they share is bitter, severed by the twin voices of mechanical time and the patriarchal demand of her husband, who calls her to come to him.

Yet Woolf is not content to settle the mechanical, public disturbance into a simple generational model, as Mann does; she resists the normalizing ability of public time as well. In the prelude to 1914, and a war which would even more deeply entrench the power of arbitrary public time over personal experience, she highlights not the piercing quality of the ringing clock bells, but their vibrational, discordant effect⁶⁰: "and from all the spires of all the London churches ... the hour was proclaimed. The air over London seemed a rough sea of sound through which circles travelled. But the clocks were irregular, as if the saints themselves were divided. There were pauses, silences. . . . Then the clocks struck again." (212). Time is not linear, but a series of sustained and overlapping circles, preserving and deflecting the individual tones in a cacophony of sound; it is the chaos of waves instead of precise lines. The sea also becomes a metaphor in *Buddenbrooks* for the consciousness that does not emphasize outward successes and appearances. In Thomas' ill-fated 'vacation' to the sea, he becomes obsessed with the binary

⁶⁰ Rebecca Walkowitz, in *Cosmopolitan Style*, also calls attention to what she terms the political strategy behind Woolf's 'evasion'; she discusses strategic un-attentiveness in a similar moment from *Mrs. Dalloway*: "by cultivating moments of diversion and by rejecting wartime priorities of attention, Woolf makes her readers more aware of social networks and helps them to distinguish between specific perspectives and universal ones" (103). For Walkowitz, this is an agentive cosmopolitanism.

opposition of diseased vs. healthy worldviews, and believes that his inability to whip himself into a frenzied goal-driven state is pulling him into death. Where the rhythm of the waves was so soothing to Hanno, and multiplied in pleasure for Tony, “die ihn mit ersichtlichem Vergnügen vom Travemünder Leben erzählen hörte” (543), Tom sees it as in itself deadly: “was für Menschen es wohl sind, die der Monotonie des Meeres den Vorzug geben? Mir scheint, es sind solche, die zu lange und tief in die Verwicklungen der innerlichen Dinge hineingesehen haben” (571). Obsessed with a masculinist belief in the primacy of political and economic reality, of the need for future-oriented activity, he perceives the endless rhythm of the waves as a sinking into the “inner” life, which cannot sustain him.

But Eleanor, who also perceives rhythms in daily life, affirms them as connections with larger possibilities for social intercourse and meaning. In 1891, as she hurries around the city on errands, she sees women shopping, and identifies with them: “there was something customary, rhythmical about it, she thought, like rooks swooping in a field, rising and falling.” (89). The rhythms of life she perceives allow her to transcend the mundane schedules of omnibus departures, Law Court cases, committee meetings, and tea, and connect imaginatively with a life greater than her own⁶¹. This is also what she perceives in 1911, returning from her European travels to the dowdy country home of Morris and Celia. She considers whether England is too trite, too pretty, and shallow, in comparison with Spain or Greece; “everything seemed pale and frail and friendly. The rugs were faded; the pictures were faded. ...In Greece one was always going back two thousand years. Here it was always the eighteenth century. ...the past seemed near, domestic, friendly” (186). The nearness of the past is familial, domestic; rather than an

⁶¹ Thomas Davis, in “The Historical Novel at History’s End: Virginia Woolf’s *The Years*,” discusses the interplay between the “everyday” and the historical in his analysis of the relation of *The Years* to the historical novel: “Woolf’s figuration of everyday life as the scene where historical processes attain legibility is not altogether an endorsement of quietism nor is it mere resignation. The novel models a way of investigating and interpreting everyday life” (19).

antiquity which preserves the form of a civilization, this is the inner life of a civilization on display, the social rituals, arrangements, and memories which give meaning to these humble domestic spaces. And she values this proximity and imbeddedness over the more impressive but detached “nobility” of Greece or Spain.

A major point of difference in the self-perception of each of the families in the novels is that the Pargiters perceive themselves as ordinary (and Woolf nearly titled the novel *Ordinary People* for that reason), whereas the Buddenbrooks perceive themselves as “vornehm” and separate from the average lot. This plays into how they perceive the social and existential value of events which occur: in the Pargiter universe, individual members can fall into the abyss of impoverishment or marry into the titled classes, but that is a function of their ordinariness and not particular, identifiable qualities. The Buddenbrooks place such great emphasis on inheritance—physical, economic, and especially of houses—that they cannot deal with change, evolution, and a diversity of outcomes. They require the *form* of their family to be replicated, whereas the Pargiters replicate the *process* of familiarization itself; hence the very different outcomes.

In a refutation of Eleanor’s turn to the domestic, the Buddenbrook house turns to the “ancient” past for its architecture and features Greek statues in its large empty rooms; a noble house is always too big for the family that occupies it. As Hoffstede’s pompous dedicatory poem insists, the rooms are “die der Himmel euch beschied”; the physical space is endowed with religious properties, and becomes a covenant, to be withdrawn only by a scornful God; his closing “Lebet wohl im prächt’gen Hause” also has a strange and dark underside; the “lebet wohl” is a wish for current pleasure, but hints at the inevitable end thereof, and the opulent house also doubles as a crypt, requiring the sacrifice of its family to preserve the splendor of its

necessary “noble” form (27). This is clear to Tom, who becomes an embodiment of sacrifice to form; even in his first day working in the family company, he realizes “es galt, die bedeutenden Mittel wieder einzubringen, die beim Tode des Alten der ‘Firma’, diesem vergötterten Begriff, verlorengegangen waren” (62). He is required to use himself up in the service of preserving the family fortune, and the distance between his personal satisfaction and the outward symbols of “vornehmheit” increase drastically throughout his life, culminating in his choice, after Hanno’s birth and the realization that childbirth is a threat to Gerda’s health, to nevertheless build a house far larger and emptier than his father’s for what will obviously be their only child, all to preserve and publicly display their “noble” status.

In contrast, the house at Abercorn Terrace is much too small for the family that occupies it, and although it too is a status symbol, that is related more to the position in London than the house itself, as Eleanor remarks to Peggy when they drive by it twenty years after its sale: “the repeated columns, the orderly architecture, had even a pale pompous beauty as one stucco column repeated another stucco column all down the street” (315). The memories of most of the children are negative, related to their dying mother, the close proximity and lack of privacy, and the rigid social conventions which held them, the daughters especially, in tight bounds. Martin considers its sale with relish: “it was an abominable system, he thought; family life; Abercorn Terrace; No wonder the house would not let. It had one bathroom, and a basement; and there all those different people had lived, boxed up together, telling lies.” (211). For Martin, the house becomes inseparable from the “system” it represents—the repeated columns that Eleanor points out to Peggy gesture toward this as well—the replication and proliferation of families, each under a masculine head: separate, respectable, constricted. Only by subscribing to a progressivist view of history, and dividing neatly the “past” generation from his own is he able to sustain his

critique of Abercorn Terrace. Martin, in the Present Day section, wishes to show Peggy how up to date he is by talking glibly of Eleanor's homosexual friends, and he chides her for being so serious: "your generation I mean—you miss a great deal. . . . you miss a great deal," he repeated," to which she replies, "I'm not that generation" (338). Martin's assumption that succession means progress and a new 'sameness' demonstrates the fallibility of his self-assured critique.

Both novels feature generational rhetoric, but showing in both cases how difficult and untenable the concept of progress can be. Woolf especially, but to some degree Mann as well, tends to destabilize the vertical, familial sense of generation, over a horizontal, time-specific one: while *Buddenbrooks*' ostensible narrative of "Verfall" could be taken—according to Tom's interpretative paradigm—to mean that generations weaken, become mixed, diluted, and thus fall apart, the structure of the novel as a whole shows that it is the combined weight of history and narrative which require the family to include rather than exclude more with each generation that leads to their dissolution. To hold together as a tribe means casting some out, and Johann Buddenbrook is willing to do that, while Jean is not. He is "der erste seines Geschlechtes gewesen, der unalltägliche, unbürgerliche und differenzierte Gefühle gekannt und gepflegt hatte, so schienen seine beiden Söhne die ersten Buddenbrooks zu sein, die vor dem freien und naiven Hervortreten solcher Gefühle empfindlich zurückschreckten" (219). The generational structure means that whatever insights and possibilities are gained tend to be lost by the conflict-driven structure of child-parent relations; Jean must "amend" his father's heartlessness, his disbelief in narrative, by reconciliation and pious discourse; Thomas and Christian must "amend" their father's piety and inclusiveness by maintaining a strong bourgeois belief in the social real. So too are Kitty and her mother structural replicas, each seeking the same thing, but at odds with one

another. Where Mrs. Malone recalls sitting as a young woman in the moors and “flinging up her bedroom window and looking down on the dark shrubs in the garden and crying out, ‘Is this life?’” she wonders how Kitty can be displeased with her life in Oxford, “in the midst of everything” (76). But Kitty, feeling stifled by the constraints of social obligation, gender expectations, and intellectual shamming, looks back to precisely the same moors her mother found so confining and considers them an embodiment of freedom and life, imbuing them with a naïve, unproblematic relation between desire and disclosure.

In each case, the perception of the previous generation as embodying identifiable and stable characteristics leads to overcorrection, either in rejection (like Kitty, or Christian), or in the exaggerated imitation (like Tom, or Milly). What becomes readily apparent in the structure of the family saga is that lines of inheritance are very queer indeed, and the only reliable transmission of values from generation to generation is the belief in distinct and separate generations. For the Pargiters, with their dispersed careers and trajectories, this does not have as many disastrous consequences as it does for the Buddenbrooks, whose insistence on the dogmatic reproduction of the same values, the same ossified forms, leaves them unable to accept the chaos of family lines, which branch out into every imaginable mode of inheritance and combination rather than proceeding, as patriarchal logic would have it, directly and unambiguously from father to son.⁶²

The chaos of inheritance is especially evident in physical characteristics and personality traits. They do not go in straight lines from generation to generation; rather, they are *Holzwege*, evident and recognizable only to those familiar with the entire social network. Rose, not Martin, becomes the soldier like her father; Kitty Malone inherits the red hair her mother’s cousin, Sara

⁶² Ricardo Quinones, in *Mapping Modernism*, discusses the paradox of time, and the different conceptions of it throughout *Buddenbrooks*; he concludes that the novel “shows not merely the decline of generations, but the decline of the generational ideal” (52).

resembles her father Digby, though she was her mother's favorite, and her deformity matches her uncle Abel's, though he is repelled by it; Hanno inherits his mother's ability, his father's hands, and his aunt's intestinal difficulties, all of which contribute to his unviability. Tony's need to find a place for all her traits within a narrative leads her the opinion that "jede Eigenschaft, gleichviel welcher Art, ein Erbstück, eine Familientradition bedeute und folglich etwas Ehrwürdiges sei, wovor man in jedem Falle Respekt haben müsse" (172). Because everything is inherited, she cannot escape the identification; everything is absorbed into her clannish sense of identity and reaffirms the circle of belonging. But even within the Pargiters, who rarely comment on resemblances, the recognition that you are acting in a manner not your own can be very uncomfortable, like Martin's frustration with the waiter: "he felt exactly like his father in a rage" (220). This is similar to Tom, who becomes enraged at Hanno not because he wants to, or even believes in what he is requiring of his son, but because he was subjected to the same inquisitions, and because he believes his ancestors require it of him; patriarchal rage is inscribed in the body itself, the body of the father inflicting violence on the son, who must inflict it on others. "O ja, das war die Frage; das war von jeher, solange er denken konnte, seine Frage gewesen! Das Leben war hart, und das Geschäftsleben war in seinem rücksichtslosen und unsentimentalen Verlaufe ein Abbild des großen und ganzen Lebens. Stand Thomas Buddenbrook mit beiden Beinen fest wie seine Väter in diesem harten und praktischen Leben?" (399). Despite not believing in the base of reality being as hard and practical as he believes his fathers to have found it to be, Tom must inflict this on his son, in order to preserve the outward form of successful business life.

The damage that this belief in the generation-to-generation preservation of outward form can inflict is evident in Tom himself; he becomes increasingly paralyzed by his own expectations

of how to act in alignment with what his father and grandfather would have done. This forced (artificial) preservation is the opposite of the accidental, transgressive, and discovered resonances between family members in *The Years*. Tom's need to preserve actually embalms him very early in his life: "es war ursprünglich um nichts mehr, als das Bestreben eines Menschen der Aktion, sich vom Kopf bis zur Zehe stets jener Korrektheit und Intaktheit bewußt zu sein, die Haltung gibt." (355). The preservation of "Haltung" is what ends up forming his reaction to the world⁶³; he becomes a caricature of himself, with his obsessive changing of clothes and stiffness of manner, because he is so determined to continue unabated, unchanged. Like Hanno's school, he is determined to merge the old style with new ideas: the old buildings "waren der Erde gleichgemacht, um neue, luftige, prächtige Baulichkeiten an ihrer Stelle erstehen zu lassen. Der Stil des Ganzen war gewahrt worden ... so herrschte der vollste Komfort der Neuzeit" (602). But just as the ossified forms of master and student, the outdated hegemonies of knowledge, and the oppressive social regime that Hanno experiences are hardly "vollste Komfort," so too are Thomas' habits, which in theory are improvements upon the old, but in reality simply embalm outdated and oppressive habits, extending their lives unnaturally.

Gender norms strongly influence the perception of generations and inheritance, for it is always the chaos of the feminine which threatens the integrity and self-identity of the masculine, in the paranoid Buddenbrook perception. Besides Hanno, whose effeminacy is a constant thorn in Tom's side, Christian is the other most threatening non-conformist. When he is discovered giving cheap flowers to a disreputable actress as a boy, his father immediately blames his wife's family, and her 'degenerate' and theater-loving brother, for the destructive and threatening

⁶³ Wesley Kort points to *Buddenbrooks* as an example of Mann's desire to use the imbeddedness of social narrative to show the impossibility of what I here term "Haltung" in *Modern Fiction and Human Time*; he points to Jean's paranoia about the family's unity being built on ostracization as showing "the implication that all human constructions house the tendency both to be reinforced and to be dismantled" (80).

‘tendency’ that has shown up in their son: “das ist unser Sohn, so entwickelt er sich . . .’ ‘Jean, mein Gott, dein Vater hätte gelacht darüber.’ . . .’Er weiß es nicht, nein; aber die Neigung zeigt sich! Die Neigung zeigt sich!” (68). The danger of marriage outside the family is that the Other can be incorporated into the self, that it is never a perfect process of reproduction; instead, in the Buddenbrook view, the degenerate tendencies can pollute and corrupt an otherwise ‘healthy’ member of the family. This is also what Tom resorts to in his first enraged outburst against Christian: “Gehe hin und verjökele dein Leben, wie du es bisher getan! Aber du kompromittierst uns, uns alle, wo du gehst und stehst! Du bist ein Auswuchs, eine ungesunde Stelle am Körper unserer Familie! Du bist vom Übel hier in dieser Stadt, und wenn dies Haus mein eigen wäre, so würde ich dich hinausweisen” (272). Christian’s lifestyle, which can be tolerated in high society but not *within* the family, is perceived as a degenerate outgrowth, a tumor, on a healthy bourgeois family; it is not so much the queerness itself as the proximity to the healthy family life Tom is trying to emulate which makes him so offensive, and causes him to cut off Christian’s literal, biological descendants from the name, fortune, and narrative of the Buddenbrooks.

The inability of the heterosexual, exogamic, bourgeois family to replicate the exact form of its existence is what leads Tom eventually to reject even his own biological son as his descendant; this patriarchal wish to entirely elide female participation in reproduction surfaces in his existential crisis while reading Schopenhauer:

In meinem Sohne habe ich fortzuleben gehofft? In einer noch ängstlicheren, schwächeren, schwankenderen Persönlichkeit? Kindische, irreführende Torheit! Was soll mir ein Sohn? Ich brauch keinen Sohn! . . . Wo ich sein werde, wenn ich tot bin? Aber es ist so leuchtend klar, so überwältigend einfach! In allen denen werde ich sein, die je und je Ich gesagt haben, sagen und sagen werden: *besonders aber in denen, die es voller,*

kräftiger, fröhlicher sagen . . . Irgendwo in der Welt wächst ein Knabe auf . . . Das ist mein Sohn. Das bin ich, bald . . . bald . . . (560)

The abstractions of Schopenhauer's philosophies allow Tom to distance himself from the dissatisfying personal relations he has and imagine a reproduction of form, a cloning, in which he can "father" the "Ich" of another, and live on in the same—dissatisfying—form of egotistical living he's been entrenched in throughout his life.⁶⁴ The philosophical system of fatherhood has its own reproductive system, and it involves submission to abstract forms, discipleship, and complete exclusion of the feminine.

This "alternative" to familial reproduction is the hypermasculine concept of the "Nachfolger"; the successor, but also the follower, the disciple, the zealot. This patriarchal form of transmission is particularly self-destructive, as it requires much more dogmatic adherence to the *form* of the "master" than the father could ever require of his sons. When the Senator dies, the question which electrifies the discussion is not who the new senator will be so much as what the new Senator will *transmit*: "Wer ist der Nachfolger?" (346). And to that question, Tom is the logical answer: ossified traditions dressed up in new liberal vocabulary. The nepotism and favoritism of the conservative political system of Lübeck is replicated in Woolf's vision of Oxford, with its dons and undergraduates and its unacknowledged homoerotic economy; male generations, which require discipleship and conformity, perceive women as transgressive, unnecessary, and even dangerous to their production: Kitty's father, in a burst of male guilt, "had suggested that she should help him. Again she saw the ink flowing—she had made an awkward brush with her arm—over five generations of Oxford men, obliterating hours of her father's exquisite penmanship" (76). The generations of men without women can only look on women as

⁶⁴ Alan Bance examines this turn to Schopenhauer in *Buddenbrooks* and other Wilhelmine novels, and characterizes the failure of Tom to identify with the mystic individualism as a criticism of *fin-de-siècle* decadence, Mann's assertion that "finding the answer in oneself is a poetic solution not easily sustained in real-life situations" (40).

contaminators and blots, aberrations in a rigid intellectual and social order⁶⁵. Edward, too, is unable to consider Kitty as being *quite* as real as Antigone, and constantly merges the two in his fantasies about her, the safe textual reality being more accessible than the volatile fleshy one.

It is in the name of the “Nachfolger” that decisions are made for generations of sons by their fathers concerning their careers and sexual partners (for daughters as well, but that usually doesn’t even rise to the surface of a “decision” since there is only ever one outcome): Edward is sent to Oxford to win awards and earn prestige; Martin to the Army to continue his father’s legacy; Tom is taken out of school and put into his father’s business; Christian sent away, as second sons generally are, into the colonies. And yet this ritual rarely results in satisfaction; Christian in fact learns far too well what second sons are good for, and how business in the colonies really operates, to make him a respectable businessman like his brother; Edward becomes so good at performing his ossified masculinist scholar role that he detaches himself from his family almost entirely, living in generations of scholars and students instead; Martin, rather than following his father through the Army and into family life, skips ahead into the dalliances and affairs. Both Martin and Edward, in the end, express a desire to have been something other than what they were, but that can never really be articulated and expressed, as their lives have so entirely conformed with the expectations of them. To embrace the chaos of difference, and imagine how differently they could have lived, is forbidden by the code they have internalized. This is what Tom feels on the day of the 100-year celebration of the company; Tony, in her internalized role as patron deity of the family records, “bot in ihrer begeisterten Überanstrengung das Bild einer verzückten Märtyrerin,” whereas Tom feels complete emptiness,

⁶⁵ Although Nietzsche would likely be horrified to be seen as advocating anything like an ‘effeminate’ history, this obsession with “Nachfolger” is basically what he diagnoses as the ‘monumental’ use of history in “Vom Nutzen und Nachteilen der Historie für das Leben”; the need to insist on a static “Greatness” is “ist ein Protest gegen den Wechsel der Geschlechter und die Vergänglichkeit” (114). In both cases, the impulse is to flatten history, especially the messy biological change of generations, into a static history of Great Men and their accomplishments.

the agony of performing a ritual entirely for its own sake, for the reproduction of a system of relations which has made him unhappy; when his mother embraces him to congratulate and thank him, “es war, als ob in seinem Inneren sich etwas löste und ihn verließ. Seine Lippen bebten. Ein hinfalliges Bedürfnis erfüllte ihn, in den Armen seiner Mutter, an ihrer Brust, in dem zarten Parfüm, das von der weichen Seide ihres Kleides ausging, mit geschlossenen Augen zu verharren, nichts mehr sehen und nichts mehr sagen zu müssen . . .” (409). Tom perceives her in very gendered terms, as an extension of the feminine promise to “compensate” for the ceaseless activity of the male, the hard, brittle work, and the cold rationality; to him she seems to offer the possibility of rest, to blot out the present, and to embrace something interior rather than a constant fixation on exterior realities. Of course Tom does not actually embrace this possibility, and instead moves forward, rejecting the feminine, the embrace, to the point that Schopenhauer will fit his beliefs like a glove.

North also has a moment of very gendered rejection of the feminine, when he sees his aunt Milly and husband Gibbs, and he sees in her fulfillment of her designated role as wife and mother a sickening reminder of the reproduction of the same: “everything, he felt, became dulled. She cast a net over them; she made them all feel one family; he had to think of their relations in common; but it was an unreal feeling” (355). He goes on, appalled that doctors and scientists like Peggy haven’t “stopped” them from breeding, and compares their current forms to the attractive young people dancing around them: “Gross, obese, shapeless, they looked to him like a parody, a travesty, an excrescence that had overgrown the form within, the fire within. . . ‘Why--?’ he jerked his thumb in the direction of the young, ‘when they’re so lovely—’” (360). The obesity of their fecundity disgusts him—he stares at the flesh on her hands covering the rings, and is appalled at the sense of possessiveness—in Freudian terms, the fear of the vagina,

the flesh covering up and absorbing his identity. The dancers, to him, represent “some mystic rite” which give him “some emotion about himself, about his own life” (353). But seeing them in locked positions, dancing, makes him consider the rigidity of the system which reproduces itself in every generation of Gibbises, and which requires each partner to face each other, dressed up in their genders, leading, and being led, around and around the mulberry bush.

The obsession with the “Nachfolger” as well as the paranoia about inheritance, the “Nachkommen,” both turn on the preposition “nach,” as in “nacheinander,” the need for succession, calling forth associations with progress, goals, and historical consciousness. But Woolf, especially through her women, continually searches for the possibility of a “nebeneinander,” a juxtapositioning which allows relation without participating in reproduction or disciple-production⁶⁶. This is what is at the center of Eleanor’s rejection of progression in her discussion with Peggy about the past:

“What I mean is, we’ve changed in ourselves,” Eleanor was saying, ‘We’re happier—we’re freer. . . .’ What does she mean by ‘happiness,’ by ‘freedom,’ Peggy asked herself, lapsing against the wall again. ‘Take Renny and Maggie,’ she heard Eleanor saying. And then she stopped. And then she went on again: ‘D’you remember, Renny, the night of the raid? . . . Going downstairs I said to myself, That’s a happy marriage. . . .’ There was another pause. ‘I said to myself,’ she continued, and Peggy saw her hand laid on Renny’s knee, ‘If I’d known Renny when I was young . . .’ She stopped. Does she mean she would have fallen in love with him? Peggy wondered. . . . ‘No, never. . . .’ Was she saying that she had never been in love, never wanted to marry? . . . I feel . . .’ she stopped. She

⁶⁶ Martin Swales, in his essay “Irony in the Novel: Reflections on the German Bildungsroman,” also uses the distinction between “nacheinander” and “nebeneinander” to frame his discussion. But then again, so does Stephan Dedalus in *Ulysses*. I do not rely on Swales usage, and find it confining and taxonomic, I note it merely to distinguish my own from his.

put her hand to her head: ‘as if I’d been in another world! So happy!’ she exclaimed. ‘Tosh, Eleanor, tosh,’ said Renny. I thought he’d say that, Peggy said to herself with some queer satisfaction. (367)

The meaning of the event she is trying to reconstruct is negotiated directly between herself, Renny, and Peggy, but by extension it touches on the experiences of Sara, Maggie, Nicholas, and the children present in 1917, to name a few. The “nacheinander” of Tom, Edward, or North must give way to the “nebeneinander” of Eleanor, as the generational narrative becomes mixed and spreads, diluting its individual reality in connection with other social realities, other narratives.

And yet Woolf is not content to let even Eleanor’s moments of insight simply stand unquestioned. The structure of both novels undercuts the individual moments of insight and clarity by placing them in immediate proximity with other, vastly different experiences and perspectives⁶⁷. In 1917, the experience which Eleanor is trying to relate to Peggy in the above-quoted section, she meets Nicholas for the first time and is amazed at his insights into life and human relations. But the theoretical alternative he represents to her is undercut by its placement next to Renny, Maggie, and Sara. When he lectures her about “the soul” and the “New World,” Eleanor thinks with excitement, “when, she wanted to ask him, when will this New World come? When shall we be free? When shall we live adventurously, wholly, not like cripples in a cave? He seemed to have released something in her, she felt not only a new space of time, but new powers, something unknown within her” (281). The abstractions she is indulging in give her great excitement, but Woolf immediately undercuts this by Sara, who is pulled in for an opinion, and responds: “people always say the same thing,’ she laughed. She roused herself and sat up. ‘There’s Maggie—she says nothing. There’s Renny—he says ‘What damned rot!’ Eleanor says,

⁶⁷ Many commentators on *The Years* wish to make a protagonist out of Eleanor, subverting all the other perspectives into copies or failed oppositions to her own. Wesley Kort is an example of this, asserting that “Eleanor’s attitude to time, then, provides a norm by which other characters can be judged” (133).

‘That’s just what I was thinking.’ . . . And Nicholas, Nicholas,’—she patted him on the knee—‘who ought to be in prison, says, ‘Oh, my dear friends, let us improve the soul!’” (281). The “nebeneinander” is actually a terrible experience, for Eleanor, because it doesn’t allow her to abstract, it forces her back into the uncomfortable present. When they go into the cellar because of the air raid, and come out again, Eleanor breathes a sigh of relief, “the guns were still firing, but far away in the distance. There was a sound like the breaking of waves on a shore far away. ‘They’re only killing other people,’ said Renny savagely. He kicked the wooden box. But you must let us think of something else, Eleanor protested” (277). The need to abstract, to consider the gunshots merely waves on a distant shore (and this is hardly an insignificant simile for the author of *The Waves*), is undone by the proximity of Renny, the Frenchman, and his unwelcome reminder that other families, other houses, are being torn apart. At the end of the night, when Eleanor steps out into the street, she feels “a sense of immensity and peace—as if something had been consumed . . .” (282). The searchlights in the sky, which are so inspiring to her, are not the benevolent beams of *To The Lighthouse*; they are targeted, enemy-searching beams⁶⁸, and as Renny’s remark indicates, the pleasure of their conversation is indeed a “consumption,” for always somewhere else there are people being killed for the very utopic Causes they are espousing. The “nebeneinander” forces the participants, and especially the reader, always back into the particular situation, rejecting the flight of philosophy, theory.

Woolf’s choice to narrate in the third person, and constantly undercut the I-potential of her characters, seems a calculated one, and related to the difficulties she encountered in both *Orlando* and *The Waves*. Orlando’s attempt to transverse historical phenomena, gender norms, readerly expectations, and the like is certainly breathtaking, but as Woolf knew, also deeply

⁶⁸ David Bradshaw argues that “the movements of the searchlight signify the potential of a social formation which is not predicated on hierarchical contempt and ignorance, war and division, but which is communitarian, inclusive and harmonious” (18); but I would argue that it implies a criticism of community spirit in its disregard of the Other.

flawed, by subsuming all difference into one gargantuan ego, incapable of self-criticism. *The Waves*, on the other hand, seemed to her a danger in that it was all depth and no “facts”⁶⁹; in *The Years* she wished to make a novel of “fact” and set her characters in definite, and familial, relation to one another, rather than suspended in midair. Yet even as a novel which *is* a family narrative, it remains suspicious of family narratives, and shows how little actual “telling” occurs; Col. Pargiter, Martin, Kitty, and Eleanor each wish to tell but are unable to. Despite Woolf’s anticipation of critics saying it would be a “novel about nothing” (*Diaries V*: 58), it manages to thematize that inability to tell in a powerful way. The ‘fault’ that many perceive in this novel, its constant frustration of expectation, the way it undercuts all of its narrators so consistently, seems to be a targeted effect, deflating the search for origins, the search for a teleology⁷⁰.

This is brought out in particular whenever characters perceive themselves as participating in a narrative, and the panic that brings about. When Rose goes to lunch at Maggie and Sara’s in 1910, she feels a curious sensation when they ask about her family: “go on telling us about the Pargiters.’ ‘About the Pargiters?’ said Rose. She saw herself running along the broad avenue in the lamplight. ‘What could be more ordinary?’ she said. ‘A large family, living in a large house . . .’ And yet she felt that she had been herself very interesting.” (160). The arrangement of the family seems on the surface unremarkable (though in the context of the novel, it is actually remarkable—there are no other large families living in large houses), but she sees a seething flux of relations beneath the supposedly stable surface of “the Pargiters.” This is also called forth when she remarks that she has lived in the neighborhood where they reside before, and Maggie

⁶⁹ In VW’s *Diary IV*, entry for 16 October 1935, she writes: “in this book I have discovered that there must be contrast: one strata, or layer can’t be developed intensively, as I did I expect in *The Waves*, without harm to the others” (347). This is written specifically after a visit from Ruth Gruber, whose dissertation, published in Germany, was called “The Will to Create as a Woman” and praised *The Waves* in particular for its lack of realism.

⁷⁰ Grace Radin, in her monograph on *The Years*, explains that although some perceive it as a ‘failure’ on Woolf’s part, “the lack of unity in *The Years* is much more than a question of technique. In a novel which attempts to include everything, to face the facts of life in this world, the only possibility for an integrated point of view lies in finding some perspective that transcends daily life” (154).

and Sara can only imagine her living in Abercorn Terrace: “‘Can’t one live in more places than one?’ Rose asked, feeling vaguely annoyed, for she had lived in many places, felt many passions, and done many things” (157). She sees how the imputation of a common identity among the family members serves to restrict and “place” her into a formal arrangement with which she is uncomfortable. But she similarly relies on such clues to “place” Maggie and Sara. For each, seeing how they are “placed” into a narrative is an uncomfortable moment of alienation, as they recognize how the family structure removes them from complete interpretive power over their own self-narratives.

Another possibility, explored more fully in *Buddenbrooks* than in *The Years*, is the perspective of servants offering a critique of the family narrative itself. Woolf, though she includes Crosby, from beginning to end, also flattens her into a sort of thorn in the side of the family rather than a fully dimensional being in her own right. She remains to some degree beyond the pale, an uncomfortable reminder of an inequitable system they wish not to think about. When Eleanor finds the work on her cottages unsatisfactory, she must resort to “the upper middle class tone she detested” (95) to put Duffus in his place; and with Crosby, as she puts her in the taxi to take her from a cramped basement to a cramped attic, she considers it a “dreadful moment; unhappy; muddled; altogether wrong” (206). Martin, too, in his interaction with Crosby, makes use of “the usual formula: ‘Well, Crosby, how’s the world treating you?’” (209), annoyed that she appeals to him as a human and not merely as a servant. By contrast, Mann includes proximal, underprivileged and quasi-servile dependents in the novel from beginning to end as equal participants in the family drama. And with Tony’s valuation of the claims of family, even the less ‘respectable’ family members, such as the cast-off or impoverished women who hang ‘dependent’ from the masculine business activity, bring her to some unlikely decisions. She

consults with Ida, not Tom, or even her own mother, when she must decide about accepting Permaneder's proposal. Ida tries to get Tony to consult her personal feelings, while Tony responds, "um mein Glück handelt es sich eigentlich gar nicht dabei, sondern indem ich diese zweite Ehe eingehe, mache ich nur in aller Ruhe und Selbstverständlichkeit meine erste Ehe wieder gut, denn das ist meine Pflicht unserem Namen gegenüber" (289). Although she ends up making the short-sighted decision to sacrifice herself for her family's name (and partially to snub the upstart Hagenstöms and Mollendorfs), she consults Ida and treats her as a valued member of the family, regardless of her economic position. At the end of the novel, her poor relations, the former servants—Klothilde, Ida, her cousins—are all she is left with, and she is content and not bitter. This is an anomaly her world; Tom, for all his charm and ease, is made uncomfortable by the stuttering congratulations of Grobleben at the baptism of Hanno, which contain a stark message of equality within their effusions, and he responds a bit too exuberantly, "und der Konsul legt ihm die Hand auf die Schulter, indem er ihm einen Taler gibt" (341). With the payment, Tom assumes he retains interpretive control of the situation, but the narrative registers his discomfort, just as it does Eleanor and Martin's.

Thus the family saga shows how tenuous a construction the "family" is, but by virtue of its repetition and familiarity between characters, it also allows both Woolf and Mann to show how characters understand each other, with or, perhaps more often, without the mediation of language. The family dynamics tend to destabilize the content-value of language over its utility as the expression of a particular style, identifiable with an individual. Mann in particular marks his characters with idiosyncratic uses of language, from Jean's use of Plattdeutsch, to Konsul Kröger's use of French, to Christian's health complaints, and so forth. Woolf, too, shows her characters in the process of perceiving the style and attitude of others; this is especially obvious

with Sara, whose utter unintelligibility throughout the novel on a content-level is sharply contrasted with how well she is able to convey her meaning to others. When North visits her on his return to London, he struggles at first to piece her together with his memory of her, but then just listens to her speak:

Yes, he thought, there's the voice; there's the attitude; and the reflection in other people's faces; but then there's something true—in the silence perhaps. ... The actual words he supposed [were true]—the actual words floated together and formed a sentence in his mind—meant that she was poor; that she must earn her living, but the excitement with which she had spoken, due to wine perhaps, had created yet another person; another semblance, which one must solidify into one whole. (324-25)

His attempt to make “one whole” out of Sara is undercut in this section, and by the structure of the novel as a whole, but his recognition that the “actual words” can convey meaning without reference to their content is one he shares with other characters throughout the novel. It is a meaning-making which relies on relation, very specifically on a common history, a sense of blood-belonging, in order to make oneself legible.

Tom, the most consistently misread or insufficiently-examined character by his compatriots, shares a similarly remarkable moment of insight with Hanno. Though he spends much of the novel loudly and painfully berating his son for his failings, and trying to force him to understand and internalize his expectations according to business, gender, and social codes—this despite in many ways actually sympathizing with him—it is not until his own anxieties overtake him that Hanno really understands his father. Because society has deemed that Gerda is cuckolding him, he waits anxiously outside as she practices music with the young lieutenant. As Hanno meets his eye,

sie fühlten es beide, daß in diesen Sekunden, während ihre Blicke ineinander ruhten, jede Fremdheit und Kälte, jeder Zwang und jedes Mißverständnis zwischen ihnen dahinsank, daß Thomas Buddenbrook, wie hier, so überall, wo es sich nicht um Energie, Tüchtigkeit und helläugige Frische, sondern um Furcht und Leiden handelte, des Vertrauens und der Hingabe seines Sohnes gewiß sein konnte” (553).

Though they cannot express it, they exchange something based on their knowledge of each other through daily contact and shared blood which defies precise characterization but is palpable to both. The unspoken communication of father and son here, which is a queer moment of connection (“ineinander,” a step further than “nebeneinander”) in an otherwise very normative and abusive relationship, can be effectively contrasted with the expectation of sympathy and drawing out which Woolf deflates throughout her novel. Men throughout both novels tend to rely on women to express the things they feel but, to preserve their gender roles, are unwilling to articulate; this tends to be Tony’s role throughout the novel, and it is exhausting. But many of the women, including Kitty, Rose, and Sara, refuse to participate in this cycle. Martin, who invites Sara to lunch in 1914, asks her about the church service she’s attended, and then is embarrassed as she begins to recite it aloud: “Hush!” he stopped her. ‘Somebody’s listening.’ In deference to him she assumed the manner of a lady lunching with a gentleman in a city restaurant. ‘And what were you doing,’ she asked, ‘at St. Paul’s?’ ‘Wishing I’d been an architect,’ he said. ‘But they sent me into the Army instead, which I loathed.’ He spoke emphatically. ‘Hush,’ she whispered. ‘Somebody’s listening” (217). The interchange criticizes the way that male privilege, combined with economic power, assumes that its tastes and proclivities are the “norm” to which all others must conform. The narrative proximity allows Woolf to deflate Martin’s perspective without becoming dogmatic, or abstracting him from his immediate relations.

But Sara is part of the urban spectacle, not separate from it, and her inability to fit into his belief in a separate, preserved family identity contributes to Martin's frustration with her. As they settle into their meal, Martin is unnerved by her lack of sympathy with him, and that she doesn't seem to listen to him, as a woman presumably ought. He attributes it to the wine she's drinking, and puts his hand over the glass to police her consumption: "she drew back her glass and sat gazing at it, as if the engine of the brain were suddenly cut off. She was very like her mother—except when she laughed. He would have liked to talk to her about her mother. But it was impossible to talk" (219). His desire to reproduce in Sara the sympathy and understanding that he (and his father) found in Eugénie is frustrated, so he attributes her lack of sympathy to brainlessness, the inability to think for herself. And yet, it is precisely the ability to think for herself which bothers him so much—instead of acting as an extension of his desire, and embodying those traits he desires, she chooses to act for herself, say what she wishes, and be as queer as she likes. So Martin transfers his desire onto Maggie, and talks to her about her mother and his father, and finds the sympathy he's looking for, the access to memory. But Sara's refusal to act as a passive instrument, a bank of memories to be opened for pleasure and drawn out, is both a physical and mental rebellion against the normative influence of attributes and resemblances, and a deflation of the generational rhetoric which would require direct lines of descent, attributable to an originary cause.

In this instance, and throughout the novel, Woolf elevates conversation as the best means for drawing out her characters as well as, through their proximity and relation, to deflate the dogmatic potential of any of their individual thoughts. There is little writing in the novel itself; Eleanor does sums, but rarely writes letters; North writes Sara, but then stops again; Abel has the obituaries cut from the newspaper to preserve, but they are lost. Their relations are contingent

and decentered. While this also exists in *Buddenbrooks*, what they rely on as their primary mode of identification is the family documents. The written word gains weight with time, where the spoken word disappears. And this is what the Buddenbrook papers demonstrate; the omnipresent “Akten”—journals, documents, records, letters central to the social, political, sexual, religious, and economic sanctity of the family—combine writing with power and agency. “Der Akt” in the sense of an action, act of a play, and so on, is distinct from “die Akte,” a document or file, but for many of the events and words recorded, they are for all intents and purposes *the same*: a chance letter from a father to a son becomes the motto of the family business; the recording of a number of children’s alleged births and deaths becomes an imperative and a condemnation of the fruitless present generation. The increasing ownership of the family narrative stands in inverse ratio to the amount of actual control the family has over their destiny⁷¹.

The first glimpse into these files is through Jean’s record of Clara’s birth, as he flips back through his very pious discourses on how the hand of God has preserved him and allowed him to prosper throughout his life. He considers how similar his arranged marriage was to his father’s, and thinks it is

bedauerlich, wie wenig Sinn er für alle diese alten Aufzeichnungen und Papiere besaß. Er stand mit beiden Beinen in der Gegenwart und beschäftigte sich nicht viel mit der Vergangenheit der Familie, wengleich er ehemals dem dicken Goldschnittheft immerhin ein paar Notizen in seiner etwas schnörkeligen Handschrift hinzugefügt hatte, und zwar hauptsächlich in betreff seiner ersten Ehe. (44-45).

The disinterest Johann shows in the history, in the documents, is related to his belief in the present, and his wish not to brush too closely against painful memories which have to be erased

⁷¹ Alken Bruns, in “Herkunftsarbeit,” examines the relation of *Buddenbrooks* to chronicles of Lübeck Mann studied in his earlier years, and concludes that these documents betray a “von Generation zu Generation zunehmende Bedürfnis nach Selbstvergewisserung durch Reflexion der eigenen Geschichtlichkeit” (56).

in order to continue the genealogical line of his second marriage. For Jean, the family papers become an act of devotion, a way of inscribing the blessing and favor of God in their daily lives.

For his children, however, the papers' religious significance take on a historical importance, as he holds them out to them as prophetic guidance⁷². In his counsel to Tony concerning Grünlich, Jean emphasizes, "der Weg, der sich dir heute eröffnet hat, ist der dir vorgeschriebene, das weißt du selbst recht wohl. . ." (88). It is quite literally "vorgeschrieben," as becomes clear to her on her return from Travemünde. She sits down and reads through the well-known stories; but what becomes apparent to her isn't the content itself, but rather the reading practice which the generational saga brings to the fore: "jeder der Schreibenden hatte von seinem Vorgänger eine ohne Übertreibung feierliche Vortragsweise übernommen, einen instinktiv und ungewollt angedeuteten Chronikenstil, aus dem der diskrete und darum desto würdevollere Respekt einer Familie vor sich selbst, vor Überlieferung und Historie sprach." (133). It is a matter of style, an elevation of the particular language of the Buddenbrooks, rather than the overblown piety of their writing itself, which impresses her, the accumulation of meaning and weight with the passage of time. She considers herself entrapped within the narrative: "was würde hier hinter ihrem Namen, den sie von ihrer Großmutter Antoinette empfangen hatte, in Zukunft noch zu berichten sein? Und alles würde von späteren Familiengliedern mit der nämlichen Pietät gelesen werden, mit der jetzt sie die früheren Begebnisse verfolgte. Sie lehnte sich aufatmend zurück, und ihr Herz pochte feierlich. Erfurcht vor sich selbst erfüllte sie." (133). This dissolution of individual identity is a result of the written record, the way her own name and experiences will become merged into a depersonalized chronicle of the family, and it is with this in mind that she writes her own engagement to Grünlich in the book, merging her father's words

⁷² Martin Swales discusses the 19th-century practice which the Buddenbrooks demonstrate here as the "family chronicle," whose point was "that it was precisely not a private diary; it recorded not thoughts, intuitions, moods, but the key events of family life and above all else the values transmitted through successive generations" (33).

with her own hand and making it literally “vorgeschrieben.” She continues with this reverence for the written documents of the family as she asks her father for a pen to cross out her marriage to Grünlich, and to enter in her second marriage to Permaneder; in each case seeing a harmony between her individual action and the family destiny.

But it is not a neutral thing to own the history of the family, and the hierarchy of interpretive power over the written record of the family becomes clearer with the passage of time, especially when the family narrative develops in “undesirable” ways. When Christian returns from his failed wanderings and pursues a dissolute life in the city, Thomas is initially unwilling to express his disappointment, which soon grows to outright hatred:

Die gehässige Verachtung, die Thomas auf seinem Bruder ruhen ließ und die dieser mit einer nachdenklichen Indifferenz ertrug, äußerte sich in all den feinen Kleinlichkeiten, wie sie nur zwischen Familienmitgliedern, die aufeinander angewiesen sind, zutage treten. Kam zum Beispiel das Gespräch auf die Geschichte der Buddenbrooks, so konnte Christian in die Stimmung geraten, die ihm allerdings nicht sehr gut zu Gesichte stand, mit Ernst, Liebe und Bewunderung von seiner Vaterstadt und seinen Vorfahren zu reden. Als bald beendete der Konsul mit einer kalten Bemerkung das Gespräch. Er ertrug das nicht. Er verachtete seinen Bruder so sehr, daß er ihm nicht gestattete, dort zu lieben, wo er selbst liebte. (266-67)

Thomas, as patriarch of the family, cannot tolerate division, dissolution, or horizontal spreading of the narrative power, and so increasingly exerts the control both of the family money as well as the family name over his younger brother. When Christian tries to legitimize his daughter after the Elisabeth’s death, the Buddenbrooks name is denied him: “über Christian, der ganz einfach zur Rangordnung Jakob Krögers gehörte, waren die Akten geschlossen” (358). The family

papers are literally closed to him; he is only a reader, a passive participant, not a producer of the name, of the history. Tony, on the other hand, identifies so strongly with the role of author that she oversteps her own role when her daughter makes an acceptable marriage: “zwar war es Erikas Name, den sie zusammen mit dem des Direktors mit vor Freude unsicherer Hand in die Familienpapiere schrieb . . . aber sie, sie selbst, Tony Buddenbrook, war die eigentliche Braut” (378). In the end, though, the unauthorized writing becomes prophetic in itself, when Hanno discovers the book (meaning that the ritual reading has stopped, since he is unfamiliar with it), and, amused to see his own name at the end of such a long line of Johanns, he makes a careful line across it. Discovered by his father, he is abused and threatened; his only reply is, “Ich glaubte . . . ich glaubte . . . es käme nichts mehr . . .” (445). And with that the papers become closed to further authorship; they can only be read, not written.

Woolf’s method contrasts with this, and emphasizes the oral over the written as the primary mode of transmission, and decentralizes the narrative. As Eleanor’s repeated refrain, “he wasn’t like that . . . not in the least” (144), shows, public accounts and written records are masculinist in nature, concerned with appearances, and the need to present a particular narrative of progress, success, and ability, whereas her own sense of the meaning of events and people is much more contingent and relational⁷³. Throughout *The Years*, characters are constantly recalling events partially or incorrectly, quoting events and words which were not given in the narrative, and revising each others’ stories. The story begins with an ending: the death of the mother, and her inability to transmit meaning, memory, and identity. Delia stays in her room, caught up in her fantasy of Parnell and wishing her mother would die; in the meantime, her mother is caught up in a memory, waking, and asking “where am I?,” looking around frantically,

⁷³ Julia Briggs, in “The Novels of the 1930’s and the Impact of History,” ties the abandonment of the ‘Novel-Essay’ form to her desire to resist preaching, and to regard “history and historical fact as fundamentally arbitrary” (81), resisting explicitly the documentation of history as essentially that of “great men’s lives.”

“as if seeking someone. She did not seem to recognize her daughter.” (22). The mother begins rambling, and then laughing, but Delia cannot follow her, “she must be thinking of some long-past family joke, Delia supposed, as she watched the smile flicker and fade away” (24). The hermeneutic circle does not extend past her; the unwritten memories and records fade away, and the mother herself becomes effaced, remembered not in her words, but in the portrait, which changes, decays, and is renewed, though, significantly, *not* as a personal remembrance, rather only as an aesthetic object. Martin, in 1908, looks at the portrait and considers, “in the course of the past few years it had ceased to be his mother; it had become a work of art” (141). This seems to be the danger of overemphasizing the permanent (written, painted) over the ephemeral; they seem to preserve something, but leave only general, not personal, things behind. The portraits in the Lasswade house, too, are negotiated and haggled over, their meaning changing depending on who looks at them. They are not static, not engraven in stone like the Buddenbrook Ahnentafel which Tony has made. And it is almost exclusively the men of the Buddenbrook family who are granted portraits, and whose lives are aestheticized. Thomas, at the end of his life, considers himself an actor⁷⁴, forced to put on a static face to preserve the stone-like immobility of his character and position: “Wirklich! Thomas Buddenbrooks Dasein war kein anderes mehr als das eines Schauspielers, eines solchen aber, dessen ganzes Leben bis auf die geringste und alltägliche Kleinigkeit zu einer einzigen Produktion geworden ist” (522-23). To Mann as well, the characters seem incapable of fluidity—like Makler Gosch who apparently spends nearly three decades on the same translation; they are in a single rut, and incapable of movement from it. But to Woolf, whatever ruts people may be in, they are not consistent, because what those ruts

⁷⁴ Martin Price, in *Forms of Life*, characterizes Woolf’s method to “extricate the work of art implicit in our lives and relations” (334), and argues that with *Felix Krull*, Mann aestheticizes life, making it a “series of performances” (340). This seems relevant in the context of the comic actor, but less relevant with the tragic acting of Tom in *Buddenbrooks*, which cannot hold its stance, and cannot continue its “form” in the face of social relations, ultimately unravelling.

mean is nearly impossible to communicate to another person; they remain mutually dynamic by virtue of the incommunicability which exists at constant odds with our attempts to “sketch” those around us.

The way that ceremonies and traditions within each family are preserved or enacted is also related to this troubled and negotiated sense of communal identity and meaning. The Buddenbrook family is constituted by ritual: weekly social events and religious ceremonies, the cycle of education, apprenticeship, travel, and partnership, the ceremonial reading from the family book, and the ever-increasing demands of holiday traditions, as seen in the minute description of Hanno’s Christmas. The Pargiters have relatively few traditions, and their meetings are fleeting, incomplete, and yet very meaningful. The more guilt and expectation required, however, the less authentic, in each case. As Elizabeth reacts to her husband’s sudden death, she takes over the personal spiritual duty he felt and makes “seine fromme Weltanschauung vollends zu der ihren” (235), instituting obligatory prayers and a charitable circle, and giving her money to every travelling pastor. The Christmas ceremony in particular is a burden, because she must preserve the outward form rather than whatever inner meaning it held for her husband: “in der Tat, das weihevollste Programm, das der verstorbene Konsul für die Feierlichkeit festgesetzt hatte, mußte aufrechterhalten werden, und das Gefühl ihrer Verantwortung für den würdigen Verlauf des Abends, der von der Stimmung einer tiefen, ernstesten und inbrünstigen Fröhlichkeit erfüllt sein mußte, trieb sie rastlos hin und her” (450). Eleanor, too, feels a panicked disbelief at the ossified traditions and ceremonies of the law courts she sees in 1910, wondering whether she was right to encourage her brother to study law when she hears the “public voice” of Morris instead of his real voice as he expounds on a case: “How could Morris stand it?” (106).

And yet there are also moments in which ceremony has the potential to renew life, to create meaning out of the arrangement, and the spontaneous interaction, of old forms with new life. This is the case at Rose's funeral, where the words Delia hears, up until the mention of sin and expression of relief for death, give her a sense that "the ceremony had renewed itself; once more they were grouped, united . . . life came closer and closer" (82). So too the Buddenbrook ceremony, especially as it becomes detached from its economic value, and the reading of the book becomes the commemoration of the dead rather than a social triumph, gives Tony the potential to renew rather than simply repeat it. Eleanor's perception of the couple at the end also has the effect of a ceremony, renewing itself in an anonymous way. While her siblings remain metaphorically in the past, joking with each other or talking about the party that has just ended, she ignores them, "watching the cab. A young man had got out; he paid the driver. Then a girl in a tweed travelling suit followed him. He fitted his latch-key to the door. 'There,' Eleanor murmured, as he opened the door and they stood for a moment on the threshold. 'There!' she repeated, as the door shut with a little thud behind them" (412). It is anonymous and yet deeply meaningful, suggesting the potential for *any* human to be caught up in the ritual of narrative, without abdicating their agency or personhood.

Woolf particularly uses objects to express the potential within things to reveal and intensify human consciousness. The description of the weather which begins each section is an illustration of this; as the smoke blows in country and city in 1891, it catches up old things and unites them with the new, throwing up new life, new celebration, from the dead; Woolf calls attention to this mixture of life and death when she calls October "the birth of the year" (86). In 1908 the bitter wind cuts through pretenses and exposes the structural flaws; it blows open the windows of the house and shatters old static modes of relation; along it goes, "shearing off all

one's faculties, one by one, but leaving something alive in the centre" (145). For the women in particular, alcohol and company allow them to loosen and generalize, to perceive larger correlations in relations, to see patterns. In 1917, in her conversation with Nicholas, Eleanor thinks: "a little blur had come round the edges of things. It was the wine; it was the war. Things seemed to have lost their skins; to be freed from some surface hardness" (272). The surface hardness, the imposed masculine reality, is broken up when things aren't seen as existing in a strict genealogical hierarchy and narrative sequence. Other correlations and modes of relation become possible. In the Present Day section, as Maggie, North, Sara, and Renny consider whether to really go to the party, North watches Maggie as she

ran her eye from thing to thing. In and out it went, collecting, gathering, summing up into one whole, when, just as she was about to complete the pattern, Renny exclaimed: 'We must—we must!' ... Yet it was only a question of going round to an old woman's party. Or was there always, he thought, as he too rose and looked for his hat, something that came to the surface, inappropriately, unexpectedly, from the depths of people, and made ordinary actions, ordinary words, expressive of the whole being. (331)

Maggie's continually-running eye, like Eleanor's momentary and fragmentary perception of the pattern, resembles Hanno's fragmentary music⁷⁵; it doesn't ossify into a theory, into a dogma, into a worldview, it is continually in motion, moving up to the surface, and then submerging itself in obscure personal consciousness, but then again flashing up and becoming a nexus of meaning shared between those participating together in its creation. As Sara hears the music, she is caught up in the potential for combination, but then, "as it repeated the same rhythm again and

⁷⁵ Although, as with much of Mann's novel, the "Verfall" is not far from it; in their commentary to *Buddenbrooks*, Eckhard Heftrich and Stephan Stachorski note, with regards to Hannos music, that it is an "Auflösung" rather than an Erlösung: "Obwohl Thomas Mann 'Auflösung' hier nur als Fachterminus zu verwenden scheint, schwingt doch die andere Bedeutung, also der Verfall, mit. Vgl. Elfter Teil, Kap. 3, wo Typhus 'eine Form der Auflösung' heißt" (413).

again, it coarsened them, it destroyed them. The dance music interfered with everything. At first exciting, then it became boring and finally intolerable” (126). The potential for difference becomes, through repetition and heteronormative expectation, a pattern requiring submission. This is different than the bodily rhythms Eleanor feels in 1911 as she considers her own life: “she felt as if things were moving past her as she lay stretched on the bed under the single sheet. But it’s not the landscape any longer, she thought; it’s people’s lives, their changing lives” (200). The rhythm she perceives is not external, and so it gives her the potential to grasp at what she fully perceives in *Present Day*, the complicated knot of lives which constitute her “I”. This is similar to the rhythm Hanno perceives in the sea: a natural rhythm of life, as opposed to the highly artificial requirements of his father’s business and family life: “Stille! Das einsame Geräusch der Harke und monotones Summen! Und dieser sanft belebte Friede erfüllte den kleinen Johann alsbald mit der köstlichen Empfindung jener ruhigen, wohlgepflegten und distinguierten Abgeschlossenheit des Bades, die er so über alles liebte” (536). The rhythm he sees calms his body, and allows him to perceive himself not as a single, expectant heir, with responsibilities and roles to fulfill, but as a network of feelings and sensations and contingent relations with those around him.

Along with the suspicion of creating narratives, both Woolf and Mann use descriptions of reading practices *within* the novels to examine how perception and aesthetics are not universal but contingent upon particular individuals. Although few of the characters in either novel are voracious readers like their respective authors, books in both texts are not neutral, nor is the process of discerning or assigning meaning. Tony’s reading choices are public knowledge and commented on by her father and brothers, Grünlich, and Morten⁷⁶, each of whom sees something

⁷⁶ As well as by critics; August Obermeyer rather snidely remarks that “Tony wird sich trotz aller Einsprüche als die ‘Gans’ erweisen, die sie nach eigener Aussage als Fünfzehnjährige war, als sie zur Lektüre von *Mimili* griff” (272).

different in her choices. Sara reads a great deal, but in her own way; in 1907, as she sits listening to the music, she reads philosophy, rejects it because it doesn't correlate to her lived experience, then picks up Edward's translation of *Antigone*—which mixes family narrative with aesthetic narrative—but reads “a line or two at random; then, from the litter of broken words, scenes rose, quickly, inaccurately, as she skipped” (127). The “inaccuracy” of her reading is hardly a condemnation of it—Sara is able to produce, and create, through her reading, not merely reproduce the meaning in her mind (which is all Edward's translation can do). Though at some points Woolf seems to praise the “standard” of scholarship, for its rigor, there is also a very apparent criticism of the paranoid and static readings it produces; paranoia for reproduction of the same form throughout all time, a scholarly patriarchal generation, reproducing itself and begetting new editions. Sara's reading engages with her present surroundings (the bare trees, the dance music), and merges her subjective experiences with Edward into the text he has translated (the phrase “my wasted youth” in particular); her readings of Shakespeare, Eliot, and others are also similarly queered and subjective, but also generative and suggestive, as the playful double meaning of “litter” of words suggests; they invite participation, rather than as North perceives about Edward, “he's a priest, a mystery monger, he thought, feeling his coldness; this guardian of beautiful words” (388).

Breaking with the received, inherited, patriarchal forms of language and suturing their rhythms and images into subjective experience is also what Eleanor is able to do, with Renan and with Dante. In each case, she reads little of the words themselves, nor is particularly interested in establishing their meaning, but instead considers how the process of language production and reception itself can be accessed; when confronted with Martin's judgment of her for reading *La vie de Jésus*, she wonders “what did they mean? The actual words were very beautiful. But who

said them—when? . . . It was what a man said under a fig tree, on a hill, she thought. And then another man wrote it down” (146). Jesus’s words to her are alive only insofar that the content makes a living connection; the form is unimportant, especially as it is transmitted through another man. With Dante she mixes his words with the landscape, “brushed lightly by her mind that was watching the moths on the ceiling, and listening to the call fo the owl as it looped from tree to tree with its liquid cry, the words did not give out their full meaning, but seemed to hold something furled up” (202). Eleanor, in a moment of decision about her future, follows the flight of the moths instead of the inaccessible Dante; Tony, too, finds that received words and ossified forms do her little good, as she too faces a decision. Deciding whether to marry Permaneder, she also follows the helpless flight of a moth with great interest, and looks to the cross-stitched “Befiehl dem Herrn deine Wege . . .’ aber ist das ein Trost, wenn man um Mitternacht mit offenen Augen liegt und sich entschließen, sich entscheiden, ganz allein und ohne Rat mit Ja oder Nein über sein Leben, und nicht nur darüber entscheiden soll?” (285). Tony begins the novel with a recitation of a catechism, which bears little relation to her behavior, and here she perceives again the deadness of the word opposed to the living, complex, and contingent reality of her decisions.

Though Tony is often neglected, by her brothers, as well as by critics, because of her supposed naïveté, she is among the few members of the Buddenbrook clan who is able to deal effectively with loss, and not be defeated by it. Against the elegiac tone of “Verfall,” or the obsessive pursuit of origins and order, she confronts life with a “childish” but also an effective embrace of possibility and constant change. This is what motivates her to suggest to Tom the bail-out of her friend’s husband in a somewhat underhanded business deal; when he rejects it, she suggests he reconsider his own position, and adapt to the times, because “ich habe mir

gedacht: Tom geht seit einiger Zeit ein bißchen freudelos umher, ... denn du weißt, daß es immer mein Traum und meine Sehnsucht gewesen ist, unserem Namen dienlich zu sein . . ." (388). Her belief in the power of chance, in contingent, momentary chances being seized, goes against the Buddenbrook ethos of always preserving "Haltung" and "Würde." But because patriarchal heredity does *not* guarantee reproduction of outward forms, and does not adapt easily or quickly to changing conditions, he feels that he cannot shore himself up artificially anymore: "mir ist, als ob mir etwas zu entschlüpfen begönne, als ob ich dieses Unbestimmte nicht mehr so fest in Händen hielte wie ehemals . . ." (365). He also believes that it is a result of his being unlike his fathers, being dangerously "mixed" instead of purely Buddenbrook:

War es nicht die notwendige Folge dieses unhaltbaren Zustandes, dieses unnatürlichen und aureibenden Widerstreites in seinem Innern? . . . Ob sein Vater, sein Großvater, sein Urgroßvater die Pöppenrader Ernte auf dem Halme gekauft haben würden? Gleichviel! . . . Gleichviel! . . . Aber daß sie praktische Menschen gewesen, daß sie es voller, ganzer, starker, unbefangener, natürlicher gewesen waren als er, das war es, was feststand! . . . (400)

Because the business venture Tony proposes fails, also due to an act of chance, Tom immediately retreats back into his elegiac mode, blaming the chaos of mixing—that there is no complete reproduction of father to son—for dooming the business. He also unconsciously blames Tony for the failure of this business venture, with its associated feminine scent of relations and connections instead of clear transactions and exchange.

Mann and Woolf are both interested in horizontal relations as much as vertical—especially how identity, style, fashion, contemporary events, are taken up by members of the same generation, and how the meaning of those events, styles, identities, are created in the

interaction between families. This mode of transmission, through interaction between siblings, cousins, and between children of different families, is at least as important in identity formation as the vertical, hierarchical sense of “inheritance.” The need to impose a vertical relation is a historical effort, related to the need to freeze and define meaning, to pinpoint; this is the diagnostic mode of which Woolf in particular is so suspicious. This is the mode into which Peggy falls, in her role as doctor and her belief in psychoanalysis, in the Present Day section:

“Was it that you were suppressed when you were young?’ she said aloud, recalling vaguely some childish memory; her grandfather with the shiny stumps instead of fingers; and a long dark drawing-room. Eleanor turned. She was surprised. ‘Suppressed?’ she repeated. She so seldom thought about herself now that she was surprised I do not want to go back into my past, she was thinking, I want the present. (318)

Peggy buys into the generational rhetoric which Foucault so clearly deconstructs in his “nous autres, Victoriens” introduction to the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*⁷⁷. The confessional mode Peggy subscribes to in her need to have Eleanor speak her ‘trauma’ is merely another sort of generational account of the past emphasizing discrete stages and easy abstractions. But Eleanor, and by extension, Woolf, de-emphasizes the absolutist tone of successive stages and elevates the endless circulation of values, memories, and events; by so doing, by refusing to “confess” the past, she deflates the genealogical imperative, the linear sequence which decrees that meaning is accrued over time, and that generations remain distinct.

Circulation, and the plethora of possibilities it entails, is opposed to the obsessive search for origins, and this is what Eleanor embraces after the death of her father: a single, austere, but

⁷⁷ “La question que je voudrais poser n'est pas : pourquoi sommes nous réprimés, mais pourquoi disons-nous, avec tant de passion, tant de rancœur contre notre passé le plus proche, contre notre présent et contre nous-mêmes, que nous sommes réprimés?” (16). Foucault’s analysis pinpoints the discourse of medicine in particular, which is Peggy’s, as continuing the religious conception of the sexual self as being primarily confessional in nature.

also metropolitan life, without aging servants, without a necessary “home,” and a family which exists only in mutual, agentive connections, rather than ownership and bonds. As she returns from her travels abroad in 1911, she considers the old house of her sister-in-law, Celia, and wonders, “should she take another house? Should she travel? Should she go to India, at last? Sir William was getting into bed next door, his life was over; hers was beginning. No, I don’t mean to take another house, not another house, she thought” (202). Her reflection about vitality is very much tied to gender, and to her deracination; whereas the Sir Williams of the male world, like her father, retire to their country houses to live out long skeletal lives, she has the freedom, through *not* taking another house, to constantly evolve and shift, to engage in a *process* rather than to identify with a *form*. Against her embrace of spinsterhood can be set Tom’s frustration with the women of his family, especially Tony and Clara, who mean a drain on the family finances, and must be “kept” rather than having intrinsic value. He expresses his frustration at the way inheritance divides, wreaks havoc on the orderly business life of the men of the family, “Ach, aber die beständige Zersplitterung . . . Mein Gott, sie liegt in der Natur der Dinge; verzeiht, wenn ich in diesem Augenblick allzu ausschließlich im Sinne der Firma rede und wenig familiär . . .” (216). Tom excuses himself by claiming he speaks only from the business point of view, but actually to him the family and business are inseparable, and to suffer from the chaos of women (their inability to accept whatever their husbands see fit to inflict on them, their lack of physical robustness, their refusal to bear acceptable offspring) is an inexcusable business failing.

This fear of the instability of women, their ability to shift and change identities, to circulate dangerously, is also what bothers North so much about his aunt Milly:

This is the conspiracy, he said to himself; this is the steam roller that smooths, obliterates; rounds into identity; rolls into balls. He listened. Jimmy was in Uganda; Lily was in

Leichestershire; *my* boy—*my* girl . . . they were saying. But they're not interested in other people's children, he observed. Only in their own; their own property; their own flesh and blood, which they would protect with the unsheathed claws of the primeval swamp . . .

How then can we be civilized, he asked himself? (358-59)

The contrast of civilization and family life is fascinating in its repudiation of the feminine, the “swamp” and the “maternal” in contrast to the rigid pillars of Western civilization which North so clearly clings to against the threat of his aunts and cousins and their reproductive chaos. But it is largely through women that this “sense of family” is created and transmitted, and it sometimes does this because of or in spite of them. Martin, visiting the Lasswade's dinner and cynically considering how “I only think of ‘better families’ when I dine in this sort of place, he thought” (239), and how much money and energy goes into preserving the ossified forms of aristocratic society. But when he hints at this to Kitty herself, she immediately retorts, “And why,” she dropped her voice, imitating his tone that was half sneering, half humorous, ‘come and eat their food when you despise them?’ ‘I don't! Not a bit!’ he exclaimed” (249). He realizes that it is only by virtue of his position within the family that he is present, and that a sense of family is what breaks class distinctions rather than creating them. Kitty's discomfort at preserving an order and harmony which seems to her at times hypocritical is balanced by her realization that her existence in multiple worlds is what allows for critical thought itself, rather than being entirely in the Pargiter world, or entirely in the Lasswade.

The centripetal effect of horizontal relations can be disarming, but also empowering, as it can enable *anyone* to examine their familial and social contexts with difference. Eleanor perceives this radical contingency, the way that worlds are built through networks of shared relations, when she is asked again about her life at the party:

My life, she said to herself. That was odd, it was the second time that evening that somebody had talked about her life. And I haven't got one, she thought. Oughtn't a life to be something you could handle and produce?—a life of seventy-odd years. But I've only the present moment, she thought. . . . Millions of things came back to her. Atoms danced apart and massed themselves. But how did they compose what people called a life? She clenched her hands and felt the hard little coins she was holding. Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre; and again she saw herself sitting at her table drawing on the blotting-paper, digging little holes from which spokes radiated. Out and out they went; thing followed thing, scene obliterated scene. . . . My life's been other people's lives, Eleanor thought. (348)

The “knot” at the centre, with spokes radiating outward, becomes her conception of herself in relation to others; momentary, fragmentary, but drawn together and extremely meaningful; “a perpetual discovery, my life. A miracle” (363). For her, life is radically contingent, inextricable from the relations which build it; but Woolf clearly separates this pleasure and meaning from the patriarchal model of generational inheritance; Eleanor, as a “spinster” stands apart from the mode of transference which makes hierarchical relations tantamount and negates all others; instead, her web of meaning spreads wide, and begins with her earliest family but spreads rather indiscriminately through her experiences. Thus it is a “miracle” instead of a lament to find not a core of being but a knot of relation at her center.

Not so with the Buddenbrook family, whose reliance on the patriarchal model restricts them, forcing them into the elegiac mode. This is the case with Johann, after the death of his wife Antoinette; separated from participation in the procreative, heterosexual, patriarchal generative model which has defined his life, and forced to consider how little it has meant to him in the end,

Er dachte nicht viel, er sah nur unverwandt und mit einem leisen Kopfschütteln auf sein Leben und das Leben im allgemeinen zurücker, das ihm plötzlich so fern und wunderbarlich erschien, dieses überflüssig geräuschvolle Getümmel, in dessen Mitte er gestanden, das sich unmerklich von ihm zurückgezogen hatte und nun von seinem verwundert aufhorchenden Ohr in der Ferne erhallte . . . Manchmal sagte er mit halber Stimme vor sich hin: "Kurios! Kurios!" (58)

The adverb "unverwandt" is a fitting one in this context; it literally means that he is looking steadfastly, but the "verwandt" root of the word is inextricable; to look steadily means to recognize his dis-sociation from all those things he was related, to see them as separate, independent beings, each with their own trajectories, and not subsumed into an egocentric biographical narrative. While his tone is of wonder rather than lament, the fact that it spells his demise points to the Buddenbrook link between activity and life, center and meaning, wholeness and vitality; this collapses with the "unverwandt" gaze into the web of relations without hierarchy and bourgeois values. Therefore, to Johann, it is the end, where to Eleanor, at an even more advanced age than Johann, thinks, "they were all young, with the future before them" (363). Her conceptual flexibility, which allows her to approach her life with a confidence in its renewability and difference, opposes the heavy form-laden theory of reality which the Buddenbrook men construct and the unravelling of which always leads to demise, instead of renewal.

To approach life without expectation, and with renewal, seems to be a nearly impossible task not only for the Buddenbrooks, but for the Pargiter men as well: at the beginning of the novel, over thirty years before his death, Col. Abel Pargiter feels that "he was out of it all" (5), that he is old, incapable; so, too, is the retired William Whatney at Morris' home, very out of it,

nearing the end of his life; their careers in the Army have taught them that (violent) activity equates with life, and the masculine view forecloses possibilities until they settle into a finality. This is certainly Tom's belief, and it is Tony's to some degree as well, because she fixates on a particular form and station of life as the only one holding meaning; even after Tom's death she "tröstete sie sich damit, daß das Ende der Firma ja nicht geradezu dasjenige der Familie sei, und daß ihr Neffe eben ein junges und neues Werk werde beginning müssen, um seinem hohen Berufe nachzukommen" (592). She wants Hanno to enliven it in the same way, in the same form as his fathers, much like the Colonel's expectation that sending Martin into the Army will provide him with the life experiences that he himself valued; instead, Martin loathes the Army and finds value in the endless dalliances of his bachelorhood which Abel found to be the nails in the coffin of his confirmed old age. Hanno certainly cannot perform this; his perspective is not nearly as hopeful as Eleanor's, but he is comfortable with endings in a way that no other Buddenbrook really can be. He intuitively recognizes that his own line will end with him, and is punished for prophesying or accepting an end to the Buddenbrook line. But after the death of his father and the dismissal of Ida, he considers: "der alten Ida Verabschiedung schloß sich in seiner Anschauung folgerichtig den anderen Vorgängen des Abbröckelns, des Endens, des Abschließens, der Zersetzung an, denen er beigewohnt hatte. Dergleichen befremdete ihn nicht mehr; es hatte ihn seltsamerweise niemals befremdet" (595). He sees it as a process, a natural process, like the death of his grandmother, and that to end is to begin something else, in a different form. Unlike his great-grandfather, he can see "unverwandt" without being estranged or "befremdet"; becoming a stranger to himself, or accepting a contingent narrative position, allows him to accept the necessity of an ending, even his own ending. This is a belief which fits much better in the Pargiter world than the Buddenbrook one he inhabits.

The acceptance of natural endings, and natural processes, rather than raging against them, or trying to force them to conform to predetermined outcomes, separates Hanno from the other men; the one glimmer of “Lebenstüchtigkeit” that his father sees in him is, in fact, when he sees his son laughing at Klothilde. Tom considers how important this ability to shamelessly exploit others is in the business world, and thinks of his own guilt-ridden machinations: “aber die Situation ohne Schamgefühl auszunutzen, sagte er sich, das ist Lebenstüchtigkeit!” (535). Hanno will obviously never perform this, and is thus unfit for living in a world of hard realities and even harder theories⁷⁸. This is exemplified by the Hagenström boys of his own age; in contrast to the sickly, introverted, and sensitive Hanno, they are “zu jeder Schandtät bereit. Sie waren gefürchtet, beliebt und respektiert” (530). Their vitality and their willingness to perform any “Schandtät” are inseparable; able to abstract and ‘place’ anyone, they know precisely what is their due, and how to make others feel it. They likely have thought little about what their gender, class, sexuality, and economic power mean, but they know very well how to use them to exploit those around them. In his English class, when all his classmates mock the inexperienced teacher, the teacher responds by picking on Hanno, an easy target for his dreaminess and effeminacy; Hanno doesn’t retaliate, but rather thinks, “ich nehme nicht daran teil, Sie zu quälen und auszubeuten, Kandidat Modersohn, weil ich das brutal, häßlich und gewöhnlich finde, und wie antworten Sie mir? Aber so ist es, so ist es, so wird es immer und überall sich verhalten” (629). Though obviously not a direct connection, this seems to offer an implicit criticism of the “alternative” which Edward’s homosocial and pedagogical relationships suggest: the pedagogue is, in this scenario, just another extension of the patriarchal impulse, and “so wird es immer und überall sich verhalten,” because wherever the possibility for a male to exploit or mock another

⁷⁸ Gerald Gillespie, in *Proust, Mann, Joyce in the Modernist Context*, characterizes Mann as practicing a “relentless pathology” (172) in *Buddenbrooks* through Hanno, which he argues paves the way for other ‘lebensuntüchtig’ narrators such as Aschenbach or Hans Castorp.

offers itself, it will be taken. His perception of his professor relies not on the exterior characteristics and surfaces which seem to constitute the base of reality in the Hagenström world, but on an intuitive understanding of the process of social interaction.

The value of insight and intuition over description and categorization is also evident in *The Years*; Woolf has examples of very othering assumptions put under the category of intuition as well as real examples of human insight. There are many moments in which characters try to anticipate what others will say, but very few moments in which they are able to do it. Sara, mocking Rose before her visit in 1910, tells Maggie, “she’ll take off her gloves; and she’ll lay one on this side, one on that. And she’ll say, I’ve never been in this part of London before” (156); however, Rose surprises them by saying instead that she’s lived just around the corner, and it is Sara who is caught ‘out,’ pretending to more knowledge and intuition than she possesses. Not so with Eleanor, who in 1911 is trying to fit herself back into the routine of English country life after her time abroad, and is put off by Sir William Whatney’s self-aggrandizing stories; in the evening they look out at owls and bats flying, and Whatney expresses an admiration for bats: “his voice was quiet and almost melancholy. Now Celia will say, They get into one’s hair, Eleanor thought. ‘They get into one’s hair,’ Celia said. ‘But I haven’t any hair,’ said Sir William” (197). Eleanor is able to very easily anticipate her sister-in-law’s phrase, suggesting that the familiarity of her English connections are circumscribed, predictable, “domestic and near” like the past, rather than the magnificent and surprising Other, like Greece and Spain. This is also what she feels in the Present Day section when she is talking with Nicholas and he interrupts to make an observation: “she knew exactly what he was going to say. He had said it before, in the restaurant. He is going to say, She is like a ball on the top of a fishmonger’s fountain. As she thought it, he said it” (350), and it is this recognition which spurs

her to perceive a “pattern” woven from the lives around her. Woolf seems to use this ‘prophecy’ both to discount the easy assumption of knowledge that comes with setting people into “types” (like Sara’s prophecy of Rose, or North’s assumptions about Kitty’s “type” (373) at the party), as well as to emphasize the knowability, the familiarity of relations, and the way that a sympathetic mind can come to predict and to support those around it.

Without this sympathetic insight, it is difficult to give an account of anyone else without doing violence to their personhood. When North comes to Sara’s flat after his nearly fifteen-year absence, she is on the phone with Nicholas, and he hears her tell him about “my cousin from Africa” which perturbs him: “it was as if she were trying to put two different versions of him together; the one on the telephone perhaps and the one on the chair. Or was there some other? This half knowing people, this half being known, this feeling of the eye on the flesh, like a fly crawling” (296-97). And despite his discomfort at being labelled, he has the same impulse to label her; noticing that she doesn’t look in the mirror, he thinks to himself, “from which we deduce the fact, he said to himself, as if he were writing a novel, that Miss Sara Pargiter has never attracted the love of men. Or had she? He did not know. These little snapshot pictures of people left much to be desired, these little surface pictures that one made, like a fly crawling over a face, and feeling, here’s the nose, here’s the brow” (300). Unable to represent the complexity and depth of a person, these portraits capture only surfaces, and string them together, attempting an artificial dimensionality.

Eleanor, too, is dissatisfied with the boxes into which a surface understanding of others relegates them; she confronts this in 1917 when she is forced to consider what meaning Nicholas’ homosexuality has for her. She initially has a feeling of repugnance, but considers that she only has inherited prejudices against it, and finally, “she realized that it touched nothing of

importance. The sharp shiver passed. Underneath was—what? She looked at Nicholas” (282). She realizes that she must look at him and consider his position as radically different from the typical assumptions she would have made of a casual friend of the family, and reconsiders and realigns her perception of him accordingly, deciding to like him instead, and to believe in his pronouncements about the New World, pacifism, a new social order, a new way of living. She asks him,

live more naturally . . . better . . . How can we?’ ‘It is only a question,’ he said—he stopped. He drew himself close to her—‘of learning. The soul. . .’ . . . ‘It wishes to expand; to adventure; to form—new combinations?’ . . . ‘this is how we live, screwed up into one hard little, tight little – knot?’ ‘Knot, knot—yes, that’s right,’ she nodded. ‘Each is his own little cubicle; each with his own cross or holy books; each with his fire, his wife . . .’ ‘Darning socks,’ Maggie interrupted. Eleanor started. She had seemed to be looking into the future. But they had been overheard. Their privacy was ended. (280)

Though Eleanor, and by association Nicholas, is annoyed by Maggie’s interruption, it is Woolf’s interruption as well—the theoretical discussion of deracinated, single Others in a utopic community has ignored the reality that Maggie’s darning represents: a complex, interrelated family context from which they all have sprung, and over which they have little control. It is all very well for the disaffected, unattached, queer intellectual to speak of “new combinations,” but as Maggie shows, his vision of the New World is equally phallogentric, with its ship of “great men” setting forth to unexplored territories, leaving the women to their petty darning of socks⁷⁹.

North, who admires Maggie, also struggles with this attraction to the idealism of Nicholas against the recognition that the social consequences of these quasi-eugenicist theories

⁷⁹ For a reading of *The Years* which ignores the imbedded criticism of Nicholas’ phallogentricism and treats his theories as unironic, unambiguous assertions of Woolf’s own “queer” perspective, see Stephen Barber’s “Lip Reading: Woolf’s Secret Encounters” in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997.

of new social orders only replicate other and more fundamental problems in the relations between men and women, between young and old, familiar and foreign. He listens with amusement to Patrick, who, while gesturing towards real estate advertisements, rails against the new craze of manifestoes, political activism, and its attendant violence; then he also listens to the men slightly younger than himself talking politics, “it was like hearing small boys at a private school ... ‘I’m right . . . you’re wrong.’ At their age, he thought, he had been in the trenches; he had seen men killed. But was that a good education?” (383). Like Martin, hearing the cockney voice in Hyde Park lecturing on “joostice and liberty!” for all, and thinking, “there wouldn’t be much justice or liberty for the likes of him if the fat man had his way—or beauty either” (228), North also recognizes a problem in the process of abstraction itself, which boys are taught from a young age to engage in: ignore the particularities of their own condition, assume an ‘objective’ viewpoint, and argue from a ‘rational’ perspective. But as he sees them argue with each other, then dance with women, then return to the ‘intellectual’ argument, he considers, “something’s wrong, he thought; there’s a gap, a dislocation, between the word and the reality. If they want to reform the world, he thought, why not begin there, at the centre, with themselves?” (384). This is a question that theory can never pose for itself: why not attempt a transformation of human relations, instead of a transformation of social or political policies, or come up with yet another intellectual theory to lead humans safely into utopia? Tony, in a strange way, also embodies this desire to make abstract theories central to social and political change. Where Morten chides her for her naiveté about world affairs, the biases of newspapers or family members (contrasted of course with his unbiased, rational, enlightened perspective), he says, “Sie sind eine junge Dame, Sie sehen alles persönlich an” (115), a criticism of her relational view of the political world. And yet, where Morten follows the trajectory of his studies and becomes a stable, conservative

Bürger, Tony, on the basis of her relationship with him, and not the content of his ideals themselves, preserves an antagonistic stance to the values even her family espouses. Unlike Tom, or Jean, or Clara, or even Christian, who have memorized codes, scripts, dogmas, or jokes to get them through any situation, Tony finds herself, beginning with the proposal from Grünlich but following her throughout her life, wondering, “wie sollte man sich dabei benehmen?” (87). She is unsure what the “right” procedure is, and so she makes up her own, and comes to unconventional courses of action which proceed from her valuation of family relations above any of the other theoretical constructs others tend to lean on.

This is the conclusion that Eleanor comes to as well in the Present Day section, when she perceives a pattern; after her correct prophecy of what Nicholas will say, she considers: “does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern; a theme, recurring, like music; half remembered, half foreseen? . . . a gigantic pattern, momentarily perceptible?” (351). For her, this momentary perception is extraordinarily pleasurable, far more pleasurable than the ownership and egotism of sexuality, because it connects all people into a fabric of meaning. She looks at Sara and Nicholas and thinks:

This is their love-making, Eleanor thought, half listening to their laughter, to their bickering. Another inch of the pattern, she thought, still using her half-formulated idea to stamp the immediate scene. And if this love-making differs from the old, still it has its charm; it was ‘love,’ different from the old love, perhaps, but worse, was it? Anyhow, she thought, they are aware of each other; they live in each other; what else is love, she asked, listening to their laughter.” (351)

The queer friendship that Sara and Nicholas enjoy is suggestive to Eleanor of a mode of relation which takes “awareness” and not possession as its primary engine; awareness and perception of

another, and not the social scripts which dictate roles and expectations. It would be easy to say that this is an elevation of the particular mode of relation which queerness represents, but that would again elevate the content into a theory instead of allowing the structure or method to suggest the potential. This alternative seems the most fruitful, and it is what Eleanor employs in her observation of the heterosexual couple at the close of the novel: awareness, combined with anonymity and distance, allows for possibility.

The turn to the family as an imaginative possibility for narrative seems, for both Woolf and Mann, to be related to the paradox of the particular; how to represent *the* world through a particular world. This is the difficulty of elevating a group consciousness, or a merged sense of identity—how to still remain legible and distinct, without resorting to egotism or possessiveness. As Nicholas and Sara’s relationship suggests, they have found a way to remain legible to each other, but outside of the normative heterosexual economy of desire. Their “we” identity does not require a submission of individual agency, and it does not transfer ownership; instead it is open, and free, as opposed to many of the anxious marriages in both novels.

Much of the anxiety and energy in the self-questioning that goes on with characters in both novels is related to their negotiation of belonging to the family identity through roles and expectations. Tony is one who is required to do this: “die einzelnen Familienglieder wußten der heimgekehrten Antonie Dank für ihre Heiterkeit; die Stimmung im Hause bedurfte dringend der Aufmunterung” (263). This “Stimmung” seems to be the opposite of Tom’s “Haltung”—it is what makes the structure livable, as even Tom cannot live with total rigidity—but it is also what threatens the imposition of patriarchal will: the moody, unpredictable aspect of it. It is a complex and shared feeling, but one which in this case takes more than it gives, for it requires Tony to enliven and entertain, often at her own expense. Eleanor is similarly sacrificed to the common

good of the household, relied upon for her role as “the soother, the maker-up of quarrels, the buffer between her and the intensities and strifes of family life” (13). Implicit in this drawing of family roles is the knowledge that there are lines which can be crossed, and to which belonging in the group will not extend. Christian’s wife isn’t recognized as a Buddenbrook, and even Gerda doesn’t really “belong” in the same way that Ida does. Tony is also threatened with this in her letter from her father: “da ich das, was Du mir von einer anderweitigen Neigung schreibst, nicht Ernst nehmen kann,” (123). “Anderweitigen Neigung” is an apt description of the transgressive threat of her affection for Morten; it participates in a non-familial economy of desire, and must be stamped out for that reason, specifically because self-denial is what it means to be a Buddenbrook: “dein Weg, wie mich dünkt, liegt seit längeren Wochen klar und scharf abgegrenzt vor Dir, und Du müßtest nicht meine Tochter sein, nicht die Enkelin Deines in Gott ruhenden Großvaters und überhaupt nicht ein würdig Glied unserer Familie, wenn Du ernstlich im Sinne hättest, Du allein, mit Trotz und Flattersinn Deine eignen, unordentlichen Pfade zu gehen” (123-24). It is clear that her role as daughter and her socio-economic position depend upon her acceptance of the family will, and that her identity as a Buddenbrook depends upon the acceptance of the worldview that she is part of a larger “chain” of being.

This oppressive aspect of family identity is what bothers North so much about his aunt and uncle Gibbs: the “steam roller” effect they have, of flattening of so many particular people into a single cohesive “family.” Their proliferation, and their stagnant breeding, sickens him, and he sees the world divided into terrifying extremes:

The men shot, and the women—he looked at his aunt as if she might be breaking into young even there, on that chair—the women broke off into innumerable babies. And those babies had other babies; and the other babies had—adenoids. ... Could nothing be

done about it? he asked himself. Nothing short of revolution, he thought. The idea of dynamite, exploding dumps of heavy earth, shooting earth up in a tree-shaped cloud, came to his mind, from the War. But that's all popp-cok, he thought; war's poppy-cock, poppy-cock. Sara's word 'poppy-cock' returned. Sow aht remains? Peggy caught his eye, where she stood talking to an unknown man. You doctors, he thought, you scientists, why don't you drop a little crystal into a tumbler, something starred and sharp, and make them swallow it? Common sense; reason; starred and sharp. But would they swallow it? (356)

The disgust at proliferation, at living without meaning, leads him to momentarily long for the cool reason of science, to decide what is right, and what is wrong. And yet he also recognizes how his desire for Peggy, or for Maggie, or Nicholas, to intervene and stop the cycle of production is itself just as normative and reactionary as their thoughtless reproduction. He considers that if men and women were to relinquish their possessiveness, to stop saying "my" children, "my" parents, "my" spouse, that they would just find other ways to elevate some and denigrate others. It becomes clear to him that the family system, flawed and possessive though it may be, also has the potential to preserve individuality insofar as it reproduces imperfectly, because it creates deformity, difference, and not perfection. He catches himself wishing to 'save' Maggie from the Gibbises, and looking at her refusing his paternalistic gesture, he thinks: "we are all deformed. Yet, disagreeable as it was to him to remove her from the eminence upon which he placed her, perhaps she was right, he thought, and we who make idols of other people, who endow this man, that woman, with power to lead us, only add to the deformity, and stoop ourselves. 'I'm going to stay with them,' he said aloud" (361). Here he comes down on the side of the Gibbises, not rejecting their thoughtless fruitfulness, and consents to continue his relation with them, refusing to elevate in their stead an "idol" of abstractions.

What Woolf seems to be gesturing at becomes clear during North's epiphany of the champagne, later in the party. He has been bothered throughout the day by people trying to "place" him, to lock him into an identity, a position, a role, and has also recognized that he is continually trying to do the same to others; seeing in Eleanor the Victorian spinster, in Sara the deformed outcast, in Edward the ineffectual scholar, and then distancing himself from these assertions. As he steps back and sees humans, not roles, and how they have all interacted with their complex times and generations, he looks at his glass of champagne and considers:

For him a life modelled on the jet (he was watching the bubbles rise), on the spring, of the hard leaping fountain; another life; a different life. ... No, to begin inwardly, and let the devil take the outer form, he thought ... Why not down barriers and simplify? But a world, he thought, that was all one jelly, one mass, would be a rice pudding world, a white counterpane world. To keep the emblems and tokens of North Pargiter—the man Maggie laughs at; the Frenchman holding his hat; but at the same time spread out, make a new ripple in human consciousness, be the bubble and the stream, the stream and the bubble—myself and the world together—he raised his glass. Anonymously, he said, looking at the clear yellow liquid. (389)

This is a nascent form of what Woolf would argue more forcefully in *Three Guineas* as being the Society of Outsiders; the recognition that anonymity is not the antithesis of individual experience but its embodiment: the sense of experience in your own time, embodied in your own particular places and times, but without the emphasis on "I," rather a willing embrace of "we" and not only one kind of "we" but many.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Angeliki Spiropoulou, in *Virginia Woolf, Modernity, and History*, directly links Woolf's engagement with the anonymous to her feminist and pacifist agenda in *Three Guineas*; examining the focus on the "obscure" throughout *The Years*, she claims that "for Woolf anonymity was something to strive for, against the individualist and proprietary trend promoted by the modern ethic of unitary identity forged in recognizable origins" (134).

The difficulty of implementing this anti-egotistical existence, of breaking out of the given forms and into a new life, is the threat of being strangled by the need to remain legible to others. Martin, listening to the Cockney man in Hyde Park preach about justice and liberty, eventually considers “what would the world be, he said to himself—he was still thinking of the fat man brandishing his arm—without ‘I’ in it?” (229). The dissolution of the ego, of the self, which is so painful to Tom, so welcome to Hanno, is here recognized to be desirable but impossible; what would it mean to exist in a world in which you could not categorize that existence, because you could not speak from any position? Kitty becomes frustrated at her party at the superficiality of the women, exclaiming, “Damn these women” (245), but then, realizing she is merely repeating Eleanor’s criticism of them, considers whether Eleanor herself has done more with her life than they, “And I? she thought. And I? . . . Who’s right? she thought. Who’s wrong? . . .” (246). North, too, considers how to possibly live differently, when all are confined to social obligations, and cannot be legible to each other without them. He is bothered by Edward’s refusal to translate from the Greek, to explain himself, and instead looks across the room at a stranger, considering:

We’re all afraid of each other, he thought; afraid of what? Of criticism; of laughter; of people who think differently. . . . He wanted to get up and talk to him. Delia had said, ‘Don’t wait to be introduced.’ But it was difficult to speak to a man whom he did not know, and say: ‘What’s this knot in the middle of my forehead? Untie it.’ For he had had enough of thinking alone. Thinking alone tied knots in the middle of the forehead; thinking alone bred pictures, foolish pictures. The man was moving off. He must make the effort. Yet he hesitated. He felt repelled and attracted” (393)

For North, the circuit of sameness must be broken, somehow; familiarity must give way to strangeness, and difference acknowledged in order to consider what it is to obtain something

from another person, and how we can live differently, outside the forms granted, without losing our ability to communicate.

The momentary self-questioning of Martin and North aside, the problem of “I” throughout *The Years* tends to come down on gender lines; the pervasive difficulty of making yourself legible to others without erasing their difference, and expecting them to collapse into a listening ear, links many of the women in the novel. This is felt by Eleanor in 1911 when she visits Morris and finds that Sir William Whatney has been asked to stay, evidently as an eligible bachelor and potential partner for her. She remembers an earnest expression of admiration from him years ago, which humanizes him, but then he introduces himself formally, which bothers her. He begins reciting stories, some heroic, some self-parodic, but as she shrewdly perceives, “she had a feeling that she would hear a great many more stories that sailed serenely to his own advantage, during the week-end” (191). His expectation of her is unstated but obvious, that she listen, and laugh at the right places, but her attention wanders: “the story was reaching its climax; but she had missed several links” (191). Narrative as ejaculation, reaching a clear climax, is a readerly expectation that Woolf very forcefully rejects throughout the novel; instead of the Buddenbrook narrative which breaks passages of *ennui* with ellipses and narrates moments of climactic conflict, Woolf pursues the opposite, by eliding the moments of decision and narrating the introspective pauses between actions. The extent to which narratives of self and sexual interest are tied is also perceived by Peggy in the Present Day section, when she is approached by a young poet:

My people, he was saying . . . hunted. Her attention wandered. She had heard it all before. I, I, I—he went on. It was like a vulture’s beak pecking, or a vacuum-cleaner sucking, or a telephone bell ringing. I, I, I. But he couldn’t help it, not with that nerve-

drawn egotist's face, she thought, glancing at him. He could not free himself, could not detach himself. He was bound on the wheel with tight iron hoops. He had to expose; had to exhibit. But why let him? she thought, as he went on talking. For what do I care about his 'I, I, I'? Or his poetry? Let me shake him off then, she said to herself, feeling like a person whose blood has been sucked, leaving all the nerve-centres pale. She paused. He noted her lack of sympathy. He thought her stupid, she supposed. 'I'm tired,' she apologized. 'I've been up all night,' she explained. 'I'm a doctor—' The fire went out of his face when she said 'I.' That's done it—now he'll go, she thought. He can't be 'you'—he must be 'I.' She smiled. For he got up and off he went. (342-43)

Peggy's young poet with his "nerve-drawn egotist's face" might be an apt stand-in for Thomas Buddenbrook, who also constantly feels pressure to exhibit. And yet Thomas' constant demand for sympathy and the unconscious blame he assigns to the women around him for forcing him to perform is undone by Peggy's insight into the gendered "I" narrative to which both men seem to ascribe. For her to become an "I" is to negate the force of their own narratives, to dispel the building pressure of despair or desire which seems to them the point of narrative itself, but which instrumentalizes it for women like Eleanor and Peggy.

Thomas' recognition that his egotism forces him to make unfair demands of those around him, particularly of Hanno, doesn't lead him to a looser or more contingent understanding of his relations, in fact it tightens it. When he finds himself in crisis, he hardens into a more rigid role: "Dies ist zu Ende!" wiederholte er. 'Es muß ein Ende gemacht werden! Ich verbummele, ich versumpfe, ich werde alberner als Christian!' Oh, es war unendlich dankenswert, daß er sich nicht in Unwissenheit darüber befand, wie es mit ihm stand! Nun war es in seine Hand gegeben, sich zu korrigieren! Mit Gewalt!" (402). Rather than using the realization of the contingency of

his characteristics and relations to make a more positive and human worldview, Thomas goes to the other extreme, seeing in the proximal Other of his brother Christian the monster in himself he wishes to exorcise. This turns into a sort of self-eugenics; correcting the ‘error’ in his heredity (as evidenced by Christian) in himself, and that “mit Gewalt,” as such corrections generally require. How can this egotism be cured, then, without another dose of egotism? Woolf’s characters also brush up against this dilemma frequently—the problem of how to express desire for difference without repeating the same structural mistake; how to ‘share’ without merely requiring someone else to fold to your own perspective. Peggy considers this as she half-listens to Patrick: “but one wants somebody to laugh with, she thought. Pleasure is increased by sharing it. Does the same hold good of pain? she mused. . . . How many people, she wondered, listen? This ‘sharing,’ then, is a bit of a farce” (334). Peggy comes no further than this—pain cannot be shared, it divides, and laughter as well—all at someone’s expense.

This feeling resurfaces later when she joins in the laughter of the family over the caricature they have drawn together: “she felt, or rather she saw, not a place, but a state of being, in which there was real laughter, real happiness, and this fractured world was whole; whole, vast, and free. But how could she say it?” (370). The state of being she perceives is one in which “I’s” melt and merge into a shared experience, not fractured into perspectives but merged in co-constitutive ways. But how can this be expressed from any one perspective? How could Peggy relinquish being “Peggy” and speak what could bring them together? She fails, as she ends up insulting North instead of expressing her vision of a different state of being:

She had got it wrong. She had meant to say something impersonal, but she was being personal. It was done now however; she must flounder on now. ‘You’ll write one little book, and then another little book,’ she said viciously, ‘instead of living . . . living

differently, differently.’ She stopped. There was the vision still, but she had not grasped it. She had broken off only a little fragment of what she meant to say, and she had made her brother angry. Yet there it hung before her, the things she had seen, the thing she had not said. (371)

The “things she had seen” seems to be a revisitation on Woolf’s part of Lily Brescoe’s ecstasy of creation, and the depersonalized perspective of *The Waves*; she has grown suspicious of the saying itself, and Peggy is unable to express it. Peggy is also an incomplete measure of the effect of her words as well, since North perceives something in her beyond what she has said. He looks at her: “it was her face that was true; not her words. But only her words returned to him—to live differently—differently” (400).

Peggy struggles earlier with how to represent Eleanor without fitting her into a scripted narrative: how to access the proximal Other without reducing her to merely a caricature. In the car, as they drive past Abercorn Terrace, and are reminded of the past, Peggy considers her “spinster” aunt and begins “to arrange the scene into an argument she had been having with a man at the hospital” (314). Here she is on the other side of “arranging” the conversational structure from her encounter with the poet; *she* instrumentalizes Eleanor, moving quickly from a narrative—one step removed from the real person she is with—into a theoretical abstraction of the caricature, to be used polemically. But as Peggy gets more involved in her “argument” and listens less to the woman next to her, she eventually encounters some incongruities:

And how does one get *that* right? Peggy thought, trying to add another touch to the portrait. ‘Sentimental’ was it? Or, on the contrary, was it good to feel like that . . . natural . . . right? She shook her head. I’m no use at describing people, she said to her friend at the Hospital. They’re too difficult She’s not like that—not like that at all, she said,

making a little dash with her hand as if to rub out an outline that she had drawn wrongly.

(317)

Eleanor, too, says the same thing in 1908 after reading the obituary notices about Digby: “but he wasn’t like that,” she said, laying her hand on the newspaper cutting. “Not in the least” (144). She recognizes how narratives have the potential to instrumentalize rather than sympathize with others, and Peggy considers this too. Beside the problem of the “I” she recognizes the problem of the “we” which is just as ethically difficult: “Where does she begin, and where do I end? she thought. . . . On they drove. They were two living people, driving across London; two sparks of life enclosed in two separate bodies; and those sparks of life enclosed in two separate bodies are at this moment, she thought, driving past a picture palace. But what is this moment; and what are we? The puzzle was too difficult for her to solve it” (317).

Although the problem of how to negotiate a “we” identity without doing violence to the “I”s involved in it is too difficult to solve in a single moment of insight, the fact that she considers this with her *aunt*, and not with the young *poet*, shows something about the potential of non-erotic relations for pursuit of “living differently.”⁸¹ Whereas the talk of particular styles, modes, and manners, dominates Mann’s text, as a way of marking individuals as belonging to particular sets, groups, schools, or generations, Woolf resists this classification system in her party in the Present Day section. Delia welcomes North, “a stranger, but a very welcome one,” into the space which is public, not familial, and filled with a very assorted company of family and non-family; she tries to point someone out, but has difficulty: “they’re somewhere. . . . Only all the generations in our family as so mixed; cousins and aunts, uncles and brothers—but

⁸¹ Jessica Berman, in *Modernist Commitments*, argues a similar point as she looks at how Woolf handles what she terms the “lived bodies” of others; “for Woolf, this gap between the known life and the unknown life becomes a vital component of the ethical encounter in narrative rather than a difference to be concealed or a problem to be overcome, and it forms a crucial part of the imaginative leap toward another subjectivity” (40). To me it seems that the ethical dilemma becomes even more fraught when the poles between ‘self’ and ‘other’ are troubled by relation.

perhaps it's a good thing" (346). This mixture is not primarily a sexual one; in fact, the cousin-marriages and hints at incest are almost the only queer possibilities that are stamped out in the course of the novel. This seems to relate to Woolf's project of devaluing the economy of desire in favor of the economy of relation, which doesn't require such strict regulations and allows more autonomy.

Where the pious Jean, caught in the middle of the liberal revolution of 1848, wishes to consider all men equal before God, and to raise his children in the same manner, his social aspirations and economic position constantly place him in vertical relations with others. Jean's ability to connect with the men he works with, to speak their language and know their needs and wishes, is evidence of the great deal of overlap between his world and the world of those around him; he lives as they do, but on a grander scale. His difficulty, though, is in raising his children in such altered circumstances without also altering their "world" and severing them from the 'ordinary' business lives of his employees. This is what he tries to instill in Tom and Tony, by encouraging them to play with and associate and speak with those of lower socioeconomic classes. He is pleased that Tony "alle Welt kannte und mit aller Welt plauderte; der Konsul zumal war hiermit einverstanden, weil es keinen Hochmut, sondern Gemeinsinn und Nächstenliebe verriet" (52). But his religious principles interfere with the outcome he expects; a feeling of community and charity are not identical; the feeling of community in fact prevents the sort of "charity" that requires a higher income, and a "higher" moral code. Though he considers himself ordinary, and considers all men equal before God, he cannot raise his children to believe the same, given the great social disparity in which they grow up. It is similar with Eleanor; her wish is to see many people, to live differently than the boxed, rigid divisions she grew up with. When Peggy, in the Present Day section, tries to coax her to talk about the past, she keeps

insisting on remaining in the present, even tearing up a photograph of Mussolini in outrage. But she tells Peggy she ought to travel, to see different cultures but the same human needs throughout the world; “I’m not despondent, no, because people are so kind, so good at heart. . . . So that if only ordinary people, ordinary people like ourselves. . .” (320). The perception of themselves as “ordinary” has much to do with their ability to interact in a non-hierarchical way, and to participate in social intercourse with others without forcing an artificial “Gemeinsinn” or an exaggerated charity, as Eleanor distances herself from this stilted relation over time.

The possibilities of exchange and transmission without engaging in the economy of desire are apparent from the first pages of *The Years*. In the prefatory section of 1880, she lingers for a moment on “virgins and spinsters with hands that had staunched the sores of Bermondsey and Hoxton carefully measured out one, two, three, four spoonfuls of tea” (4). Woolf deftly shows how the Victorian economy hypocritically relies on women’s unpaid labor to soften the brutalities of exploitative capitalism, while simultaneously marginalizing them when they do not participate in heterosexual coupling; the hands that tend “charitably” to the poor, are themselves utilized in the household to provide service to the men, to memorize their habits and wishes and provide. Tony also internalizes this equation when she sees the opportunity for her daughter to “cancel” the debt of her willful divorces: “dennoch war es, besonders seit sie selbst, wie sie sagte, ‘abgewirtschaftet’ hatte, Frau Anotniens heißester Wunsch, daß ihre Tochter die Hoffnungen erfüllen möge, die ihr, der Mutter, fehlgeschlagen, und eine Heirat machen, welche, vorteilhaft und glücklich, der Familie zur Ehre gereichen und die Schicksale der Mutter vergessen lassen würde” (373). Tony’s use of “abgewirtschaftet,” ironic though it may be, shows that on some level she recognizes the very cynical use of her sexuality to improve the prospects of the business, and has internalized the interpretation of her divorces as a ‘debt’ to the family.

Tom also recognizes, though doesn't allow himself to fully examine, the double standard for sexuality he promotes:

Man entschädigte sich hier für seine auf dem Kontobock seßhaft verbrachten Tage nicht nur mit schweren Weinen und schweren Gerichten . . . Aber ein dicker Mantel von biederer Solidität bedeckte diese Entschädigungen, und wenn es Konsul Buddenbrooks erstes Gesetz war, 'die Dehors zu wahren,' so zeigte er sich in dieser Beziehung durchdrungen von der Weltanschauung seiner Mitbürger. (265)

The "compensation" for the presumed stresses and difficulties of the man of the world is in the form of mistresses and whores, as Abel Pargiter also knows. The economic consequences of the rigid gender system leave women with little choice but unpaid virginal labor (Eleanor, Klothide, Ida), being used as currency in transactions (Tony, Clara, Kitty), or being directly and cynically paid for their sexuality through prostitution.

Eleanor recognizes the impossibility of this position; to separate oneself from the economy of desire, of patriarchy, is to risk marginalization and illegibility, and the alternative currency is recognized by very few. In 1911, standing before the mirror, she thinks: "but now I'm labelled, she thought—an old maid who washes and watches birds. That's what they think I am. But I'm not—I'm not in the least like that, she said. She shook her head, and turned away from the glass" (192). Like her reflection on the public account of Digby in the obituary, she rejects the equation of sexual experience with worldly wisdom. She is unwilling to defer and efface herself because she hasn't participated in the heterosexual coupling that others, like Tom and Martin, feel is necessary for a woman to gain a voice. Like Lily Brescoe, she recognizes how she is being read, but refuses to perform the role of sympathetic but limited conversation-partner to all men, single or married, that she comes into contact with.

Sexuality and narrative are, in both texts, intricately linked, with the desire for knowledge overlapping the carnal with the textual—the letters from Abel’s mistress, or the family Akten. In their retrospective accounts of their lives in their familial houses, reactions range from gushing sentiment to violent rejection, but one thing remains consistent: it is a place in which sexuality does not exist, where despite that fact that it is at its most evident through the prominence of marriage and children, that sexuality itself remains effaced, covered, or silenced as a motivation or reality for anyone’s actions. While Delia, along with Martin’s line of thought about the lies told in the family system, shouts her defiance of the sexual imprisonment she perceived in the Victorian household: “It was Hell!” (396), to Tony, it was the opposite; a refuge from uninvited and aggressive male sexuality threatening to remove her forcibly from the home: “als wir klein waren und ‘Kriegen’ spielten, Tom, da gab es immer ein ‘Mal’, ein abgegrenztes Fleckchen, wohin man laufen konnte, wenn man in Not und Bedrängnis war, und wo man nicht abgeschlagen werden durfte, sondern in Frieden ausruhen konnte. Mutters Haus, dies Haus hier war mein ‘Mal’ im Leben, Tom . . . Und nun . . . “ (497). The sale of the house represents the forcible erasure of a “safe” place for Tony, and it is significantly linked to her mother rather than her father. The home comes, paradoxically, to represent both virginity and sexuality; it is unthinkable for a child to engage in sex within their parent’s house, and unthinkable for the parents themselves to engage in it. This is not just a Buddenbrook fixation; the Hagenströms, for all their looseness in business ethics and social niceties, purchase the house specifically to avoid the sexuality of their children; he wants the larger house for himself, and to vacate their current house for his daughter and her fiancé, who “seit langen Jahren verlobt sind . . . Die Hochzeit soll nun nicht allzu lange mehr hinausgeschoben werden” (513). Unable to marry and be sexually active in their parents’ house, the unprolific Buddenbrooks must vacate theirs to make way for

the up-and-coming, active Hagenströms. But the actual reason behind all of these social and spatial arrangements, the sexual desires which rarely come in such neat and planned-for spaces and divisions, can never be spoken; it is unspeakable within marriage, and a smutty joke to be told between men at the club without.

Tony is quite willing to speak boldly on many subjects, but the unspeakable subject is for her always sexuality; threatened with bankruptcy, her husband appeals to her father, and he asks her if she has learned to love him in the four years she's spent with him. Initially she answers dutifully, but then, realizing what it might mean to stay with him, she says, "vier Jahre . . . ha! manchmal hat er abends bei mir gesessen und die Zeitung gelesen in diesen vier Jahren. . .!" (184). The four years, which have seen the birth of their child, have been profoundly isolated, and the "Zeitung gelesen" seems to stand in for an alienated sexual relation as well, one which cannot be expressed. When her marriage to Permaneder also falls apart on the grounds of sexuality, and he is caught with the servant, Tom and Tony immediately move past the particulars of the sexual act—which could easily be construed as rape—and into the "political" implications of the marriage and whether or not it should be dissolved for a "stupid" act (323). Her divorce is literally founded on the word Permaneder uttered, the word which combined sexuality and marriage, and which Tony Buddenbrook could not unhear.

For Tom, too, the unspeakability of his sexual relations in his marriage to Gerda troubles him. When she does finally become passionate about something, it is not him, but her music⁸², the one passion he doesn't share, but she finds a substitute in the lieutenant stationed in the town. While he knows the town is gossiping about his blindness to being "cuckolded" by his haughty

⁸² Peter von Matt, in *Verkömmene Söhne, misratene Töchter: Familiendisaster in der Literatur*, while gushing about the erotic potential of Gerda as an embodiment of art, remarks that "der Erzähler selbst geht um sie herum wie um eine Fremde, nie ganz Begreifliche" (246), but takes this as a natural condition of her gender, and a function of her sexuality, to remain mysterious and inexplicable.

wife, he is aware and troubled by the fact that whatever is going on, it defies such easy description:

Was fürchtete Thomas Buddenbrook? Nichts . . . Nichts Nennbares. Ach, hätte er sich gegen etwas Handgreifliches, Einfaches und Brutales zur Wehre setzen dürfen! Er neidete den Leuten dort draußen die Schlichtheit des Bildes, das sie sich von der Sache machten; aber während er hier saß und, den Kopf in den Händen, qualvoll horchte, wußte er allzu wohl, daß ‘Betrug’ und ‘Ehebruch’ nicht Laute waren, um die singenden und abgründig stillen Dinge bei Namen zu nennen, die sich dort oben begaben. (551)

Without a vocabulary for sexuality, for the chaos of the wide field of desire, unspoken, unacted, it represents, Tom is tortured by the unspeakable, unnamable. For the Pargiters, too, the Victorian household of 1880 is a set of strict prohibitions and unspeakable acts, from Abel’s “adventures” with Mira, which he can never discuss, to Eleanor’s warning to her sisters seeing a man stepping from a carriage, “don’t be caught looking” (18), to Rose’s encounter with the male exhibitionist; none of it can be spoken, can be explained, or discussed. Rose especially struggles with this, in her terror of what she had seen, since she has no vocabulary to express her terror: “what had she seen? Something horrible, something hidden. But what? There it was, hidden behind her strained eyes” (40). The experience is incommunicable according to any category of which she is aware, but she feels guilty about it anyway. Nearly thirty years later, when Martin complains, “what awful lives children live!” Rose immediately agrees and adds, “and they can’t tell anybody” (151). Unable to express themselves, Tom and Rose are threatened by a sexuality which escapes the confines of their language, of what could even be spoken if they wished to.

Such public encounters defy description, because they do not fit into a simplistic binary of marital or extramarital sexuality. It is perhaps worth remarking that sexuality *within* marriage

seems to be, for both Mann and Woolf, the ultimate transgressive act; it is never represented, or even discussed, in either novel. Although the extramarital affairs of men in both novels *do* exist in the category of the speakable, narratable, because they are perceived as threats to the system of sanctioned heterosexual marriage, they can only be spoken of and narrated retrospectively.

Throughout 1891, Abel Pargiter, who well could marry his mistress instead of keeping her on the side, wishes to tell, to explain, first to Eleanor, then to Eugénie, but holds back, thinking, “no, no, he said to himself with sudden conviction, as Eleanor came in. I can’t do it . . . she has her own life to live” (98). So too with Eugénie, he believes that to speak the unspeakable would break a social contract, violate something about the women themselves. This affair also obsesses Martin, retrospectively; in 1913 he thinks about it, and how he and his siblings couldn’t even talk about the affair when they discovered the letters after his death: “Why had his father lied? What was the harm of keeping a mistress?” (211). In the end he finds it much simpler to blame it on the prudery and virginity of women than on the damning double-standard of possessiveness and license which Martin’s dalliances also maintain, resembling of all people, Tom Buddenbrook, who expects virginity from Tony but upbraids her for her naïveté in objecting to Permaneder’s sexuality. This assumed dichotomy clearly continues to influence Martin, for when he finally does speak the “unspeakable” to Maggie in 1914, and boldly talks about Mira to his cousin, as well as about the attraction he perceived between Abel and Eugénie, Maggie responds, “are we brother and sister?” she asked; and laughed out loud” (234). To her, sexuality is clearly not a foundational crisis of identity, and the life and sexuality of her mother doesn’t control her as it so obviously does Martin, and as Abel believed it would control Eleanor. But Eleanor’s rejoinder, as ever, is to place the conversation outside the hierarchical economy of sexuality and desire and into a mode of horizontal relation, and as she sees her brother filling out in his role as bachelor

and philanderer, she considers, “it became perfectly obvious to her, listening to his voice through the door, that he had a great many love affairs. But who with? and why do men think love affairs so important? she asked as the door opened” (147).

For Eleanor, the possibilities offered by celibacy for human-based interaction outweigh the pleasures of sexuality; this also seems to be the alternative, for Mann, that Hanno represents, although it can exist only before sexual expression is possible. The queer friendship he enjoys with Kai exhibits some structural similarities to the homosocial and homosexual desire of many other Mann protagonists (Tonio Kröger especially), but the narrator lays great emphasis on his *sexlessness*, especially the fact that while Kai, by the time of Hanno’s death, has passed into puberty, for Hanno it was “noch nicht der Fall” (604). At fifteen, this makes him quite a late bloomer, especially compared to his father, who was obviously sexually initiated with the flower-shop girl Anna by the time he was taken into his father’s service at sixteen. But for Mann, Hanno seems to represent an almost genderless and sexless paradise of possibility: the fluidity of desire before its expression becomes possible. This seems to be at least part of the motivation of narrating the single day of Hanno’s life in greater detail than any single day in the entire novel; to locate all the potentials for difference which are closed by his death.

Hanno represents much in the way of possibility to Mann, but that idealization is also undermined by Woolf’s portrayal of childhood through Rose. Hanno’s childhood is, like Tony’s “Mal,” a cordoned-off Eden of possibility, “die reine, starke, inbrünstige, keusche, noch unverstörte und uneingeschüchterte Phantasie jenes glückseligen Alters, wo das Leben sich noch scheut, uns anzutasten, wo noch weder Pflicht noch Schuld Hand an uns zu legen wagt, wo wir sehen, hören, lachen, staunen und träumen dürfen, ohne daß noch die Welt Dienste von uns verlangt . . .” (371). This ‘sacred’ childhood is treated in a very sentimental, elegiac tone, the

elevation of possibility for difference, always murdered by the advent of adult responsibilities, and especially adult sexuality: “Ach, nicht lange mehr, und mit plumper Übermacht wird alles über uns herfallen, um uns zu vergewaltigen, zu exerzieren, zu stricken, zu kürzen, zu verderben . . .” (371). Mann wishes to posit the childlike innocence of his childish perspective, the infinite play it suggests, as an absolute value, but Woolf shows how this equation is based on a gendered assumption of male sexual identity and development. Rose demonstrates how fragile this world of fantasy is, but also how dangerously it can play into very real exploitation of young girls for their inexperience. For it is precisely during Rose’s fantasy of “riding by night on a desperate mission to a besieged garrison” (26) that she is targeted by the exhibitionist. Rose learns that, particularly as a young girl, sexuality is *not* infinite play, that fantasy is *not* an Eden of possibility, that instead, her desire to exploit its gender-bending possibilities result in her “education” by men as to the consequences of her attempt to break into the public space as an imaginative girl on her own. Rose’s later actions seem to confirm the way that this “possibility” exists only in male fantasy, and for the purpose of exploiting real women, in imagination or in real-life assault.

Eleanor is the character who comes closest to the idealization of a state of sex-lessness, but unlike Hanno, it is not through ignorance of sexuality, but through a continued choice to explore possibility and consider it in others and in herself, never committing herself to any particular formation or iteration⁸³. Eleanor, cast early into the role of pseudo-mother as benefactress and committee-member, lives as her father’s stay-at-home daughter, but doesn’t engage with the role. Even in the midst of very normative meetings, she doodles her all-

⁸³ The importance of this non-participation and openness is what Gregory Castle points to in his discussion of *The Voyage Out* in *The Modernist Bildungsroman*; “Woolf perhaps more than any other modernist writer calls into question the fundamentally patriarchal authority—characterized by compulsory heterosexuality and its sociocultural imprimatur, marriage—of classical Bildung and subjects its dialectics of self and society to a negative critique that is itself the starting point, and the critical context, of Bildung for women” (216).

important circle with spokes radiating out, suggesting the possibility of infinite departure from any particular identity, any particular moment:

All it comes to is: I'm right and you're wrong, she thought. This bickering merely wasted time. If we could only get at something, something deeper, deeper, she thought, prodding her pencil on the blotting-paper. Suddenly she saw the only point that was of any importance. She had the words on the tip of her tongue. She opened her mouth to speak.

But just as she cleared her throat, Mr. Pickford swept his papers together and rose. (169)

Like Hanno, this is a moment of possibility offered on the level of the text but cut off from her own world, and yet, unlike Mann, Woolf does not wish to elevate the *content* of what Eleanor is suggesting as a theory for imitation (like his vision of childhood) and/or elegy; instead, Woolf consistently cuts off the narrative just when it could begin to be theoretical, suggesting instead that it is the structure of the narrative itself which she wishes to emphasize, the moment of consideration, of possibility, as precisely that, possibility, unexpressed.⁸⁴

Kitty also approaches this possibility, again from the unexpected position of the hostess, the wealthy Lady, a “type” easily derided by North and others for fitting into particular roles and narratives. At her party in 1914 she considers the relation of the sexes to each other and continually asks her what the purpose, or worth, of such meaningless parties and relations might be; whether Eleanor’s withdrawal is not more valuable than her begrudging participation. When she sees the men coming in after dinner, “like gulls settling on fish” (247) to find the most ‘sympathetic’ woman to talk to, she bitterly rejects, like Martin, the artificiality of sexual relations, based on mutual exploitation. But then she considers the old couple, with nothing left

⁸⁴ Though she almost entirely ignores *The Years* in her treatment of Woolf in *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*, Melba Cuddy-Keane remarks on the anti-theoretical stance Woolf adopts in many of her essays and speeches. She quotes from Woolf’s talk on “The Leaning Tower,”: “the germ of a theory is almost always the wish to prove what the theorist wishes to believe” and goes on to explain that Woolf focuses “less on message than on contact, that her words signify less for their referential than for their phatic function” (99).

to gain from each other, “there was something—was it human? civilized? she could not find the word she wanted—about the old couple” (247), and then finally thinks back to Edward, to Oxford and how often she had felt devalued and mocked for her gender or lack of education, then considers “yet she respected Edward and Tony too” (247). Finally she talks with Martin and feels “the old family affection return” (248), and notices how well and poorly they understand each other; this is another possible mode of relation, not based on exploitation, nor on exterior values, most similar to the longevity of the old couple’s talking. The family itself seems to offer possibilities of relation that are not based on exploitation but are also fulfilling, because the economy of relation does not rely on surface judgments and the sex appeal of the economy of desire; in a twist, rather than killing the Angel of the House, Woolf reimagines the possibilities of relation without the undercurrent of patriarchal, incestuous desire⁸⁵.

The possibilities of narrative combine with the possibilities of relation, for Woolf, in their ability to hollow out the present, to reconcile irreconcilable binary oppositions and place people, ideas, and experiences in new formations. The determined arranging of Mann’s “Haltung,” however, with its meticulous attention to detail, its motifs and its obsessive time tables, is criticized in the perception Rose has of the river; “some buried feeling began to arrange the stream into a pattern. The pattern was painful” (153). Woolf’s point seems to be that proscribed patterns and arrangements, no matter how inclusive, do violence to the things they arrange. Instead, the spontaneous arrangement of the siblings at the end of the novel seems to preserve affinity, relation, and meaning, but without being forced by the actors themselves; intuited by the “artist”, perceived by the spectator, extemporaneously:

⁸⁵ Mary Jean Corbett notes, in her discussion of Woolf’s method in *The Years*: “to be sure, the novel itself persistently critiques the patriarchal, but more surprising in Woolf’s oeuvre is the impulse to reconstitute, recuperate, refigure, and reimagine familial life in affectively gratifying egalitarian forms, such that individuals will have the opportunity to reconceive their relations in new ways on new models” (200).

In the mixture of lights they looked prosaic but unreal; cadaverous but brilliant. And there against the window, gathered in a group, were the old brothers and sisters. ‘Look, Maggie,’ she whispered, turning to her sister, ‘Look!’ The group in the window...wore a statuesque look for a moment, as if they were carved in stone. Their dresses fell in stiff sculptured folds. Then they moved; they changed their attitudes; they began to talk. (410)

Their living sculpture is a species of narrative which doesn’t progress historically and teleologically, telling the end from the beginning and dividing the righteous from the unrighteous; instead, it is a spontaneous perception of the present, working through and against the consciousnesses of all those present, hollowing out the moment and making it more suggestive than it could be without the aesthetic gaze; it is the lifting of sensation from one plane of reality into a communicable realm of meaning.

It is not accidental that this living sculpture is of *siblings*, not lovers, and that its domesticity, ordinariness and spontaneity are limited in their application as “art.” Woolf perceives in this contingent, fragmentary, but shared perception a method which is generative, productive, rather than the endless repetition of the same forms. It devalues the content of the ego and upholds the method of perception itself, and through engagement with multiple embedded circles of identity, the individual is able to perceive meaning beyond the particular roles and possessions which she or he has been assigned. This is Kitty’s feeling in the spring of 1914 as she strolls around alone on her husband’s estate:

Spring was sad always, she thought; it brought back memories. All passes, all changes, she thought, as she climbed up the little path between the trees. Nothing of this belonged to her; her son would inherit; his wife would walk here after her. She broke off a twig; she picked a flower and put it to her lips. But she was in the prime of life; she was

vigorous. She strode on. . . . A deep murmur sang in her ears—the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone. She lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased. (263)

For Kitty, an inner feeling of connection is all she can feel, as a woman in a man's world, and yet for her that is enough; the contingent enjoyment of her position is sufficient, without trying to scratch out a place of her own. This is the opposite of the horror of the Buddenbrooks when the Kröger family mansion is sold (a result of the 'degenerate' sons living life in the outer form of opulence but without the process of business sense which built up the family wealth); it is purchased to be pulled down, divided, and separate, smaller family mansions constructed in its too-large grounds. Tony, always willing to lament the loss of sublimity and greatness, exclaims: "Großvaters Grundstück! Gut, damit ist das Besitztum verpfuscht. Der Reiz bestand gerade in der Weitläufigkeit . . . die eigentlich überflüssig war . . . aber das war das Vornehme." (211). The elegiac tone of "Verfall" is inescapable, as the symbolic value of the house was its impracticality, its imposition on its landscape, the domination of public space for one small family rather than its division for accommodation for many. By extension, the dominating forms of "great" art tend to prevent other, more humble and domestic arts from practicing, and the contingency Kitty espouses is at odds with the imposition of the Buddenbrook aesthetic—especially since her terminal position resembles that of the 'reduced' circumstances of Tony and the other women, and yet Kitty says "I daresay I'm better off as I am," she added, half to herself, 'with just a boy to chop up wood' (397).

This perception, and this possibility of perception, is tied especially to the body, to the memories and associations of that transgressive object. The strange effect of embodiment within family narratives is that memories are shared, and bodies can be as well, and can blur the line

between individual experience and collective experience; not always in the moment, but in the recollection. In 1914, on her way to the estate, Kitty “stood in her travelling-dress, wondering if she had forgotten anything. Her mind was a perfect blank for a moment. Where am I? she wondered. What am I doing? Where am I going? Her eyes fixed themselves on the dressing-table; vaguely she remembered some other room, and some other time when she was a girl. At Oxford was it?” (253). She is presumably remembering the night after her tea in 1880, when she found male Oxford society so frivolous, obsolete and inane (and now, it is female society which she finds to be equally tiresome), and she thinks, “what would Nell think of this, she thought, tilting up the beautifully polished brass jug and dipping her hands in the hot water” (71). The oddity of this ‘memory’ in 1914 is that it can hardly be said to be *her* memory at all, it is her memory of *trying to think through another’s perspective*⁸⁶, and this structural similarity of feeling alienated from her own bodily experience is what recalls her. This recollection is generative, because it invites participation, rather than shutting it out.

This is not to suggest that either Woolf or Mann has a particularly rosy view of the family as a social arrangement; in fact, both narratives tend to emphasize the heartlessness of reproduction, and how much it casts asides and grinds up in its need to continue. Christian, when he tries to convince Tom to accept his marriage to Aline and thereby legitimize their child, offers her as a contrast to the unhealthy descendants of Buddenbrooks which Tony, Tom, and Clara have all proven to create: “Nein, du hast keinen Begriff, Thomas, was für ein prachtvolles Geschöpf das ist! Sie ist so gesund . . . so *gesund* . . . !” (344). Her health and her vitality are her attractions for the morbid hypochondriac Christian, who eventually will become victim to them, committed to an asylum by Aline, unable to speak for himself, to assert himself as a

⁸⁶ Pamela Caughie, in her discussion of the uses of memory and repetition in *The Years*, also points to a devaluation of the individual perspective, and the theory of origins: “the novel shows us that what we assume to be personal may well be an expression of what is interpersonal or communal” (103).

Buddenbrook. The instrumentalization at the hands of the “healthy” which Christian undergoes is hardly a generative model Mann wishes to espouse. This is also the question Woolf poses throughout the novel—is the connection worth it? Is it worth its continuance, seeing to what idiotic ends human lives are put? Martin, at the Lasswades, considers, “if this doesn’t work, he thought, looking at the portrait of a nobleman with a crimson cloak and a star that hung luminous in front of him, I’ll never do it again” (237). He must consider whether there is something human behind the aesthetic façade of fashion and wealth, and whether he can assent to it. This is a question often posed at parties and gatherings throughout the novel: will I do this again? Is there something behind all of this interaction? Is it normative because the narratives all get thrown into fashionable frames and hung on the walls, or is the oddity of that gesture of inclusion, of other and self in one frame, itself what it means to be human?

The horrific outcome seems to both Woolf and Mann to be the merging of the human with ossified, meaningless roles, which require “compensation” if not outright numbing to perform. For Tom, because the patriarchal impulse to control, own, and preside has been so consistently performed, he feels empty, incapable of fixing his sights on further goals and activities: “sein Tätigkeitstrieb aber, die Unfähigkeit seines Kopfes, zu ruhen, seine Aktivität, die stets etwas gründlich anderes gewesen war als die natürliche und durable Arbeitslust seiner Väter: etwas Künstliches nämlich, ein Drang seiner Nerven, ein Betäubungsmittel im Grunde, so gut wie die kleinen, scharfen russischen Zigaretten, die er beständig dazu rauchte . . .” (521). The artificiality, the aestheticism, of his values, continued not out of personal conviction but an inherited duty, is precisely what Hanno observes with horror in his father as he sees him go about his daily activities wearing a mask. Woolf also suggests the inhuman consequences of becoming merged with a role, within or without the family; Peggy also finds at the base of her profession

the same artificial need for “Betäubungsmittel”: “all her patients said that, she thought. Rest—rest—let me rest. How to deaden; how to cease to feel; that was the cry of the woman bearing children; to rest, to cease to be. In the Middle Ages, she thought, it was the cell; the monastery; now it’s the laboratory; the professions; not to live; not to feel; to make money, always money” (336-37). This is part of Peggy’s vision of human life as a series of “grooves” into which men and women fall and must exert unimaginable effort to get out of: the groove of established roles, established rituals, which do not provide them with meaning; in childbirth or in the laboratory, they call out, like Tom, for something to deaden them to the inhuman sublimation of personal desires to particular, inherited forms.

In essence, for effective resistance to the merging of identity and role, narratives must efface themselves, efface their own value as narratives, and concentrate on ways of resisting the genealogical imperative to seek origins and to determine outcomes, reaching instead for an *agentive* genealogy that allows the past to open possibilities rather than close them. Thus the perception of reality, and the passage of time, is not a neutral, assumed thing, but a constitutive, integral part of the perception of human value. Time is a negotiated quality throughout both novels, and the comfort that characters feel with its passage is directly related to the amount of control they wish to exert over their own narratives. Confronted with the possibility of rift, of a foundational flaw in the family, Johann dismisses it, saying, “halten wir es nun mit der fröhlichen Gegenwart” (18). He runs his household, also, with an emphasis on extending the present moment; the family dinner which begins the novel is a “ganz einfaches Mittagbrot ... und man saß nun, gegen vier Uhr nachmittags, in der sinkenden Dämmerung und erwartete die Gäste.” (8). This easy opulence and presentist thinking contrasts with Thomas’ endless rushing to fulfill all obligations, and his general obsession with running out of time to accomplish them.

His goal-obsession, which he perceives as part of his gender and family identity, leaves him at the end of his life unable to handle the present: “es gab nur noch Gegenwart und kleinliche Wirklichkeit, aber keine Zukunft und keine ehrgeizigen Pläne mehr” (520). For him, there is “only” the present, too small, too weak for his purposes, whereas for his grandfather, the present was more than enough. Even Hanno, though incapable of setting or keeping goals, is caught up in his father’s paranoia; his experience at the seaside is a frantic attempt to cling to the present: “aber die Zeit verging unaufhaltsam im Wechsel von Regen und Sonnenschein, See- und Landwind, stiller, brütender Wärme und lärmenden Gewittern, die nicht über das Wasser konnten und kein Ende nehmen zu wollen schienen.” (540). The word “vergehen” is telling in this context; time does not just move, it moves *away*, to some degree, *passes* away as Hanno consumes his time in anticipation of the inevitable end of the vacation. The same prefix, *ver-*, is used to describe Tony’s process of maturation: “so wanderten die Jahre vorbei, und es war, alles in allem, eine glückliche Jugendzeit, die Tony erlebte” (75). Her youth passes her by, and is unable to be narrated; in the *Verfall*-driven story, years of happiness are just “*ver*”-lived, lived away, lived up, and not really experienced in the same way that the times of trouble and disaster are. Thus to resist narrative entirely, to engage with moments not of crisis but of possibility, of ordinary possibility, is the only way to resist the “*vorgeschrieben*” narrative.

Woolf’s suspicion of narrative, especially of the expressive or retrospective account, is clear throughout the text⁸⁷, as she cuts off most characters’ speech before they run into the content of anything from the past, or if she does allow them to go on, it is usually into an incoherent or fragmentary or simply false memory. Where Mann takes great pains to make sure

⁸⁷ Or at least, it *would* be clear if critics didn’t regard *The Years* from the outset as a “failed novel”; even among its admirers some are unwilling to believe that Woolf’s extensive editing, and the destruction of coherent “scenes” led to a more intentional or remarkable novel. Grace Radin, granting all the “aura” of origins to Woolf’s earlier holographs, painstakingly tries to “recreate” the novel that could have been from the novel that was, calling *The Years* plagued with “problems,” and demonstrating “unevenness” and a “lack of resolution” (158).

that all retrospective accounts line up perfectly in their details, in the manner of expression, and the mutual meaning derived from them, Woolf shows the past as something fabricated out of muddled accounts. In 1914, sitting at the Lasswade's party, Martin hears a man tell of his experiences in Ireland in 1880: "he spoke very simply; he was offering them a memory; he told his story perfectly; it held its meaning without spilling a single drop" (240). While to the bachelor Martin this is the pinnacle of narrative perfection, Woolf seems to hold her *own* narrative of 1880 against that "perfect" story, valuing by extension the "spilling" of details, the sprawling incoherence of its exposition, along with its stuffy domestic interiors, dead ends, which cut off action before it begins. Throughout the early sections, there is a great masculine longing to disclose: first Col. Pargiter who wishes to tell about his mistress, then Martin, and finally Rose in 1910, who visits Maggie and Sara, living where she has lived with a companion previously, and she feels that "her past seemed to be rising above her present. And for some reason she wanted to talk about her past; to tell them something about herself that she had never told anybody—something hidden" (158). This "hidden" story, hidden under layers of learned masculine stoicism, seems to be referring to her story about the exhibitionist, but she realizes that she can't explain it, that the attempt to bring the past into the present "made her feel that she was two different people at the same time; that she was living at two different times at the same moment" (158-59). And so she never says what it was that seemed so vital.

Sara seems to represent another pole of suspicion of narrative through her inability to even tell coherent narratives. Throughout the novel her mythopoetic mutterings defy the realist mode of narrative accuracy, and yet they seem to remain intelligible enough to those hearing them to still generate meaning, and especially to illustrate character rather than events. When Martin asks her to describe her brother-in-law Renny, she explains:

“His mother was dead. . . . And he was afraid to tell his father that the horse was too big to ride . . . and they sent him to England. . . .” She was skipping over railings. “And then what happened?” said Martin, joining her. “They became engaged?” She was silent. He waited for her to explain—why they had married—Maggie and Renny. He waited, but she said no more. Well, she married him and they’re happy, he thought. (226)

Although her disconnected sentences could hardly be said to constitute a “biographical sketch,” they do, despite her silence on the engagement and marriage, seem to convey to Martin a sense of the meaning of the life he leads and the man he is.

In her choice of “domestic, near” England, over the wider expanses she has seen, Eleanor also specifically makes a choice for her “mother” tongue: “what a lovely language, she thought, saying over to herself again the commonplace words, spoken by Celia quite simply,’ but with some indescribable burr in the r’s, for the Chinnerys had lived in Dorsetshire since the beginning of time” (196). The particular pronunciation, the particular words, make an impact not in their content, but in their rhythm, their resonance, and especially in how they transmit a sense of the past. The Chinnerys have lived in one place since the beginning of time, not because that beginning is the longed-for point of origin, but because language and time are coterminous, they beget each other, and the family’s presence makes the social and linguistic evolution a way of accessing fragments of the past as preserved not in objects but in speech. This manner of speaking is also an obsession of Mann’s; his meticulous characterization of the pronunciation and dialect of nearly every character. His desire to characterize the style of each person shows how language can become the intersection of the general grammatical with the individual body, the individual expression, and as such, it is also metonymic for the participation of the family with larger social schemas. As such, the mother tongue assumes great importance, and the

distance from it is a way to measure characters' ability to literally relate to one another (Edward, who is stuck on Greek and cannot relate to others, has a stilted relation with his own language). The domestic tongue, the mother tongue, becomes a way of measuring how generative, how productive it can be in making connections, fluid, and not static ones (like the scholar's 'new' editions of the same words).

Though the interest in language as the expression of a particular style interests both Woolf and Mann, and they both employ repetition in the pursuit of this, it is to different effect; Mann's use is very targeted, and very literal, whereas Woolf intentionally didn't reread earlier sections when writing later ones, and allowed the imprecision of her own memory to filter into the distortions of her characters⁸⁸. Tony mocks her parents for defending Grünlich's inflated language, but ends up repeating the exact same phrases when she considers how Morten pleases her: "Innerlich dachte sie: Wichtigtuerei? Man befindet sich in fremder Gesellschaft, zeigt sich von seiner besten Seite, setzt seine Worte und sucht zu gefallen – das ist doch klar . . ." (106). Mann's use of repetition emphasizes the irony of her situation, discounting the process of reflection, and indeed revision, of her earlier position, by repeating the phrase word for word.⁸⁹ Woolf, on the other hand, is willing to undermine her own ethos as a narrator through the use of repetition. During Rose's lunch with Maggie and Sara in 1910, when she invites them to the family meeting to see the Pargiters "in the flesh," she then "remembered Sara's phrase, 'the caravan crossing the desert'" (163), a phrase which doesn't occur anywhere in the chapter or the book; having not met for several years, it is unlikely that she would have said the phrase except

⁸⁸ From VW's *Diary IV*, 22 May 1934: "I shant, I think, re-read; I shall summon it back—the teaparty, the death, Oxford & so on, from my memory" (221); Victoria Middleton also points to this passage and concludes, "she intended to reveal the gropings of her imagination, to render the fiction-making process visible" (168)

⁸⁹ Heide Lutosch links this, in *Ende der Familie – Ende der Geschichte*, as do other Mann scholars, to his fascination with Wagner's use of leitmotifs. She argues that these exact repetitions "stellen das Geschehen auf doppelte Weise still, indem sie zum einen durch die Wiederholung einen Vorgang als ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen darstellen, zum anderen, indem sie Gegenwart und Vergangenheit nebeneinander stellen und die gewesene Dynamik gewissermaßen 'einfrieren'" (64).

at the very luncheon being described. And yet, it is not recorded. Is this an editorial mistake of Woolf's, from the many years of revision and constant deletion? Perhaps. Like Martin's assertion in March 1908 that Eugénie has been dead over a year, despite the June 1907 section preceding it where she is very much alive, the 'mistake,' whether intentional or accidental, seems to serve the same purpose as Rose's free-floating quotation—to destabilize a true believer's stance in the infallibility of narrative, and to show the process of memory coming to inaccurate or only self-referential conclusions.

When Woolf utilizes exact repetition, it passes from situations and characters which were not shared, suggesting a commonality of perspective united only on the level of the text itself. The phrase "justice and liberty," first brought up by Delia in her fantasy of Parnell, is recalled by Eleanor at news of his death in 1891, then is heard by Martin and Sara in Hyde Park in 1914, finally resurfacing with North in the Present Day section; their separate encounters and considerations do not build off one another, but suggest a sort of shared criticism of abstract political language in the face of their separate family difficulties, a dispersed but palpable spatial representation of how unfitting such theories are in everyday relations. The phrase "a feeling out of all proportion to its object" is initially attached to Eugénie (113), who exaggerates, but then almost immediately crosses over to Col. Pargiter (115), who certainly does not exaggerate; it then moves to Martin, to describe his rage at seeing the virginal Ann ignoring him at the Lasswade's party (250), and finally in the Present Day section it describes how North feels when he recalls Peggy's criticism (373). In each case it shows excess of emotion, but where Eugénie is tempted to exaggerate her sympathy, the men are induced to rage, very gendered rage—the phrase becomes not what might be expected, a hysterical female overreaction, but instead an almost inherited patriarchal rage, called up whenever a woman neglects or criticizes a man. It is

also telling that in each case, the men do not speak their feelings, but in Eugénie's case, it is her words themselves which express the exaggerated emotion; the structural blockage to expression seems to intensify the male's self-enclosed emotional turmoils. This is what is at play in many of Sara's tit-for-tat repetitions—showing men how pompous and hollow their words are. She parrots her father's words in 1891, “to—er—to—er—reform one's habits” (120), then she repeats her mother's praise of a potential suitor for Maggie in 1907, “a most distinguished man” (133); at lunch with Martin in 1914, as discussed earlier, where she cuts him off talking about himself, “Hush,” then repeating his phrase, “somebody's listening” (217); finally in the Present Day, she repeats back to North the precise phrases and mannerisms that Nicholas has been preaching for the past fifteen years, “how can we make laws, religions, that fit, that fit, when we don't know ourselves?” (299). In each case Sara's superficial repetitions empty the words of their intended meaning and render them flat and egotistical rather than profound or moving, showing how the obsession with precision and outward forms of language can hollow out the generative, productive potential of language as a fluid entity.⁹⁰

As with language, so too with narrative; Woolf values those which are not intent on the preservation of a particular form of life, but rather those which seek through their method to expand, produce, and not to represent, to clone. For Mann, too, the question of the teleology of narrative is not irrelevant—what is the point of these family narratives? Do they show personal development, are they a series of smaller *Bildungsromane* sandwiched into the same fictional world? Or are they social histories? Historical novels? To the question of development, it seems to be an obsession of the characters within the novel, but not an interest of the novel itself.

Separated from each other, Tony, Thomas, and even Christian to some degree seem to narrate

⁹⁰ Clare Hanson, in “Virginia Woolf in the House of Love: Compulsory Heterosexuality in *The Years*,” points to Sara's use of repetition as in particular enacting what Butler terms a “parodic repetition of gender” and showing that “gender is not stable but tenuously constituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (62).

their own compelling novels of development, complete with their own interpretations of how their lives have been impacted by political and social changes, how they have developed in discrete stages, and what the meaning or lack thereof has been. Yet put together they tend to undermine one another and cancel out the moral prerogative of the *Bildungsroman* (put simply, to show the shape of development of the individual) because these individuals seem much more static than they can possibly realize. Hanno's narrative, in particular, with its lack of development, temporally, physically, or psychologically, points toward Mann's resistance to the novel of development. Woolf's characters are far from any conception of development, and yet they too constantly confront the question of where their own lives fit within the fabric of their social reality, and how that reality is affected by their sense of imbedded identity within the narratives of others⁹¹.

To approach the question of what the purpose of the narrative is, the best place to look is likely the ending itself. *Buddenbrooks* ends with the transfer of narrative from "life" to "paper"; after Hanno's death, and the literalization of his final line through the family tree, Gerda returns the family documents to Tony: "solange ich am Leben bin, wollen wir hier zusammenhalten, wir paar Leute, die wir übrigbleiben . . . Einmal in der Woche kommt ihr zu mir zum Essen . . . Und dann lesen wir in den Familienpapieren" (644-45). Her equation of life with the narrative life of the documents and not with her own continued existence is emphasized in her final questions, "Tom, Vater, Großvater und die anderen alle! Wo sind sie hin? Man sieht sie nicht mehr" followed by her despairing statement, "das Leben, wißt ihr, zerbricht so manches in uns, es läßt so manchem Glauben zuschanden werden . . . Ein Wiedersehen . . . Wenn es so wäre . . ." which is so emphatically contradicted by the prophetic voice of Sesemi Weichbrodt, "*Es ist so!*" (646).

⁹¹ Paul Sheehan argues that Woolf resists the *Bildungsroman* in all her mature novels because of its implicit assumption that "subjectivity is narrative-shaped"; instead, he argues, "Woolfian subjectivity is marked by being directionless, intuitive and potentially contradictory. It is, in other words, *form-defying*" (135).

The reunion she speaks of may well be a religious statement, but it has its grounding in the form of the novel itself: the novel *is* the “Wiedersehen” of which they speak. The transcription and repetition of the dead stories which Tony holds is an impossible reunion, because the documents themselves cannot break free from an individual perspective without exerting ownership over others. However, through the aesthetic fabric of the novel, and despite the narrator’s rather obvious biases throughout, life and narrative are stitched together⁹².

Woolf ends in a surprisingly similar fashion. Eleanor, who, like Tony, has been the butt of many jokes but the most consistent narrator throughout, falls asleep at the family party, and awakens in the middle of a conversation, disoriented: “but where was she? In what room? In which of the innumerable rooms? Always there were rooms; always there were people. Always from the beginning of time” (404). She overhears North asking Edward about a Greek tragedy he has translated, and she disdains Edward for his gentle rebuff, for his unwillingness to articulate what it is he finds so obviously vibrant and affirming about the plays that he cannot translate into his own life, his own actions. She hears him express a wish that he hadn’t pursued the life of the scholar, but what it was instead she cannot hear, and she is frustrated in her attempt to make meaning of it: “there must be another life, she thought, sinking back into her chair, exasperated. Not in dreams; but here and now, in this room, with living people. She felt as if she were standing on the edge of a precipice with her hair blown back; she was about to grasp something that just evaded her. There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken” (405). The “other life” of which she speaks is the novel; it is the structure which gives purpose to their actions, but *not* in an easily-categorized and therefore –dismissable sense of

⁹² This interpretation contradicts the countless readings of *Buddenbrooks* which emphasize only Tony’s comic qualities, like Saarilouma, who reduces her to a mere “motif” and characterizes Mann’s narrator as “discretely ironic” towards her throughout (280), not to mention Patricia Tobin’s declaration that the novel is “patently a matter of fathers and sons” (54). How either of these critics is able to account for Tony’s circumvention of the narrative, and re-inscription within an entirely feminine context, remains to be seen.

nobility, catharsis, and ceremony; rather, it remains in the fragmentary, the relational, the contingent world of ordinary relations and experiences. Eleanor pauses and reflects: “she hollowed her hands in her lap, just as Rose had hollowed hers round her ears. She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; to make it stay; to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding.” (406). So what is the point of the narrative? The fabric itself. Not its end, its outcome, its result, but the sustained consideration of relations which it narrates, the stitching together of fractured perspectives, flawed memories, and incomplete gestures, which despite their obvious flaws still manage to convey the here and now.

For both authors, the narrative of the family, and its emphasis on the particular, especially its ability to set “nebeneinander” the events, characters, and relations which would remain “nacheinander” otherwise, allows them to resist the genealogical imperative, that pressure to connect beginning to end, to seal a narrative hermeneutically, to close up and define, and of course, to stamp it with the name of the Father, the originator. Though both could be said to exert an ‘aestheticist’ ethos, in reality, both Woolf and Mann remain suspicious of the aesthetic impulse to generalize, to universalize, and to “preach.” The genealogist’s method, which they both employ, allows them to see, even in a pathos-ridden Verfall, possibilities and potentialities for difference and for affinities and associations that do not conform to a strictly generational conception of historical time, and set up the possibility for members of the family to enter “ineinander” rather than repeating the same structures, the same stories.

Chapter 3. RADICAL CONTINGENCY OF IDENTITY IN *DER MANN OHNE EIGENSCHAFTEN* AND *THE MAKING OF AMERICANS*

For two authors whose writing careers began, respectively, with an exposé about violent, compulsory male homosexuality in boarding schools, and one of the first sustained lesbian coming-out narratives, Robert Musil and Gertrude Stein could hardly seem less amenable for comparative analysis. But their careers take on odd resonances as they develop; from *Q.E.D.* and *Törleß*, each went on to write a triptych of short stories focusing on women (*Drei Frauen* and *Three Lives*) and employing radical and controversial techniques for representing those women, before embarking on the longest projects of both of their lives, *The Making of Americans* and *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. Each of these monumental novels has attracted intense discussion, but, as with Woolf and Mann, it has remained almost exclusively in separate fields. Although both share features—their length and incompleteness, the mixture of personal involvement and clinical detachment, the self-conscious study of national culture, and an open approach to form—only one sustained discussion has placed the two texts in direct conversation with each other: Nicola Glaubitz's 2015 article in *Modernist Cultures*, "'Normal Man' and the Modernist Long Novel: Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* and Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*." Her attention is focused on Musil and Stein's shared background in experimental psychology (both pursued graduate work in the field), and how scientific discourse affected their perception of character within each novel; she argues that they both "redefine literature as a tool for analysing scientific language and procedure" (331). She resists the categorization, by Moretti, Jameson, and others, of their long novels as "failed" epics, but in so doing she relies on her *own* characterization of the novels as being primarily the result of scientific, especially psychological, conventions, and in effect, "abandoning narrative" (316).

Such a description is an easy one to make, based on the smattering of quotations from the novels themselves that she employs⁹³. But is it sustained by actually reading the texts themselves? How can Musil be accused of abandoning narrative, when at his death he left thousands of pages of character sketches and meticulous details for plot trajectories? In valorizing Stein's use of quantitative methods, does she ignore the full title of the novel (*The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress*), whose insistent refrain throughout the novel is on "history" and not science? I would argue that the only way to characterize these novels as "abandoning narrative" is to ignore the method that Stein and Musil pursue; each insists on the imbedded and radical contingency of identity within the narratives they build. Although the open forms of each novel—such that "form" is not a very effective descriptor for either—invite different modes of reading, both Musil and Stein insist on reading, on sustained analysis, for themselves, and surely for their readers as well.

My own comparative juxtapositioning does not begin with generalizations about critical discourse about the novels, nor the extra-textual biographical details that seem so vital to many critics. I believe that to take Stein's focus on the "making" of Americans seriously means to regard her novel as a demonstration of the method of "making" she is analyzing⁹⁴; she constructs the text not as a clinician or detached observer, but as an embodied, queer, woman; "I throw myself open to the public,—I take a simple interest in the ordinary kind of families, histories" (34). To take *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* as an "Essay," which Ulrich considers writing at several points in the novel, is to conflate Ulrich with Musil; rather, it is intentionally *not* a

⁹³ Glaubitz quotes Stein only seven times and Musil five, while devoting the bulk of her paper to discussions of other critics' claims; a more sustained reading, which she acknowledges, is Stephen Meyer's monograph *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science*, but Glaubitz seems to invert his thesis; he claims that "instead of being modeled on scientific experimentation, her writing turns out to be a form of experimental science itself" (xxi), which retains the emphasis on narration that Glaubitz pointedly turns against.

⁹⁴ Catriona Menzies-Pike, in her discussion of the relation of materials from the Stein archive to the final product of the novel, also emphasizes taking the novel on its own terms rather than attempting to read biographical details into it, insisting that Stein emphasizes "making" because "the narrative *objectivizes* the process and the product" (139).

philosophical treatise, of which Ulrich would be so fond. Musil constructs a complex world of pre-war Kakanien in order to suggest not a fantasy, but a reality that is available for analysis through careful reading. To read these two encyclopedic texts next to each other is difficult, if not impossible, but it pursues the method employed by each to deconstruct the position of authority inherent in the ‘author’ and to pursue a radical contingency. I will argue that this contingency is achieved through juxtaposing elements which both retain their absolute difference, and yet retain a baseline of relation between them because of differences in identity and outlook which never can be subsumed by the ‘expert’ or ‘master’⁹⁵.

Among the many curious fragments in Musil’s *Nachlass* is his characterization of the novel in a planned introduction; he argues that writers secure of their reputation are “verwöhnt” (1936) by their readers; these readers, he suggests, “sind gewöhnt zu verlangen, daß man ihnen vom Leben erzähle und nicht vom Widerschein des Lebens in den Köpfen der Literatur u. der Menschen. Das ist aber mit Sicherheit nur soweit berechtigt, als dieser Widerschein bloß ein verarmter, konventionell gewordener Abzug des Lebens ist. Ich suche Ihnen Original zu bieten, Sie müssen also auch ihr Vorurteil suspendieren” (1937). For Musil, this ‘contract’ between readers and authors in which the life-like-ness of their work is judged against conventionalized and recognizable strategies and traits leads to an abdication of what he perceives as his responsibility to *problematize* the relation between life and literature, and confront the reader with ambiguity, incompleteness, and possibility. Narration according to a scheme, with its attendant generic conventions, is prejudice, and poor thinking, or simply writing “ohne Methode” (1937). His method of “exactness” presumably offers not completion, but a commitment to examination of life through fiction, rather than simply the leftovers of life,

⁹⁵ Linda Watts expresses the hope that, specifically for Stein criticism, a renewed attention to reading itself will lead to a critical situation in which “literary formulas of creation and reception might be disrupted long enough and sharply enough that we might in fact be reading Gertrude Stein” (15). The same could equally be said of Musil.

reheated according to new narrative conventions. Stein also anticipates the marginality of her work, recognizing that her method foregrounds a reality which is never conventional, precisely because of its intended universality⁹⁶. She begins the second section of the novel, “Martha Hersland,” (which sets off nearly one hundred pages of digression from the ‘real’ story) with this: “I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way that I can do it. Everybody is a real one to me, everybody is like some one else too to me. No one of them that I know can want to know it and so I write for myself and strangers” (289). Her “contract” with her readers is, like Musil’s, also tenuous, and is based on their alienation from each other; she writes for herself—using a method which she can justify to herself, and not according to conventions—and for strangers—those who are willing to accept her method and test its viability. She introduces this contrast early in the novel as well, addressing the reader directly: “this that I write down a little each day here on my scraps of paper for you is not just an ordinary kind of novel with a plot and conversations to amuse you, but a record of a decent family progress respectably lived by us” (33). Against the “plot and conversations,” a corollary to Musil’s indictment of the “Abzug des Lebens,” she asserts herself and her own analysis, the “decent family progress lived by us,” characteristically including herself as an object of study.

In contrast to these conventionalized, “amusing” novels, Musil and Stein both wish to foreground narrative and linguistic precision and an unapologetically comprehensive method. Musil, in another fragment of a “Nachwort,” argues against kitsch, claiming that in politics, psychology, literature, “es sind zu viele auf der Welt, die genau sagen, was getan u gedacht werden müsse, als daß mich nicht das Gegenteil verführen sollte. ~ die strenge Freiheit” (1941). For him, this freedom is inextricable from the length, the open structure and difficulty of his

⁹⁶ Yet many critics insist on reading Stein through the conventions available; Glaubitz according to experimental psychology, and Clive Bush according to a conglomeration of ‘satire,’ ‘Cubism,’ and ‘discontinuity’ (34).

novel, and perhaps too its inability to conclude. Stein also acknowledges the importance of length in her study, “anyone can see then by looking hard at any one living near them that a history of every one must be a long one” (183). Stein’s method is relentless, but comprehensible in its own terms; it demonstrates the process of “looking hard at any one” and takes the “any one” very seriously; a novel of amusement and wit selects its characters for particular characteristics which move the plot along or enrich the conversation, whereas Stein’s method, totalitarian or even imperialistic as it may seem at times⁹⁷, is also resolutely democratic, in pushing further into basic human modes of understanding. For her, the telling and the looking are inextricable, and you have to condition yourself to see it, which may just be another way of saying that this “freedom” is “streng.”

For both authors, the process of narrative, especially the historical aspect of narrative, is central to their projects. Despite Glaubitz’s claim that Musil and Stein are engaging in theoretical work (scientific discourse), both novels are actually self-consciously historical, displacing the persons and events under examination into an inaccessible past. Musil writes, “dieser Roman spielt vor 1914, zu einer Zeit also, welche junge Menschen gar nicht mehr kennen. Und er beschreibt nicht diese Zeit, wie sie wirklich war, so daß man sie daraus kennen lernen könnte. Sondern er beschreibt sie, wie sie sich in einem unmaßgeblichen Menschen spiegelt” (1817). The anti-pedagogical drive in Musil is strong, and in his notes about the novel he resists classifications which would undermine the problems of time, of identity, and of theory; in a description of the second volume of the novel he construes it as “den Versuch eine Geschichte

⁹⁷ Fredric Jameson, in “A Note on *A Vision*,” criticizes this tendency, saying that her aim to “order and explore the immigrant America of an increasingly populist democracy” is “impossible” (272). He also examines, in “Gertrude Stein and Parts of Speech,” what he diagnoses as the possibility of an implicit American exceptionalism as the result of her privileged socioeconomic position; “it could also be an account of the rootlessness of the exile, who has no context and no social friction to deal with, as well as an income which permits just such a separation” (357). How his *own* ‘vision’ manages to escape these difficulties (especially the taint, as an endowed professor, of “income”), and arrives at a paradise of classless communication, remains to be seen.

überhaupt erst möglich zu machen” (1844), and adds that it is “durchaus keine philosophische, sondern eine Forderung” (1844); in both cases emphasizing the need to follow the internal method, inextricable from the lives it describes, rather than imposing a system of conventions or theories through which to categorize and thereby tame it⁹⁸. For Stein as well, the novel is a living history, though paradoxically of a bygone era;

I am living, I am certain, I am important in me in my realising that each is themselves inside them that each one is of a kind in men and women ... Always kinds are connected with other kinds in men and women. Sometimes I want to be describing lots and lots of kinds in men and women, I want to be going on and on and describe one and then another one and then connections between them. (584)

Where a philosophical or psychological account of *The Making of Americans* would follow some of her more diagrammatic and systematic divisions of kinds and develop a theoretical typology (though it is worth noting that she promises rather than produces such diagrams), here she identifies her own “living” not with the types themselves, but with the pursuit of *connections* between types. Her novel is, in this formulation, not a demonstrative account of “kinds” but an elucidation of the method by which “connections between them” can be formed.

For Stein, this method takes on almost biological dimensions as she considers her desire to get her analysis just right: “to be completely right, completely certain is to be in me universal in my feeling, to be like the earth complete and fructifying” (574). The rhetoric is totalizing, but her emphasis isn’t so much on the universality of her analysis as on the reproductibility of her method; to be complete “like the earth” is not to engage in dissection and taxonomy, but to bring forth fruits of its own. She explains that her feeling of certainty is just one mode among many;

⁹⁸ Walter Strauss, in his repudiation of the term “philosophical novel” in regards to Musil and Proust, also emphasizes the centrality of narrative to Musil’s method; he distinguishes between the heavy-handed attempt to incorporate “theory” with Musil’s sustained attention to the process of “thought” at work (18-19).

Some build certainty up with little and little sure things and make a pile of them, some are summary and all embracing in the certain feeling they have always in them, some are certain of almost anything, some are hardly certain of anything, some have to have a complete system for each certain feeling in them, some have a sense of dramatic arrangement to complete the scene of the certain conviction. (449)

She acknowledges these different modes of coming to certainty, of which a “complete system” is just one option rather than the preferred method⁹⁹; for her, a “fructifying” method would seem to be the one that finds the grounds for comparison rather than simply taxonomizing all the various expressions of being; or in other words, “there are many ways of knowing, as I have been telling, there are many ways of telling” (325).

Musil, on the other hand, seems quite invested in discovering a method by which a moral approach to life is implemented, rather than the “Teillösungen” available in nearly every system, simple or complex. For Ulrich, in a moment of difficulty, wrestling with the problem of writing about life or experiencing it, he surges into a triumphant clarity: “es steckt keine Notwendigkeit dahinter!” (1649). He is reacting, in the moment, to Fischel’s assertion that the most reliable building blocks of human relationships are the most basic—greed, desire, violence—but the realization is more broadly applicable: there is no *necessary* correlation between any current deployment of reality and the ephemeral possibilities which surround it, and opening up any one of them allows for further rhizomatic explosions¹⁰⁰. In a fragment from the *Nachlass*, Musil, considering his father’s death, speculates as to how this continuity could be differently

⁹⁹ Astrid Lorange examines Stein’s interest in situating the methods of the mind in constructing provisional identity: “she posits the very concept of ‘self’ as the product of human nature and its representationalism. Stein’s model of the mind is as an emergent system—a dynamic and continually altering experiential field” (124).

¹⁰⁰ I reference Deleuze and Guattari as a possible corollary, especially in the emphasis on “becoming” rather than a stable sense of self. For a more extended analysis of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Butler’s criticism of them, see Zeynep Talay’s discussion of “Self and Other in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*.” He concludes his discussion with the observation that in regard to these themes, Musil addresses them “differently, and, perhaps, more productively” than these philosophical accounts (60).

represented, other than the typical model of inheritance, succession, discipleship, progress; “auch fehlte mir völlig das Gefühl für jene Kontinuität, die, wie man behauptet, Ahnen und Nachfahren verbindet; die Erblichkeit gewisser Anlagen und Eigenschaften, die gewiß vorhanden ist, erschien mir nicht wichtiger, als daß die verschiedensten Melodien aus den gleichen Tönen aufgebaut werden können” (1830). In other words, there is no “necessary” correlation from the first notes of a melody to their full expression, and the model of origination and progression has, to him, exhausted its usefulness, calling for renewed juxtapositioning and experimentation.

For both Musil and Stein, the question of inheritability and difference is related to larger questions of agency and identity, in building “kinds” or “Eigenschaften.” Against the “Gefühl für jene Kontinuität” that Musil references, in which an essentialist identity connects generations and individuals, both authors would argue for a much more radically contingent method of understanding identity. What Stein perhaps shows more clearly than any actual, codified theory of personality and identity is how damaging the identification with particular traits and characteristics can be. In her discussion of “virtuous being,” Stein lists a number of individuals, including Redfern and Melanctha, and explains how they have come to an understanding of themselves as exhibiting a particular characteristic as the core of their being: “they are right all of them, all these things, each thing in each one, are characteristics in each one but they all think that one characteristic is the whole of them, they all of them forget the other things in them that are active in them” (442). This is what drives the fatalism of her earlier *Three Lives*; Lena, Anna, and Melanctha each become obsessed with a particular “Eigenschaft” and identify their personhood with it, and this identification is what leads to each of their deaths¹⁰¹. Against this

¹⁰¹ Each of the narratives seems in fact to be presented in what each of the central figures would choose as their narrative mode: Anna in a straightforward, no-nonsense declarative style: “Anna led an arduous and troubled life” (1); Melanctha in a tortured, circumlocutive, and self-undermining interrogation: “Melanctha all her life did not know how to tell a story wholly. She always, and yet not with intention, managed to leave out big pieces which

there are also those who are unconscious of their qualities and are equally ruled by them, such as the sisters Anna, Cora, and Bertha, who each in turn become beautiful and desirable, but “this never made any connection for them to the other or other ones who had not had the change in them, the beauty in the one that had it then was like existence in the mother of them, it was in them one after the other of them as if it had always been in them, it had no connection in them with a past or future in them” (102). Without any consciousness, they become mere instruments of characteristics, acted upon rather than identifying with them, which is also problematic. Both of these possibilities are what Ulrich touches on in his examination of how ownership and “Eigenschaften” work together; you can try to assert a primary identity through them, and own them, or you can see them as agentive outside yourself; “es ist eine Welt von Eigenschaften ohne Mann entstanden, von Erlebnissen ohne den, der sie erlernt, und es sieht beinahe aus, als ob im Idealfall der Mensch überhaupt nichts mehr privat erleben werde und die freundliche Schwere der persönlichen Verantwortung sich in ein Formelsystem von möglichen Bedeutungen auflösen solle” (150). But neither of these states is what Ulrich himself lives; because he is conscious of the effects of identification, he lives between them, not above, but between, and it is this consciousness of being between identities, more than any of the actual contingent ‘insights’ he comes to, which Musil emphasizes as the possibility for a different mode of being.

The radical conception of self this entails—in which there is no *a priori* identity available, that traits do not exist prior to their deployment—enrages Walter, who sees it as a sign of the degeneracy of the times, because “nichts ist für ihn fest. Alles ist verwandlungsfähig” (65). This seems to be at the core of Walter’s annoyance with Ulrich, that he is perhaps capable of

make a story very different, for when it came to what had happened and what she had said and what it was that she had really done, Melanctha never could remember right” (57); and Lena the unquestioning, simplistic, and yet tragic inability to theorize; “Yes it was all a peaceful life for Lena. The other girls, of course, did tease her, but then that only made a gentle stir within her” (143). Each of these could be said to fall into a certain narratological trap; they choose a dominant characteristic, decide that it is the essence of their being, and follow it to a faulty and tragic end.

anything. Ulrich's continual reappraisal of this moniker "Mann ohne Eigenschaften" leads him to routinely seek to pursue contradiction, to frustrate simplistic readings of his actions, and to explode binary oppositions. But he is also aware that "schließlich besteht ja das Ding nur durch seine Grenzen und damit durch einen gewissermaßen feindseligen Akt gegen seine Umgebung" (26), meaning that reactionary identity is also identity. Stein pinpoints the Ulrich-type negation as not somehow "above" the systems it criticizes, but as merely one possible identity among others, and a not particularly generative one: "Negative egotism then is when one has enough egotism never to follow any other leading, never to live anybody else's life in living, always to have the best reason why every condition in living is the wrong place for them and not to have enough egotism to live their own life, to do their own choosing, to really be resisting" (231). For her, this is reactionary, as all character is; identity is an interaction between "bottom nature" and "other natures" that it comes in contact with; therefore, reading and misreading these as primary or secondary identities misses the point that all these are infinitely variable, and can never become salient to anyone except in interaction with agency and consciousness, especially when confronted with difference.

The necessity of this difference, and difference as equal and changeable rather than lesser and stable, is how Agathe's presence morphs the sense of being a "man without qualities" from a simple position into a negotiated state of being. He is confronted with her as, in many ways, a "woman without qualities," in a much different way from his own, theory-inflected self-image: "dieses Geischt beunruhigte ihn durch irgend etwas. Nach einer Weile kam er darauf, daß er einfach nicht erkennen konnte, was es ausdrücke. Es fehlte darin das, was die gewöhnlichen Schlüsse auf die Person erlaubt. Es war ein inhaltvolles Gesicht, aber nirgends war darin etwas unterstrichen und in der geläufigen Weise zu Charakterzügen zusammengefaßt" (676-77).

Because he is unable to easily assign her to a category and a type, she unravels his privileged position as spectator, theorist, and eternal outsider. He is affected by her, and disturbed, and finds in this opposition many of the elements of his own identity that he considered infinitely mutable to be much more determined than he thought. This is also the counterpoint to the more totalizing systematizing of Stein; that she consistently interrupts her own tendency to universalize with the very particular circumstances of her own judgments. Like Ulrich, confronted with absolute, unassimilable difference, she explains that she is “desolate” because “I get an awful sinking feeling when I find out by an accidental hearing, feeling, seeing repeating from some one what I have not been hearing, feeling, seeing as repeating in this one and then I am saying if it had not been for this little accidental thing I would not have known this repeating in this one and it is so easy not to have such an accidental happening” (611). Confronted by the large effect of chance and subjective emotion, she nevertheless persists in her attempt to categorize human experience, but always through mutable and contingent categories, not universal absolutes.

For Ulrich, his relationship Agathe succeeds and displaces the experiment of ‘exact’ living because it is *not* an experiment¹⁰²; instead, he realizes that his isolation and theoreticization cannot deliver him from his sense of individual, indivisible identity and that such a drive to abstraction could only intensify and reaffirm his sense of himself as a ‘genius’. Agathe represents the possibility of escaping the cycle of identifying with or against entirely: “sobald es mir gelingt, gegen Agathe gar keine Selbst- und Ichsucht mehr zu haben und kein einziges häßlich-gleichgültiges Gefühl, dann zieht sie die Eigenschaften aus mir hinaus wie der Magnetberg die Schifffnägel! Ich werde moralisch in einen Uratomzustand aufgelöst, wo ich

¹⁰² Matthias Luserke-Jaqui and Philip Payne, in their discussion of “utopism” in the novel, point out that Agathe enters the text, not coincidentally, at precisely the point at which the *Parallelaktion* also unravels: “the undermining of what seemed at the outset a neat philosophic stratagem on the part of the hero — the ‘Urlaub vom Leben’ lasts scarcely more than a few months — virtually coincides with the fiasco of the unworkable public program to find the idea to redeem the empire” (326). She embodies the turn away from philosophy to personal relations.

weder ich, noch sie bin! Vielleicht ist so die Seligkeit?!” (940). For Ulrich, this state of being is accessible only “zur Zweit,” and this is a moral condition he longs to access: not simply evaluating everything for its relation to an abstract, universal, but always problematical personal *system*, instead in a chaotic but comprehensible personal *relation*. Stein also recognizes how easily this abstract identification can lead to personally reprehensible actions: “this one was very clever and quick and energetic, this one had really a quality of bottom thinking, this one was strong in keeping going at working and always this one was not succeeding in living ... Always this one had an exalted nature in him and always this one was not in any way petty in his being and always this one was always failing in being decently good to any one” (374). Here there is a clear conflict, to an outsider, between the ‘promise’ of his nature, or his qualities, and their deployment, but because he has subscribed to an *a priori* belief in the permanence of these qualities, he is unable to see this dissonance in himself. The qualities of goodness or badness, seen in an abstract way, have for Stein far less value than the ability to distinguish your own value system at work, rather than a “romantic” conception of yourself as a stable being:

Sometimes it is astonishing to some one that they are effected by something in a way and that is the way their kind of them in men and women are certain to be affected by that thing and they did not know of which kind they were and that they would be effected the way this kind in men and women is always being effected by something and so they found it completely astonishing to know it of themselves that they were effected that way by that living. (706)

These are such as are able to become conscious of their implication within a “kind”; they are not abstract, universal, and undifferentiated subjects, but through their reactions, they become explicable to themselves and others.

Fanny Hissen is an example to which Stein continually returns of one who is able to recognize her implication within a “kind” and find importance in her ability to see herself in this light. As Ulrich is able to with Agathe, through her experiences with the Shillings and Martha Wyman, Fanny is able to generate a genuine sense of difference, and see her own nature as relative and not universal and absolute: “this one came to have it even more in her, came to have it almost really in her by an individual kind of thinking that arose of itself inside her” (65). The individual thinking arises through her interaction with another. For Stein the “making” of Americans is to learn to balance the sense of independence and self-determination with an acknowledgment that identity is also not agentive, but in many ways rooted to elements beyond the control of the individual. This is her constant refrain of “singularity”:

Singularity that is neither crazy, sporty, faddish, or a fashion, or low class with distinction, such a singularity, I say, we have not made enough of yet so that any other one can really know it, it is as yet an unknown product with us. It takes time to make queer people, and to have others who can know it, time and a certainty of place and means. Custom, passion, and a feel for mother earth are needed to breed vital singularity in any man, and alas, how poor we are in all these three. (21)

Instead of elevating a particular model of singularity (a paradise of queerness), she offers a contingent context for all types of non-normative behavior¹⁰³. Queer people, singular people, are not simply what society wants to term singular or queer, but must arise out of contexts of customs and traditions that gradually are discarded by these “singular” individuals. Musil, in his

¹⁰³ I particularly argue for this because of Lisa Ruddick’s treatment of “singular” as meaning simply “lesbian” (63); although it is certainly relevant to the discourse of sexuality in Stein, and my intent is certainly not to erase the particular possibilities of “lesbian” within the novel, I do think it is reductive to Stein’s methodology in the novel to simply read biographical details as “determining” the meaning of the text. Ruddick reads specific iterations of sexuality at every phase of the novel, arguing that even the coda, with its emphasis on ‘family living,’ Stein is really just “tak[ing] out its ideological rage” (128). This seems to me to say more about Ruddick’s rage than Stein’s.

condemnation of the “great” authors, who like to gather crowds with their dogmas, asserts that such an ego must “sehr viele Gleichgesinnte haben, damit er für einen ungewöhnlichen Geist gilt” (373). Rather than an easily-identifiable cadre of “Eigenschaften” by which the “queer” can be recognized and taxonomized, Stein asserts, “there are many ways of having queerness in many men and women. There are many who have not any such queerness in them, many have things in them that others around them sometime think queer in them but there are many who have not such a kind of queerness in them that makes really a character in them” (195). How you come to be distinguished from those around you is not by having your queerness align with recognizable signs of “difference,” but by recognizing your own contingency.

Arnheim is the ultimate example of a staged singularity, whose ability to impress and to remain talked about is a function not of his ability to recognize the contingency of his own identity, but the “secret of totality” which he exudes everywhere he goes:

Die Grundgestalt seines Erfolgs war überall die gleiche; umgeben von dem Zauberschein seines Reichtums und dem Gerücht seiner Bedeutung, mußte er immer mit Menschen verkehren, die ihn auf ihrem Gebiet überragten, aber er gefiel ihnen als Fachfremder mit überraschenden Kenntnissen von ihrem Fach und schüchterte sie ein, indem er in seiner Person Beziehungen ihrer Welt zu anderen Welten darstellte, von denen sie keine Ahnung hatten. (193)

He becomes important through the exterior characteristics attached to him, in particular because so many of them stick to him, though he doesn’t excel at anything in particular, other than the ability to market his own name. Precisely because he is *not* singular, but is only able to market to all those willing to buy into his singularity, he is successful; willing to doubt themselves, others capitulate to his deluded self-confidence. This is what Stein diagnoses as well:

Some of such of them sometimes then make melodrama of themselves to themselves to hold themselves together to them. Some of such of them make of themselves to themselves and sometimes to other ones that know them a melodrama of themselves to make to themselves each one of themselves a whole one to themselves and sometimes to make of themselves a whole one to others around them. (312)

The inability to be “whole” becomes, for Stein, the impetus to create a melodramatic account of the self which always postulates a pre-existing essence from which all the drama has been generated. But it is the inability to exist on its own terms that leads this type to seek melodrama, and to seek wholeness, to prove it to others. In contrast to this are those who exist only in the particular; Ulrich comes to be suspicious of the normative mode of science, that it combines traits from all in a species, or rounds up or down, and generally relies on norms instead of paying attention to all the contradictory pieces of evidence: “vielleicht ist dieser Unterschied so wichtig, daß er das Gemeinsame aufheben kann? ... Alles hat teil am Allgemeinen, und noch dazu ist es besonders. Alles ist wahr, und noch dazu ist es wild und mit nichts vergleichbar” (572). This seems to be Stein’s method writ large: everything exists in particulars, is not comparable according to exterior terms, only those generated from the interaction between particulars.

Stein’s method doggedly pursues the “one” as much as the “kind”, and in so doing wishes to show the dynamic interaction between consciousness, environment, agency, and identity:

There are many kinds of men and many millions of each kind of them, there are many kinds of women and there are many millions made of each kind of them, there are many children of these many men and many women and the kinds are often very much mixed up in them but more and more the kind that really is in each of of them more and more as one knows them it comes out to be clear in each one of them. ... Some kinds of them

have much more of an individual being as a nature in them than there is in other kinds ...

All this will come out slowly as it is written down about them, it comes out slowly in the living that every body is every day doing with all the many kinds of them. (116)

Here the interaction between “each” and their “kind” is a matter of individuality and categorization; each categorizes herself as it becomes clear to her, as she sees resonances in those around her¹⁰⁴. This *method*, rather than any *trait*, seems to be what is at stake in recognizing a “kind”—that they have similar methods of recognizing themselves as a discrete category. It is specifically through “writing,” though, that these resonances become clear—in my own terms, a *genealogy* is required, not one linking all individuals to an originary type, but one which tracks successive stages in each, elucidates a typology not through dead taxonomies but through living associations.

Musil also contrasts organic communities with those sustained only by the combined alienation of technology and society. While he is not interested in asserting a nostalgic Arcadia, Musil does level criticism at the “überamerikanische Stadt” he sees swallowing all difference into a regime of mass modernity; its perfect rhythm is maintained by a dogmatic belief in the efficacy of its organization: “durch nichts so viel von der gemeinsamen Kraft verschleudert wird wie durch die Anmaßung, daß man berufen sei, ein bestimmtes persönliches Ziel nicht locker zu lassen” (31). As everyone is caught up in the belief that they are pursuing their own individual goals, they expend ceaseless energy undermining each other. Ulrich identifies this tendency to demand subordination in Walter, in Lindner, in Hans, and in Schmeißer, the gardner’s Communist son. As he observes him, he can see that for all his anti-bourgeois talk, he is just as

¹⁰⁴ In her discussion of Stein’s method, Tanya Clement explains how “each” and “one” take on co-constitutive dimensions: “recognizing another person’s singularity had as much to do with Stein’s identity as it had to do with her recognition of someone else’s; there was a contradiction between remembering and experiencing the complete rhythm or singularity of a personality, and between experiencing and expressing that personality” (445).

ecstatic at being caught up in a “movement” for political and economic reform as any eager neophyte: “den gleichen Wert haben Überzeugungen; die Einbildung, an ‘großen Ereignissen’ teilzunehmen; der Schimmer ‘großer Ideen’; Vorurteile; der Glaube an das Menschengeschlecht; an die Zukunft; an Gott; an die Vergangenheit usw. All dies vereinfacht die Welt auf ein erträgliches Maß und ohne dies würde sie als eine ungeheure Unordnung erscheinen” (1632). For Ulrich, this desire to submit chaotic experience and particularities into a totalizing order is what underlies all reform movements, and conservative movements as well: the expectation that by reducing people into “viewpoints,” you have simplified life into manageable pieces.

This contradictory desire to perceive yourself as very clever by identifying with one dogmatic group in order to distance yourself from the rest of the ‘herd’ is what underlies Hans’ pursuit of racial theory, Lindner’s pursuit of religion, Walter’s pursuit of art, and Schmeißer’s pursuit of socialism. Walter’s visions of being a fish among a school are partially fulfilled when he joins up with the crowd marching to Leinsdorf’s palace to protest: “die Menschen, denen er in großen Mengen begegnete, erinnerten ihn an seinen Traum; der Eindruck einer beweglichen Eile ging von ihnen aus, und eine Zusammengehörigkeit, die ihm weit ursprünglicher vorkam, als es die gewöhnliche, durch Verstand, Moral, und kluge Sicherungen besorgte ist, machte eine freie, lockere Gemeinschaft aus ihnen” (625). He is enamored with the possibilities of this free association, without all the normal trappings of identity. But the cohesion of the group entirely depends upon these identifiers, suppressed in the pursuit of a ‘universal’ political action—they are almost all white, middle-class, middle-aged, Austrian males. For Walter, so insecure in his relations with Clarisse, the homosocial bond becomes something he willingly submits to, and finds a primary identification with. Stein also shows how constitutive this homosociality is with her discussion of the nameless father of Anna, Bertha, and Cora: “there was nothing wrong about

him, anybody could see in him that he was a man and there are many of them made just like him ... with other men around them, existence in them gets to be a little stronger inside them, they come almost to feel themselves to be inside in them ... when they are alone with women or with children they have never in them anything of such a feeling” (99). They are constituted almost entirely by the sense of sameness they cultivate with those around them, and this seems to be clear only to the women excluded from it, like Stein, and like Rachel, who has spent a lifetime serving groups of men. When she is thrown into a bizarre conjugal relation with Moosbrugger in the *Nachlass*, she is initially worried that she’ll have to develop an entirely new mode of relations with him, as a criminal, but finds that “in der Tat, wer in der richtigen Beziehung zu Verbrechern lebt, lebt zwischen ihnen so sicher wie zwischen anderen Menschen” (1586). This seems to cut both ways, showing that criminal society is just as safe as ‘normal’ society, and also that normal society is just as ‘dangerous’ for a woman like Rachel as her relationship with Moosbrugger is. Her recognition is shrewd, and it points to the easy assumption that men engage in that they are among neutral equals when in fact difference is excluded¹⁰⁵.

This is what underlies Diotima’s salon—an unrecognized performance of group feeling which stands in for a real community. Ulrich notices this and mocks both Diotima’s pretensions and the completely artificial ‘connections’ being formed between participants in the Parallelaktion: “im Grunde entspringt auch wirklich alle solche gewaltsame Geselligkeit wie die bei ihr, wenn sie nicht ganze naiv und roh ist, dem Bedürfnis, einen menschliche Einheit vorzutäuschen, welche die so sehr verschiedenen menschlichen Betätigungen umfassen soll und niemals vorhanden ist” (101). For him, union is impossible, and this need to pretend for a union means that these communities only exist in self-assuring performance, and overeager ones at that.

¹⁰⁵ Disturbingly, this is precisely Glaubitz’s predilection in her discussion of the “normal man” in both Musil and Stein—she ignores gender completely, posing the central question for both authors as being “How can the idea of ‘average man,’ of statistical persons, be reconciled with traditional character-centered narration?” (318).

Instead, the commonalities that exist aren't ever on the level of consciousness, and can only become evident through outside intervention and analysis; considering how the cult of the New pushes for the same objectives in different ways, he synthesizes all the competing voices and movements: "sie hatten einen gemeinsame Atem; würde man jene Zeit zerlegt haben, so würde ein Unsinn herausgekommen sein wie ein eckiger Kreis" (55). He eventually recognizes this tendency even in himself, that what he has been pursuing in Agathe has been sameness clothed as difference, and has been a sustained attempt to live something radically different, without considering the problems of asserting an outsider's position. As their trip into the "thousand-year kingdom" breaks down, Ulrich bitterly says:

"Wir müssen uns nach einem Dritten umsehn. Der uns zuschaut, beneidet oder Vorwürfe macht." Er blieb vor ihr stehn und sagte langsam: "Zwischen zwei einzelnen Menschen gibt es keine Liebe!" Ag. richtete sich auf einem Ellbogen auf und lag da, mit großen Augen, als ob sie den Tod erwartete. –Wir sind einem Impuls gegen die Ordnung gefolgt – wiederholte A. – Eine Liebe kann aus Trotz erwachsen, aber sie kann nicht aus Trotz bestehn. Sondern, sie kann nur eingefügt in eine Gesellschaft bestehn. Sie is kein Lebensinhalt. Sondern eine Verneinung, eine Ausnahme von den Lebensinhalten. Aber eine Ausnahme braucht etwas, wovon sie Ausnahme ist. (1673)

He realizes that his pursuit of the singular, the queer, the outside, has been plagued with an oppositional rhetoric, "aus Trotz" rather than for its own pleasure; their incestuous union requires vanilla sex in order to be appealing, and in so doing it engages in the very abstractions they are wishing to escape from.

The paradox of an outsider's perspective is that it requires a set of abstractions to flatten others before inscribing itself as the distinct contrasting figure. Stein acknowledges this as well:

Mostly every one is in some way a distinguished man or a distinguished woman inside themselves to themselves from something, from doing, being something, from not doing or being something, from doing things like some one, from doing things like every one, from doing things better or worse than some one, from doing things not so well or better than almost any one, from doing something and not doing some other thing, from doing some things and never doing some other things, there is every kind of thing that can give distinction. (448)

The difficulty in this “distinction” is both the violence it does to others as well as the fact that it is almost entirely caught up within actions—it becomes descriptive rather than generative, and can only assert its individuality in a negative state. Mabel Linker shows the two sides to this; on the one hand, through an obliviousness to this paranoid sense of ‘distinction’ she is able to really generate original things: “she had sensitive being in her to the point of creation, she was not of the kind of women that have instrument nature in them, she never did any one’s living, she always did her own living, when she loved her own loving” (216). But though she is allowed to create when she is oblivious, when her world comes in conflict with those of others, she becomes an individual only through the need to police her into conformity; initially, those around her aren’t interested in her seeming feeling-lessness, but “later, feeling in Mabel became more important to those that knew her. Later there was a question in the mind of every one who knew her what kind of feeling she had in her. Later every one came to feel about her that mostly she had not any feeling in her” (220). Because she does not display what others consider ‘natural’ feelings and reactions, she is condemned by an otherwise indifferent society. Stein’s point seems to be that individuality really only exists in the negative, in failing to adhere to norms that are imaginary contracts anyway.

For Stein, group identity gains salience both through an internal recognition of sameness as well as through the negative identification of others: “very often very many who are being living come together and they are together then and very many are very willing that very many should be doing this thing should be coming together and very many are not very willing that very many should come together and very many are in some way telling about this thing” (839). Through the wish that others should not be allowed to cohere, identity is formed; this is also what Musil asserts about Austria: “denn nicht nur die Abneigung gegen den Mitbürger war dort bis zum Gemeinschaftsgefühl gesteigert, sondern es nahm auch das Mißtrauen gegen die eigene Person und deren Schicksal den Charakter tiefer Selbstgewißheit an” (34). Self-assurance and distrust here are intimately linked—the wish to forbid others grows as you consider yourself more distinct. Although the identities of any nationality, ethnicity, religion, race, or class can only ever become more interlocking with continued contact, the wish to maintain distinctions leads to the paranoid reaction of asserting negative identity, to combat the helpless feeling that you are not in control of the meaning of the identifiers attached to you. Ulrich also feels this in a rare moment of vulnerability; attacking Hans Sepp for his utterly illogical, inconsistent and naïve belief in the “community” of German-speakers, Ulrich pauses, noting his own implication in what he is accusing them of:

Er sah wohl klar, daß der gezähmte Egoismus, aus dem sich das Leben aufbaut, ein geordnetes Gefüge ergibt, wogegen der Atem der Gemeinsamkeit nur ein Inbegriff unklarer Zusammenhänge bleibt, und er war für seine Person sogar ein zur Absonderung neigender Mensch, aber es ging ihm eigentümlich nahe, wenn die jungen Freunde Gerdas ihre ausschweifende Behauptung von der großen Mauer aufstellten, die überstiegen werden müsse. (556)

He recognizes his own implication in their determination to reach an “outside”, and finds that he can distinguish this naïveté only by virtue of having passed through it. This is similar to Stein’s insistence on viewing all stages of human life, from infancy to death, because you can recognize the passage of time really only in others: “they know in them by looks and looking at other ones” (517). Only through the proximity of others with difference and sameness, are you able to recognize in yourself particular modes of development, both those that you have engaged in as well as those you haven’t. This is what Ulrich and Agathe see from their hideout in the garden, perceiving the world of the possible through the bars of the world of the real: “heute wußten sie, daß die Welt, wie sie ist, allenthalben gebrochen erscheint durch eine Welt, wie sie sein könnte, weil zwischen den Widersprüchen der Mensch an Mensch bindenden Gefühle und durch die Löcher aller höheren Absichten dunkel der Spiegel eines ekstatischen Lebens hervorschaut” (1337). This “ecstatic” life is only accessible through the interpenetration of the proximal Other, but it is possible to break through it at any point, by seizing on the feelings which bind person to person and pushing through to another mode of relation, neither bound by convention, nor set in opposition to it¹⁰⁶.

The treatment of history becomes another marker of how identity can be used either generatively or dogmatically; against the attempt to assert an ahistorical, universal perspective, Ulrich says, “man kann seiner eignen Zeit nicht böse sein, ohne selbst Schaden zu nehmen” (59). This is Ulrich’s criticism of Walter, whose blasé rejection of modernity is a ruse through which he can easily see, as Walter is in fact very successful in his own time, through precisely the pose of afflicted and belated artist he adopts. The ‘diagnostic’ mode in which Walter engages is one

¹⁰⁶ Judith Ryan, in her discussion of Musil’s use of empiricism and psychology in *The Vanishing Subject*, emphasizes that the ecstatic state is not glimpse “into another world but another way of seeing this one. The person experiencing does not move out of the ‘self’: rather, that complex bundle of elements we call self and world changes its relational structure” (221).

that easily morphs into a moralizing, pedagogical tone; this is what “The Past” becomes for David Hersland; “his early living was not, then in his middle living, in him, in his feeling. It was in him as part of him, it came out of him sometimes in talking, it was not in him then in his middle living nor in his later living, it was not in him then in his feeling” (273). Because it does not come out in his feeling, and only through his talking, it is not preserved as something distinct, and therefore it becomes simply “bragging, illustration, moralizing” (274). Instead of enlivening and personalizing the past, it becomes a foreign object, a good, or as Arnheim expresses it, part of a “Warenmarkt” of “Geist” (407). When the historical loses its particularity, it enters into an amoral market exchange in which nothing has intrinsic value; this is what Ulrich perceives as he looks at architecture and fashion and sees how different historical periods are thrown together. Their easy interchangeability signifies for him the moral bankruptcy of the *bricoleur*: “darum schien ihm auch das, was man Wechsel oder gar Fortschritt der Zeiten nennt, nur ein Wort dafür zu sein, daß kein Versuch bis dorthin kommt, wo sich alle vereinen müßten” (872). The modern valuation of the “new” leaves an emphasis on ahistoricity on the one hand, which shows how unable we are to synthesize or consider the claims of what has come before, and on the other shows the mania to assert “progress,” however dubious it may be. To take seriously the intellectual and emotional endeavors of the past is to emerge from a sense of indeterminate pastness or eternal present into a sharp consciousness of the possibilities of both the historical and the contemporary.

The inability to recall, or the desire to live in an eternal present represents one of the major failures of identity in both novels; the mother of Anna, Bertha, and Cora is among these: “she had real existence in her but she had no importance inside her, there was nothing in her to connect her to a past a present or a future” (100). To exist without duration is really not to exist

at all; without a sense of history, any particular event that happens to her can be assimilated, because there is no narrative coherence, and very little identity. Musil describes the dangers of not being able to distinguish as well: “denn zum Stattfinden gehört doch auch, daß etwas in einem bestimmten Jahr und nicht in einem anderen oder gar nicht stattfindet; und es gehört dazu, daß es selbst stattfindet und nicht am Ende bloß etwas Ähnliches oder seinesgleichen” (360). Without a sense of historical consciousness, events are rolled into an eternal present, in which everything is interchangeable or equally relevant and learning is impossible, as evidenced by the Herslands; “very many are not all their living learning anything from the experience they have with themselves in their living. This is very common. Alfred Hersland in a way was such a one. All the Hersland men in a way were such ones in their being” (576). The inability to consider past experiences leads to a fixity in which only changes in circumstances register, and changes in their own identity are glossed over. Curiously, this is also the fate of the poor people living around the Herslands as well: “in all of such families no one ever asked about the things around them, and no one ever talked about the queer ways anybody else had in him. All that was existing for any of them were the things that happened to them” (96). Though there is certainly a danger to an identity created by gossip, insinuation, and a narrative of ‘progression,’ there is clearly also a danger in not being able to talk about change, or even notice that it is occurring: “there is nothing for them except their daily living which is all there is then of them” (97). The inability to think metacognitively about their situation and position leads them to remain where they are, defined by an eternal present in which conflicts unroll without genealogies, without precedent. Though Stein is hardly advocating an othering dialogue about “queer ways,” she seems to emphasize that without talking about qualitative difference, especially through the strangeness of the past, there is no category to recognize strangeness or difference in the present.

Stein's interest in telling the "whole history" of every kind of being is tied very intimately to this need to preserve the absolute difference and strangeness of the past¹⁰⁷; without this, history merely becomes a easily-assimilable morality tale. For her,

It is a very strange thing this thing and an interesting thing that almost not any one is to any one is to themselves inside them one having been in all parts of being living. That is to say it is very striking one man is writing about some one and that one about whom that one is writing is to that one say an old man. That one writing tells about that man being a young one, tells about that man being a middle aged one and always it is a description of the old man who was once a young man, a child, a middle aged man, it is not a description of a young man a middle aged man or a child. ... I am not saying that not any one can be feeling more than one stage of being in themselves, in any other one, but I am really almost saying this thing. (731)

With her emphasis on the absolute division between stages in human life, Stein can't entirely say that knowledge of "being" across the lifespan is possible, but through this act of description—in which difference is narrated and recognized—it is *almost* possible. The ability to think backwards can be paralyzing, but it is also the first target for elimination in almost every ultra-modern, forward-thinking regime; the past must become a clear narrative in which all that came before was insufficient and inhuman. This is Hans Sepp's proto-fascist claim, that all who came before failed to make the great "sacrifice" required to usher in his glorious Germanic future; Ulrich refutes this, cynically saying "es muß wirklich an überwundenen Zeiten etwas daran gewesen sein," schloß sich Ulrich an 'sonst wären doch nicht so viele nette Menschen einst mit

¹⁰⁷ Kelley Wagers discusses Stein's use of the historical, and identifies two strategies Stein deploys to resist the totalizing nature of a "whole" history; the first is the use of "democratic representations" of individuals, and the second is the "incoateness" of the text; through Stein's ability to listen carefully to individuals, and yet not subsume their particularity, she "represents an open synchronic existence instead of a prescribed linear development" (34)

ihnen einverstanden gewesen. Vielleicht ließe sich das für uns ausnützen, ohne große Opfer zu bringen?“ (485). This “etwas” is both the human element in common between past and present, as well as the absolute difference that must be preserved. It leaves the observer willing to engage with it wondering, as does Ulrich, looking at a family photo album, “warum haben sie eigentlich alle gelebt? fragte sich Ulrich. Aber er würde zu dieser Zeit etwas darum gegeben haben, wenn er noch einmal mit Tante Jane hätte sprechen dürfen” (457). Tante Jane comes alive for Ulrich through her photographs, and the stories he remembers her telling, and he realizes that through engagement with this familiar—but distinctly othered—narrative he could come to conclusions about how to live in his own time and place.

Ulrich’s moments of desire for the past are few, but powerful; the experience with Tante Jane is one, and his trip with Agathe is another; here, for the first time, “er sehnte sich nach Vergangenheit” (1666). Narrative is the means of coming to meaningful conclusions about the difference and importance of the past, which Stein explains in her own obtuse manner:

In a way it is a gentle thing to be one being not any longer living that is to say it is a gentle thing to be one having done something and doing that thing was not a gentle thing not at all a gentle thing. It is a gentle thing to be one being one not any more doing the thing that one was doing and it is a gentle thing to tell about that thing by some other one the thing that one was doing. Doing a thing is not quite a gentle thing, and having done the thing is almost a gentle thing, and some one telling about it when that one is not ever doing a thing is a gentle thing and discussing that thing the thing done is a very gentle thing. (857)

Here she builds a sort of ‘hierarchy’ of gentleness; it is *not* gentle to do a thing, having done it is *almost* gentle, but telling about that same thing *is very gentle*. The gentleness is not in simply

fitting that “thing” into an undifferentiated narrative, but reflection first becomes possible when the past is in the past, when the action can be said to have come to a close. Only through this telling and discussing do resonances, problems, and possibilities become evident. This is also Musil’s perspective, as he speaks about the search for a solution in mathematical terms:

Was man ein Zeitalter nennt – ohne zu wissen, ob man Jahrhunderte, Jahrtausende oder die Spanne zwischen Schule und Enkelkind darunter verstehen soll–, dieser breite, unregelmäßige Fluß von Zuständen würde dann ungefähr ebensoviel bedeuten wie ein planloses Nacheinander von ungenügenden und einzeln genommen falschen Lösungsversuchen, aus denen, erst wenn die Menschheit sie zusammenzufassen versteht, die richtige und totale Lösung hervorgehen könnte. (358)

The possibility of a “richtige und totale Lösung” is, in Steinian terms, only possible through a “whole history of every kind of being”; only through the recognition of transhistorical and cross-cultural phenomena—through examination of *all* relations, *all* attempts, *all* outcomes—is any solution possible. And it is only through narrative that this is possible, but narrative *not written by historians*. Musil is quite adamant about this, that “größtenteils entsteht Geschichte aber ohne Autoren. Sie entsteht nicht von einem Zentrum her, sondern von der Peripherie. Aus kleinen Ursachen” (361). There is a radical democracy to this history-making, that it is possible, in Steinian terms, for “any one” to synthesize the available “Ursachen” and come up with a comprehensive narrative. And this history is far more likely, for him, to emerge from common circumstances than from any ‘great author’ of history or fiction, with their dogmas and entourages.

Although these self-promoting authors represent a danger to Musil, to Stein the danger seems to be simply in not writing in the first place; the difference between those who are able to

come to insight and those who don't can be seen in David Hersland, the younger. He seems to also be an important test case for Stein in distinguishing between an understanding perspective and a truly incisive method for examining life. She references again and again that David doesn't "ever really completely" accomplish what he intends; "he was one certainly not completely asking about each one being the one that one is in being living" (815), and then "he was not ever really completely needing to be explaining everything. He was not ever completely explaining everything" (816). To Stein, the step from almost completely explaining to completely explaining seems to be the process of working it out to completion in writing:

Some one is doing something. Some have done something. What they have done they have done and they worked then and they did a thing and certainly it was a complete thing quite a complete thing and it was not so gently a complete thing as it is when some other ones are seeing it a completed thing. Some one has done something. It is a completed thing, a quite complete thing. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. It is all done. It is a complete thing. It was done by some one. The one that did that thing began it and went on with it and finished it. It is a complete thing. Any one can see it and every one is certain that it is a complete thing, and some are certain that it is a complete thing and some are feeling it to be a complete thing and they are telling about it as being existing, a complete thing, and certainly it is a complete thing, and certainly then it is in a way a gentle thing, that is to say a gently complete thing, that is to say a thing that is a complete thing and some are certain of this thing. (860)

The *process* of writing is here neither gentle nor complete, but the process of reading and considering completes it, because the method of reflection employed is given opportunity to either expand and become fruit-bearing, or to remain shadowy and unlivable. This seems to be

the difference between the eternal critic, David, and Stein, the creator; she is capable of generative completion.

David Hersland's inability to come to complete certainty is also carried by Ulrich, whose necessary contemporaneity with the narrative leaves him unable to fully account for his own imbeddedness in his method. Speaking to Agathe about reality, and reproducibility, he says,

sie zeigt sich in unseren Erlebnissen und Forschungen nie anders wie durch ein Glas, das teils den Blick durchläßt, teils den Hineinblickenden widerspiegelt ... Man kann irgendetwas in sehr verschiedener Hinsicht als das genaue Abbild von etwas anderem auffassen ... Das ist ein sehr allgemeiner und sehr unsinnlicher Begriff von Bildlichkeit. Er setzt ein bestimmtes Verhältnis zweier Bereiche voraus und gibt zu verstehen, daß es sich als Abbildung auffassen lasse, wenn es sich ohne Ausnahme über beide erstrecke.

(1342)

Here he speaks to the impossibility of separating the subjective from the objective relation to objects and people around him. To him, this wide-spread belief in the ability to clearly diagnose imitation and originality is founded on a false notion of objectivity, because it assumes a predetermined hierarchy of subject to object, which is never clear from the outset, and rarely in hindsight either. Stein's novel is also very involved in blurring these lines of subjectivity and objectivity, as she consistently interrupts her analysis to describe her feelings, of euphoria as well as melancholy. She announces that "I would like certainly to be sometime in love some with every one, to have every one sometime in love with me and then I would be certain what way each one had loving being being in them" (658), thereby discounting the objective stance of the researcher, implicating herself in the affective dimension of her work, which she elsewhere calls "a history of the way I love it" (291). When she is saddened by the inability to love, to

experience, to understand everyone, she wishes to live with every one, but “I do not want to realise each thing they are experiencing, I do not care anything about such a thing, all that I am needing to be one being living is to be realising completely how each one is experiencing, with what feeling, thinking, believing, creating” (729). She also merges this with her own bodily experiences:

It should come out of me without pressing without any straining in me to be pressing, I can be doing thinking to be helping, I should not be doing any pressing and any straining, I have been doing a little it has not come to be a complete thing simply coming, it is to be then to rebegin to come out from me. Always each thing must come out completely from me leaving me inside me just then gently empty, so pleasantly and weakly gently empty, that is a happy way to have it come out of me each one that is making itself in me. (586)

The birth imagery in this section is unavoidable, and is closely tied to the “fructifying” method she describes elsewhere; the novel is not a detachable object, but one tied into her experiences, her body, her own history¹⁰⁸.

The novel of humor, abstraction, genre and convention is what Musil and Stein identify *against* in order to demonstrate the possibilities of their own methods. For Musil, the line seems clearly drawn between Arnheim, the Great Author, dealing in total abstraction, and Ulrich, whose frustrations with writing and conventions of expression lead him to assert that he’d rather commit suicide than write a book. And yet, when offered the chance to become Arnheim’s secretary, he thinks about it in very explicitly narrative terms. As he walks home, he remembers himself as a little boy and sees the image as his mother would see it, full of hope and expectation, and for Ulrich, “hatte das Ganze doch vor allem den Eindruck auf ihn gemacht,

¹⁰⁸ Lisa Ruddick interprets this passage as specifically anal/excretory rather than vaginal/parturitory, as part of her long discussion of anal imagery in the novel (77); the vagueness of Stein’s language could obviously point to either, but I think the point, either way, is that it identifies an embodied discharge with her method of writing itself.

einem großen Schreck entronnen zu sein” (648). This great terror he feels is tied to what he senses is a general mode of perception in which the individual feels that everything works together to justify his own position, “daß unbewußt etwas entsteht, worin man sich Herr im Hause fühlt” (649). In his analysis of why this feeling, and desire for this feeling, are lacking in him, Ulrich comes to the conclusion “daß das Gesetz dieses Lebens, nach dem man sich, überlastet und von Einfalt träumend, sehnt, kein anderes sei als das der erzählerischen Ordnung!” (650). As soon as you are able to put magical words like “when” “after” or “before,” you abstract yourself from your situation, and perceive yourself as the “master” of it:

Die meisten Menschen sind im Grundverhältnis zu sich selbst Erzähler. Sie lieben nicht die Lyrik, oder nur für Augenblicke, und wenn in den Faden des Lebens auch ein wenig ‘weil’ und ‘damit’ hineingeknüpft wird, so verabscheuen sie doch alle Besinnung, die darüber hinausgreift: sie lieben das ordentliche Nacheinander von Tatsachen, weil es einer Notwendigkeit gleichsieht. (650)

For Musil, this need to place in order—in a careful “nacheinander” of cause and effect—becomes a self-serving method in life and in art. Arnheim, as such an author and such a man, represents the danger in this mode of authorship which loves order and causality, and avoids all which doesn’t fit into the narrative he is presenting. These novels have neat endings, clear plots, and identifiable themes. And to Musil, they are terrifying¹⁰⁹.

Henry Dehning seems in some ways to represent the dangers of this mode of self-narration for Stein; and the fact that he is also a successful businessman seems related to his inability to tolerate complications. In opposition to what she describes at the beginning of the

¹⁰⁹ Hans-Joachim Pieper, in his discussion of Musil’s relation to Mach and Nietzsche, concentrates on Musil’s conscious decision to resist “erzählerische Ordnung” by spinning out a horizontal surface rather than a causal thread; “eines der auffälligsten Merkmale dieses Romans besteht darin, daß sich trotz zahlreicher Begegnungen und kleiner Abenteuer keine Handlung, kein Geschehen ergibt. Selbst der sich durchhaltende Erzählstrang über die sogenannte ‘Parallelaktion’ führt nur zu der inhaltsleeren ‘Parole der Tat’ (145).

novel, which is a man recognizing in himself that which he so earnestly despised in his own father, Henry Dehning is completely incapable of that act of recognition: “it is strange how all forget when they have once made things for themselves to be very different. A man like Dehning never can feel it real to himself, things as they were in his early manhood, now that he has made his life and habits and his feelings all so different” (7). This forgetting is tied to the self-narrative, the rags-to-riches narrative which, once it has established itself in the new order, sets about to erase anything about the ‘rags’ portion which doesn’t fit into the neat new worldview. David Hersland, senior, also seems to have this kind of being which exercises constant control over narrative; Stein speaks of the addiction of his “kind” to their own ‘bigness’ as being, among a number of things, “some have it so much in them that they have Arabian nights inside them” (121). Here the Arabian nights seem to signify, for David, a paranoid and insecure need to establish his own power over narrative, and to execute anything which doesn’t fit into the novel of masculine achievement he is trying to write with his big exploits.

For Musil, this obsession with clean-swept narratives also has much to do with *Eigenschaften*; he laments the mutability of humans, namely that they are unable to recognize how fundamentally they contradict the trajectory of their own self-narratives; although they could be the complete opposite of what they were before, “sie adoptieren den Mann, der zu ihnen gekommen ist, dessen Leben sich in sie eingelebt hat, seine Erlebnisse erscheinen ihnen jetzt als der Ausdruck ihrer Eigenschaften, und sein Schicksal ist ihr Verdienst oder Unglück” (131). This constant reading of the present, and adjustment, is the terrifying potential of stories to shape behavior and to allow people to compartmentalize their identity with pleasant adverbs like “before”. For Stein, too, the danger in stories is related to violence to characteristics; of Julia Dehning, she says, “and so those who read much in story books surely now can tell what to

expect of her, and yet, please reader, remember that this is perhaps not the whole of our story either, neither her father for her, nor the living down her mother who is in her, for I am not ready yet to take away the character from our Julia” (15). Narrative, specifically of the convention-rich, storybook variety, comes to signify the violence against character, the robbing of complexity, which Stein so actively resists.

Agathe experiences this same frustration when she finally opens up about her first husband, and Ulrich responds with a cold, clinical diagnosis of the sort of ‘narrative’ into which it fits, especially as he sees it as being merely an extension of the same love story in which he was involved with Valerie. She recognizes in this a tendency (an accurate recognition, since it dooms their later relationship) to view everything between them with an anxious comparison to what a ‘normal’ love affair looks like. After they withdraw from the *Parallelaktion*, they begin to spend their afternoons in the garden together; Agathe looks at him:

“Er will nicht, daß es bloß eine Liebesgeschichte werden soll,” dachte sie; und fügte hinzu: “Das ist auch mein Geschmack.” Und gleich darauf dachte sie: “Er wird keine andre Frau nach mir lieben, denn dies ist keine Liebesgeschichte mehr; das ist überhaupt die letzte Liebesgeschichte, die es geben kann!” Und sie fügte hinzu; “Wir werden wohl einen Art Letzte Mohikaner der Liebe sein!” (1094)

This conscious self-identification with stories is what leads to disaster again and again in the novel, from Walter and Clarisse’s Wagnerian struggles to Meingast’s Platonic pedophilia to Lindner’s stylization of himself as St. George; in each case, the sense of identifying *with* a particular narrative in order to escape another has disastrous consequences. So too in *The Making of Americans*; Philip Redfern and Martha Hersland’s triumphant engagement is the result of a mutual misreading; “you are a comrade and a woman,” he cried out in his pleasure, ‘It is the

new world' ... They spent much time in explaining to each other what neither quite understood. He never quite felt the reality of her simple convictions, she never quite realized what it was he did not understand" (433). Philip, in response to this lack of understanding, turns his marriage into a copy of his parents'—a "spectacle of armed neutrality" (430), as Stein calls it—thereby attempting to fit Martha into a pre-arranged narrative, while she re-enacts her own parents' dysfunctional separate existence.

For these cases, the danger seems not so much to be in identifying with or against a narrative, but in being unable to distinguish yourself from it, seeing only a fatalistic train of cause and effect. Stein gives the curious description of a "resisting" person who is not "engulfing" but thinks that she is:

this made this one in her inside her in her feeling and often in her talking melodramatic in description ... Feeling herself to be being an engulfing one gave to this one melodramatic sensation of being an important one ... She had from this melodrama, in her later, a history inside her of the past living in her and this was of her as a completely dominantly engulfing being in her living. (569)

Melodrama and history have a very specific interaction here; her sense of being the star of her own melodrama, telling her "history inside her" to herself, allows her to warp her self-perception around that misconception. This seems to be the danger of having a history only *inside* you and never *exterior* to you (that is, written). Though written records certainly can be manipulated, and are not immune to flights of melodramatic self-importance, there seems to be something irreplaceably permanent in the ability of the written history to preserve contradiction in a spatial way that grants it superiority over a causal, belated, and self-editing internal history. Musil, too, emphasizes the possibilities of a non-purposive, un-teleological narrative mode, as Ulrich

considers the saying “the sun shines on the righteous and the unrighteous,” but only *first* on the righteous, and *then* on the unrighteous:

Nacheinander ist der Mensch doch auch lebendig und tot, Kind und Erwachsener, er straft und verzeiht so; ja diese Fähigkeit, Widerprechendes bloß nacheinander tun zu können, ließe sich geradezu verwenden, um das Wesen des Persönlichen zu definieren, denn überpersönliche Wesen, wie die Menschheit oder ein Volk oder eine Dorfbewohnerschaft, vermögen ihre Widersprüche nicht nur nacheinander zu begehn, sondern auch nebeneinander und durcheinander. (1398)

The flexible form of Musil’s novel allows for these contradictions to exist, and even thrive; this seems to be the importance of a “impersonal” corporation of ideas and characteristics, a community which allows difference to exist instead of stamping it out in favor of a pure outcome always clear from the beginning of the narrative.

And yet this impersonal history is paradoxically always caught up in individual bodies and lives and cannot exist as abstraction. Stein makes it clear what value this sort of a history would have, far beyond a merely clever novel: “sometime there will be then such a history of every one who ever was or is or will be living, and this is not for anybody’s reading, this is to give to everybody in their living the last end to being, it makes it so of them real being, it makes for each one who ever is or was or can be living a real continuing” (177). The history here *makes it real* to those living; the consciousness of being caught up in, implicit in, and integral to, a history, gives reality to being, gives it a sense of connection and distinction. This is also what Ulrich comes to understand about his “Selbstmord vs. schreiben” dilemma; where he initially thinks back to his “Teufelswette” with Tuzzi on the train to his father’s funeral, still caught up in his detached, experimental life in Vienna, “es fuhr ihn durch den Sinn, daß Gerda von ihm

verlangt hatte, er möge ein Buch darüber schreiben. Aber er wollte leben, ohne sich in einen wirklichen und einen schattenhaften Teil zu spalten ... Er erinnerte sich, leichthin gesagt zu haben, er werde wohl ein Buch schreiben oder sich töten müssen" (662). The author who does not write, or at least does not write what he ought to, is also present to Stein through David; his writing comes to stand in for life, "he did then write down that he was a troubled one and really he was not then a troubled one in the sense of being interested in that thing, in the sense of remembering anything of such a thing" (848). For David, this writing is not analytical, and is therefore not true; he writes what he wants to be instead of what he is, and produces a "shadowy" self, as Ulrich was afraid he would.

But Ulrich's relation to narrative becomes complicated as his valuation of both life and writing undergoes an inversion through his relationship with Agathe. When he explains the "Teufelswette" with Tuzzi to her, much later, his emphasis has changed:

"Ich aber habe ihm zugeschworen, daß ich mich töten werde, ehe ich der Versuchung unterliege, ein Buch zu schreiben; und ich habe es aufrichtig gemeint. Denn das, was ich schreiben könnte, wäre nichts als der Beweis, daß man auf eine bestimmte andere Weise zu leben vermag; daß ich aber ein Buch darüber schreibe, wäre zumindest der Gegenbeweis, daß ich nicht so zu leben vermag. Ich habe nicht erwartet, daß es anders kommen wird." (1278)

His need to write, demonstrated by his frenetic psychology essays, has surprised him, and he must account for it. The simple binary of living/dying and not-writing/writing is complicated by the way that his relationship with Agathe is determined by writing, and the fact that living with her has made writing necessary for him. The revelation that Agathe is reading what he writes changes the nature of his writing, and their relationship, and makes the writing a part of life, and

a part of their experiment, rather than separate from it. This is something Stein gestures toward as well:

You write a book and while you write it you are ashamed for every one must think you are a silly or a crazy one and yet you write it and you are ashamed, you know you will be laughed at or pitied by every one and you have a queer feeling and you are not very certain and you go on writing. Then some one says yes to it, to something you are liking, or doing or making and then never again can you have completely such a feeling of being afraid and ashamed that you had then when you were writing or liking the thing and not anyone had said yes about the thing. (485)

The struggle to create alone can produce any number of things, but once it has met a “yes” it enters into a moral equation, into an irrevocable relation between author and reader, and has entered the realm of the real, rather than the possible.

General von Stumm also recognizes the paradoxical relation of writing to events, not that meaning is always deferred until it becomes historical, but instead, “möchte ich behaupten, daß die Weltgeschichte früher geschrieben wird, als sie geschieht” (977). He claims this, in the chronology of the novel, just before the climactic meeting of the *Parallelaktion* in which Tuzzi eventually emerges victor, moving toward peace and war; Stumm’s insight is that the need for narrative draws the eye to details which may become important, that it writes in advance of events, ascribing to them meaning. This is an understanding of narrative outside of a teleological perspective; an understanding that it is constructed as it goes, and not after the fact¹¹⁰. Stein points to the transformative power of this ability to speak from within the narrative or context:

¹¹⁰ Melanie Taylor, in her reading of the Stein’s treatment of difference, also highlights the link between narrator and purposiveness: “teleologically, the ultimate dissolution of the narrator’s subject position has a pleasing logic: where conventional ‘meaning’ is dislodged, subjectivity is destabilized and may eventually become ‘unreadable.’ In other words, identity cannot meaningfully exist outside language if it is language that gives identity meaning” (38)

Some one and that one is quite reasonably an observing one is seeing some one sitting and that one is to very many looking an interesting enough one and then that one the one that is reasonably observing says of this one... that this one is certainly quite entirely a stupid one, that one can tell that by observing that one and knowing so that that one is not at all really an interesting thing. This one then tells about that one the one sitting and it is certainly true what the one telling is telling about that one, it is quite a good description and it is pleasantly then an astonishing thing to be certain that the one describing the other one from observation is extraordinarily of the same quality and having been having the same history in being living as the one that one has been describing and quite correctly describing. (749)

The astonishing element of this description is that it emerges from the “same history in being living,” that it is a critique launched from an imbedded, embodied relation, from within the narrative community to which both belong. This reading of one who is commonly held to be “interesting” but is in actuality “stupid” represents an alternative reading, more focused on the accuracy of the insight than the popularity of its content.

For narratives so sprawling and with such enormous casts of characters, both Musil and Stein consistently resist the temptation to distance themselves and “talk down” to their characters; instead, they show how the processes of recognition and insight are related to their imbeddedness within particular contexts. Agathe is a continual reminder to Ulrich that he too has a relative position, can be subjected to critique, and has emerged from a particular context, but this does not discount his insights, in fact it adds to them. As they talk about their memories from a sporadically shared childhood, they wonder, “können die Erinnerungen zweier Menschen, die von einer ihnen beiden bekannten Vergangenheit reden, nicht nur einander ergänzen, sondern

auch, ehe sie noch ausgesprochen sind, schon verschmelzen?“ (701). To “melt” their memories together is to recognize that the lines between their past and present, and between their own identities as brother and sister, are destabilized through the attempt to reach each other. This is a relation in which one perspective does not become the preferred, and the other subordinate to it; instead it becomes a creative, interpersonal enterprise. Ulrich is surprised by the power of this relation, that it has the potential to totally undermine his belief in his ability to see things with detachment; in speaking of Agathe’s choice to change the will, he acknowledges that “merkwürdigerweise übte ja das Verhalten seiner Schwester, das man tadeln mußte, wenn man es bewußt untersuchte, eine betörende Lockung aus, sobald man es miträumte; denn dann entschwand alles Strittige und Geteilte, und es bildete sich der Indruck einer leidenschaftlichen, bejahenden, zum Handeln drängenden Güte” (824). What appears to an outsider’s perspective an easily-judged action becomes for Ulrich, when he “dreams with” it, an entirely moral, life-affirming action. For Stein, too, the importance of the “Progress of a Family” is not for its moral value in an abstract sense of ‘progress,’ but because it is spoken *from the perspective of one caught up within it*; “that is the story that I mean to tell, for that is what really is and what I really know” (3). Like Ulrich, Stein refuses to abstract herself, separate herself, from the story, and so spins out its possible insights from within the family.

But contrary to the many normative assumptions about the family, for Stein this familial perspective isn’t a ‘natural’ state of being; it has to be negotiated within its context, ‘made,’ and recognized as such. The Hersland family shows this negotiation at work, as they each try to assert their independence while totally neglecting the mother who has a different way of relating to her world than their loud father. When Madeleine Wyman comes as a governess, and listens to the stories of Mrs. Hersland’s past, her sympathetic understanding, her “dreaming with,” afford

her a place of intimacy that disrupts the ‘natural’ order of the family. Stein speaks of Madeleine “owning” Mrs. Hersland’s early history through her listening:

It was by such owning that they [children] felt something cut off from them. A part that should have been them Madeleine Wyman held in possession. It was not of them then, it was cut off from them. It should have been then as a piece of the whole of each one of the three of them. Madeleine Wyman held it in possession. In their very later living they each one had it again in them. They came again to own their mother and their father in them (255).

What they come to realize is that this insight into their mother is not a biological inheritance, nor a social fact; it must be a conscious choice, an affirming decision to identify with instead of against. This comes only after her death, when they recognize through loss the facts of her history not as commonplaces of her time, but as struggles and insights in their own right; this then manages an ownership without instrumentalization through a recognition of contingency and difference.

The Hersland children have to confront their own abstraction, and come to view the preceding generation without a stable sense of what they were and meant, and consider what they dealt with on their own terms, in order to “own” the narrative of their mother again. Ulrich also pushes back against this blasé generational rhetoric in his discussion with Diotima about the possibilities of difference for the *Parallelaktion*: “aus sehr naheliegenden Gründen behandelt jede Generation das Leben, das sie vorfindet, als fest gegeben, bis auf das wenige, an dessen Veränderung sie interessiert ist. Das ist nützlich, aber falsch. Die Welt könnte ja in jedem Augenblick auch nach allen Richtungen verändert werden oder doch nach jeder beliebigen; es liegt ihr sozusagen in den Gliedern” (273). This belief that whatever preceded you is “fest” while

what you would like to change is negotiable leads to the same structural problem in generations; whatever the next generation perceives as its “Nachlass,” its inheritance, *that* is taken as stable, although precisely that sense of stability is what the preceding generation fought to establish, against what *they* felt was an unlivable, but stable, reality. Stein acknowledges that examining the proximal past, the immediately preceding generation, is the most difficult task of all, because we cannot, except through force of will and imagination, really see our parents as participating in the same flux that we feel, once we have seen the end result; “since there is no other way to do with our kind of thinking we will make our elders to be for us the grown old men and women in our stories, or the babies or the children” (6). To make them into older or younger people is to make stories about them, to abstract them into a “fest” history, rather than narrating *with*, seeing the possibilities that the world continually generates. In this way the family becomes an agent of possibility, when seen through a co-constitutive lens, rather than a predetermined reality.

Stein’s enthusiasm for narrating these co-constitutive traits and modes carries her at times to seemingly normative statements about “family living,” and the emphasis on “progress” seems to beg for resistance, yet she consistently emphasizes that the “family” is not a concept or an entity that exists prior to its expression: it is descriptive and constitutive rather than normative, for there are “many ways of family living” (159)¹¹¹. In a somewhat Butler-esque vein she constantly emphasizes the family as performance, something tentative, and often queer:

Family living is a thing a family in a way is realising. Sometimes a family is not at all realising that thing. Mostly a family is in a way knowing the kind of family living they have in them. Sometimes it is a queer thing to have them telling family living. ... Family living is a peculiar thing because not any one, mostly, is deciding family living and

¹¹¹ Franziska Gygax, following Ruddick, ignores this in her dogmatic binary “family” vs. “female wandering”; she reads the family as a unilateral, stable term, against which the creative female must define herself; “by disrupting the family *and* the patrilinear narrative, a female writing subjected is constructed” (19).

always each one is himself or herself inside her or him and family living is in a way a combination that in a way is not coming from any one. (638)

The family, in this formulation, arises from a combination of individuals that may have no *necessary* correlation to any of the individual component parts, and assumes its own organic identity (which is similar to Musil's insight that innumerable melodies can be built out of the same notes). Family identity is also here very much a matter of conscious telling, of examination and exchange between members who decide their own level of participation in that collective identity. For Ulrich and Agathe, it comes as an unexpected surprise to both "daß sie beide eine Familie bildeten. Und während Ulrich von dem Verlangen nach Gemeinschaft spricht – nun wieder mit dem Eifer eines Mannes, der sich eine gegen seine Natur gerichtete Pein zufügt; nur weiß er nicht, ob sie sich gegen seine wahre oder seine angenommene Natur richtet –, hört Agathe an, wie seine Worte ihr nahe kommen und sich wieder entfernen" (724). They see the possibilities for union rise up in the mutual telling and listening they engage in, and Ulrich is unsure how this new identity will fit into his sense of self, as is Agathe. The oddity of this interaction is heightened by Musil's use of the present tense, which occurs only a handful of times throughout the entire text; here it seems to highlight the sense of possibility and destroy the end-laden teleology of narrative because it has *not* already been decided, even by the narrator, what the outcome of this familialization will be.

To Stein, the Hersland and the Dehning families seem to represent two distinct modes of family living, related to the salience of their sense of group identity, and to how they exert ownership or independence from each other. The Dehning family, bastions of bourgeois values, solidly occupying the role of wealthy upper class morality, talk a great deal to each other, and in so doing basically promote their own identity as a "brand"; like Tony Buddenbrook who sees her

family name as a gold standard against which to compare all others, Julia Dehning and her mother each “really had it in them to be needing to be succeeding in having something that would be for them a stamping by them of Dehning family living” (639). The difficulty in having a “stamp” by which each action of any individual will be known is precisely the same as in *Buddenbrooks*: the interaction can only work when all are together, and among themselves. It only exists in a negative state, as defined against an outside agent, and never in an assertive, positive sense. Stein interrupts the narrative later to say, “I was just telling some one interesting things about each one of them in that family having it in them that egotism in them did not in them make them doing very well the thing they had some talent to be doing” (687). Ability and talent here stand in inverse proportion to the egotism of the family; as soon as you identify with a trait, you are unable to really count on it as a positive value. The negativity of this egotism becomes very obvious in the way the Dehnings treat Alfred Hersland; trying to use his father-in-law’s name to make business deals, and assuming he is within the family, is not allowed when Henry feels that he is not “honest” enough in his dealings, and when their marriage falls apart Alfred comes to be “pretty nearly a completely hated one in Dehning family living, being certainly a completely hated one in Dehning family living and being then a tradition as a hated one not honest in daily living in Dehning family living” (691). The “stamp” of the Dehnings only is utilized to ostracize those not worthy of it, and their narrative about Alfred comes to assume a moralistic tone, that he is a “tradition” and a warning to any who try to move outside the sanctioned identity.

Against this intense involvement and “stamp” of identity, Stein offers the contrast: “the Dehning family could have a tradition of hating him be in them as a thing they might have been inheriting, the Hersland family could mostly not be feeling hating them the Dehning family very

personally in them” (691). The Hersland family is constituted by its incoherence as a unit, that is, by the similarity of its individual members in their desire to assert their independence from each other:

Each one of them had already then their own kind of trouble inside in them ... they were different each one of them from the others of them in the troubles they had then inside them, in the lonely feeling they had sometimes in them that they were alone each one in them, in the scared feeling they could have in them, in the hurt of angry feelings each one in their own way had inside them. (127)

Though they each experience the same feelings, they do not talk about them, nor are encouraged by their parents to view their experiences and feelings as dependent on each other or any stable family identity. The family identity is really only coherent on the level of the narrative of the novel; it is not available to any of the individual members. This can be seen in Martha’s departure for college; “she went on and the family living of the Hersland family was changing some as I was saying and a little Martha was changing in her as the family living was changing around her ... this was the history of all of them then, that they were each one of them taken up with the being inside of them then” (428). They become a family in their separate preoccupations with their own being inside themselves; they are uninterested in each other, and only through that disinterest they are remarkably similar.

Musil’s own interest in the family is more tangential throughout *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, though it was an early concern, as can be seen in the formative interest it played in the earliest fragments of what would become the novel. In a segment published in 1926 in the *Berliner Tageblatt* called “Die Entdeckung der Familie,” a family album of short sketches is presented, the only one of which that makes it into the novel is “Tante Jane” the piano teacher.

But Musil's attention is trained on the possibilities and dangers of this microsocial or perhaps asocial mode of relation called the family:

Denn darin besteht ja wohl das Hauptwesen der Familie, daß auch der Mensch, der keinen Platz in der Welt hat, der keine Kinder bekam und keine Gedanken, der weder berühmt ist, noch reich, dessen Name nur bei der Todesanzeige der Allgemeinheit vor Augen kommt, daß dieser Mensch doch in der Familie seinen bestimmten Platz hat. Man ist jemand in der Familie. ... Was in der weiten Welt draußen nirgends ein Witz wäre, löst hier schallendes Gelächter aus, und man kann nicht sagen, woran es liegt; es ist eben lustig, und schließlich ist das die Hauptsache beim Witz. Dazu gehört, daß alle Menschen, die nicht zur Familie zählen, weit lächerlicher sind, als sie es wissen ... weil alles, was in der Familie geschieht, tiefer traurig oder schallender heiter wirkt, als ihm eigentlich zukäme, weil Kein-Witz dort Witz wird und allgemein unwichtiges Leid zu persönlichem Unglück, ist sie die Stammburg aller Geistlosigkeit, welche unser öffentliches Leben durchsetzt. (2024-25)

The family here becomes a liminal zone; it allows for identity and a sense of coherence for those who have no place in a larger, indifferent, and success-oriented society, but it also prevents the efficacy of "Geist," the formation of a critical or outside perspective. The family has therefore both normative power *and* revolutionary potential; it can become a bastion of outdated conservatism or the only force widespread enough to break the ever-nascent institutions so concerned with creating mass-produced identities for all.

Much like Ulrich, who remains skeptical of the normative influence of bourgeoisie family structures, David Hersland exists both inside and outside of family identity. Stein goes to great lengths to stretch out the range of his modes of association; "sometimes it was a pleasant thing to

him to know then that everything means something, that he was a part of every one who was a part of him and sometimes he had very much family feeling in him, sometimes he had quite enough family feeling in him, very often he had not very much family feeling in him, very often he was naturally not having any family feeling” (862). For him, relations with others inside and outside of the family carry equal weight, and he at times reacts very strongly against the family living he sees in both the Herslands and the Dehnings. Yet Stein’s emphasis on the ‘progress’ of the family doesn’t really allow for an “outside”; he cannot exist outside of the context in which he was born, and which he acknowledges throughout his life. In fact, the assertion of his independence from the family is essentially simultaneous with his death: “he was then not living in Dehning family living. He was then not living in Hersland living, almost not in any Hersland living. He was living then in being living. He was then not going on being living” (899). His death suggests the untenability of a privileged “outside” in which all critique and thought is possible; it levels him, incorporates him into the larger narrative of which he is only one component, rather than as he sees himself, the center¹¹². Stein explains his nature as being “something like his mother and something like his father. He was something like his sister Martha, he was something like his brother. He was different, quite different from his mother and his father and his sister and his brother ... He was one needing to be one being living to himself inside him” (827). But his need to be living to himself is just a need among other needs in the Hersland family, it does not separate him from them in his living, even if it separates him in his own feeling. Indeed, David Hersland’s belief that family living is simply a stage which he eventually outgrows says much more about his fantasies about “normal” family living than it does about the realities of life for any of his other family members.

¹¹² George Moore, in his discussion of Stein’s use of repetition, discusses David Hersland’s function in the narrative at length; he asserts that “Stein’s decision to end David’s story with his death shows how his character has failed to live up to the dynamic sense of ‘being’ mandated by the life he has now uncovered in the search for meaning” (188).

Throughout *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, whenever characters envision themselves as participating in or outside of the system of “normal” family life, they tend to make some of the worst decisions for themselves and others. Ulrich and Agathe’s father believes he is making the right choice for them after his wife’s death: “es hatte zu den Eigentümlichkeiten des alten Herrn gehört, der sie so sorgenvoll voneinander benachrichtigte, daß er die beiden in zartem Alter, gleich nach dem Tod ihrer Mutter, aus dem Haus tat” (673). For him, the institution of the family requires him to preserve it through letters rather than physical presence; he preserves the appearance of a “normal” family as a substitute for what it actually is. The core of Walter’s conflict with Clarisse is also related to his reading of what “normal” family life demands, and his requirement that she conform to it: “er schämte sich zu dieser Zeit, weil er kein Kind besaß, er hätte fünf Kinder gewollt, wenn das Clarisse und sein Einkommen gestattet haben würden, denn es drängte ihn, die Mitte eines warmen Lebenskreises zu sein” (608). Feeling torn between a youthful desire for extra-familial, socially-recognized ‘genius’ and his adult desire to affirm life through being like everyone else, Walter is willing to rape Clarisse, under doctor’s orders, to force this bizarre synthesis of ‘natural’ family life with ecstatic aesthetic passion. Leo Fischel and Arnheim both also fantasize about normal family life; Fischel as a hell from which he must escape, through money (1389); and Arnheim as a heaven for which his money ought to qualify him. And yet Arnheim feels like his own family traits are inferior to Ulrich’s, that the practical reasoning and instincts of his father, unlike the ‘scholarly’ attributes he believes define Ulrich, will disqualify him: “die Vernunft seiner Familie fürchtete er, als wäre sie wie allzu lebhaftes Sprechen und flatternde Gebärden eine Familienschwäche, die ihn auf den Höhen der Menschheit unmöglich mache” (643). He perceives the “normality” of his family as a trait he must overcome in his need to assimilate; paradoxically he must rid himself of the very traits

which led his family to their socioeconomic ascent in order to gain access to the exclusive club of what he perceives as deracinated, infinitely cultured people (who never really are).

In a strange way, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* demonstrates more about the contingency of identity on family relations than *The Making of Americans*, perhaps because the family identity isn't thematized as much. For behind almost every major event in the novel, there is a hinge of family relationships: Ulrich's involvement in the Parallelaktion is the result of his father's contacts; Diotima and Ulrich's intimacy is allowed because they are cousins; Hans Sepp is obsessed with racial purity because of his German last name and the uncleanliness of the family bathroom; Clarisse's father drives her relationships with both Meingast and Walter; and the entire Moosbrugger thread is carried by family relations, from Ulrich's father's involvement in questions of legal culpability of the mentally disturbed to Bonadea's husband to Clarisse's brother arranging the visit to the asylum. In each case the action is dependent not on indifferent, larger social forces, but intricate networks of family identity; the story is rooted in the relation between family identity and personal agency, and shows how that reading works both ways, to enable and also to delimit possibility. Stein was also very aware of the real-world consequences of family choices and identity; like David Hersland, as the youngest sibling, she knew her being was the result of the ideas and desires of her parents, far beyond her control. For David, the contingency of his existence is compounded by the fact that he owes it to the deaths of his siblings:

Mr. Hersland had always intended to have three children and as I was saying there had been two and these two had not gone on being living and so David Hersland came to be living and sometime later in some way he heard this thing when he was still quite a young one and he had it in him then to be certain that being living is a very queer thing,

he being one being living and yet it was only because two others had not been ones going on being living. (743)

This places extraordinary pressure on the contingency of family relations for individual identity, as your biological self is the result of choices completely outside your control, and for David, it is mixed with guilt and indifference to the fates of the siblings who ‘made way’ for him.

But this interaction works both ways, as children also bring their parents to knowledge about themselves and decenter their self-images. David Hersland, senior, holds a strong belief in his own ability to brush away what is unimportant in pursuit of the essential, and thereby succeed, but

He never knew it in him how far the nature in him could carry him, how he could not come to the last end of fighting, he never knew it inside him that he was not brushing people away from around him when he went away from them in another direction in a blustering fashion until his children in his later living when they were angry with him for his impatient feeling said it to him. (148)

Only his *children* are able to convince him of the inaccuracy of his opinion of himself, and how self-serving that narrative is. So, too, with their independence, do they convince their mother of her unimportance to them, “she had never been important to them after they had come to their individual feeling, they had never been in her a part of the important feeling to herself inside her, now she had a scared feeling in her, now she was lost among them and mostly they forgot about her, now she died away among them” (114). Where her feeling that they were extensions of her self is contradicted by their independence, she recognizes how dependent that sense of self is on them, and this leads to fear and death. Ulrich is also confronted with terrible self-knowledge at his father’s death; while he receives the news with indifference, as he sees the minute and

paranoid preparations his father had taken, full of complicated “Auflehnungen” against the very order which he always upheld, it actually moves him deeply: “beinahe sah er eine Verwandtschaft mit sich selbst darin, diesmal aber nicht zornmütig, sondern mitleidig” (697). He sees the relation between his own more open rebellion and his father’s strange and unexpressed pride in his son’s rejection of the values he himself fought to instill; “denn so erscheinen die Lebenslösungen der Söhne immer den Vätern, und Ulrich wandelte ein Gefühl der Pietät an, indem er an das Ungelöste dachte, das in ihm selbst stak” (698). What seemed to him a matter of indifference becomes, as he considers the claim that the relation exercises on him, almost a rebuke, when he considered himself unable to be rebuked. David Hersland, senior, also comes to this realization when his daughter comes to live with him after her failed marriage: “Martha was annoying to him being as she was of the same kind of being as the being that was in him” (410). Like Ulrich, the uncomfortable proximity, the familiarity which annoys him eventually turns into a revelation of his own being, a rebuke.

While for Ulrich this recognition of “Verwandtschaft” seems like an exception to the rule, Stein recognizes that this feeling of anger and recognition in family living is necessary to form any intimacy, any relation:

Mostly each one being in any family living, mostly each one being in any living is having to having in that one again and again angry feeling from each one that one is knowing in the family living, from each one that one is knowing in any living ... It is perhaps almost completely certain that each one in some family living is having some angry feeling about each one in that family living and about each one in a certain kind of way of having angry feeling and in each way of having some angry feeling having it again and again.

(762-3)

The emphasis here isn't really on the presence of anger in families—it is omnipresent—but more on the way that anger about family living, and the recognition of different “kinds” of anger, is related to how you come to know anything about others; intimacy is being able to recognize difference and cope with it. Stein explains the necessity of this recognition, but also that it is always tied to family living: “how it is done the thing some one is doing in family living is a thing that every one in that family living is knowing. How it is done and how it is done again and again the thing that is done again and again, done by some one in some family living is a thing that every one in that family living is knowing” (920). Knowledge here is familial, though perhaps not always conscious; everyone in the family is aware that it functions, and how, but is not necessarily equipped to explain it. The knowledge is dependent on the durable if fragile network of relations within the family, and especially on their repetition over time.

Repetition is central to Stein's method throughout the novel, and the family seems the ideal vehicle to showcase the combination of proliferation and stagnation in its repetition and variation. She admits the difficulty but possibility that the family offers in this pursuit of knowledge: “it certainly is quite entirely a difficult thing to keep on a long time with several living in a house together, a family to go on really listening to what each one is telling, to what each one is needing, having for living” (639). For Stein, here, family living is precisely what she identifies as her own method, it is *listening to repeating*; this repetition is only available within the family. Where else is the sort of sustained, dissociated, but intimate listening possible, without being implicated in an erotic way? Though the living can be made difficult, it is a difficulty which leads to knowledge, since it is only through a process of mutual change and recognition that the *compulsion* to repeat family living can evolve into a *choice* to continue the relation. This seems to be what divides those who continue in it from those who do not:

There are some families and some of them do again and again do such a thing do being such a one, do being such a family of them. There are some families and some in such of them are ones having been doing such a thing being such a family of them again and then not again. There are some families and any one of them can almost remember having been doing being such a family again. (912-13)

The choice to cohere is a choice for repetition and proliferation, rather than a choice for separation. This choice may certainly be compulsory, through a variety of means, but for Stein the proximity of family relations, the possibility for intimate and yet detached observation, makes this repetition sufficient. And the sufficiency of family life is what she turns to in the final pages of the novel: “there are enough kinds of them. There are very many kinds of them doing something in a family living that is done and done and done by them” (921). It seems that what allows Stein herself to conclude her project is the sense of the sufficiency of repetition and examination within the family that will continue beyond her narrative.

In the coda to the novel, Stein also points out the integral connection between family life and narrative:

There are some families and the children are living and the mother is living and the father is dead and the children have married some one and they have had some children and the children are telling about any one being one marrying some one and having some children, and are telling about not marrying, and are telling about not having any children, and are going on doing then something. (912)

Though she describes many different kinds of families and how death and continuation affect them, here death and continuance are both quite deliberately tied to “telling”—so much so that the telling comes to almost stand in for the death, to guarantee continuance of the family identity.

Musil shows a fascinating converse to this assertion in Clarisse, whose madness on the island with Ulrich pushes both into intelligibility and sterility:

“Wir spielen hier unsre Geschichte,” verlangte sie, “auf der Lichtbühne dieser Insel.” ... [wir] sollten es vor einem großen Orchester und einem dunklen Zuschauerraum spielen müssen – wirkliche Liebende auf der Bühne und nicht bezahlte Personen - : nicht nur ein neues Theater entstünde, sondern auch eine ganz neue Art der Liebe, die sich ausbreiten würde, Menschengebärden durchleuchten würde wie feines Astwerk, statt sich wie heute ins Dunkel des Kinds zu verkriechen. Das sagte Cl. Nur kein Kind! Statt etwas zu leisten, bekommen die Menschen Kinder! Zuweilen nannte sie die kleinen Erinnerungen, welche sie für A. in den Sand legte, ihre geheimen Kinder, oder sie nannte jeden Eindruck, den sie überhaupt aufnahm, so, denn er schmolz in sie hinein wie die Frucht.”

(1747)

Clarisse’s rage against the ‘natural’ continuance of biological human life is related to her fanatical attachment to theatrical expression, her need to perform for an audience. She resists the continuance of narrative through children, believing that they are merely an extension of the individual will, in the attempt to make a new mode of living simultaneously aesthetic and real¹¹³. On the island, she sets out stones and sticks in the place of children to “record” her language, but they are completely unintelligible, ephemeral, and ultimately meaningless.

With Stein’s insistence on examining the whole spectrum of human life, from infancy to beyond death, she also runs into the difficulty of intelligibility and knowledge, but comes to a very different conclusion from Clarisse. She speaks of the difficulty of knowing anything about

¹¹³ Lisa Appignanesi’s account of femininity in Musil seizes on this terminal state of Clarisse as an indication that in her, “the imaginative and spiritual possibility of the feminine together with its anarchic and asocial basis, goes astray as she becomes the prey of her own distorted vision of the male in herself” (142). Although the very normative separation of masculine and feminine in this account is problematic, the basic observation that through this identification with abstraction from her corporeal body leads her to dissociative and destructive thinking is helpful.

the very old, those whose experiences and even language are so far removed from current realities; however, she gives several possibilities for connection, “when one is oneself a fairly old one, one will be knowing a little more perhaps of this thing, one is knowing a little of something of this thing from old relations one is knowing and one knowing all the family of these then is perhaps a little knowing what these are as younger ones in living” (563). Stein highlights three things: the need to be “fairly old” oneself, or the necessity of sympathetic experience; the way that identity is imbedded in interpersonal relationships; and the fact that a great deal of one’s knowledge about a person is tied not horizontally to their contemporaries, but vertically in their family. What she seems to be suggesting is that coming to know the process of aging yourself allows you to re-evaluate the stories and experiences of those older than you, and to find in that necessary difference of generations the ability to perceive similarity. She also discusses this in reference to the Wyman family, about whom she claims,

Later when one knew the children better and still later when no one any longer saw any of them and only remembered them, one then could reconstruct the foreign father and mother out of the children and so could come to an understanding of them, a realization that they had been alive then and human. Later then there will be a reconstruction of them, not from any impression from them but from what their children had in them as nature in them and so the parents will come to be made soon to us out of the memory of the children as later one remembered them, the children when one no longer saw them.
(260-61)

Here the knowledge to be gained is not agentive, through the will and sympathy of the children, but rather through the unconscious transmission of parent to child. History is available through the children, and specifically the realization that these dead, inaccessible parents “had been alive

then and human.” Louise, one of the children, sees herself primarily as related to her siblings, and having little connection to her parents, but “she did not know it in her that she was nearer them than were her sisters and her brother” (268). Stein suggests that recognizing this affinity would have served her better than looking constantly to her siblings for affirmation and identity.

In emphasizing the vertical transmission of traits and natures over the horizontal identification with siblings, contemporaries, lovers, and the like, it may be tempting to accuse Stein of a search for “origins” instead of an analysis of current conditions; this may be true in some places in the rambling novel, but in the end she definitively disavows it. She emphasizes in her coda again and again that *anyone* is capable of pursuing analysis and coming to insights about their own living; this is the radical democracy which family relations allow:

Every one in any family living can be one completely remembering that any family living is existing. Any one in any family living can be one beginning not remembering that any family living is existing. Any one in any family living can be one being one having been remembering that any family living is existing. There is no time to begin being in any family living for some being in family living. ... Some being in a family living are certain of some such thing as being in any family living. Some being in any family living are not certain of such a thing are not certain of being in any family living being then existing, in their being then being living. (916)

Stein highlights both the ability for anyone to launch an examination, and the agency involved in that analysis, as well as the way that being in “a” family living correlates or does not correlate to your certainty that those particular experiences are applicable to “any” family living, meaning that access to any ‘generality’ must be always contingent on the fragile connection to your immediate social context. Narrating the family depends on this tension between particular

experience and general applicability, but it also depends on an evolving perspective, both within the family living as well as on it. This is clear in the last, incomplete sentences of the novel:

The way of doing what is done and done in a family living is a way that a family living is needing being one in a way existing. Sometimes then that family is going on in that way of existing. Sometimes that family living is going on into another way of being existing. Sometimes some one who has done and done what is done by some one in the family living of that one is coming to be an older one and is then going (922)

In these final words Stein emphasizes the mutability of family living, that it has the potential to change, to morph into new modes of being, and that this process continues, is an open process, as is her novel. The “progress” narrative seems here to give way to the “making”; Stein leaves the narrative to the agency of those invested in exploring and experiencing new modes of living, of remembering, and of telling their stories.

The family is very specifically the carrier of this potentiality, and it is in a revolutionary, non-hierarchical way. Stein emphasizes again and again that “there is family living. Some are remembering that there is family living. Any one can be one remembering something of this thing, that there is family living” (913). This is a non-compulsory identity, the choice to remember your imbeddedness within structures which are themselves not particularly agentive. But this choice to examine what wasn’t your choice has the potential to transform your perspective on the relation of any human identity to any other: “some are being one being in a family living and they are ones going on being such a one and they might not be ones going on being such a one and certainly they would be ones being such a one being ones going on being in a family living when they were ones being in the family living in which they were being” (917). The lynchpin of this assertions seems to be that the continuation of identity within a family leads

you to realize how your choice to continue, which generally doesn't seem to be a choice at all, but is anyway, highlights the co-constitutive nature of family identity; it certainly has the potential to damage and suppress, but it also has the potential to call forth into being something which would not otherwise be available. Musil also discusses this as Ulrich and Agathe consider the implications of continuing to live together; Ulrich considers first that "das Leben in der Familie ist nicht das volle Leben; junge Menschen fühlen sich beraubt, vermindert, nicht bei sich selbst, wenn sie im Kreis der Familie sind. Sieh dir alte, unverheiratete Töchter an: sie sind von der Familie ausgesogen und ihres Blutes beraubt worden" (716). The vampiric potential of the family is a danger when it compels identification and participation, but Ulrich also considers that in other circumstances, where mutual sacrifice and concession to each other are present, "ich kann mir dieses Unbedingt-für-einander-Einspringen, dieses Gemeinsam-Kämpfen und – Wundentragen aber auch als ein urangenehmes, tief in der Menschenzeit ruhendes, ja schon in der Tierherde ausgeprägtes Gefühl denken" (716). There is, for Ulrich, at least the potential for transformative experience, though interestingly it is staged as an instinctual collective feeling, covered up by egotistical bourgeois vampirism, which must be accessed now through agency, rather than being simply the presumed and necessary condition of the species. In this way, the family has the potential to initiate a new mode of perception, a radical realignment of relations between individuals and their environment¹¹⁴.

The family carries potential for recognizing modes of being because it allows for descriptions of affinity in both personal and analytical ways; as Stein expresses it, "every one has some feeling of people resembling each other" (337). Looking at those around you has the

¹¹⁴ Ingrid Berger, in her discussion of contingency in the novel, examines the sibling-dynamic between Ulrich and Agathe and asserts that "die in der Form des Dialogs entwickelte Geschwisterbeziehung ist ein Modell, das Zeit als *gemeinsame* Geschichte konstituiert, das 'Welterzeugung' als Zeit begreifbar macht, in der die Gegenwart als Topologie der 'Verschaltung' der Lebenszeit fungiert" (133).

potential to allow you to “make” typologies, but without doing violence to their individual identities:

Every one then is an individual being. Every one then is like many others always living, there are many ways of thinking of every one, this is now a description of all of them. ... Every one has it to say of each one he is like such a one I see it in him, every one has it to say of each one she is like some one else I can tell by remembering. ... There are many ways of making kinds of men and women. (290)

Here Stein elucidates two different modes of perception; the first recognizes resemblances and categorizes by “seeing,” the second by “remembering.” These are also differentiated by the fact that the first “say” what they see, and the second “tell” it; this distinction may seem entirely arbitrary, but it is a consistent one in the novel. There is a difference between insight/explication and memory/narrative; this somewhat aligns with the distinction between David Hersland’s “nearly” complete explications, and Stein’s systematic remembering/telling. To Stein, because there are “many ways of making kinds in men and women” (333), only through sustained examination and accountable systemization is any sort of totality of insight possible, and this is available only through writing. She speaks of some who resist “looking” because it destroys their tentative categories, that they will simplify and pass over many so that they will not become confused, but for Stein this confusion, if it is followed by consideration, remembering, and feeling, “this is then a beginning of learning to make kinds of men and women. Slowly then all the resemblances between one and all the others that have something, different things in common with that one, all these fall into an ordered system” (341). They are not forced into a relation, they fall in, and the mode of perception shifts with each new piece of human evidence, rather than being clear, teleologically, from the ‘beginning.’

For Stein, it is the trenchant consideration of the individual—not as a collection of traits, but as an embodied being existing in stages throughout life, and implicated in a network of associations and ideas—that leads to more universal knowledge. In her lengthy consideration of Julia Dehning, she makes this connection clear: “this is to be now a history of living in her, of being in her, of what each one knowing her felt in her, what those living with her felt about her, how one can know her, how one can come to know any one, of being in every one” (636). A description of the process of how you come to know *Julia* is also a foray into how you know *anyone, everyone*. This also seems to be the case with Ulrich’s obsession with Moosbrugger; when he is approached by a prostitute, and considers her human appeal, he gives her money but walks away, leaving her surprised. In this moment he remembers Moosbrugger and considers what this inverse to Moosbrugger’s murder of the prostitute might mean, and how Ulrich’s ability to imagine the thoughts and feelings that led to the murder, while acting in an opposite manner, allows him to see the hypocrisy of the society which condemns the violent desires they all possess:

Sein Zwiespalt war ein anderer und gerade der, daß er nichts unterdrückte und dabei sehen mußte, daß ihn aus dem Beild eines Mörders nichts Fremderes anblickte als aus anderen Bildern der Welt, die alle so waren wie seine eigenen alten Bilder: halb gewordener Sinn, halb wieder hervorquellender Unsinn! Ein entsprungenes Gleichnis der Ordnung: das war Moosbrugger für ihn! (652-53)

The proximity of his action to Moosbrugger’s brings him into an exacting consideration of the causes and claims he has on society, and on Ulrich himself. For Ulrich, this shifts his mode of perception; rather than seeing Moosbrugger as a deviant who hasn’t suppressed what he “ought” to, he sees that society suppresses the fundamental affinity between criminal and ‘normal’

behavior; in severing the connection between human and human, we impose an order of abstraction. The proximity and relation of difference to sameness is necessary to make any meaningful insight into the human condition.

Moosbrugger, despite his episodic presence, occupies a large role in the novel as well as Ulrich's consciousness, especially before Agathe, because he suggests another mode of relation to others, to objects, and to the self¹¹⁵. Where Ulrich spends hours of analysis and discussion, in conversation and on paper, on the problem of "Innerlichkeit" and environment, Moosbrugger experiences a state akin to the "andere Zustand" without analysis: "das Wichtige war, daß es gar nichts Wichtiges bedeutet, ob etwas draußen ist oder innen; in seinem Zustand war das wie helles Wasser zu beiden Seiten einer durchsichtigen Glaswand" (239). He sees a different connection between things precisely because of his inability to discern; his relation is metonymic rather than analytic, associative not definitional. For Moosbrugger, "das Leben bildet eine Oberfläche, die so tut, als ob sie so sein müßte, wie sie ist, aber unter ihrer Haut treiben und drängen die Dinge" (241). This is a different formulation than Ulrich's real and possible world theory, but it is not mediated by a theory at all; it is a mode of perception. The German word for perception, "Wahrnehmung," quite literally means to "take truth" from something, and this is what Ulrich eventually comes to as well. When Bonadea comes to the Tuzzi's to accuse him, he remembers a dream he's had and considers what each mode of perception entails; the rational/analytical and the metonymic/analogical:

Die Beziehung, die zwischen einem Traum und dem, was er ausdrückt, besteht, war ihm bekannt, denn es ist keine andere als die der Analogie, des Gleichnisses, die ihn schon

¹¹⁵ Ekkehard Schreiter, in his analysis of identity and form in the novel, asserts that Moosbrugger's inability to express himself is a central concern throughout the novel: "was sich hingegen wiederholt, und zwar als Problem des gesamten Romans, ist die Frage nach der Beschaffenheit einer persönlichen Wahrheit, die gleichzeitig intersubjektiv vermittelt werden kann" (148), which he ties to Agathe and Ulrich's "andere Zustand" as well; he defines the problem as "*es müssen Lösungen gefunden werden, mittels allgemeiner Sprache Einmaliges zu sagen*" (149).

des öfteren beschäftigt hatte. Ein Gleichnis enthält eine Wahrheit und eine Unwahrheit, für das Gefühl unlöslich miteinander verbunden. Nimmt man es, wie es ist, und gestaltet es mit den Sinnen, nach Art der Wirklichkeit aus, so entstehen Traum und Kunst, aber zwischen diesen und dem wirklichen, vollen Leben steht eine Glaswand. Nimmt man es mit dem Verstand und trennt das nicht Stimmende vom genau Übereinstimmenden ab, so entsteht Wahrheit und Wissen, aber man zerstört das Gefühl. ... Ulrich hatte das Gefühl, in dem Gassengewirr, durch das ihn seine Gedanken und Stimmungen so oft geführt hatten, jetzt auf dem Hauptplatz zu stehen, von dem alles ausläuft. (581-82)

Here Ulrich can see quite clearly the two modes of perception, and how they are mutually exclusive; to analyze is to, in some measure, kill what was alive, while to spin out this analogical or metonymic perception risks total abstraction and madness. But there is something vital in being able to compare them, in standing at the “Hauptplatz” in which you can set both modes next to each other and take the “truth” from each. This is what Stein also gestures toward in her discussion of conflicting facts and opinions: “each one says something about some one and that one says something says a number of things sometime about herself or himself and everything any one, anything any one says about that one anything that one says about that one everything that one says about that one is in a way a true thing” (577). Her insight here seems to be that if you look only at descriptions and abstractions, you can clearly line up a theory of “truth” with whatever fits your prejudices, but to juxtapose conflicting truths allows you to see something more than just binary opposites.

Whereas Ulrich is interested in identifying a “Hauptplatz” for metacognition, Stein flattens her discussion into competing consequences of being rather than conscious choices about how to think. She discusses three types of minds, how they proceed, and their relative stasis or

dynamism: there are “those having good minds, better minds than capacity for experiencing, such can have some principle of growth in them” who are open enough for impressions, but need their minds to process them, “those having mind only about as strong as the power of receiving impressions in them, such of them just keep going,” and who don’t exhibit much growth, and finally “some of them who have finer power of receiving impressions than quality of mind to direct them and these then more and more are stultified in their living by running themselves by their minds” (366). The focus is less on the power of intellect or imagination, but on the consequences, and how the first allow experience to stimulate growth, where the second simply continue rather statically, and the last receive more than they are willing to experience, and thus stall. This last group seems to include Ulrich, whereas the first would include Agathe; the analytical mindset stumbles over experience, whereas the associative absorbs it and is energized by it. Neither is inherently better—in fact they seem to complement each other when exercised in conjunction—but when isolated and made extreme, they become dangerous and self-enclosed modes of perception. This is obvious in the *Irrenhaus*, as Clarisse’s extreme metonymic thinking clashes with Dr. Friedenthal’s clinical, instrumentalizing stance. Where Clarisse sees “nobility” in the syphilitic patient or ‘genius’ in the man mechanically painting, discounting the difficulties they face, Dr. Friedenthal “empfand die spukhafte Verrücktheit der Welt, in der er lebte, nur noch dann, wenn durch eine Berührung mit der gewöhnlichen der Gegensatz geweckt wurde” (986). Only through establishment of a norm is his inhuman treatment possible; in the absence of the mode of perception which sees relation instead of instrumentality, it becomes a mechanism for perpetual suppression of what could otherwise be valid human expression.

These two modes roughly correlate to Ulrich’s revelatory vision of the two trees of life as “Gewalt” and “Liebe”; in the violent suppression of particulars to a rationalizing “Eindeutigkeit”

the analytical mode finds its most extreme expression, whereas the “*Gleichnis*” mode sees association and “*Verwandschaft*” (593). But instead of valuing or pursuing one mode over the other, Ulrich wishes to unite them, in an almost incestuous way, as his relationship with Agathe demonstrates¹¹⁶. This non-hierarchical relation is vital for Stein’s conception of the purpose of her novel as well; “more and more then this will be a history of every kind and the way one kind is connected with the other kind of them and the many ways one can think of every kind of men and women as one more and more knows them as their nature is in them and comes out of them in the repeating that is more and more all of them” (180). The history is not a history of individuals, from which you can abstract a moral purpose, and a set of traits to dogmatically follow; instead it is a history of modes of perception, ways of thinking, and ways in which those ways of thinking are connected, repeated, and changed. It become an explication of a set of relations and not a stable hierarchy of values.

The non-hierarchical mode is carried in many ways by Agathe, who perceives these different modes, but in an interpersonal and not an abstract sense; when she goes with her capsule in hand to the grave of the forgotten poet and considers suicide, she thinks about her possibilities in very concrete terms: Hagauer or Ulrich, and if Ulrich, “dann mußte er sie aber auch führen, ohne sie zu verlassen. Er war die Schwelle zwischen zwei Leben, und alle Sehnsucht, die sie nach dem einen der beiden empfand, und alle Flucht aus dem anderen führte zuerst zu ihm. Sie liebte ihn in einer so schamlosen Weise, wie man das Leben liebt” (966).

Whereas Ulrich builds image after image and fills pages with analytical commentary on

¹¹⁶ Andrew Erwin, in his discussion of the novel as a “quest” narrative, explains it as “an attempt to cultivate a way of being that abandons the modern quest for the autonomous, self-grounding subject—a subject that could constitute the object of questing for itself. This way of being would embrace instead a mystical self, responsive to the Other as a foundation of selfhood but mindful of the difference entailed in sharing the world with beings whose ideas, thoughts, and desires are mutually constituted. Ulrich’s experiment fails, however, because it attempts to achieve a kind of pure relation of presence and oneness with the Other, a transcendent finality of an *unio mystica* that in fact obliterates Otherness rather than preserving it. This failure is indicative of Musil’s break with the *teleological* quest in favor of a different type of novelistic quest” (96-97). This non-teleological mode is also, I argue, non-hierarchical.

terminology about “trees,” “kingdoms,” or “conditions” of being, Agathe sees her possibilities in relations. And yet neither Ulrich nor Agathe wish to exchange their modes of perception with each other, and instead rely on their combination, while still recognizing their difference¹¹⁷. Stein also discusses this difficulty in perceiving conflicting modes while still retaining your own subjectivity:

It is a queer feeling to be completely realising the way another one is seeing something another one is realising something and to be quite certain by realising that one can not be seeing, cannot be remembering that thing ... to be completely realising that one being feeling, being remembering, being seeing something and to be completely realising that one realising another one's feeling seeing remembering that thing cannot one's self feel see and remember that thing. (711)

Stein's point here seems to be that just by recognizing that someone else employs a different mode of perception *doesn't mean you escape* the problem of your own perception. This seems to be the “queerness” of the feeling; you remain yourself, able to see difference forming and existing, but unable to get out of your own subjectivity. Thus combination and sustained proximity become the only method of getting past the limitations of these modes.

What Stein characterizes as “queer” feeling can be terrifying or comfortable depending on the relational dimension; for Ulrich in the first stages of the novel, alone, ‘exact,’ and wrapped up in his own theory, he recognizes a terrible tendency in the amassing of fact and rationality to inflate itself into a body of knowledge of enormous size: “aller Formen gesunder und kranker, wacher und träumender Hirne durchziehen ihn zwar wie Tausende kleiner

¹¹⁷ Appignanesi argues that Agathe, as a “complete feminine being” and therefore capable of “subverting the conditions of the mind and grasping reality in a total and different way,” is unable to realize a solution “which has validity outside the sphere of the personal” (156) and therefore requires Ulrich's ability to theorize and abstract to complement her, although this union ultimately fails in its realization.

empfindlicher Nervenstränge, aber der Strahlpunkt, wo sie sich vereinen, fehlt” (154). This is nearly the complete opposite of Woolf’s vision of the knot of individuality radiating out into spokes; Ulrich has a fear of the center, of the endless relationality it suggests without identifiable purpose¹¹⁸. But after his experiences with Agathe, his fear of the (vulvic) center morphs into an identification with it; the relational mode becomes life-affirming, an ecstatic society of mutually-building equals. In one of the many drafts of his “Gartengitter” or what would become “Atemzüge” chapters, Musil allows Ulrich to quite neatly refute his earlier formulation of the dead center; “egozentrisch sein heißt fühlen, als trüge man im Mittelpunkt seiner Person den Mittelpunkt der Welt. Allozentrisch sein heißt, überhaupt keinen Mittelpunkt mehr haben. Restlos an der Welt teilnehmen und nichts für sich zurücklegen” (1407). Allocentric modes of perception allow for emphasis to be distributed throughout the spectrum of relations, without a necessary middle.

Musil speaks of Agathe again and again in these terms—having “nothingness” at her center—which allows her to not become merely one mode of perception among others, but a living possibility for the maintenance of a “world” of experience: “da die Gegenstände unseres Denkens keineswegs ganz unabhängig von seinen Zuständen sind, vermengen sich nicht nur in jedem Menschen diese beiden Denkweisen, sondern sie können ihm bis zu einem gewissen Grad auch zwei Welten gegenüberstellen” (857). These “worlds” are seemingly irreconcilable modes of perception, but can exist *nebeneinander*, held in place not by force of will but by the desire to examine and to experience them both at the same time. Stein is never quite willing to allow any

¹¹⁸ Patrizia McBride also takes the empty center of a ring as her primary metaphor for Musil’s identification of what she terms the “void of ethics”; she argues that while many German philosophers diagnosed this “emptiness” at the center with existential loss and engaged in pessimistic accounts of cultural decline, “Musil did not believe that the ethical void was the result of an inauspicious development driven by a historical process of rationalization that culminated in a cultural crisis of unprecedented proportions. Rather, his investigations led him to see it in terms of a structural feature built into the human condition, a void which for centuries had been disguised, indeed surreptitiously filled with narratives postulating the existence of a primordial ethical instance” (12).

exteriorization, like two “worlds” existing next to each other; instead, she insists on it being the *same* world which is only legible to those willing to examine conflicting types of being, to see affinity instead of endless difference. For her, the ability to see “likeness of the type of character combining with another” allows that person to form surprisingly durable categories: “sometimes it makes of everything a strange world for living and sometimes it makes to one’s feeling the world a pleasant and familiar place for living” (222). For Stein, this ability to sustain a categorical understanding without doing violence to any of the particulars can have two outcomes—an elegiac sense of loss for a nonexistent homeland of wholeness, or a comforting reassurance that life is in fact knowable, if subjected to rigorous interpersonal examination.

Stein’s method is often metonymic in the sense that it sets in close proximity unconventional but related processes, such as eating, washing, or handwriting, but this ability is transferred into more abstract meaning-creating enterprises such as perception, and she handles these adeptly, to show how non-hierarchical categorization is possible. To accomplish this, she examines understanding as a process with unique goals and methods, but the common denominator of being constructed rather than occurring ‘naturally’:

In each way of making kinds of them there is a different system, a different way of feeling, a different way of thinking them as being resembling one to the others of them ... Knowing a map and then seeing the place and knowing then that the roads actually existing are like the map, to some is always astonishing and always then very gratifying. To some there is the same thing in living and to such a one seeing each one they are knowing as young ones and older ones and very old ones, and seeing them then as having in them the kind of being that hearing others talking, and reading what others have written, makes every one know is the nature of human being knowing this then in every

one at each period in them is to some as I was saying astonishing and then gratifying.
(389)

Stein inverts the traditional understanding of “places” existing before “maps” and shows the delight in recognizing the ways in which records come to stand in for places; so too for people, the ability to recognize from reading, listening, seeing, a tentative system of human interaction. She steps back from the (universalist) cartographer’s position to that of the person viewing the maps; some “makings” of that space will correlate and inspire, others will just confuse, but none is the “correct” interpretation, it is a matter of perception.

The second point in Stein’s analysis is that duration is a key aspect of human identity—to know someone “at each period” in their lives means recognizing successive stages, and difference not just in others but *in yourself*; that you are not self-identical throughout your organic life, but exist in somewhat discrete physical and emotional developmental stages. This is what makes sustained analysis necessary, and what requires narrative to access. Stein examines the necessity of continuation in her discussion of loving:

A thing not beginning and not ending is certainly continuing, one completely feeling something is one not having begun to feel anything because to have a beginning means that there will be accumulation and then gradually dying away as ending and this cannot be where a thing is a complete thing. So then many women give to the men loving them the awe-inspired feeling of realising an eternal thing. (701)

For Stein, narrative must be continuous in order to be complete; it cannot have a beginning and end, that is, it cannot attempt to find its own beginning or decide its own ending. This “eternal present” is very specifically gendered for Stein; women are the ones able to exist in this state of continuity without trying to break it into discrete events, climaxes of feeling or experience.

Ulrich's long-winded discussions of feelings and whether they are a "Vorgang" or a "Zustand" have relevance to this—the difference to him being in the duration, and the intentionality involved; a Vorgang is simply a procedure, with its end in sight, but a Zustand has the potential to endure (1159). To Ulrich, also, this is found in love:

“Eine neue Wahrheit hebt an” erzählte Ulrich. “Sobald einem Menschen die Liebe nicht als irgendein Erlebnis begegnet, sondern als das Leben selbst, oder mindestens als eine Art des Lebens, kennt er einen Schwarm von Wahrheiten. Wer ohne Liebe urteilt, nennt das Ansichten, persönliche Auffassungen, Subjektivität, Willkür; und bei ihm ist es auch nur das. Aber der Liebende weiß von sich, daß er nicht unempfindlich gegen die Wahrheit ist, sondern überempfindlich, ... daß ein Liebender zugänglich ist für alles, was geliebt, und also gewollt, gedacht und in Worten niedergelegt worden ist.” (1111)

For Ulrich here, love becomes a mode of life, and not merely an experience; it is passion, and not affection. Passion is creative, anarchistic, subjective, but not in the way that the intellect wants it to be—that is, totally separate from intellectual activity, a process of “Rausch” which interrupts, and then subsides—it is a mode of understanding, of loving, through relation, which destroys the typical boundaries we try to set between objects, people, and ideas.

But Ulrich, and by extension Musil, is adamant that this state of being is *not* what sentimental, kitschy accounts of it would wish to portray; it is a union of the exact, impersonal method with the totally subjective, interpersonal. As he explains to Diotima when she is trying to justify her intellectual ‘adultery’ with Arnheim to him,

Denn nur wenn Menschen ganz sachlich wären – und das ist ja beinahe dasselbe wie unpersönlich –, dann wären sie auch ganz Liebe. Weil sie nur dann auch ganz Empfindung und Gefühl und Gedanke wären; und alle Elemente, die den Menschen

bilden, sind zärtlich, denn sie streben zueinander, nur der Mensch selbst ist es nicht.

Maßlos verliebt sein, ist also etwas, das Sie vielleicht gar nicht möchten . . ! (476)

Ulrich is warning Diotima against the unforeseen consequences of her pairing with Arnheim, but the almost mystical union he describes between the interpersonal and the technical is what also seems to bring him back again and again to the ironic demand for a “Generalsekretariat der Genauigkeit und Seele” (825). In his constant battle over the two camps, he sees endless possibility in exactness (but also how sterile it becomes in life), and against that the fecundity of stupidity (with its attendant danger of overdramatization and inexactness). Agathe becomes for him the living embodiment of possibility of sustaining these two mutually exclusive worldviews; together, they can become “die ungetrennten und nichtvereinten”; as soon as they say this, they both realize “daß sie etwas vorhätten, das alle angehe, und nicht bloß einem persönlichen Bedürfnis entspränge. Jetzt waren sie viel sicherer, sie kannten mehr von ihrem Abenteuer. Alle Einzelfragen waren Schaum, unter dem der dunkle Spiegel einer Lebensmöglichkeit lag” (1316). It becomes not a personal affair, but a battle for an embodied possibility of life barely known among others, but which could open up new narratives, not simply old conventions recycled again and again.

Stein is also invested in sustaining a “vital singularity” which she perceives as being non-existent among both Americans, who have no roots, and Europeans, who have no vitality. She examines how the emphasis on ‘exactness’ and technical mastery has influenced consciousness and social behavior; “all with a metallic clicking like the type-writing which is our only way of thinking, our way of educating, our way of leaning, all always the same way of doing ... it is sad here for us, there is no place in an adolescent world for anything eccentric like us, machine making does not turn out queer things like us, they can never make a world to let us be free each

one inside us” (47). For Stein, what Ulrich longs to implement is the easiest mode of relation, automation, exactness, which does not allow for queerness or difference. This is, to her thinking, the more basic mode of living, which recognizes only sameness and insists that these perceptions are empirical facts. Against this she asserts, “it is never facts that tell, they are the same when they mean very different things” (26); in other words, processes and methods which pride themselves on their objectivity and rigor can only justify themselves on their own terms, can only tell the same facts, asserting the viability of the outcome based on the predictions they set forth. But Musil also shows the danger of the inverse, of a world without stability, without reference, and without facts, in Clarisse. Though she seems to exist in a state of hypersensitive awareness of affinity and relation, she has no critical faculty, and in particular has very little ability to examine herself changing over time. Ulrich notices this as he returns from his father’s funeral; the night he left, Clarisse was tearing his clothes off, demanding he father a child with her, but now, caught up in the ‘virile’ philosophy of Meingast, he sees that she is completely indifferent to him: “es mag auch ein sehr gewöhnliches kleines Erlebnis sein, diese verlöschte Wärme des Eigennutzes in einem Blick; trotzdem war es wie ein kleiner Riß im Schleier des Lebens, durch den das teilnahmslose Nichts schaut” (781). He realizes that subjectivity is also impersonal; Clarisse only looks for exterior confirmation of what she already feels or thinks, and so uses people with passionate intensity one moment, and ignores them the next.

Although Ulrich constantly insists on his “moral” worldview as being the ability to distinguish between what is and what might be, and to promote “was sein könnte” (490), this must be a choice, and not simply an inability to recognize ‘what is,’ which is what Clarisse seems to represent. She takes aspects of what he says—like being a man without qualities, that there is a second world where all are innocent, or that everyone should treat reality as

constructed—and adopts it as a dogma instead of examining it as another facet of reality. Her mode of perception is unable to discern cause and effect, or to narrate change as it occurs: “oft waren mehrere Gedanken gleichzeitig ineinander da, oft gar keiner, aber dann konnte man die Gedanken wie Dämonen hinter der Bühne stehen fühlen, und das zeitliche Nacheinander der Erlebnisse, das anderen Menschen eine richtige Stütze abgibt, wurde in Clarisse zu einem Schleier” (144). Though the ability to perceive outside of narrative form is essential, it must be agentive, as a choice among other modes of perception, and not the only one available. Clarisse’s one-track mind identifies a trait and carries it to absurdity, to insanity; and this operates also with the spate of Stein characters who are instrumentalized without even realizing it, such as The Good Anna or the Gentle Lena, “they are wonderful instruments for other people’s living, they never know it in them that it is other people’s lives they are living” (202). Without being able to consider difference as the choice between the possible permutations of reality, you are trapped in a reality which does not recognize its own “making” at work.

Ulrich despises the inability of the engineers and theoreticians around him to actually implement an “exact” mode of living; their choices and fantasies are outdated and sentimental: “es scheint, daß der brave, praktische Wirklichkeitsmensch die Wirklichkeit nirgends restlos liebt und Ernst nimmt” (138). This is because such a “Mensch” always goes in for abstractions, for feelings of having feelings instead of experiencing them himself, and for metaphors of living, of success, instead of on his own terms. The turn to the possible is not systematic in the theoretical sense, but in Ulrich’s own sense of what constitutes the moral, that is, consideration of all that could be; “es entstand auf diese Weise ein unendliches System von Zusammenhängen, in dem es unabhängige Bedeutungen, wie sie das gewöhnliche Leben in einer groben ersten Annäherung den Handlungen und Eigenschaften zuschreibt, überhaupt nicht mehr gab” (251).

This complex knot of relations is a totally different mode of living, and requires that you subjugate a stable sense of identity to a method of intense examination and experience. This is what Ulrich tries to explain as he defends his understanding of morality as *not* instrumentalizing, *not* bound to abstract considerations like duty: “Moral war für ihn weder Botmäßigkeit, noch Gedankenweisheit, sondern das unendlich Ganze der Möglichkeiten zu leben. Er glaubte an eine Steigerungsfähigkeit der Moral, an Stufen ihres Erlebnisses, und nicht etwa nur, wie das üblich ist, an Stufen ihrer Erkenntnis, als ob sie etwas Fertiges wäre, wofür der Mensch bloß nicht rein genug sei” (1028). By treating reality as something always already constructed, and recognizing that there isn’t a teleology to it—that there is no purposiveness outside of human action, which is sequential, relational, and not primarily rational or theoretical—Ulrich pushes into a new mode in which “progress” is possible, outside the system, through consideration of the system itself. This understanding is one to which Agathe also comes as she contends that Ulrich’s belief in the power of the Other in erotic relationships places all the discursive power in the creating/desiring partner, and takes the other as somewhat instrumentalized, a flattened, static surface: “vielleicht wird aber auch die wirkliche Person erst in der Liebe ganz wirklich? Vielleicht ist sie vorher nicht vollständig!” (1116). Here Agathe points out the difficulty in Ulrich’s own theoretical abstractions, that they rarely take the mutual dynamism of self and other into account. From what position—completion or lack?—are you speaking, when you begin your theory of love?

This is one fundamental point on which both Musil and Stein agree: there is danger in abstraction, in theory, without a necessary anchor to lived experience, to embodied individuals, and to the complex networks of identification and relation in which they are always already entwined. Like Agathe, Ulrich also considers how the affective dimension is constantly suppressed in the desire to build an abstract theory for living; he asserts, “daß wir, um zu

erkennen, unsere Gefühle möglichst beiseitelassen müssen. Wir schalten sie aus, um ‘objektiv’ zu sein, oder versetzten uns in einen Zustand, worin sich die verbleibenden Gefühle gegenseitig unwirksam machen ... und somit ist ein Nullzustand, ein Neutralisationszustand, kurz ein bestimmter Gefühlszustand” (1192). He levels the hierarchy of intellect vs. feeling, objectivity vs. subjectivity, by demonstrating that the theoretical mode is just another feeling, and not a particularly desirable one; in fact, what does it say about our value system that such a neutralized, dead state of being is assumed to be the ‘highest’? The move to neutralize feeling through an abstract (and dead) theory is demonstrated through Hagauer, his ability to “button up” all experience in mutable but restrictive codes. When confronted with Agathe’s determined separation, he considers whether perhaps anything in his own behavior had something to do with it, and initially, “es war ihm schmerzlich, daß er in seiner Erinnerung keinen einzigen Beweis jener voll geöffneten und traumverlorenen Hingabe fand” (951). To suppress the pain of this memory, he begins to consider what might be wrong with Agathe, that she didn’t “give herself” as she ought to have done, were she a ‘real’ woman: “sie kam ihm, betrachtete man das genau, geradezu ungesund gleichgültig vor” (951). As soon as Hagauer is able to assure himself that he has considered and observed her behavior from an ‘objective’ and ‘exact’ standpoint, he loses all his earlier feelings of inadequacy and doubt, and finally, “Hagauer sah also einen geschlossenen Typus vor seinem geistigen Auge” (952). With a type, a diagnosis, and a theory of a “weit verbreitete weibliche Minderleistung” (952), Hagauer has neutralized his own feelings and created a very portable—because of its dogmatic, sexist, and self-affirming qualities—theory for Agathe’s behavior. It may seem uncharacteristic for Musil to devote an entire chapter to a pedagogue like Hagauer’s struggle to respond to Agathe, but it seems to serve as a warning against the sort of “methodical” thinking that is neither methodical nor actually thinking, when

you consider thinking as a combination of affect, intellect, and experience, as he does throughout the novel.

Stein is also interested in how this, in her view, deficiency of thought, the ability to extract principles but understand nothing of human character, becomes valued. In one of her rare moments of connection to the world outside the text, she mentions Herbert Spencer, the famous 19th-century biologist and general polymath, and examines how this lack of understanding and theoretical impulse go hand in hand¹¹⁹:

Mostly these have not much instinct for being in things and in men and women. What these realise as being in things and in men and women is mostly true and alright for a beginning for living but these then do not react to it in living, these rationalize it and from that they come to a principle in living that from then on all their life guides them. These have not then a capacity for growing from experiencing. (365)

Rather than being an advantage, this capacity for abstract reasoning is for Stein a handicap, a blockage to development and growth; with a fixed theory, and seemingly endless energy, they can only go in one direction, further isolating themselves from their own human understanding by virtue of their self-affirming theories. She takes this further, tying this inability to account for affect and experience to the emphasis on rationality and logic itself:

Many are very logical in being ones being thinking, some of these are demonstrating something, some of these are beginning demonstrating something, some of these are not really demonstrating anything, some of these are occasionally demonstrating something ... Some while they are being logical are experiencing very little of being ones being

¹¹⁹ Given this characterization of Spencer, it is striking that Joan Richardson seizes on Spencer himself as ‘evidence’ of Stein’s engagement with biology. In *A Natural History of Pragmatism*, she spins out the speculative claim that “Stein’s patterning of words is a prehension of the genome’s patterning” (240), an almost eerie further demonstration of the union of lack of understanding and what tries to pass itself off as interdisciplinary Theory.

living, some while they are being logical have at times the conviction of being ones experiencing being living, some are certain that being logical ones makes of them ones being ones experiencing being living and this is perhaps true of them. (781)

While the final “perhaps” suggests the possibility that rationality and experience are not by nature in opposition to each other, the “conviction” seems mostly to be undermined by the reality of the position itself; those who are willing to dissociate thought from experience will have a difficult time actually accounting for the complexity of experience. This formulation clearly links logic to demonstration, *not* recognition and understanding, which suggests that, like Herbert Spencer, those who are eager to be ruled by theory only sustain this artificial mode of experience by *ruling out* everything that doesn’t fit.

An easy argument against Stein’s indictment of this theoretical mode would be to simply point out how totalizing and theoretical her models, complete with ‘diagrams,’ of personality and psychology are. There is some validity to this criticism, but Stein proceeds in a very unscientific way, in the sense that she has no idea where she will end up when she ends; she has no hypothesis, and nothing to prove in advance¹²⁰. Anticipating a similar question about the seemingly unrelated chapters of Ulrich’s writings on feelings and psychology, Musil writes in his notes: “Zu den Kapiteln über Gefühlspsychologie: das ist nicht Psychologie (in der Endabsicht), sondern Weltbeschreibung” (1941). For Musil, the point of such a seemingly theoretical and totalizing section is *not* to elucidate a new post- or neo- or contra-Freudian theory of drives and affect, but to describe the world as it comes, using theoretical potential but always imbedding it in a narrative context (as we also receive these chapters specifically filtered through Agathe’s reading of them, and not in their ‘purity’). Ulrich’s considerations within these chapters also

¹²⁰ In Paul Stephens’ account of Stein’s relation to “information overload” and the strategies she employed to break and sustain attention, he discusses B.F. Skinner’s attack on her ‘scientific’ language, and sets against it William Carlos Williams’ discussion of Stein as erasing the useless contributions of science/philosophy (148).

work against the theoretical mode; he considers the complaint that experience never really matches how theories of feeling assert it “ought” to work, and responds: “es ist das Zugeständnis, daß das wirkliche Geschehen überhaupt nicht ganz, und auch nicht in seiner Endgestalt, dem gedanklichen Bild entspreche, das man sich von ihm gemacht habe” (1169). Here the difficulty is in the “Bild” and not in the “Geschehen” itself; the theory is unable to deal with the complexity of events, partly because the “picture” never can be isolated in its frame, as it is constantly evolving; there is no primary identity, or teleological aim, that can be spoken from the beginning. The “Endgestalt” is only a corpse fashioned piecemeal from observed and inferred events, it cannot approach the ‘real.’

As a counterpart to the criticism Stein levels against logicians and scientists, Ulrich also recognizes this tendency in mystics and fanatics, that being too caught up in experience can also lead to the same structural problem. Although he admires these accounts of transformative spiritual experiences, and the possibility of “entwerden” they seem to offer, he explains to Agathe that they always want to identify a dogmatic “message” as the purpose of the experience: “von diesem Augenblick an erzählen sie uns natürlich nicht mehr ihre schwer beschreiblichen Wahrnehmungen, in denen es keine Haupt- und keine Tätigkeitsworte gibt, sondern sprechen in Sätzen mit Subjekt und Objekt, weil sie an ihre Seele und an Gott wie an zwei Türpfosten glauben, zwischen denen sich das Wunderbare öffnen wird” (754). Caught up in the necessity of a utility-value to their experience, they consider the ‘real’ of their visions to be the message they are to convey, which always ends up re-establishing hierarchies of language, gender, class, religion, and so forth. This becomes an empty transfiguration, because it has not transfigured the *method* of understanding reality, only opened up an emphasis on experience that can be just as easily hijacked into a purely theoretical mode as detached ‘logic’ as it more frequently is as

‘commandment.’ This is a fundamental misreading or misrecognition of the value of these experiences; Stein too addresses this ability to misread your own abilities and experiences as she speaks of one whose “mind in him was slow only because it went on logically working when all the actual learning had been done by this one as experiencing and it seemed slow because this one believing that his mind was developing things for him let this mind run him and keep him from poignant experiencing” (372). The over-emphasis on his mind’s abilities has led him to devalue the experiential knowledge which, to Stein at least, is the only thing moving him forward, and that without his consciousness.

Stein emphasizes how little the process of learning has to do with institutions and systems of education through Martha, Philip, and Cora; each of these pursue educational goals and achieve what they set out for, but each fail to really learn anything. Martha is considered by many to be “very foolish in not remembering what having been experiencing something any one would have supposed she would have been really learning” (424). The very few moments in which she seems to learn something, characterized as “attacking moments” because they upset assumptions she’s made, tend to lead her not to understanding but abstraction. When she sees a man hitting the woman with an umbrella, “this man was for her the ending of the living I have been describing that she had been living. She would go to college, she knew it then and understand everything and know the meaning of the living and the feeling in men and in women” (424). Her motivation to go to college is to understand “living” and “feeling,” which means that she *separates* herself from the heterogeneous mixture of living people she’s been surrounded by and pursues abstraction, education representing here the failure to understand, and instead to cover that failure with the acquisition of jargon or theory. Cora Dounor is also attracted to the “sordid life and the common lot” but only through complete detachment; she “pursued her way

expounding philosophy, imbibing beauty, desiring life, never questioning the things nearest her, interested only in abstract ideas and concrete desire and all her life was arranged to leave her untouched and unattached” (437-38). Philosophy is for Cora a realm in which she can pursue a hypothetical connection to life and satisfy her desire for the “common lot” because she’s convinced her theories are universal human principles. But she is completely unattached, other than to Philip Redfern, who is equally alienated from any true understanding; he “learned his principles from his mother and these were in her longings and aspirations rather than reasoned settled purposes and experiencing and they were real in him though really then he did not believe in them though then and longer he lived by them” (431). Having been trained by his mother to accept her beliefs as realities, he lives by a theory which is not even borne out in his own practice; as a champion of women’s rights in theory, in practice he disrupts the structure of a successful women’s college, has an affair with Cora, and treats Julia with disdain and coldness because she doesn’t fit his theory of what a self-actualized woman should look like.

The Arnheim/Diotima/Tuzzi affair shares some structural similarities with the disaster of the theories of Philip, Cora, and Julia; like Cora, Arnheim looks to philosophy and other abstract disciplines as a compensation for his total alienation from life; “die gesamte Ideologie eines großen Mannes, die ihn erfüllte, sei nur der Notersatz für etwas, das ihm verlorengegangen war” (384). Growing up sheltered and taught to regard himself as above the common lot, Arnheim becomes, in his mind, a voice of the common man in his extensive writings; but like Cora, this is just an “Ersatz” designed to simulate the warmth of human relations by synthetic, abstract means. This “blinder Ideologenhochmut” (389) is what motivates his obsessive acquisition of trivial and dispersed knowledge, and what scares him away from committing to Diotima; his love of the theoretical, which he confuses for a love of “Seele,” leads him to his preaching.

Musil's ironic commentary on these mass-produced platitudes comes with the first introduction to Arnheim; "ein solches Mittel, das die Seele zwar tötet, aber dann gleichsam in kleinen Konserven zum allgemeine Gebrauch aufbewahrt, ist seit je ihre Verbindung mit der Vernunft, den Überzeugungen und dem praktischen Handeln gewesen, wie sie alle Moralen, Philosophien und Religionen erfolgreich durchgeführt haben" (186). Musil points out the inability for theory to keep life alive; it must kill life, must pin the corpse of any living thing to a card and taxonomize it, or preserve it artificially, in small, digestible doses, doled out by the beneficent hand of a systematic pedagogue. This system could be cynical if it were intentional, but it continues precisely because those who kill life are convinced they are contributing to it; as Ulrich expresses it, "Wissenschaft führt das veränderliche Erlebnis auf das unveränderliche Gesetz zurück und hat darum immer etwas vom 'Reich der toten Natur' an sich" (1919). Here the theoretician resembles a taxidermist more than a zoologist, by seeking to explain life by abstract laws with easily-portable concepts, rather than examining the system as it develops, and within which he himself is implicated and inextricable¹²¹.

The consequences of these abstractions can be extreme, but because the effects are so indirectly linked to their causes—through the very mechanism of rational detachment, because systematic, metonymic thought is vilified—no one but the world-building novelist is really equipped to criticize it. Ulrich examines the methods by which logical systems are built and concludes, "Philosophen sind Gewalttäter, die keine Armee zur Verfügung haben und sich deshalb die Welt in der Weise unterwerfen, daß sie sie in ein System sperren" (253). These systems, which are always small enough to be manageable in the course of a treatise or a

¹²¹ Tobias Gnüchtel, in his examination of Musil's use of narrative argumentation, contrasts these two modes of examination—the abstract, conceptual, and the concrete, chaotic—as well: "von hier aus wird das 'Zu-einem-Begriff-Einschmelzen,' das der Essayismus vermeiden will deutlicher: Wenn der Essayismus als exakter Lebenentwurf Reduktionen vermeiden will, darf 'die ungezähmte Wildheit der Dinge' nicht sprachlich reduziert, sondern muss in ihrer Kontingenz ausgehalten werden" (402).

dissertation, simplify to a dangerous degree, enacting violence on real-world relations, though rarely taking into account how they are deployed. Arnheim speaks of this “indirectness” as a trait of the modern businessman, but it is relevant to every move to abstraction:

Durch diese zur Virtuosität ausgebildete ‘Indirektheit’ wird heute das gute Gewissen jedes Einzelnen wie der ganzen Gesellschaft gesichert; den Knopf, auf den man drückt, ist immer weiß und schön, und was am anderen Ende der Leitung geschieht, geht andere Leute an, die für ihre Person wieder nicht drücken. Finden Sie es abscheulich? So lassen wir Tausende sterben oder vegetieren, bewegen Berge von Leid, richten damit aber auch etwas aus. (638)

The consequences of this indirect “button-pushing” mentality, in which the ethical responsibility for any action is deferred to an abstraction, are literalized in Moosbrugger. Musil compares Moosbrugger’s fate—the protracted consideration of death—to the fate of a sparrow, and concludes it is a relief to see the sparrow die because you just have to find the natural laws responsible for its condition, “statt daß man sie, wie in der Moral und Rechtsgelehrtheit, selbst erzeugt” (534). To “beget” laws in abstract, rational, but horrifyingly violent ways, is the consequence of detached theoretical reasoning; this is Moosbrugger’s realization as he considers his fate: “So war die Vorschrift nun der Ersatz für die verlorene Teilnahme der Welt, und Moosbrugger dachte: ‘Du hast einen lange Strick um den Hals und kannst nicht sehen, wer daran zieht.’ ... Aus solchen unpersönlichen Geschehnissen setzt sich in einer Weise das persönliche Geschehen zusammen, die vorläufig unbeschreiblich ist” (533). Although these complex interlocking systems of the modern state are generally indescribable, setting them in a narrative context allows Musil to critique the structure of this theoretical apparatus: it trades individual, personal relations for an appeal to abstract ideals, which allows individuals to justify, ethically,

their actions. But examined in an insistent narrative, the connections are maintained against the indirectness.

Moosbrugger's dissociative thinking allows him to literalize this tendency to treat individuals as abstract entities; he becomes split into hundreds of Moosbruggers, all of whom share in common the fact that they are reduced to an instrumental usage, they are all "allgemeinen, inhaltsarmen Begriffe" (532). The reduction to a flat concept is the violence of abstraction, as Bonadea also experiences. After she becomes caught up in the *Parallelaktion*, in its abrupt swerve into sexology, she talks to Ulrich about how interested Diotima is in her 'deviant' sexuality, and then realizes, in this other context, how instrumentalized she has become: "sie hatte zu ihrer Überraschung erst mit Bewußtsein bemerkt, daß diese Worte nicht für die Wissenschaft, sondern auch für das Gefühl eine Bedeutung haben, als aus deren unbeaufsichtigter Gefühlsseite schon die Flammen züngelten. Sie hatte da Diotima gehaßt. 'Über so etwas so zu reden daß man alle Lust daran verlieren muß!' (888). Her anger is at the violence of abstraction, of dissociating words from their affective dimension, of 'sterilizing' her experience while simultaneously oversexualizing it. Stein speaks of the problem of being instrumentalized as well; "as I was saying then the instrument nature is one having sensitive being or power of idealizing or power for seizing without knowing it other people's suggestion. If the seizing is their own volition that makes another being, that is not living other people's lives in living" (224). To "seize" is to abstract, to pull from one context into another, and to use it for another purpose. This is why the only possible strategy for resistance to this instrumentalization is to insist on narrative, to insist that identity is rooted in a context legible only through painstaking world-building, which is the opposite of the palaces of the air in concept-laden thought.

The deracination inherent in the move to abstraction presents, for Musil, two major problems; such theories end up either restricting themselves further and further into compartments, losing all capability of connectivity, or pushing into universalist claims which their authors never recognize as springing from their own particular biases. The first problem is the one that perhaps garners the more spiteful of his rhetoric; these are the “Berufsideologen,” the specialists who know nothing; one particularly deformed example is the criminal specialist assigned to Moosbrugger, with his own private reliquary of grisly objects:

Es gibt solche Menschen, welche das Leben eines Heiligen oder eines Bohemiens führen, ganze Universitäten zusammenlesen, in den entlegensten Winkeln irgendeiner Sache (unfehlbar) Bescheid wissen, wie ein böser Hofhund, der keinen zweiten duldet, über ein außerordentlich scharfes kritisches Urteil verfügen, und doch schöpferisch nichts mehr hervorbringen als während ihres ganzen Lebens ein paar, in ihrem Unverhältnis lächerlich kleine spezialistische Veröffentlichungen. Das wäre der Kern! (1695)

The territorial treatment of knowledge leads to its utter devaluation, and the inability to trust any of its tiny gains to be valid for any whole; these are the “Teillösungen” against which Ulrich warns again and again—they are valid only on paper, and on thinly-printed sheets of jargon-rich journals in any discipline. Ulrich also encounters this in Dr. Strastil, an astronomer he meets on the tram; they talk briefly about science, but he asks her where she’s going and she says she’s headed to the mountains for a “bit of nature.” Ulrich, astounded at this idiotic and sentimental platitude from the mouth of a colleague he admires, tries to explain how untenable and problematic this conception of ‘nature’ is, but “sie war nicht imstande, ihn zu verstehen; ihre große Denkerfahrung in reinen Begriffen nützte ihr nicht das geringste” (866). Like Cora, she is adequately prepared to converse on a few particular subjects, but demonstrates an absolutely

unoriginal viewpoint in nearly any other area; Ulrich notes with sadness the connection between “einer außerordentlichen Entwicklung des begrifflichen Denkens mit auffälligem Schwachsinn des Seelenverstandes” (867). Her ability to think conceptually, because it has been compartmentalized and abstracted, actually hinders her ability to think critically in other areas, and especially not to handle the moral dimensions of her work, her life, or art. This resembles his description of the industry of academic knowledge to a poultry farm—“man hat für hochfliegende Gedanken eine Art Geflügelfarm geschaffen, die man Philosophie, Theologie oder Literatur nent, und dort vermehren sie sich in ihrer Weise immer unübersichtlicher” (358)—in which each discipline is carefully fattened, encouraged to focus only on engorging itself and not to consider what implications arise from this division of poultry-ness, or by extension, humanness, and to what horrific and exploitative ends it generally leads.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who bulldoze distinctions in their pursuit of universal truths; Hagauer is a particular target of this characterization. Musil’s description of his “buttoning-up” method as universalizing in its aims but arising completely from his own personal biases:

denn sein alltägliches seelisches Erleben bestand zum größten Teil aus fachlichen Beziehungen und bei persönlicheren Vorkommnissen aus jenem ‘rechten Gefühl,’ das eine Mischung aller in der weißen Rasse im gegebenen Fall möglichen und im Umlauf befindlichen Gefühle darstellt, mit einem gewissen Aufschlag an den lokal-, berufs- oder stadesmäßig nächstliegenden. (950)

Musil dissects the presumptions of moral rectitude when based on an unexamined, uncritical recycling of every half-baked feeling of racial purity, class solidarity, intellectual equality, and gender obliviousness; this is at the core of Musil’s criticism of Kant, included among his notes.

He calls into question the applicability of universal tenets such as the categorical imperative, saying that Kant “drückte ja nur das Gefühl des Bürgertums aus, wenn wir zu entscheiden hätten, möchten wir es so, und besser, machen” (1889). He goes on to link this desire (to stuff a particular ideology, which arises from particular racial, gender, economic, and political conditions, into a universal philosophy) to the causes of war generally, as nations engage in the same exercise of promoting their own particular, and unexamined, concepts of social being, onto a worldwide stage¹²². By extracting these insights into the human condition from their imbeddedness within particular social organizations, you lose the narrative cohesion which would also show how quickly these are able to change. In viewing the rapid interplay between movements in art and politics before the war, Musil compares this theory-heavy infighting to fashion: “‘Man ist’ wechselt, wie es scheint, ebenso schnell wie ‘Man trägt’ und hat mit ihm gemeinsam, daß niemand, wahrscheinlich nicht einmal die an der Mode beteiligten Geschäftsleute, das eigentliche Geheimnis dieses ‘Man’ kennt” (453). By positing a universal “man” behind any of the drapery, intellectual or literal, placed on display, these abstractions cannot deal with their own contradictions and simply become replaced without ever being examined.

Stein also points to the inability to see internal contradiction as strongly correlated with the desire for universal principles: “there are then very many men and there is then from the generalized virtue and concrete action that is from the nature of them that might make one think they were hypocrites in living but they are not although certainly there are in living some men

¹²² Patrizia McBride develops an extended analysis of Musil’s usage of and identification with or against Kant in her chapter on the ethics of aesthetic judgment; she characterizes Musil as “relocating” Kantian principles in an analysis firmly grounded in his own contemporary situation, but also acknowledges that his strongest engagement with these principles is not in his notes or philosophical writings but in his novel which Offers “a self-referential testing ground for Musil’s understanding of art’s relation to ethics” (127). She does not explicitly acknowledge, though, that this constitutes at least a revision if not a refutation of the assumption that abstract philosophical discourse is the best-suited mode for inquiry; her quotation does suggest, however, implicitly, that Kant’s writings are *not* self-referential, and do not constitute a testing-ground for the conditions they analyze, which is Musil’s point.

wanting to deceive other men but this is not true of this kind of them” (489). Stein then gives a long description of this kind, a bumblingly theoretical and generally harmless, but totally hypocritical bunch; they have a theory of virtuous being in their minds and perceive whatever they do to be in harmony with that abstracted good, but they can never correlate their own far from moral actions as deficient in their moral universe without extreme violence and shock: “they are the men then very ordinary men who have it in them to believe that that they have inside them in their living in their feeling in their thinking what all good decent men have in them in their thinking” (491). Stein points out that this desire to make of themselves an everyman and consider that all others act as they do corresponds to a totally un-self-conscious mode of living in which nearly everything they do contradicts the principles they espouse, but because they view themselves as good in an abstract sense, they cannot even see that their actions contradict their intentions. Only to those around them is this obvious; “it is perplexing always to the families of them” (504). In other words, the only way to combat this tendency to abstraction is through the family, the proximal Other, through those able to see the narrative continuity and the apparent contradictions within that narrative, but who are already implicated and will not simply reject, but work to correct or complicate that perplexing abstraction.

This seems to be the role that Agathe plays for Ulrich as well; she takes what he would approach as theoretical possibilities and literalizes them, showing them in their relational context for him; this comes out in her decision to change her father’s will: “es kam ihr vor, es wären Recht und Unrecht nicht mehr allgemeine Begriffe und ein für Millionen von Menschen angerichtetes Kompromiß, sondern zauberhafte Begegnung von Mir und Dir, Irrsinn erster, noch mit nichts vergleichlicher und an keinem Maß zu messender Schöpfung. Eigentlich machte sie Ulrich ein Verbrechen zum Geschenk” (798). Though this could be seen as anarchy, and Ulrich

considers this possible facet of this interpersonal and literal understanding of crime and justice, it is also an antidote to the mass-production which abstraction tends to produce. In the perhaps negligible, but powerfully interpersonal, incestuous relationship he develops with his sister lies the possibility of a different moral order, one which doesn't require obedience and submission:

Dabei werden Geduld, Gehorsam, Regelmäßigkeit, Gleichmut und andere sehr ordentliche Eigenschaften zu Hauptbestandteilen des Menschen im Privatzustand, während alles Ungezügelter, Gewalttätiger, Süchtiger und Gefährlicher, dessen er, als ein Wildromantiker, doch auch nicht entbehren mag, seinen vortrefflichen Sitz im Regime hat. Wahrscheinlich ist diese merkwürdige Neigung, sich einem Regime zu unterwerfen, oder ein anstrengendes, unangenehmes und dürftiges Leben nach den Vorschriften eines Arztes, Sportlehrers oder anderen Tyrannen zu führen, obgleich man es mit ebenso gutem Mißerfolg auch unterlassen könnte, schon ein Ergebnis der Bewegung zum Arbeiter-, Krieger- und Ameisenstaat, dem sich die Welt annähert. (1054)

The need for a “regime” is the danger of a society which prides itself on individuality; in seeking a regime in fitness, or social groups, or politics, or art, norms amass themselves and reassert hierarchies, and their compartmentalization ensures that everyone, as long as they believe that they are exerting their individual wills, actually will never come across the idea that they are all subscribing to the same system¹²³. This creates a system of masters and disciples, in which power is concentrated in abstract systems above the comprehension or resistance of any individual, and therefore all submit themselves to it.

¹²³ Butler addresses this in her chapter “The Question of Social Transformation” in *Undoing Gender*; she argues that “we might say, ‘we must know the fundamentals of the human in order to act in such a way that we preserve and promote human life as we know it.’ But what if the very categories of the human have excluded those who should be operating within its terms, who do not accept the modes of reasoning and justifying ‘validity claims’ that have been proffered by western forms of rationalism? Have we ever yet known the ‘human’? What might it take to approach that knowing? Should we be wary of any final or definitive knowing? If we take the field of the human for granted, then we fail to think critically—and ethically—about the consequential ways that the human being is produced, reproduced, deproduced” (222).

The danger of theory is in its pedagogical nature; it always wants to attract disciples and adherents, to assure itself of—to borrow a term from Mann—a “Nachfolger.” Meingast, Musil’s resident philosopher, embodies this tendency in a particularly odious way, and encourages Clarisse, who views herself as his shield bearer, to further abstraction. Where she constantly questioned herself before, and especially in conversations with Ulrich, found herself being undermined and put on the spot for her contradictory assertions, she finds in her disciple-master relation with Meingast a willing promoter of her more insane ideas. He praises her ‘originality’ of thought, and convinces her

daß man sich einem Wahn überlassen müsse, wenn man der Gnade teilhaftig geworden sei, ihn zu fühlen. Denn ein Wahn ist eine Gnade ... überdies verstand sie unter Wahn nichts anderes als man Willen nennt, nur besonders gesteigert. Clarisse hatte sich bisher davon eingeschüchtert gefühlt, daß sie sich nur wenig von dem, was in der Welt vorgehe, richtig zu erklären vermöge, aber seit der Wiederbegegnung mit Meingast sah sie sich gerade dadurch begünstigt, nach eigenem Ermessen zu lieben, zu hassen und zu handeln. (910)

The master/disciple interaction encourages not just sycophants but psychopaths; it encourages Clarisse to view herself apart from the network of relations which had hemmed her more insane impulses in, and kept her in check. Abandoning these for the “new” theories of Meingast, she is strengthened in her resolve to discard the judgments of the ‘common’ crowd and rise into genius, via abstraction. Clarisse is a demonstration of the easily-instrumentalized applicability of the discourse of genius, as she perceives herself as accessing universal, world truths, and yet with her increasing illegibility and paranoia, is unable to communicate, and encloses herself in a system only intelligible to herself.

The difficulty of this this mode of critical and self-un-conscious pedagogy is highlighted in Stein through a pair of musicians. Mackinly Young is a promising young musician, but learns to trust only his own judgment:

He was certain that he needed to be one to be really living to be one creating something in writing music that certainly would be a thoroughly good thing ... [he was] steadily learning more and more and always then when he was composing the only thing that was anything were things that really were not anything, were just suggestions of there being somewhere inside that one a sense really in being living ... [he] would certainly end up by teaching something and being certain that the ones he was knowing would never work hard enough or be serious enough to really do the thing. (693-94)

The pedagogue is the failed creator: unable to create, he resorts to teaching, and to criticism. So too are the theoreticians: unable to create a living unity, they hack up life into manageable pieces and stuff it into their books (in formaldehyde) or hang it in natural-enough looking environments (if you ignore the fact that the subjects don't move). This is further exemplified in Arragon, Alfred's teacher, who approaches a more generative mode but falls short: "this one had inspired affection in him and to himself and to every one it was passion, it never was passion in him and more it came out in him as more and more in living this one needed that other ones by their creating approximated to what his taste would have been if he had had passion instead of affection for luxury and beauty in living" (578). This is discipleship; not passion, but performance, and especially a performance which requires its neophytes to shape themselves, their art, into preconceived ideas and forms, borrowed from abstractions about beauty or other ideals. Against this is true "passion," which though anarchistic, is nevertheless creative; it builds, and does not need to reassure itself through anxious appraisal of its validity. In Diotima and

Arnheim's relationship, there is constant anxiety about whether they are truly at the pinnacle of spiritual and intellectual communion, because of his businessman's sense that "groß ist, was durch tüchtige Reklame dafür ausgeschrien wird" (433). Without advertisement, and without coming in anticipated forms and recognizable poses, Diotima and Arnheim are lost. In contrast, without a theory of love, or one which develops along with their relationship, Ulrich and Agathe are able to enact a passionate connection that is creative and self-conscious.

The desire to merge, unite, and create in this "passion" is what Ulrich realizes as he reflects on his reasons for writing about psychology in the first place; he realizes that writing about it was an attempt to make his incestuous desire 'safe' and to house it in respectable terms—theoretical terms, in other words. But as he thinks about it, he realizes: "die Zuneigung zu Agathe und die Abneigung gegen sein Leben in der Welt waren stets zwei Seiten ein und derselben Neigung und Lage gewesen ... verstand er seine Vergangenheit richtig, so war anfangs sein rasches Hinschwenken zu Agathe auch eine Kampfansage gegen die Welt gewesen; Liebe ist überdies immer die Auflehnung eines Paares gegen die Weisheit der Menge" (1314). With this realization of his desire for union, he considers that "der Kern aller seiner Kritik an der Welt nichts so sehr als ein Wissen um die Liebe gewesen sei. 'So bin ich denn' ... es wurde ihm vielleicht zum erstenmal der tiefe Widerspruch seiner Leidenschaft gegen die ganze Anlage seiner Natur bewußt" (1314). The "passion" that he perceives at the core of his being—which to his surprise is opposed to the 'exactness' he demands of himself otherwise—makes his relation to Agathe also a deeply personal disturbance of what he considered settled. This is the anarchy of pairing, the fact that it creates something entirely new, entirely unexpected, in the combination of individuals, making an identity which cannot directly correlate to what preceded it. Ulrich considers this union in a very biological manner: "dann bildet sich eine Gemeinschaft heraus, die

einen ungewöhnlichen Ursprung zeigt wie eine Narbe ... an die Stelle des Ich ist der erste, deutlich als unbehaglich und eine Verminderung empfundene, aber doch unwiderstehliche Ansatz eines Wir getreten" (715). Although this can seem like a reduction, it quickly grows into a "scar," as two distinctly enfolded beings merge into something that can no longer be easily separated into its component parts.

The potentialities of pairing fascinate Stein, who asserts again and again that it is necessary to study groups of twos, threes, and more to understand anything about identity;

There is then always repeating, there is then always individual existing. There is then always repeating, there is then always repeating in each one, in each kind of them, in pairs of them, in pairs of women, in pairs of men, in pairs of men and women ... a pair of them with so individual a relation made up of two who are so singular in their being that it never seems that there can be others just like them. Always then one sees another pair of them and sometimes it is almost dizzying, it gives to each one of the pairs of them an unreal being. (221)

This pairing is paradoxical, almost "unreal" because those in this relation are simultaneously individual and inseparable; although there are many ways in which this pairing can occur, the best outcome is when a pairing forms something that is co-constitutive because what is shared is the codependency of it, the dualism required to be dynamic, to propel forward into continued relation. Ulrich speaks to this dynamism as he explicates the "thousand-year kingdom" as a kingdom of *love*; this state of being is the desire "mit der Hilfe gegenseitiger Liebe in einer so gehobenen weltlichen Verfassung zu leben, daß man nur noch das fühlen und tun kann, was diesen Zustand erhöht und erhält" (874). But this is much easier to theorize than to enact, as Ulrich comes to realize when he continues with Agathe; at the end of the climactic meeting of

the Parallelaktion, he meets up with Agathe and they both want to explain how they are feeling; he grabs her hands and they both “verlor für einen Augenblick den irdischen Begriff. Der Stoß des Blutes klopfte aus einer Hand an die andere. Ein tiefer Graben unweltlicher Herkunft schien sie und ihn in ein Nirgendland einzuschließen” (1025). Caught in an incestuous, physical relation, this would seem to be the apotheosis of the theory he has been spinning out, but as he remembers all he’s said about it, “in der unmittelbaren Anwendung, die sie zwischen ihm und seiner Schwester in diesem Augenblick erfahren sollten, war es plötzlich unmöglich. Das erregte ihn hilflos. Aber Agathe verstand ihn deutlich. Und es hätte sie glücklich machen müssen, daß zum erstenmal die Schale um ihn ganz zerbrach und ihr ‘harter Bruder’ wie ein zu Boden gefallenes Ei das Innere preisgab” (1025). For Ulrich, the importance is attaining the condition he has sought, and he interprets it as failure, but for Agathe, success *is* vulnerability, and this is a step towards the intimacy he’s longing for as well.

Although they both retreat from this moment, their proximity in the house continues to exacerbate the conditions of their paradoxical union and separation; Agathe, tired of Ulrich’s endless discussions and theories, thinks: “wie schön wäre es, wenn er nichts sagte als: ‘Ich will dich lieben wie mich selbst, und dich kann ich eher so lieben als alle anderen Frauen, weil du meine Schwester bist!’” (1059). Although she doesn’t say what she is thinking, nor does he say what she wishes, Ulrich looks at her intensely and “sie war in diesem Augenblick allen seinen Sinnen verführerischer denn je gegenwärtig, und etwas von dem, was sie verbarg, erriet er, wenn auch nicht alles” (1059). Something is transmitted between them, but it is on the level of understanding and not conscious thought or conscious speech. In this way, they resist Ulrich’s expectation for rational discourse. In a Hegelian sense, they never come to a synthesis because they are never fully differentiated into separate and opposing parties; because of their familiarity,

each retains something of the Other within them, and their intuitive understanding seems to exist in a perpetual state of “Aufhebung”. Stein also sees the potential for this understanding and its effect on identity:

Two knowing each other all their living might tell each other sometime what each one of them thought the other one had been, thought the other one would be doing in being living. Two having known each other very well in their living might tell each other what each one thought really about the other ... Two knowing each other very well in living might be knowing what each one thought about each other one ... Two knowing each other very well in being living might be thinking they are not knowing what the other one is thinking about the other one ... Two knowing each other in living one might be telling some one sometimes what that one thought of the other one.” (746-47)

To consider the possibilities for intense and mutual understanding also requires the admission that pairing can result in the collapse of certainty and understanding as well, which Stein thematizes here. But whether it fractures or enlivens identity, this ability to combine always leaves a mark, related as always, in Stein, to the “telling” of it.

Ulrich and Agathe also grapple with the difficulties of positing an ideal and intuitive understanding that only exists precognitively, prelinguistically, and never can be deployed in the real world. When Ulrich claims that a true agreement of minds would be a “zweiter Verstand,” Agathe responds that such a claim is the egotism of every couple; “sie glauben bloß, sie zu haben!” fiel nun Ulrich wieder ein. ‘Sie stimmen überein!’ ‘Sie werden übereingestimmt!’ (1107). When they discuss what sorts of agents could ‘force’ this agreement, they consider that “sie gehen nicht immer fein zu Werke, um uns Menschen eines Sinnes zu machen. Suggestion, Gewalt, Einschüchterung, Gedankenlosigkeit, Feigheit und ähnliches spielt keine ganz kleine

Rolle dabei” (1107). Cultural and social forces, institutions and norms of all varieties, all tend to emphasize their own ability to create community, a sense of unity based on whatever they emphasize, but this is the opposite of mutual pairing; instead, this is abstraction and deracination again, the impulse to submit to a regime, to a dogma, and to fit yourself into a community by making ever-smaller boundaries of who is included within its confines. This is what Ulrich realizes about his time as a soldier, his time as a mathematician, and eventually, about his experiences as a lover as well; in each case the price of membership in the group is the sense of estrangement and difference that he constantly preserves with Agathe. This is what, for Julia Dehning, is unsettling about marriage to Alfred; “it left her a foreboding sense that perhaps the world had meanings in it that could be hard for her to understand and judge” (33).

Where Julia finds this foreboding and frightening, Ulrich finds this possibility of having new modes of perception opened through relation invigorating. During the *Nachlass* descriptions of his trip with Agathe, he gushes, “Es ist so schön, anders zu sein, als man geboren wurde” – fuhr A. fort – ‘Ich habe mich aber eben davor gefürchtet” (1660). He explains to her his dreams, and that they seem to express a desire not to dissolve and merge, but to multiply; he thinks “daß unsre Begierde nicht verlangt, ein Mensch aus zweien zu werden, sondern im Gegenteil, unsrem Gefängnis, unsrer Einheit zu entrinnen, zwei zu werden in einer Vereinigung” (1660). When Agathe questions whether this is not just another form of possessiveness clothed in more palatable language, he responds, “Nie ist es das, was die andern sagen!’ Er schleuderte den großen Stein, den er in der Hand hielt, so zornig zur Erde, daß der lockere Kalk zerbarst. ‘Wir haben uns vergessen’ sagte er sanft, nahm Ag. unter dem Arm und zog sie fort. ‘Es müßten eine Schwester und ein Bruder noch dann sein, wenn sie in hundert Stücke geteilt sind” (1661). This comes again and again through Ulrich, the emphasis on the specifically familial, sibling-

incestuous dimension of their union; without that mutual relation, the “geschwisterliche Wuchs der Körper aus einer Wurzel” (1082), then it is just difference without understanding. To Musil, this is very much a gendered phenomenon, which is why he pushes continually toward androgyny as the ideal state. Agathe, not just as a sister, but as a woman, is a continual revelation to him. Through her he begins to see himself not as an undifferentiated human, but as equally gendered and embodied, which causes him to stand

reglos vor Staunen, als ob es Wunder was für eine Entdeckung bedeutete, daß der Mensch in zwei verschiedenen Dauerzuständen lebe. Nur verbarg sich unter diesem Stillstand seines Denkens eine andere Erscheinung. Denn man kann hart sein, selbstsüchtig, bestrebt, gleichsam hinaus geprägt, und kann sich plötzlich als der gleiche Ulrich Soundso auch umgekehrt fühlen, eingesenkt, als ein selbstlos glückliches Wesen in einem unbeschreiblich empfindlichen und irgendwie auch selbstlosen Zustand aller umgebenden Dinge. (687)

This seems to be a realization that gender is performance, that he could identify with a particular deployment of masculinity in its hardness, exteriority, and egotism, but also could perceive his relation differently. Gender becomes a “condition” and not an eternal division¹²⁴, and this becomes a recognition of the necessity of the proximal Other, the always-differentiated but intuitively similar other, not an extension of his ego or sexual desire, but an active, necessary difference.

Though this is, for Ulrich, caught up in gender and androgyny, for Stein this is a vital though rare realization that your identity is in flux just as much as that of the other: “there are

¹²⁴ In Talay’s discussion of gender in the novel, he points out that Agathe is the agent of the “andere Zustand” because she, unlike Clarisse or Diotima, does not attempt to carry out a theory, and by remaining insistently embodied, but fluid in identity, she represents “an alternative mode of being-in-the-world, neither cultural nor ideological” (64).

many ways then that people have affection in them, there are many ways of having feeling about people near one ... Mostly every one has changing in them in their feeling about any one. Mostly every one never thinks about the changing the other one may be having in them” (215). This is a recognition of simultaneous, non-hierarchical existence: that you exist in a mutable state as much as those who you consider changing in themselves. To consider yourself unchangeable, or only in ways that you are in control of, is to attempt to “master” life, to master your own narrative and recognize no other voices. Ulrich brushes up against this gendered problem in the *Nachlass*:

Herr dieses Zustandes werden zu wollen, kam U. jetzt oft ganz lächerlich vor. –Ich bin ja seine Frau geworden – sagte er sich – Wir sind 3 Schwestern, Ag., ich u dieser Zustand ...Ich u Du sind ja auch nur Dinge. Aber wir sind Dinge, die miteinander in Signalaustausch stehn, u. das gibt uns das Wunderbare; es fließt etwas zwischen uns hin u her ... Ich habe gesagt, wir sind Schwestern. Du hast nichts dagegen, daß ich die Welt liebe, aber ich muß sie lieben wie eine Schwester, nicht wie einen Mann, oder wie ein Mann eine Frau. (1523-24)

To embrace difference is *not* to embrace it as a heterosexual man ‘owning’ and dominating the state of being, the result of desire; instead it is to love without possession, perhaps without gender entirely. It is to love in a familial way, incestuously and not incestuously; the familial comes to signify a mode of relation somewhere *between* queer and straight (although these should also not be posited as binary opposites), sexualized without being sexual, “etwas, das sich den gewöhnlichen Begriffen des Zusammenlebens nicht unterordnen ließ ... eine Zärtlichkeit ohne Ziel und Schranken. Auch ohne Namen und Hilfe” (1504). In opposition to Meingast’s xenophobic “Männerbund,” to be a “Schwesterbund” as Ulrich is suggesting is to create a differentiated experience of desire in which no necessary predation or domination defines the

cohesion of the group, rather their elective participation in the state of being itself, constitutes its cohesion.

Stein includes a somewhat extended description of how a sisterly relation such as this could exist, though she hardly idealizes it; the codependency of the two Shilling sisters is evidence against this as well. But with the sisters Anna, Cora, and Bertha, she suggests that their mode of relation does not require them to flatten distinctions between them into one narrative: “Anna and Cora and Bertha went through the changes then and they were living then altogether, they went through their changes, the changes she had had in her, first they were in Anna then in Cora and then in Bertha and they were never to the mother a history of her, they were never to her a history inside her” (101). Presumably speaking of puberty and menstruation, Stein does not level each of their experiences into a grand narrative of womanhood and coming of age¹²⁵; though their changes may well be similar, they maintain their distinction, and they do not come to form a history. She is suggesting, against the common idealization and appeal to “woman’s” experience, that there is nothing in any biological experience that is a *necessary* point of contact between all women, even those as closely related as sisters. This is also the case for Agathe, who has no strong relationships with other women, and distrusts the suffrage movement and its easy appeal to political solidarity (through its abstract, mass identification of primary traits such as gender). When she considers all her sexual experiences, she is astounded at the pettiness of the system of sexuality she has experienced which ‘elevates’ women to a prefabricated sex life in which they play a starring role, but have little to say in practice: “die Philosophie, die Agathe auf solche Weise erwarb, war einfach die des weiblichen Menschen, der sich nichts vormachen läßt und unwillkürlich beobachtet, was ihm der männliche Mensch vorzumachen trachtet. Ja, es war

¹²⁵ This is a temptation that some critics follow; Ruddick and Gyax in particular, invested as they are in their own narratives of daughters resisting fathers, claiming that “the narrator literally makes herself the mother of her characters” (15). Here Stein seems to resist that assumption that ‘mothering’ should entail any particular relation.

überhaupt keine Philosophie, sondern nur eine trotzig verhehlte Enttäuschung” (728). Though Musil engages in a great deal of flattening in making Agathe representative of femininity, he also acknowledges the potential that such an insistent difference can have in resisting either sentimental or philosophical accounts of sexuality.

This desire to abstract and identify the biological and emotional aspects of sexuality is something about which both Stein and Musil hold deep reservations. Diotima’s project to move the *Parallelaktion* into a sexological direction, her curiosity for the ‘nymphomania’ of Bonadea, and her pseudoscientific claims about erotic love in marriage “durch härtere Selbsterziehung” (820) not only fail to lead her or anyone around her to more satisfying sexual or emotional relationships, but it also allows Tuzzi to marginalize the potential difference she represents, and to subordinate her role in decision-making, in politics, into an interesting, if irrelevant, side-affair. Clarisse’s Nietzschean beliefs about sexuality and her tendency to view others as mere functions of a mythic game leads her to missteps with Ulrich, Meingast, Walter, and Moosbrugger. In the *Nachlass*, she drifts into irreclaimable regions of abstraction, with her diagrams in the sanatorium, and her insistence that Ulrich fit “auf dem rechten Platz in dem System ihrer Einbildungen” (1375). This insistence that difference be reclaimed—made subordinate into a pre-existing system—is also what ensures the David Hersland, junior, never forms any lasting relationship with any one, and dies alone:

In a way he was quite certain that not any one not coming to be loving him could be coming to be completely listening to him. In a way he was quite certain that not any one was coming to be loving him. In a way he was not certain of this thing. In a way some one was coming to be loving him and certainly then was listening to him and certainly then he was knowing this thing knowing that this one was listening to him and in a way

then he was certain that this one in a way was coming to loving him and certainly then this one was not ever complete that thing and in a way he was certain of this thing certain that this one was not coming to be completely that thing one loving him. (866-67)

Unable to fit this “one” into an absolute category, he rejects whatever semblance of “loving” he or she has for him, and moves on, on occasion surprised that he is unable to form attachments, but convinced in the accuracy of his own self-perception.

Part of the originality of Stein’s method is her ability, through the language she uses, to resist easy classification; her description of “loving,” from beginning to end, could describe any number of actual couplings, from vanilla sex to bestiality. Rather than engaging in the biologically deterministic jargon of Diotima, or the sentimental, confessional mode of Bonadea, Stein describes the functions and structures of loving as they are deployed:

Many women have it in them to be sometimes loving some one. Many of such of them have it in them then to be laying their hand on that one, to be feeling inside in them then and out from them the way any one being one having feeling of being some one directing any living is feeling, being some one giving something is feeling, being some one receiving something is feeling, being some one many might be finding it necessary to be respectfully addressing is feeling, being some one who is some one who is an important one by reason of being one being born to be in living is feeling. (739)

This feeling of giving, receiving, of being inside or outside of another, is applicable to a wide range of sexual experiences, without being “descriptive” or taxonomic in nature. Musil also wishes, through the vagueness of his descriptions, to expand sexuality beyond the biological and into the narrative; it is sustained through understanding and relation, and not investigation and theory. As he observes Agathe’s sexual difference, and how she experiences sexuality in a totally

different manner from him, Ulrich is at first tempted to engage in psychoanalytic explanations of why she might not have “die richtige Verbindung von Liebe u. Geschlecht” but then stops himself: “A. ließ diese Art Verstehen vor sich selbst nicht gelten. Einen geliebten Menschen verstehn, darf kein Nachspionieren, sondern muß ein Schenken aus einer Überfülle glückhafter Eingebungen sein. Man darf nur das erkennen, was bereichert” (1663). To accept difference without knowledge, without fitting that difference into a system, and a hierarchy, is to him what it means to reach a different mode of relation.

Stein’s desire, mentioned earlier, to “love everyone,” is related to this need to sustain interest despite difference; the need for love is a need for knowledge without relying on clinical or theoretical detachment. When she is confronted with types of being she does not know, or has difficulty loving, she admits: “I have not been loving any of this kind in men and women, I would like to be loving some one some, of this kind in men and women ... I am feeling some one of this kind in men and women. I know some thing of the character in them, something of the way they do some things in living, but they are a kind of them that are really different from these kinds I have been describing” (634). Having made this admission that her knowledge fails where love isn’t present, she says, “I will not be telling my troubles to everyone” (634). Loving is trouble, just as much as telling is; they trouble the boundaries between self and Other, and destabilize easy systemization. This is the paradox Ulrich addresses with Agathe as well;

Man liebt einen Menschen, weil man ihn kennt und weil man ihn nicht kennt; und man kennt ihn, weil man ihn liebt, und kennt ihn nicht, weil man ihn liebt ... Ist weiterhin die Liebe stärker als das Erstaunen, so kommt es zu einem Kampf zwischen diesen beiden, und manchmal geht daraus die Liebe – wengleich verzweifelt, erschöpft und unheilbar verwundet – als Siegerin hervor. (1105)

Though knowledge and love seem incommensurable in this assessment (which is difficult to determine, as Musil constantly revises this dialogue in the *Nachlass*), it is through this very inability to be reconciled that another state of being can emerge, not identical with any of the states that precede it, and capable of lifting (*aufheben*) differences in perception into a new mode of relation.

Ulrich's talk of the "thousand-year kingdom" and specifically his references to "seraphic love" form the basis of this new potential mode of relation:

Man könnte auch sagen: Liebe ohne Gegenspieler, dachte er. Oder ebensogut: Liebe ohne Geschlechtlichkeit. Man liebe heute überhaupt nur geschlechtlich: unter Gleichen möge man sich nicht ausstehn, und in der geschlechterweisen Verkreuzung liebe man sich mit einer wachsenden Auflehnung gegen die Überschätzung dieses Zwangs. Von beidem sei die seraphische Liebe aber befreit. Sie sei die von den Gegenströmungen der sozialen und sexuellen Abneigungen befreite Liebe. (877-78)

To accomplish this, gender expectations must fall away, or at least become detached from their "social" deployment. This is what Ulrich gestures at earlier, when he considers Diotima, his cousin, as simultaneously potentially erotic and un-erotic; he reconsiders his earlier sexual relations as "unrecht" and considers his strangely intimate relationship with her: "das reine Gefallen zweier Menschen aneinander, dieses schlichteste und tiefste der Liebesgefühle, das der natürliche Ursprung aller anderen ist, kommt bei dieser psychischen Verkehrung überhaupt nicht mehr vor" (284). Although, for him, at this point in the novel, the thought of an intellectual union without a physical one is difficult, because of their "Abneigung" on a physical level, there is also a sort of 'visionary' power in their unsexual relation to each other which keeps them in conversation and relation with each other, without ownership.

What Musil diagnoses as the “social” and the “sexual” dimensions of love, which must fall away to enter into a “seraphic” love, are also what Stein’s conception of loving must struggle against: “it is very hard for mostly every one to understand why another one has that way of loving, that way of being angry in them that they have in them. Some try to understand the other one’s way of doing these things but mostly every one finds it very puzzling. ... Some could let anything pass excepting the kind of way some one has of loving” (453). She later explains this more specifically in contrast her own method of examining all kinds of loving: “I am loving just now beautiful loving, I am loving nice loving, I am loving just now every kind of loving ... A very great many have very many prejudices concerning loving, more perhaps even than about drinking and eating. This is very common. Not very many are very well pleased with other people’s ways of having loving in them” (605). Most people, for Stein, have a desire to legitimize their own way of loving by suppressing others: by imposing a social compulsion and a sexual direction onto loving. More than almost any other dimension of human identity, this ‘queerness’ in loving is what people are least likely to ‘let pass’; having a certainty of moral and social rectitude is the antithesis of exploring human desire as it finds its various means of expression. Ulrich also discusses how identity and prejudice work together in the monogamous heterosexual system to limit knowledge and exploration; when Walter comes to Ulrich after his fight with Clarisse, he accuses him of encouraging Clarisse’s madness by allowing her to declare her love for him. Ulrich responds by considering what it would really mean for him to take Clarisse’s love seriously as a polyvalent desire, and not an either/or: “sie würde auch dich lieben u gerade dann in der besten dir zukommenden Art, weil sie frei von dem Ärger wäre, daß du gewisse Eigenschaften nicht hast, an denen ihr doch auch etwas liegt. Die einzige Bedingung wäre, daß du dich mir gegenüber wirklich als ein Freund betragen müßtest” (1567). Ulrich

diagnoses the problems of their marriage as relating to the expectation that one sexual partner fulfill all the expectations and embody all the characteristics of the other; but to take the free roam of desire seriously would require a selfless—perhaps sisterly—love between all sexual partners involved.

Stein also places the proliferation of possibility at the center of her project to write a “complete” history:

There are many kinds of loving in men, more and more this will be a history of them, there are many ways for women to have loving in them this will come out more and more in the history of women as it is here to be written, there are many ways for men to have loving in them, there are many ways that loving comes out from them, there are many ways for women and for men to have loving in them, this is a history of some of them, sometime there will be a history of all of them. (158)

Here Stein emphasizes the importance of loving to the project of writing her novel itself; loving is intimately tied to narrating. This is Ulrich’s insight as well, in his discussion with Agathe about love:

Der Mensch, recht eigentlich das sprechende Tier, ist das einzige, das auch zur Fortpflanzung der Gespräche bedarf. Und nicht nur, weil er ohnehin spricht, tut er es auch dabei; sondern anscheinend ist seine Liebseligkeit mit der Redseligkeit im Wesen verbunden ... Man muß sich also selbst den Reim darauf bilden, daß Gespräche in der Liebe fast eine größere Rolle spielen als alles andere. Sie ist das gesprächigste aller Gefühle und besteht zum großen Teil ganz aus Gesprächigkeit. (1219)

This seems to be central to both Musil and Stein’s resistance of the biological/diagnostic reading of sexuality, or the social limitations placed on it; love exists through speech—talking, telling,

remembering, and communicating¹²⁶. Speaking becomes central to sexuality, something entirely human and entirely within and to itself; implicated in the production and reproduction of what is human are both the sexual and the narrative dimensions: “some have it to love many men and many women or many men or many women, some have it to love the repeating in them, some have it to love every one and the repeating in every one, some have it to love some and to love repeating in every one” (307). Stein flattens the difference between ‘original’ and ‘repeated’ loving, interested in how these different modes of loving can proliferate and multiply rather than simply possess and extract.

Though Stein’s emphasis on repetition doesn’t have a precise parallel in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, Musil is also attuned to the ways in which the possible proliferates and generates, as opposed to the sterility of the scientific, rational, and exact. In his analysis of the ecstatic state, he distinguishes between “Stimmung” and “Gefühl,” and asserts that the “unbestimmten Gefühl” has something magical about it, because it doesn’t require that all of its contradictions resolve themselves into a distinct and nameable feeling; “ein Vergleich fiel ihm ein: ‘Das eine stirbt wie ein Einzelwesen, das andere dauert an wie eine Art oder Gattung’” (1198). Rather than insisting on singularity, embracing plurality allows for a generative fecundity, a plurality of forms rather than one indivisible ideal. Stein’s typology emphasizes plurality and repetition as well, blurring the line between type and individual; the motivation behind this seems to be an interest in democratizing this process of perception, taking it out of the hands of ‘experts’: “all men and all women, if they keep on in their living come to the repeating that makes it clear to anyone who listens to them then the real nature of them” (141). Stein’s love of repetition is evident

¹²⁶ Hans-Georg Pott, in his analysis of contingency and feeling in Musil’s work, points to this passage as indicating the centrality of the metaphoric mode to the process of loving: “ihr Wesen oder ihre Idee lässt sich nicht anders als im Gleichnis erfassen, oder in Musils Worten: durch Vergleichsketten, deren Glieder bis zur gänzlichen Unähnlichkeit verschieden sein können” (182). I would suggest that this “Vergleichsketten” is what I have characterizes as ‘metonymic’ rather than metaphoric, as the relation comes to the fore, rather than the object.

throughout the text, but here she emphasizes the fact that it is available to *anyone* willing to pay attention, and that it can reveal sets of differences and similarities in any formulation of human society—the closest available one being the family, which is why she returns to it again and again. But her intent in this repetition is not to formulate a stable theory, but rather to continually listen for disturbances and singularities emerging from that fecund repetition:

Each one then is sometime a whole one in me, I know it and I tell it, I am filled up then with that whole one inside me and I tell it and then it settles down inside me to always hearing it repeating in such a one, filling in and changing and being a completer and completer history of that one and always then it is quietly there in me and I like it. Sometimes it is disturbed in me and again completely fills me and then again it settles down in me. Then again it is quietly there in me and I always like it. (323)

Knowledge, repetition, and completion are related in somewhat contradictory ways here, but the crux of the assertion seems to be that completion is not a matter of finality and stability (that is, any history that can become “completer” has no “Endgestalt”), but an ongoing process of discovering relation and proliferation, emphasizing method over result. In this way, the “progress” of the family isn’t *toward* a utopic destination, but rather progression *through* a method by which they come to self-awareness¹²⁷, not of their singularity, but of their implication within a network of human relations; to discover singularity, you must also be willing to embrace your own redundancy.

This uncanny realization that your identity is tied up with the members of your reproductive unit—siblings, parents, cousins, children—can be unnerving, or it can be the

¹²⁷ Barbara Will, in her analysis of the discourse of genius in Stein, discusses two types of repetition in Stein; the unconscious, mechanical kind, and the queer kind which repeats back the same terms with difference, and she observes that with this repetition “alien” to itself, “*The Making of Americans* has metamorphosed from a formulaic reporting of all types of human being into a text *in process*, a text uncertain of its own future direction” (51).

occasion to switch from the particularity of metaphor to the relationality of metonymy, from the abstract and absolute into the contingent. In a genealogical sense, this shift in mentality is the switch from a pursuit of origins to a tracing of lines of possibility. Musil emphasizes this in his discussion of Kakanien and the War; he says that all are looking for the “Ursprung” of the War, and that each party, blindly ideological in their sense of absolute identity within their nation, race, ancestry, but

Schweren Herzens muß man also auf seine persönliche Ahnenreihe verzichten und annehmen, daß man ‘ab irgendwo’ gruppenweise gemeinsam abstamme. Und das hat verschiedene Folgen. So die, daß die Menschen sich teils für ‘Brüder’ halten, teils für ‘Fremdstämmlinge,’ ohne daß einer diese Grenze zu bestimmen wüßte, denn das, was man Nation und Rasse heißt, sind Ergebnisse und keine Ursachen. Eine andere Folge, nicht minder einflußreich, wenn sie auch nicht so offen zu Tage liegt, ist die, daß Herr Beliebig nicht mehr weiß, wo er seine Ursache hat; er fühlt sich infolgedessen wie einen abgeschnittenen Faden, den die fleißige Nadel des Lebens haltlos aus- und einzieht, weil man vergessen hat, ihm einen Knopf zu machen. Eine dritte, jetzt erst aufdämmernde, zum Beispiel die, daß man noch nicht nachgerechnet hat, ob und inwieweit es Herrn Ebenso-Beliebig doppelt und mehrfach gibt; im Bereich des erblich Möglichen liegt das durchaus, bloß weiß man nicht, wie groß die Wahrscheinlichkeit ist, daß es einem wirklich widerfahren könnte, sich selbst zu begegnen, aber ein dumpfer Druck davon.

(1437)

The insistence on stable and *a priori* categories of identity is, for Musil, to exchange cause for effect in the most dogmatic manner possible. Where some see chaos in the evolutionary perspective, and the possibility of duplication, Musil seems to see a chance to change, to pursue

a new mindset, outside the framework of “purity”. Against the endless divisions of identity politics, Musil sees the possibility of shared inheritance, of human possibility in proliferation.

The irony with which Musil views his contemporary scene is apparent in his treatment of the avant-garde, represented by ideologues like Hans Sepp or Feuermaul, or by dilettantes like Walter; the self-conscious modernity of these perspectives, assured that they are new, unique, and vibrant, prompts his mocking question: “die Familienzeitschriften haben sich die Haare kurz schneiden lassen; die Staatsmänner zeigen sich gern in den Künsten der Kultur beschlagen, und die Zeitungen machen Literaturgeschichte. Was ist also abhanden gekommen?” (57). Although it is an ironic question, in relation to such trivial publications, for Ulrich, “what *has* gotten out of hand?” seems to be a refrain for all those convinced of their particularity and their mission to convert the world to their own new dogma, but whose similarity in method leaves them nearly indistinguishable from each other. Walter and Clarisse’s piano playing enacts this blank, meaningless reproduction, rather than proliferation with difference. Ulrich is put off by their playing, seeing them next to each other: “die gleichen sinnlosen Schreie ausstoßen, in der gleichen Weise Mund und Augen aufreißen, von einer zwecklosen Gewalt gemeinsam vor- und zurückgerissen werden” (143). It becomes a mechanical reproduction rather than a creative enterprise, as their hammering comes to signify an insistent rhetoric; “die Wohnung vermochte das Klavier dröhnen zu machen und war eins jener Megaphone, durch welche die Seele ins All schreit wie ein brünstiger Hirsch, dem nichts antwortet als der wetteifernde gleiche Ruf tausend anderer einsam ins All röhrender Seelen” (48). This mechanical reproduction is dangerous because it simultaneously teaches individual to view themselves as alienated, but requires them to adopt dogmatically-defined identities as the basis of their connection to others. The screaming megaphones are a far more relevant metaphor in contemporary protest culture than in Musil’s

day, making them an unsettling reminder that, far from existing outside of culture, these displays are performances that replicate the same problems.

Stein also makes clear distinction in her novel between “repeating” and “copying,” and has little sympathy for those who engage in the latter: “many go on all their life copying their own kind of repeating, many go on all their life copying some one else or some other kind of men or women’s kind of repeating, some kind of being that they have not in them” (192). The difference between repetition and copying is in timing; something which has its own being within it can repeat itself and still move forward in unexpected directions, while a mimetic thing is always belated, can only copy *after the fact*, and thus can never copy the trajectory, only the appearance. This is at work in her condemnation of Julia Dehning’s ultra-modern décor: Stein deplores the clean, cold lines, with their “sad resemblance to a college woman’s college room” (31), and notes how the new ‘colonial’ or ‘craftsman’ furniture is merely “copied without life from old designs” (31). These mechanical reproductions can copy only the outward form, not the trajectory and imbedded community within which the pieces themselves were created. But Stein is hopeful that precisely through the family, Julia may be able to overcome this copying aesthetic and emerge into something new: “under Julia’s very American face, body, clothes and manner and her vigor of the domineering and crude virgin, there were now and then flashes of passion that lit up an older well hidden tradition” (15). Were she to embrace the older tradition, from her grandmothers, she could find singularity through repetition, rather than simply reproducing the same tendencies and ideas as all of her contemporaries. Thus generational, and in this way, queer inheritance and proliferation have the ability to combat dogmatic, self-conscious modernity.

Stein describes such dogmatic and self-promoting purveyors as having it in them “mostly to make every one feel it about them that they are very strong ones in living ...these then can

have sentimental feeling, and pride in them and romantic imagination but really this cannot at the bottom of them disturb them ... they have a lack in them" (548). This is an almost eerily accurate description of Meingast, perceived as a "genius" and as "very strong" by those around him, but completely derivative and frighteningly dogmatic in his assertions. With his neo-Platonic cult of devotees, he wishes to eradicate the old systems of morality based on humanity and decency and to erect a masculinist war state in its place, with a new totalitarian aesthetic: "die Welt ist nur als ästhetische Phänomen zu rechtfertigen; jeder Versuch, sie moralisch zu begründen, ist ja auch bisher mißlungen ... Nur systematisch geübte Grausamkeit bleibt als das Mittel, über das die vom Humanitarismus verblödeten europäischen Völker noch verfügen, um ihre Kraft wiederzufinden!" (1520). Preaching a futuristic "war as hygiene" and "scorn for women," Meingast links aesthetics to destruction, to the systematic annihilation of difference, the extermination of the other, to support its own program of vitality. At the core of this belief is, as Stein asserts, a "lack," an inability to understand difference, and to require only identical reproduction instead of differential proliferation.

For Stein this danger is also particularly linked to the aesthetic; she speaks of one "kind" for whom "things are important to them as use, emotion, passion gives them meaning but these have not any of them activity in attacking being and so they have not imagination or dramatic sense of meaning in them, they have not a spontaneous relation to things in living" (367). Filtering everything through a paranoid filter of rationality and aesthetics, these can never create spontaneous connections, but can only recycle the same ideas and experiences; they are never able to generate difference because, as with one in particular, "his theory of beauty and goodness and luxury was closing him to impressions of beauty and luxury and learning" (368). The theoretical approach is not a "spontaneous relation" and can only describe, dissect, and

taxonomize, never synthesize and generate. Musil also includes “one” very like the man described by Stein, one curiously referred to as “man” until his name, Meseritscher, emerges; a keen social critic, and knowledgeable about everything on the “scene,” he “wußte von allen Erfindungen und Entdeckungen seiner Zeit und verstand keine einzige. Es genügte ihm vollauf, all das vorhanden und gegenwärtig zu wissen” (999). It is clear that Meseritscher assesses these cultural productions for their utility, their social exchange value, and not for any inherent human value; as the greatest social luminary and critic, he has ‘mastered’ his time, but is completely useless outside of it, and contributes almost nothing himself: “Meseritscher glaubte nicht an große Ereignisse, ja er liebte sie nicht. Wenn man überzeugt ist, daß man in einer sehr wichtigen, sehr schönen und sehr großen Zeit lebe, verträgt man nicht die Vorstellung, daß in ihr noch etwas besonders Wichtiges, Schönes und Großes geschehen könnte” (1002)¹²⁸. This is a dark but very real possibility for both Musil and Stein, that the aesthetic can become completely deracinated, unattached to history, to identity, to value, and blown every way without a firm grounding in human relations.

For Stein, the only way to combat this amnesia of endless reproducibility and contemporaneity is not to take refuge in an imaginary “outside,” but to recognize the sameness in reality for what it is, both a challenge and an opportunity. To acknowledge this is disillusioning but also vindicating, because through that recognition there is the possibility of difference:

Sometimes in reading, sometimes in thinking, sometimes in realizing, sometimes in a kind of way in feeling, knowing repeating knowing always everything is repeating,

¹²⁸ Given the scathing treatment of Meseritscher as the detached, ironic commentator, it comes as a surprise that many critics project precisely this persona onto Musil himself; such critics generally are enamored with the first half of the novel and have little to say about the turn to Agathe, seeing in her a ‘weakening’ of the experiment and ultimately the reason for the novel’s indeterminate ‘failure.’ For an example of this tendency, see Martin Swales’ characterization of Musil’s technique as at its core detached and ironic, and then his admission, “ich muß gestehen, daß für mich Musils gewaltiges Roman-Projekt an Resonanz verliert, insofern es durch die Agathe-Handlung in einen Wunschtraum jenseits aller Ironie mündet” (60).

knowing that there will be going on living is saddening. ... sometime some one is a young one and that now some one is in their middle living and that now some one is an old one and sometimes it is a queer feeling in one this and then not anything, not writing, reading, dying, being a dead one, living, being a young one, being one is a real thing inside one then. (516)

This “queer feeling” is a recognition that your identity is not something you own entirely for yourself, but which is built in interactions with others; there can be a sense of inevitability, that you are destined for certain outcomes, but there is also possibility that it can lead to insight and change, if, to follow Stein’s dictum, “always, one having loving repeating to getting completed understanding must have in them an open feeling, a sense for all the slightest variations in repeating, must never lose themselves so in the solid steadiness of all repeating that they do not hear the slightest variation” (294). When practices of observation allow for repeating *without* an elegiac sense of loss, they can break through the “solid steadiness” of repeating and to recognize difference as it emerges.

Another crucial component of this ability to recognize variation is sustained attention over time: “always it is quite well to be waiting a considerable time to be really certain from realising the repeating coming out of some one, what can and what cannot come out of that one” (600). The necessity of a strong historical sense, not only for how things *were*, but for how things *might have been*, is correlated to the ability to understand difference. Arnheim also references this as a counterpoint to the mystical, metaphysical love he feels tugged into with Diotima: “Logik setzt aber wiederholbare Erlebnisse voraus; es ist klar, wo die Geschehnisse wechseln würden wie ein Wirbel, in dem nichts wiederkehrt, könnten wir niemals die tiefe Erkenntnis aussprechen, daß A gleich A sei, oder daß größer nicht kleiner sei, sondern wir würden einfach

träumen” (506). Without a recognition of repetition, a sense of reality would be ungrounded, but this “logic” which he emphasizes is not an abstract one, it is tied to Diotima, and it shakes the foundations of his rational perspective. This relational logic perceives “keine Philosophie, sondern ein ebenso körperhaftes Erlebnis” which unsettles him; he feels, for the first time,

daß die Außenwelt nicht an seiner Haut aufhörte und die Innenwelt nicht bloß durch das Fenster der Überlegungen hinausleuchtete, sondern daß sie beide sich zu einer ungeteilten Abgeschiedenheit und Anwesenheit vereinten, die so mild, ruhig und hoch war wie ein traumloser Schlaf ... alles Böse war so sinnlos, wie im Grund auch alles Gute in diesem Umfangensein von der zärtlichen Urverwandtschaft aller Wesen überflüssig wurde. (386)

It is not only repetition which makes this clear to Arnheim, but the physical reality of Diotima; not her ideas and words, but her body itself, which confuses the boundaries his logical mind wishes to draw. This is a confrontation between an instrumental understanding of the body and an experience of the body as an intervening, transgressive object with its own reality, blurring the line between individual beings, and between mind and body, in an “Urverwandtschaft” that unsettles a logical, hierarchical perspective.

Ulrich and Agathe also have to confront embodiment in their pursuit of a different mode of living. After nearly a thousand pages of emphasizing the “Siamese twins” and the merging of their bodies into one ecstatic condition, Ulrich reflects on the fecundity of difference; “kann man es denn verstehen, warum in aller Welt das Ideal aller Liebenden es ist, ein Wesen zu werden, ungeachtet diese Undankbaren fast allen Reiz der Liebe gerade dem verdanken, daß sie zwei Wesen und als Geschlecht verlockend ungleich sind?” (1348). Because attraction is bound up in difference and separation, the desire to annihilate difference, though nearly universal, is precisely that which would destroy the possibility to sustain it. Ulrich and Agathe each learn about their

own bodies as they discover each others’, and this physical reality is fundamental for their “Reise ins Paradies.” For once, they have little to say to each other, and become caught up in each other:

Standen jetzt wie auf einem hohen Balkon, ineinander und in das Unsagbare verflochten gleich zwei Liebenden, die sich im nächsten Augenblick in die Leere stürzen werden.

Stürzen. Und die Leere trug sie. ... Die Körper, während die Seelen in ihnen hochaufgerichtet waren, fanden einander wie Tiere, die Wärme suchen. Und da gelang den Körpern das Wunder. A. war mit einemmal in Ag. oder sie in ihm. ... So sehr sie seit Wochen jeder Tag darauf vorbereitete hatte, fürchteten sie in dieser Sekunde, den Verstand verloren zu haben. Aber es war alles klar in ihnen. Keine Vision. Eher eine übermäßige Klarheit. ... was sie anblickten, war formlos und weiselos und hatte doch aller Formen und Weisen freudreiche Lust in sich. (1656-57)

Rather than being caught up in a “Rausch,” a merely biological/chemical reaction that overcomes reason, their experience of embodied exchange is actual a heightened mental state; it is totally different than what they expected, and yet palpable and real to both of them. Their “ineinander” blurs the boundaries of family, sex, gender, time, space, and language, and although they are able to sustain this only for a few weeks, this ability to reach ‘another’ relation is dependent on the trust they exert in each other, and the clarity of their physical experience.

Stein is also unapologetic in her conflation of bodily reality with mental identity, which at times comes across as essentialist—her lengthy discussion of how the “fat” and “thin” Shilling sisters are determined by their body size, or Cora Donour’s abstraction from her body as the reason for her abstraction from life—which is a valid criticism, but she also wishes to foreground the body as a factor in identity through time; this is her constant emphasis on distinct stages in human development. Rather than treating all events as though you have an adult mindset (the

default, though a strange choice for default, as Stein points out), you must instead “have that we are to ourselves young and grown men and women” (5), always in our “feeling” recognizing the bodily conditions which surrounded our now-abstracted memories. This is the only valid mode of narration for Stein, one which accounts for the body and how it marks perception:

I am beginning to know of some groups in men and women, what they have as hands and faces and ears and bodies to them and being in them, and ways of acting in them when they are young men and young women, older young men and young women, middle aged men and women, old men and women. I do not know yet very much about what any group of them are when they are young children. I am slowly spreading very slowly spreading to them. (726)

Though recognizing the difficulty in accessing the difference of the past, especially in a different stage, such as childhood, Stein asserts that a complete narrative must take all expressions of human life, in discrete stages in time, as they are imprinted on the body, and examine them with an unwavering attention to their relation to others.

Ulrich also comes to the realization that it is the embodied relation with Agathe which has the potential to pull him out of his abstract thoughts, out of his eternal “maybe” and into a “yes”; as he returns to Vienna from his time at his father’s house with her and enters ‘historical’ time once again, he is confronted with the possibility of war gathering; he begins considering all the implications, but stops abruptly:

Ja daß er überhaupt moralisierte, dieses Denken nach theoretischer Art, das die Natur bei Kerzenlicht betrachtet, kam ihm völlig unnatürlich vor ... In diesem Augenblick strömten Ulrichs Gedanken wieder aus dem Allgemeinen zu ihm selbst zurück, und er fühlte die Bedeutung seiner Schwester ... Agathe tat doch nichts, als daß sie die Hand danach

ausstreckte. Sie war der Mensch, der die Hand ausstreckt, und an die Stelle von Ulrichs Überlegungen traten Körper und Gebilde der wirklichen Welt. (827)

The only viable affirmation that exists for him is to embrace Agathe, in order to resist the threat of flattening morality or undifferentiated chaos. The incestuous dimension of their relationship is necessary to both assert and destabilize their sameness and difference; Ulrich explains that Plato saw wholeness as being sent to earth in two forms, two genders, and then he asserts that this understanding of lack in erotic relations leads to endless problems. Agathe interrupts his explanation, saying, “man sollte denken, daß Geschwister doch den halben Weg schon zurückgelegt haben müßten!” (904). Instead of an economy of desire and dominance, of assertion of identity against a partner, a sibling implies an already-present sameness unmatched in other relations, and provides an interiority to perception. This is what Ulrich is getting at when he suggests that particularities could fall away and become “geschwisterlich und im wörtlichen Sinn ‘innig’ untereinander verbunden” (762). A sibling-like relation between particulars does imply a common heritage, but doesn’t determine *how* that relation should be mapped into a hierarchy; the distinct pieces come to merge with those around them, rather than being forced into a relation. This also specifically references Ulrich’s childhood wish to become a girl: “wenn er heute einen Ausdruck dafür suchte, etwa dem Zustand entsprach, er taste im Dunkeln nach einer Tür, stoße auf einen blutwarmen oder warsüßen Widerstand und presse sich immer wieder an ihn, der seinem Verlangen hindurchzudringen zärtlich entgegenkommt, ohne ihm Platz zu machen” (690). This “tender” resistance is only possible where a relation of preserved difference along with intense proximity is present, and this is most commonly found in siblings.

It is important to note that the family is just one of several possible methods of coming to understanding and insight; for both Musil and Stein, this is in fact rarely the case. Most are not

reflective, or are entirely destructive of their own potential; as Ulrich bitterly states, “im alten Orient hat es den Harem hervorgebracht, und heute hat man dafür die Familie” (944). But seen for its potential to bring difference into inescapable proximity, and the almost universal sense of individual identity imbedded within families, the oppressive institution can also become an instrument of change:

As I was saying listening is not helping any one very much with this thing, knowing ones self inside one is not helping one very much with this thing, talking about being having been in one is not helping one very much with this thing. Knowing family living is helping some with this thing, having little ways in moments inside one in feeling, in doing something perhaps is helping something with this thing, mostly not anything is really helping one doing this thing, realising the whole being having been, going on, going to be going on in any one. (732)

For Stein, self-actualization is nearly impossible to attain, but “knowing family living,” combined with other active processes of insight and examination, can help spur this process, as it allows for *anyone* to see difference at a close range, and extended over a long period of time. The method she employs here is an ordinary one, but with extraordinary attention to the implications of that which it examines. She explains how someone has come to have “complete” being in him: “this one then really was very early a completely highly developed one, this one was very flowing in the completely creating power this one had inside him, this one was a quite inquisitive one, this one had hardly any suspiciousness in natural ordinary daily living in him” (559). The creative potential in this one is linked to his trust in “natural ordinary” life; instead of seeing the ‘ordinary middle-class’ as a stage to be rejected and overcome, Stein’s perspective here allows for a great deal of sophistication and development within it. This is also clear in Ulrich’s rebuttal

of Hans' characterization of "middle-class love" as possessive; he points out how Hans' own dogmatic conception of love is far more demanding and brutal than that of the average "Bürger," especially in his demand to find ratification of his knowledge. For Ulrich, this abstraction is death, "denn Kenntnis nehmen, das nimmt etwas von den Dingen, sie behalten ihre Gestalt, aber scheinen darin zu Asche zu zerfallen, es verdunstet auch etwas von ihnen, und es bleiben nur ihre Mumien. Darum gibt es auch keine Wahrheit für Liebende; sie wäre eine Sackgasse, ein Ende, der Tod des Gedankens" (559). Love becomes a position of necessary relativity, it becomes a method for creation, rather than a cold process of identification and description.

Here Ulrich distinguishes between what could be called the "consumptive" method of loving and the "creative" method; this is something he returns to when he begins to serve as "maid" for Agathe. This is the first time he loves his ordinary life, and the rituals of dressing and preparing take on new meaning as he assists her; instead of seeing her clothes as merely seductive pretexts for a desiring male, he considers "daß sie etwas ziehend Verlockendes und etwas den Blick Abweisendes vereinte, war sie auch ein kunstvolles System von Zwischenhalten und –befestigungen rings um geschickt verteidigte Wunderdinge und bei aller ihrer Unnatur ein klug verhangenes Liebestheater" (938). When he perceives the system from neither a detached, aesthetic standpoint, nor from a personal, erotic one, but rather from a creative (especially a co-creative) standpoint, it becomes infinitely more complex and entails possibilities for formation and relation he has never considered before. For Stein, the ability to create is fundamental, but more widely dispersed and differently received:

Some can make their own honor, some their own living, some their own religion, some are weak and can do one thing, make one thing their own, some are strong enough and all of it, loving, honor, and religion in them, all of it is some one else's of some one else's

making, some can just resist and not make their own anything, there are many of them.

Some out of their own virtue make a god who sometimes later is a terror to them ...

Some make some things like laws out of the nature of them, out of the nature of some other one. Some are controlled by other people's virtue, and then it scares them. (443)

Stein identifies the difficulties with those who allow other systems to control them, as well as those who become terrified of the laws or gods they make for themselves. Some are only able to resist without creating anything in return, which is the frequent accusation levelled at Ulrich as well. But for Stein there are many ways of creating, and many possible outcomes.

Rather than becoming paralyzed by the implications of any step, as Ulrich frequently does, Stein doesn't make any identity immutable, and shows how success and failure are never foregone conclusions: "I certainly would like to know it about each one just how the being in them connects itself with any one, with anything, with every one so that that one is succeeding is failing in living ... I am much less interested in their being good ones or bad ones, clean ones or dirty ones, rich ones or poor ones, well-mannered or badly-mannered ones, sick ones or well ones" (695). To her, none of these categories have any bearing on success or failure, which seems to be more related to negotiating a contingent identity within your own "kind" and not in relation to others, as well as being open to change while recognizing affinity and repetition. This is her way of navigating a perplexing world without a heavy-handed moral theory of being, by embracing uncertainty and contingency in experience:

Some have it to be experiencing that they are experiencing more than experiencing and this is to very many completely convincing and it is to some completely convincing ...

To some, some having experiencing of something which is more than any experiencing are convincing when they are explaining this thing. To some it would be a very pleasant

thing if not any one having such experiencing ever got mixed up between what was, what is, what will be to that one and how it comes to be, how it came to be, how it will come to be, in short the explanation, the description, the condition what as experience to them was without any condition. (780)

These last ones wishing for the “pleasant thing” are anti-theoretical; they accept experience as sufficient in itself, and survey the generators of abstractions with distrust and a bit of pity for their inability to separate and distinguish what is happening to them. For Ulrich, too, experience allows a much more heterogenous mixing than theory, and it is only through juxtapositional comparison that these resonances can be made productive: “die Umkehrbarkeit des Verhältnisses bedürfte eines genaueren Vergleich, um glaubhaft zu werden, der es auch erst ermöglichen müßte, Begriffe der Wahrscheinlichkeit auf geschichtliche und geistige Ereignisse zu übertragen und zwei so verschiedene Gesichtskreise einander gegenüberzustellen” (1209). For him, rather than attempting to line up perfect little concepts, a generative method would push them up against each other, and through the friction of difference, carry some of that potential energy into action.

The attempt to sustain this generative resistance is what Ulrich and Agathe’s relationship becomes: absolute difference without subordination, and without even comprehension. In the midst of his writings about feelings, Ulrich interrupts himself, and adds in parenthesis a personal anecdote about Agathe, and how their feelings and knowledge of each other relate: “ich kannte das ihre nicht, und sie nicht das meine, aber sie waren nur für einander da, und hingen geöffnet aneinander, während alle andere Abhängigkeit verschwand; und darum sagten wir, wir wären aus der Welt gewesen, und in uns” (1165). This is an openness to each other without a necessarily erotic component, or at least not an erotic component related to gain and satisfaction. It is

sustained through contact and circulation in an economy of surplus desire, not instrumentalized and not dominated. This is also what Stein describes in her somewhat peculiar and extended description of what the Herslands and Dehnings do and don't provide for each other:

David Hersland was one not really needing something. Julia Hersland was one not really needing something. George Dehning was one not really needing something, Alfred Hersland was one not really needing something. Each one of them was one not really needing something. Each one of them was a very different one in being such a one in being one not really needing something. (893)

Stein then goes on to explain how they *do* provide things for each other, but not that which they “need”; it becomes an economy of difference and mutual exchange, rather than of need and exploitation. As discussed earlier, “es steckt keine Notwendigkeit dahinter!” (1649); there is no necessity driving them to use each other, but rather, they give and receive out of proximity and relation. Like Fanny Hissing and the Shillings, their “queer” relationship is important not because of some need it fulfills, but because “they were a problem to her” (80); those who are problematic are not flattened into yourself, but retain their identity as problems, and can generate change within you as well.

There is a queer aspect to this relation which doesn't fit into easy categories and which continually resists definition; of Ulrich and Agathe, Musil says, “sie glichen ja zwei Menschen, die Hand in Hand aus dem Kreis, der sie fest umschlossen hat, hinausgetreten sind, ohne schon in einem anderen Kreis zu Hause zu sein. Darin lag etwas, das sich den gewöhnlichen Begriffen des Zusammenlebens nicht unterordnen ließ” (1435). Their ability to continue without becoming either brother and sister or lovers is part of what prevents them from entering another “Kreis,” instead it allows them to sustain a metamorphosized, mobile, un- or over-gendered relation with

each other. The insistence on the system over the individual can lead to ossified relations; Stein's difficult but ongoing analysis of how people relate to death through religion has something to say about this as well. Mr. Hissen, who is dogmatic in many respects, is also perhaps the only character who truly allows his children to do as they please without interference; Stein explains his difference from those who have many theories but no connection to practice: "in Mr. Hissen then it was a different thing, his generalization was a complete generalization from the complete feeling acting being thinking in him ... religion was living to him but not living when he was no longer a live one, he was in himself all that there was of religion, dead is dead, he was very certain, religion was not in him a contradiction of this thing" (509). Although it would seem to be a contradiction to live a religion which emphasizes immortality, and to believe in death as a fact, this is possible for him because he doesn't believe in religion as an abstract thing existing outside of himself; it doesn't contradict him because he does not separate his actions from abstract beliefs, and insists on his embodiment and contingency, and not the system.

This is the conclusion that Ulrich comes to as well when he considers how the most humanistic ideas and systems often end up eradicating the most people; rather than attempting to synthesize contradictions, "in dem Augenblick, wo Ulrich dies dachte, fühlte er, daß sein Leben, wenn es überhaupt Sinn besaß, keinen anderen hatte als diesen, daß sich die beiden Grundsprären der Menschlichkeit darin selbst zerlegt zeigten und einander in der Wirkung entgegenstanden" (594). Ulrich resists the cult of genius, such as that promoted by Clarisse and Walter, in its expectation of a Messianic synthesis of all contradiction, and sees instead how the acceptance and even cultivation of contradiction is necessary for life itself. Only through explication of these attributes he has acquired, and the spheres from which they issue, can they acquire meaning, though not in an exploitative sense. The cult of genius depends on the

individual life as expressive of a grand and totalizing narrative, whereas perceiving individuals as always being “made” allows for a different relation to contradiction. To resist that totalizing narrative of History, individuals must engage in their own histories/herstories; Stein shows how different meaning is attached to history, to some it is important “to have written about every one around them the history of each one” to others “their own history, the history of them and inside them” and then “in the different parts of living” that is in different stages of development, (184), while to others it is “to know about it in the history of everyone one what kind of feeling they had in them” (185). For the rarest, though, “some few are always living who want about each one who ever was or is or will be living a history of every bit of them” (185); this rare individual is the one who seeks, not a *theory* of being, but an *explication* of being, a demonstration of the living as it comes in history.

For Stein, it is only this kind, who desires to experience without subordinating difference, that complete history is possible; only through engagement with difference is learning possible. She describes her own ‘learning’ as “slowly more and more knowing resemblances all the resemblances existing, slowly more and more having confusion and then slowly again and again beginning and getting clearer the kinds of them and then losing them in more complicated differences and resemblings and so always more and more I am understanding and always more and more I am changing” (336-37). This process of learning is unstable and contingent because the objects of her study shift and she does as well; through constant metamorphosis, though, and specifically through the representation of that metamorphosis in writing, she is able to pursue a generative method of reading her world. Ulrich also describes this as “kein Gebot, es war ein Gebiet, das er betreten hatte” (255). The world of the novel seems to be for Musil the only sustainable “Gebiet,” capable of sustaining contradiction and difference within it. Rather than

simply negating concepts, the novel allows the pursuit, the research, of the methods and modes of life as they are lived by embodied beings, and not as abstractions.

This is in stark contrast to the empty forms of life that the “great” authors offer their readers, which displace reality to sustain their narratives, and require subordination of intellect to convention. Ulrich explains this to Diotima after they discuss Arnheim:

Lassen Sie uns etwa an große Schriftsteller denken. Man kann sein Leben nach ihnen richten, aber man kann nicht Leben aus ihnen keltern. Sie haben das, was sie bewegte, so fest gestaltet, daß es bis in die Zwischenräume der Zeilen wie gepreßtes Metall dasteht. Aber was haben sie eigentlich gesagt? Kein Mensch weiß es. Sie selbst haben es niemals ganz in einem gewußt. (574)

The desire to press down their meaning, to force it into conventionalized forms and meanings, makes the content and the method of their book negligible in comparison with their circulation value, as they become currency, markers of values, not valuable in themselves. This is clearly the case with General Stumm’s “campaign” into the library; when he confronts the librarian with the sheer inhuman magnitude of the books he must read, the librarian responds, “Sie wollen wissen, wieso ich jedes Buch kenne? Das kann ich Ihnen nun allerdings sagen: Weil ich keines lese!” (462). By flattening the value of books into their utility for specific purposes, the librarian has a fantastic and abstract system by which anyone can be confirmed in what they already know. This is essentially the state of affairs in a climate of criticism in which ‘distant reading’ is expected—reading itself is demonized, and only the “effects” or “functions” of books become important, which is another way of just affirming the system which could be destabilized through careful engagement with the texts themselves. Agathe realizes this about Hagauer as well, that for all his renowned ability to quotation, “niemals aber wird er, und sei es auch nur als das Beispiel von

etwas Falschem, einen Namen nennen, der sich nicht schon ein gewisses Hausrecht in den Zeitungen zumindest dadurch erworben hat, daß sie sich tadelnd mit ihm beschäftigen!" (681). A master of the circulation of knowledge rather than a producer of it, Hagauer stands in for all those who merely circulate the same generalizations about texts rather than reading them and examining their applicability to life¹²⁹.

Such a reading practice is the method these texts require, because it is based on a radical contingency of identity between reader and author. It is precisely the opposite of *Bildung*, as Leinsdorf or Arnheim would lament; *Bildung* is merely discipleship in minutiae, and leads to more attempts to discredit the process of reading itself. Meingast's philosophy is a demonstration of this, as he wishes to annihilate the difference inherent in a contingent reader/writer relationship and instead thinks: "es sollte einer der bedeutendsten Abschnitte seines neuen Buchs werden, den er unter diesen Umständen zu beenden gedachte, und man sollte dieses Werk nicht ein Buch nennen dürfen, sondern einen Rüstungsbefehl für den Geist neuer Männer!" (782). Wishing, like Arnheim, to get *past* the book, and to reach directly into the hearts, minds, or other body parts of his readers, Meingast attempts to do away with the intermediary step of reading. But Musil's constant problematization of the expectations for completion and convention is another way of asserting the necessity of reading as an intermediary state in order to preserve the contingent relation of author to reader¹³⁰. Stein, too, pinpoints the danger in this desire to make ideas circulate without critical distance or intermediary steps, when she reflects: "I am thinking, I am knowing, when I am reading, when I am hearing, when I am seeing, when I am writing, when

¹²⁹ Kordula Glander, in her analysis of the interrelation of structures of narrative and structures of reality, also discusses Musil's treatment of programmatic readers like Arnheim or Hagauer, and concludes that Musil's oft-recurring phrase "'Leben wie Lesen' wäre dann als Appell zu verstehen, das zufällig Verwirklichte immer wieder infrage zu stellen. Gerade die fiktiven Realitäten, die die Literatur bereitstellt, sind es ja, die das erstarrte Wirkliche immer wieder mit dem bloß Möglichen, aber Bedenkenswerten konfrontieren" (195).

¹³⁰ Burton Pike, arguing for the necessary incompleteness of the novel, asserts that openness and deferral are at the center of Musil's desire to shift reading practices, which he links to the moral dimension of the novel as well: "*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* asks us to change our views about literature as well as the way we think about life" (367).

I am talking, that very many are not feeling thinking believing what some one thinks every one is naturally believing feeling thinking” (619). The only way to combat the “common sense” mindset that everyone believes or thinks a certain way is for Stein to think, read, and write; this is the process of exteriorization which preserves the difference without become a unilateral assertion of identity.

It is uncommon to question the platitudes which surround us, in academia as much as in ‘ordinary’ life, but through an openness to change and difference, Stein suggests it is possible, even for the most conventional of people. Julia Dehning, who tends to be flattened in comparison with others for her undifferentiated nature, when she examines the experience she’s had with Jameson, and the conventional morality which was shocked by his riding alone with her, she looks very deeply at the structures underlying those assumptions, and reads more into the experience than she normally would: “such natures suck a full experience from every act, and live so much in what, to others, means so little, for is it not all common and to be expected” (20). The value of experience is not in the particularities of the actions, but in the method by which it is examined. Against the prejudices of class, sexuality, and gender handed down through thoughtless generations, Julia reads something different; the process of reading can queer even the most normative text. This is also what Ulrich realizes when he considers the stories of the Fall from a non-dogmatic and unacademic, but personal perspective: “Ulrich glaubte nicht an solche Geschichten so, wie sie überliefert werden, sondern so, wie er sie entdeckt hatte” (874). Insight is not in the narrative itself but in the *reading* or discovery of the text; in other words, in the method of reading itself. If you rely on reception and transmission, you get dogma, but if you encounter texts with an insistent preservation of difference and openness to discovery, you can transform ordinary experience into extraordinary insight.

For Stein, this sort of relation between creator and reader is fragile, but has the potential to transform as well. After her long discussion of disillusionment, she turns briefly to consider “the moment and a very complete moment to those that have had it when something they have bought or made or loved or are is a thing that they are afraid, almost certain, very fearful that no one will think it a nice thing and then some one likes that thing and this then is a very wonderful feeling to know that some one really appreciates the thing ... the perfect joy” (485). This perfect joy is a co-constitutive act between reader and creator/text, as it elevates understanding while retaining the distinctness of person and text. Reading has the potential to transform when it is taken as a method of difference in itself, rather than simply as a mechanical mode of extracting information.

Both Musil and Stein dream of ideal readers which will complete the circuit of identity, not becoming flattened into the worlds of their texts, but also not abstracting particular elements for their own devices and making their narratives into mere pretexts in the pursuit of something more important. Ulrich expresses dissatisfaction with life when he encounters it in comparison with novels: “diese Geschehnisse unseres Lebens haben weniger Leben als ein Buch, weil sie keinen zusammenhängenden Sinn haben” (900). In order to allow life to become as life-like as a novel, in other words, it must be recognized as having a system which gives it order; but that system must be generative and not prescriptive. Such a reading, which gives context without destroying particularity, could lead a reader to insights based on their contingent difference, rather than simply being rolled into the text. Stein, anticipating rejection and perhaps an easy flattening of the difference of her novel’s method, appeals to future readers again and again: “mostly to every one reading there is not any understanding, that is very certain, sometime to some one it can have meaning” (345). While it is easy to identify yourself as a reader with the

“some one” creating meaning from the text, it is something else entirely to live with that understanding in a generative, open way, and to allow it to mix with other texts in order to generate further permutations of those histories and identities¹³¹.

¹³¹ This point shares some notable similarities to Gene Moore’s characterization of the methodology of Musil and Proust in his comparative analysis of them, *The Novel as Research Instrument*. He argues that for both protagonists, “narrative thus provides a means for deciding what is essential, or at least a means of keeping this question open, so that no possibilities are excluded ... Both narrative ‘methodologies’ are, in effect, means of avoiding choices, of keeping all options open” (116).

Chapter 4. THE CURIOUS CASE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER, OR THE LONG NOVEL THAT WASN'T

If Stein can be criticized for having underthought anything in *The Making of Americans*, it perhaps would be that, for all the variation in the present, she maintains a very rigid sense of the past (oddly in keeping with Mann), especially in her consistent presentation of preceding generations as being more 'pure' and self-identical. For her, reaching into the past means, at most, three generations, and coincides unambiguously with the 'crossing-over' immigrant narrative. But as I've been endeavoring to demonstrate, these origins are never unadulterated and hardly clear, even when lines of lineage are immaculately kept. This is what both Proust and Faulkner share: a suspicion of originary narratives, and a constant interest in the evolution and 'ends' of family. For Proust, three generations is a laughable amount of time to try to 'decide' anything about a trait or a family; start with ten, or twenty, and even then you'll eventually realize that there was no origin: instead of origins, there are only means of transmission, and these are through narratives, especially through texts. And for Faulkner, the very concept of a pure and self-actualizing 'crossing over' into the 'virgin' American space is unimaginably fraught, for all races and classes that end up in conflict with each other in the 'new' world were always already in conflict with themselves. Both authors share an interest, and an anxiety, about the relation of time and narrative¹³², especially as they attempt to decipher and examine the 'ends' of narrative rather than its beginnings.

But as soon as I begin—according to the method I've set up in my second and third chapters—to investigate this assertion that both authors are suspicious of originary narratives, I

¹³² Nicole Moulinoux, in her "Enchantments of Memory: Faulkner and Proust," one of the few actually comparative examinations of the two authors, examines their similarities in portrayals of time but concludes that "they also both sound over and over again the same note of tragic lament" (38). This is clearly a reductive account of the complex relation that both authors have to memory and 'lament.'

am confronted with the question: why did they choose such remarkably different forms of narrative to represent this suspicion? The comparison *should* be compelling (and I do think it is, despite my choice to separate them), given how many things are similar: both create “worlds” of their own through their works, and populate them with incredibly large and intricately-linked casts of characters. Both show little interest in representing anything beyond the pale of their immediate biographical experiences, or places that aren’t more or less directly fictionalized. Both narrate periods of time which are fraught with national/regional significance (for Proust, the *belle époque* which leads up to WWI takes its cues from the 1871 Commune; for Faulkner, WWI and WWII both seem to more or less replicate and exacerbate conditions present in the Civil War), and yet they fracture any stable sense of national identity by representing enormous and multi-generational fragmentations along lines of class, race, gender, sexuality, and place (urban vs. rural especially)¹³³. Both were carefully attuned to, and represented throughout their works, elements of personal style in dialects and idiolects. Both had fraught relationships with their own family histories, and spent a great deal of their works obsessively returning to significant episodes from them. And both were extraordinarily conscious of their works as totalities, constantly revising and rewriting as they went. Yet Proust’s monument stands as the paragon, oddly enough, of the “long novel,” and Faulkner could be said to never have produced a “long novel” at all, at least in terms of length and ‘totality’ of plot. Why is this this case?

There are certainly biographical reasons that made the sustained and expensive writing period of Proust impossible for Faulkner, and yet beyond this, there are within the works themselves far more compelling formal differences which demand examination. In broad terms,

¹³³ Moulinoux’s comparison of Faulkner and Proust breaks down almost immediately as she claims instead that “both insist upon the collapse of the aristocratic code, and equate the rise of the parvenus with the triumph of vulgarity and immorality. The two-sided Proustian world, namely ‘Swann’s Way’ and ‘the Guermantes’ Way,’ representative of French classes under the Third Republic, calls to mind the opposition between the Sartoris and the Snopeses in Faulkner’s novels” (37).

one could say that Proust was writing—from the outset, and very self-consciously—*one* long novel, whereas Faulkner, from the outset, wrote essentially endless short stories (as even his novels consist mostly of essentially episodic and somewhat self-contained chapters). Proust's world seemed to him indivisible from the “recherche” which spawned it, whereas for Faulkner, the world existed, and must be brought out section by section, in fraught and contradictory histories. From the manuscript of *Flags in the Dust* to *Sartoris*, this irreconcilability of narrative and form can be seen at the center of Faulkner's choices; instead of allowing the different strands of narrative to ravel out into disconnected stories, how might he be able to make these “ends” meet?¹³⁴ This is what I will consider in this excursion into what I have termed the “long novel that wasn't.”

Faulkner is a curious case with respect to lengthy narratives; it is possible to read the collected stories, novels, plays, screenplays even, of the Yoknapatawpha County saga as merely one series, one universe, divided into different works, but with more or less the same reality, the same place, and the same characters dispersed throughout them. This is in fact what I attempted to do in my first comparative reading of Faulkner and Proust; treating all the novels as merely accidentally or incidentally separate, and leveling the formal differences, flattening them all into one ‘recherche,’ I was able to argue for some compelling thematic parallels with Proust. And while I will reference comparisons between the two authors throughout this chapter and the next (because I believe Proust is still necessary to ‘save’ Faulkner from a solitary reading, and *vis versa*), I have split them within the form of my *own* study because the nagging question

¹³⁴ Wesley and Barbara Morris, in *Reading Faulkner*, point out that *Flags in the Dust* originally began with Bayard looking at family records, and became for Faulkner a family history somewhere “between repudiation and commemoration. It is an ambiguity at the heart of *Flags in the Dust*, one that Faulkner narratively transcends in his Yoknapatawpha chronicle. Yet given the discoveries Faulkner made in his first family novel and the subsequent excitement he felt in having opened what seemed an inexhaustible topic with numberless characters, we can easily imagine the anguish he suffered when his publisher rejected the manuscript because it did not ‘seem to have a story to tell’ (112-13). Thus, in his revisions for *Sartoris*, he (assisted by his editor) had to confront the nexus of family history and ‘story’ in a very direct way. I would argue that this was foundational for the form of his later novels.

remained: what about form? Why *aren't* these narratives just one enormous Bible of the South, beginning with Ikketoumba and the Halberstoms, continuing with the Sartorises and Composons, then through the Snopses and their antagonists into a millennial future? This is the question that ends up bedeviling all attempts to totalize Faulkner, especially such projects as *The Digital Yoknapatawpha Project* or *The Writings of William Faulkner*; to make a "world" out of his works, you must either *discount the resistant narratives themselves*, or give them such enormous ambiguity and presence that they end up becoming meaningless as texts.

The events and characters don't line up from novel to novel, and later novels that deal with materials from earlier short stories often change them completely. Horace Benbow completes a metamorphosis into, but not quite, Gavin Stevens; Sam Fathers has not just two fathers, but apparently at least four, as he tells two separate ordinary stories to Quentin and to Isaac (not to mention that he would have been dead twenty years before he was able to tell it to Quentin); Buddy MacCallum who is a bachelor in 1919 is apparently able to produce not one but two sons *over* the age of 21 by 1940; Boon Hoagenbeck who is in his 40's and firmly situated within the McCaslin camp in 1877 is apparently still in his early 40's and employed by the Priests in 1905; and Luster, a boy in 1928, is somehow also a boy in 1909. There is also the curious way in which the town consciousness registers essentially no event outside of those concerned within each novel; lynchings such as Goodwin's, Joe Christmas's, or Rider's are never mentioned elsewhere; the spectacular burnings of the Sutpen, Burden, Compson, or McCaslin estates seem to exist in their own vacuums; the outrageous affronts to town decency such as Emily's necrophilia, Temple Drake's rape or her baby's murder, Addie Bundren's decaying parade through town, or Reverend Hightower's high-profile disgrace are never cross-referenced, even in events that seem to occur in the same time period, or with the same people.

Each novel and story seems to construct its own reality and, despite many compelling consistencies between texts, to still defy the attempt to make them into a coherent world. In order to construct a “Quentin Compson” who can span *The Sound and the Fury*, “That Evening Sun,” *Absalom, Absalom!* and “A Justice,” you must construct a theory of Quentin not available within any of the texts; you must create a meta-textual reality, something amenable to plotting on various chronologies, maps, and character charts. And once you have arrived at that, you have little need for the inarticulate or incoherent Quentin of the novels and stories himself. The difficulty with making a world of Faulkner is that *Faulkner didn't make a world; he only referred to it.*

So, what do we do with the novels and stories themselves, if we wish to examine how they interrogate the questions I've raised above (relating to anxiety about narratives, and the interplay between familial traditions and spaces and narrative traditions and spaces, especially in the “ends” to which they come), without resorting to a pre-existing “theory” of Faulkner, or of narrative? My method, which is certainly incomplete, and has difficulties of its own, is to select a few of the novels which most obviously foreground issues of form (narrative) and family, particularly those which are concerned about the “ends” of narrative, and the “ends” of families. These are, in my estimation: *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Go Down, Moses*. Certainly other novels foreground formal issues (the interplay of prose and ‘script’ in *Requiem for a Nun* begs this question), others are concerned about “ends” (such as *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished*), and family is a central concern in essentially all his novels (the Snopes trilogy in particular). To observe my selection is to note that they are essentially his early output, with the exception of *Go Down, Moses*; why not the later novels? For me, though they continue many of the same thematics, Faulkner's later novels lose almost all

interest in *interrogating* the form of their narrative; although the Snopes trilogy features, like *As I Lay Dying*, multiple narrators, they are entirely conventional, conversational, and almost over-eager to explain away their role as narrators. And his last novel, *The Reivers*, is the most convention-ridden *Bildungsroman* imaginable, with a picaresque hero straight out of Twain. *Sartoris* is simply too compromised by its textual history to make an effective vehicle for analysis, and I skip *Sanctuary* not because I think it is aesthetically inferior to those composed around it (I think it is fact much better than his later novels in that respect), but because thematically it rests on the fringes of my concerns rather than squarely in their sights. A case could also be made for studying the short stories produced in this period as well, but I am interested primarily in how the *novel* foregrounds issues of form and family, and will leave the stories Faulkner chose *not* to ultimately settle into his novels to other commentators.

Although I have found it untenable to keep the direct conversation between Proust and Faulkner alive, in keeping with my pursuit of comparative readings, I will examine two pairings of novels—the first, what I'll call the “Compson problem” with *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, and the second, the “Jefferson problem” with *As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August*—and then conclude with a discussion of *Go Down, Moses* in relation to the two pairings.

The “Compson problem” centers on Quentin, and the anxiety of narrative; it could be summed up in three words: “is,” “was,” and “again.” Through the accretion of narratives of the past, Quentin comes to view himself as prematurely aged, as unviable for the future, and burdened by not just a problematic and fraught familial history, but the history of a town and a region that becomes metonymic for the entire human race. Unable to live in the present, he finds himself drawn into a ‘was’ that is increasingly complex and seems to point to unviable ends at every turn; the ‘was’ threatens constantly to become an ‘is.’ A comment from *Requiem for a Nun*

seems apropos in this context, as Faulkner reflects on the struggle against histories, “as when you stand say alone in a dim and empty room and believe, hypnotized beneath the vast weight of man’s incredible and enduring *Was*, that perhaps by turning your head aside you will see from the corner of your eye the turn of a moving limb” (184). The recognition of a distinct and ‘enduring’ *was* is, for Quentin, unbearable, because it constantly prevents him from forming viable experiences and memories of his own. This is at the base of his desire to commit suicide; it is, to him, the negation of ‘was,’ along with all traces of movement and life (as he says, the iron weights will rise but not his own body), therefore as he thinks about his plan to kill himself at the end of his section of *The Sound and the Fury*, he listens to the bells: “a quarter hour yet. And then I’ll not be. The peacefulest words. Peacefulest words. *Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum.* Somewhere I heard bells once. Mississippi or Massachusetts. I was. I am not. Massachusetts or Mississippi” (174). Misquoting the Epicurean epitaph about maintaining indifference to death, he interprets it as a negation of his being, a blissful renunciation of ‘is’, staged in personal terms. For him, rather than engaging with the conditions of his life which have produced this anxiety and trauma, he chooses to simply submerge them, which is also his strategy with the scent of honeysuckle:

I stooped through the fence and went across the pasture running I ran in the gray grass among the crickets the honeysuckle getting stronger and stronger and the smell of water then I could see the water the color of gray honeysuckle I lay down on the bank with my face close to the ground so I couldnt smell the honeysuckle I couldnt smell it then and I lay there feeling the earth going through my clothes listening to the water and after a while I wasn’t breathing so hard and I lay there thinking that if I didnt move I wouldn’t have to breathe hard and smell it and then I wasn’t thinking about anything at all (156)

Rather than overcoming or interrogating the associations and emotions the scent brings to him (which, it should be noted, his ‘idiot’ brother Benjy actually *does* manage to do¹³⁵) and thereby put an ‘end’ to the psychological torture, Quentin just submerges it beneath his consciousness; like the watch, or Caddy’s sexuality, what tortures him is the fact that they still ‘are’ no matter what he does, and therefore he feels that he must make an ‘end,’ to create his own ‘was.’

Near the end of his section, in an internalized monologue/dialogue with his father (given, interestingly, in present tense rather than past), Quentin remembers what his father has said (or is still in the process of saying), trying to get him to accept what *is*, to help him get over his fixation on Caddy and negative states in general:

and he it is hard believing to think that a love or a sorrow is a bond purchased without design and which matures willy-nilly and is recalled without warning to be replaced by whatever issue the gods happen to be floating at the time no you will not do that until you come to believe that even she was not quite worth despair perhaps and i i will never do that nobody knows what i know ... and he was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was (178)

His father’s intent is to get Quentin to see that tying desire to a particular object is doomed to failure because of time; because everything will change—both the desire and the object, as well as the method of connecting them—then “was” is the saddest word, as it is only ever *after* something has had an end that it can become significant. However, Quentin revises his father’s

¹³⁵ It should be noted that although Proust’s Marcel in general bears some striking similarities to Quentin, in this respect, his approach to time is much more like Benjy’s; when confronted with an overpowering scent, he submits it to analysis and connection rather than attempting to drown it; standing outside the bathroom in the first volume, he smells “une fraîche odeur de renfermé qui ... me pénétra d’un plaisir non pas de la même espèce que les autres, lesquels nous laissent plus instable, incapables de les retenir, de les posséder, mais au contraire d’un plaisir consistant auquel je pouvais m’étayer, délicieux, paisible, riche d’une vérité durable, inexplicée et certaine. J’aurais voulu, comme autrefois dans mes promenades du côté de Guermantes, essayer de pénétrer le charme de cette impression qui m’avait saisi et rester immobile à interroger cette emanation vieillotte qui me proposait non de jouir du plaisir qu’elle ne me donnait qu par surcroît, mais de descendre dans la réalité qu’elle ne m’avait pas dévoilée” (393). Though the past remains inaccessible to him, he allows it to give pleasure instead of despair.

statement much earlier in his section, as he walks along in Harvard square thinking about how the social life of the university will continue without him: “hats not unbleached and not hats. In three years I can not wear a hat. I could not. Was. Will there be hats then since I was not and not Harvard then. Where the best of thought Father said clings like dead ivy vines upon old dead brick. Not Harvard then. Not to me, anyway. Again. Sadder than was. Again. Saddest of all. Again” (95). For Quentin, “again” is sadder than “was” because while “was” just means that there has been an end, “again” means that *there is still an “is” despite your “was.”* What he intuitively, and finds immeasurably depressing, is that no narrative actually has an end, only *you* have an end in *it*. The narrative goes on, repeats, cycles through things again, but you are no longer contained within it; at Harvard fashions will come and go, classes begin and end, but you will no longer be. And this is sadder than “was” because although you can create your own “was” by destroying your own “is” yourself, you can never destroy “again”; it will happen without any human intervention or narration.

Faulkner revisits these concerns about repetition, livability, and narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!*, complicating Quentin’s personal difficulties by imbedding them within the discussion and investigation of the Sutpen family’s struggles. Charles Bon, who might seem like a more suitable candidate for suicide than Quentin, actually reverses his logic and assents to the ‘again’ in his letter to Judith:

Because I cannot say when to expect me. Because what WAS is one thing, and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what IS ... is something else again because it was not even alive then. And since because within this sheet of paper you now hold the best of the old South which is dead, and the words you read were written upon it with the best (each box said, the very best) of the new North which has conquered and

which therefore, whether it likes it or not, will have to survive, I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live. (135-36)

Although this very letter is what instigates the events that lead to his own death, Charles uses it to reaffirm a survival in which he actually *does* take part, through his son and grandson, unlike Sutpen, whose insistence on trying to repeat an outdated and unviable mode of living leads him to a fruitless death. Judith, like Charles, recognizes far better than her father that survival and adaptation mean the incorporation of difference, rather than the repetition of the same; she recognizes that if something will live ‘again,’ it will have to live differently, and so she takes this very letter to General Compson’s wife, wishing to make a conscious narrative connection outside of her own line, outside of the self-destructive Sutpen legacy she has been implicated within but over time comes to question and even reject. She tells her (and this communication between women is significant in a novel constructed primarily around narratives told between men):

And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something—a scrap of paper—something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that *was* once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be *is* because it never can become *was*. (131)

Regarding as she must (since they sit in the hall of her house) the tombstones which represent those who *were* her loved ones, Judith makes the remarkable and unexpected decision to suture herself on to a stranger’s life, to incorporate the Other into herself, and to make her family’s

history meaningful through its continued relevance as a shared, disjointed herstory, rather than a self-enclosed adventure story or Bildungsroman, which is what Sutpen envisions. She institutes an inclusionary reading practice, one which allows the other to quite explicitly regard the ‘end’ of a narrative in order to make it live ‘again.’

But this is not the conclusion that Jason Compson (for simplicity’s sake I will refer to Quentin’s father as Jason Compson and his brother as Jason IV) comes to; his reading practice, honed on ironic and detached portraits of his contemporaries and nihilistic discourses with his children, asserts that, in relation to the Sutpens, “you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens” (103). Treating these texts as distinct and ‘impervious’ documents, Compson is only ever able to read the same thing in them, according to his own paradigmatic view. *Absalom, Absalom!* dramatizes not just the loss of sons, but the *misreading* which leads to their loss in the first place; both Sutpen and Compson lose their oldest sons to death, and their younger sons to celibacy or bachelorhood, by viewing the narratives they have as immutable, personal, and paradigmatic, rather than being able to be changed ‘again’. And yet what *Absalom, Absalom!* asserts, against this self-destructive and normative account, is the vibrancy and potentiality of reading practices which seek to incorporate difference and confound entrenched paradigms (both Shreve/Quentin and Henry/Charles). Shreve and Quentin’s ‘performance’ of the narrative of the Sutpen family comes to very different conclusions than Jason Compson’s, especially on the centrality and meaning of love; whereas his father’s hopeless advice in *The Sound and the Fury* is to simply submerge and forget about his feelings for Caddy, Shreve, via the Henry/Judith/Charles triangle, confronts the nexus of identity and sexuality with his questions:

“Who to say it if wasn’t maybe the possibility of incest, because who (without a sister: I dont know about the others) has been in love and not discovered the vain evanescence of the fleshly encounter; who has not had to realise that when the brief all is done you must retreat from both love and pleasure, gather up your own rubbish and refuse—the hats and pants and shoes which you drag through the world—and retreat ... but maybe if there were sin too maybe you would not be permitted to escape, uncouple, return.—Aint that right?” (338)

Against the harsh reality of time in relation to sexuality—is union possible at all if it can only ‘happen’ instead of continue to ‘be’?—Shreve asserts that “the dreamy immeasurable coupling which floats oblivious above the trammeling and harried instant, the: *was-not: is: was:* is a perquisite only of balloony and weightless elephants and whales” (338). Shreve is able to confront Quentin, through this ‘other’ narrative, with the impossibilities of his own incestuous desires—namely, that making incest into a paradigmatic negation of time wouldn’t solve anything—and so when Quentin admits, “I dont know,” Shreve responds, “Maybe I dont either. Only, Jesus, some day you are bound to fall in love. They wouldn’t just beat you that way” (339). Thus through examination, they are able to quite literally free the ‘*Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum*’ from its status as an epitaph and incorporate it into a living, potential, coupling.

It is significant that throughout *Absalom, Absalom!*, the most productive and fecund narratives are those which do *not* adhere to known paradigms, but rather those—like Quentin and Shreve’s queer “hushed and naked searching” (312), allowing them to ‘enter’ each other (to insert the word from Mann, they enter “ineinander”) and reproduce the Sutpen story “thinking as one” (316)—which push against normative readings. Miss Rosa is an example of this; she is able to anticipate Mr. Compson’s dismissal of her, with its belittling sympathy, and resist it, setting

against the constant “*they will doubtless have told you*” her own “*but they cannot have told you,*” about her summer of wisteria which “*I lived out not as a woman, a girl, but rather as the man which I perhaps should have been*” (149). She explains:

I became not mistress, not beloved, but more than even love; I became all polymath love's androgynous advocate. There must have been some seed he left, to cause a child's vacant fairy-tale to come alive in that garden. Because I was not spying when I would follow her. I was not spying, though you will say I was. And even if it was spying, it was not jealousy, because I did not love him. ... not as women love. Because I asked nothing of him, you see. And more than that: I gave him nothing, which is the sum of loving. (151-52)

Because Rosa's love does not conform to a genital 'reality' and exists almost exclusively in the language used to describe it¹³⁶, it is something entirely unknown and unimportant in the masculinist reckoning of Jason Compson (who in fact asserts that she never even went through puberty at all); however, it motivates most of her actions and in fact drives the narrative itself. Rosa's love of Charles is unique in the Sutpen saga, as it expects neither reciprocity (which is what dooms Charles with relation to Sutpen), nor dominance (which dooms Henry and Charles), nor carnal 'proof' (which dooms everyone Sutpen encounters). Although she is derided and sidelined in the phallogentric Jefferson universe, her insistent difference in the *text* undermines the normative accounts and explanations offered for Sutpen, and it is only because Quentin listens to her instead of assuming he already knows (he begins in that position, but overcomes it) that he is able to, with Shreve, similarly “overpass to love, where there might be paradox and

¹³⁶ This also seems to be the case in *The Hamlet* where the normative sexual escapades are treated off-hand, and yet the 'honeymoon' of Isaac Snopes and the cow is given an almost Baroque excess, taking on a mythic quality as they soak up “Troy's Helen and the nymphs and the snoring mitred bishops, the saviors and the victims and the kinds—it wakes, upseeping, attrive in unaccountable creeping channels” (181).

inconsistency but nothing fault nor false” (331); this is a unique, non-hierarchical creation: “it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other” (330). Like Rosa’s non-sexual relation with Charles, this narrative affair brings them into surprisingly non-binary examinations of the past, and of themselves.

Although *The Sound and the Fury* in most respects makes fairly incommensurable Shreves and Quentins, in this respect, the ‘marriage’ of narrative is consistent between the two; Quentin’s final actions revolve around Shreve, and in fact he also incorporates the ‘other’, the stranger, much like Judith, as he marks his letter to Shreve, and not to Caddy:

Our windows were dark. The entrance was empty. I walked close to the left wall when I entered, but it was empty: just the stairs curving up into shadows echoes of feet in the sad generations like light dust upon the shadows, my feet waking them like dust, lightly to settle again. I could see the letter before I turned the light on, propped against a book on the table so I would see it. Calling him my husband. (171)

Against the impressions of countless male generations of scholars, who then go on to father other works, Quentin quite consciously assents to a queer marriage, making him a ‘husband’ and co-producer of the narrative of his life; by reaching outside of the self-consuming family narrative he is able to ‘father’ a work which does not consume him. Like Versh’s example of the “bluegum” children who eat their father, Quentin’s father is consumptive in more than one sense of the word; in the Appendix he is spoken of as being

bred for a lawyer and indeed kept an office upstairs above the Square, where entombed in dusty filing-cases some of the oldest names in the county—Holston and Sutpen, Grenier

and Beauchamp and Coldfield—faded year by year among the bottomless labyrinths of chancery: and who knows what dream in the perennial heart of his father, now completing the third of his three avatars. (330)

As an “avatar” he, like his grandfather, is consumed by the moldy records and names of the past, unable to produce anything on his own, and doomed to circle obsessively around the same reading practices, the same conflicts, but in a space, mentally and literally (as he sells off more and more land), that is reduced rather than enlarged by further generation.

The names which fade are those which cannot incorporate difference; this is clear in the fate of both the Compson and the Bascomb lines in *The Sound and the Fury*. When Maury writes to Jason IV asking for money, he appeals to his sense of family pride, acknowledging that using his sister’s money will allow him to bring about “the ultimate solidification of my affairs by which I may restore to its rightful position that family of which I have the honor to be the sole remaining male descendant” (223). Like Jason IV, he is hyperconscious of his status as an ‘end’ and yet, also like Jason IV, through his inability to connect meaningfully and productively with anyone outside of his family, he ensures that both names will become “was” in Jefferson history, markers on tombstones and forgotten place-names, but not living realities¹³⁷. This contrasts effectively with Benjy, the Maury who *wasn’t*, or wasn’t allowed to continue to be one; deprived of his name before it can mean anything to him, disinherited before he could mourn the loss, Benjy is able, despite his state-enforced inability to reproduce, to *produce* surprising and anti-normative readings of his abject, limited position. The only Compson to view Dilsey’s family as

¹³⁷ This is the fate of most of the self-proclaimed bachelors in Yoknapatawpha County; in the Snopes trilogy, the contrast is shown particularly between the bachelor Jody Varner and the fecund Snopes clan (including Flem as a willing step-father); Jody always has the exact same suit made by the exact same tailor, and insists on selling the slightly-older ones to others on Frenchmen Bend, “so that on almost any Sunday night one whole one or some part of one of his old suits could be met—and promptly recognized—walking the summer roads, and replaced it with the new succeeding one ... the perennial and immortal Best Man, the apotheosis of the masculine Singular” (*The Hamlet* 7). The sterile, bachelor male is capable only of accounting for and encountering himself, can only copy and clone that which he believes and produces.

his own, and the only of his brothers not tortured by questions and doubts (in fact, he never once uses a question mark in his section), Benjy is punished not for what he ‘tried to do’ to the girl outside the gate, but because no one could read him outside of their own normative sense of what male-female relations ‘always’ have at their base. His own account of the experience is: “I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out” (53). Though his attempt to “say” is merely read as the attempt to rape the girls, that says more about the assumptions that other men make than about Benjy. What is so transgressive about this, and what is indirectly being punished about it, is that he is trying to articulate himself in the first place, to speak from his own perspective. As long as he is docile and instrumentalized, in the social view, and thereby castrated, he cannot avail himself of speech, which is reserved for those deemed worthy to reproduce.

Although Benjy clearly experiences psychological and emotional trauma as the result of his castration, it seems to pale in comparison to the trauma Quentin feels for *not* having been castrated; as opposed to his brother Benjy, who is “trying to say,” to *begin* talking to the girls outside his gate¹³⁸, Quentin is paranoid about how the *end* of his experience with the little Italian girl will come out, how it will be interpreted; after his ‘arrest’ and release, as he drives out of town, he cannot stop himself from laughing:

Still I couldn’t stop it and then I knew that if I tried too hard to stop it I’d be crying and I thought about how I’d thought about I could not be a virgin, with so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girlvoices lingering in the

¹³⁸ Frédérique Spill, in her essay “And Then Everything Sort of Rolled Away’: Reading *The Sound and the Fury*, or the Acceptance of Bewilderment,” notices this phenomenon as a function of Benjy’s narrative technique: “whatever story is threading its way in the meshes of the successive narratives and through the incessant time-shifts, it somehow keeps beginning again” (105).

shadowy places and the words coming out and perfume and eyes you could feel not see, but if it was that simple to do it wouldn't be anything and if it wasn't anything, what was I. (147)

Obsessed with the need to put an “end” to everything, and to see the end from the beginning, Quentin places himself in constant anxiety about negative states such as virginity. Thus his attraction to Versh’s account of the man who castrated himself “but that’s not it. It’s not not having them. It’s never to have had them then I could say O That That’s Chinese I dont know Chinese” (116). In contrast to Benjy—whose narrative is able to account for multiple perspectives, and retrospective accounts, to accept what has been and is no longer along with everything that still is—Quentin insists on knowing the teleology in advance; he must know whether “it” was “something” or not before he does “it,” and ends up like the man who castrated himself, attempting to create a negative state by ending the possibility of further production, of further consideration.

Benjy, in abdicating control of his circumstances, never really ‘loses’ anything, unlike both of his brothers, who end their narratives frustrated and embittered by the independence and autonomy of Caddy¹³⁹. But Benjy is able to ‘endure’ in ways that they cannot, and in so doing, he resembles the mules which Faulkner so frequently praises throughout his novels. In *The Reivers* he explains that, “free of the obligations of ancestry and the responsibilities of posterity, he has conquered not only life but death too and hence is immortal; were he to vanish from the earth today, the same chanceful biological combination which produced him yesterday would produce him a thousand years hence, unaltered unchanged incorrigible still within the limitations

¹³⁹ Arnold Weinstein, in *Recovering Your Story*, points to the technique of Benjy’s narrative as being Faulkner’s finest demonstration of the painful situation of the unknowing subject rendered in an ‘end’-driven narrative; “it is time itself that courses through his story, time as endless, lacerating loss. ...What happens to us when we read prose that gives us effects without causes? For that is what Faulkner has been doing: showing us Beny’s moaning, his dreadfully cogent moaning, before handing us the explanation that tells us why” (313).

which he himself had proved and tested; still free, still coping” (92). Although the mule is a ‘pariah’ in the sense that he stands outside, is instrumentalized and incapable of reproduction, his persistence allows him to level a critique against the “obligations of ancestry” and to negate the exploitative means that have produced him. Benjy’s contingent perspective builds off of constantly shifting realities, and yet remains remarkably consistent; in particular this is obvious through the desire to control time itself. Jason IV, though less obviously paranoid about time than Quentin, also tries to master it (as evidenced by both of his unsuccessful attempts to ‘chase’ down his niece), and only Benjy is able to experience it in a relative rather than an absolute way; this is apparent from the first pages of the novel, as Caddy asks him, “did you think it would be Christmas when I came home from school. Is that what you thought. Christmas is the day after tomorrow. Santy Claus, Benjy. Santy Claus. Come on, let’s run to the house and get warm” (7). As his life is dominated by habit, and each resembles the next, Benjy has little use for concepts such as ‘yesterday’ or ‘tomorrow’; his sense of time is relative—quite literally, as it relative to the *relative* who is there with him, who makes time worthwhile or not. Caddy’s voice and body (particularly her smell) anchor him to reality, providing the bookends of his section as seen above and in the conclusion: “Caddy held me and I could hear us all, and the darkness, and something I could smell. And then I could see the windows, where the trees were buzzing. Then the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep” (75). The conditions necessary to make sense of his experience are stability of place, acknowledgment of the primacy of psychological over physical reality, and the irreducible domesticity, the stability of the “us all” that forms his frame of reference¹⁴⁰.

¹⁴⁰ This bears remarkable similarity to Marcel’s comments about the necessity of retrospective narration to allow ‘habit’ to render a space ‘habitable.’ He compares this to nesting, gathering familiar things into a domestic structure; “malgré tout il est bien heureux de trouver, car sans l’habitude et réduit à ses seuls moyens il serait impuissant à nous rendre un logis habitable” (17).

Absalom, Absalom! extends in many ways this abdication of narrative control, and the acceptance of subjugation to time rather than striving for mastery over it; like the French architect who “had singlehanded given battle to and vanquished Sutpen’s fierce and overweening vanity or desire for magnificence or for vindication or whatever it was (even General Compson did not know yet) and so created of Sutpen’s very defeat the victory which, in conquering, Sutpen himself would have failed to gain” (35), Rosa too makes of her ‘demon’ something which exists as both her own narrative and his. Quentin realizes early on in her telling that the wraithlike but also human being that materializes from it is *not* the cardboard cutout he has come to associate with Sutpen, but a living, emergent being inextricable from the narrative which calls him into consideration:

It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity—horror or pleasure or amazement—depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale. (18)

The project of *Absalom, Absalom* is the attenuation of time: to extend the act of telling into almost uncharted regions, merging reality and unreality, exploding the dimensions of verisimilitude¹⁴¹. The result of extending the moment of telling to almost Proustian length is an interrogation of the relation between time and control itself; by showing Quentin the narrative not as a teleology—in which all elements have a predestined purpose, an ‘end’ to which they are

¹⁴¹ Jo Parker, in her discussion of the novel in *Narrative Form and Chaos Theory*, argues that the text consistently frustrates efforts to fixate on a ‘reality’ beyond the surface of the text: “the text deliberately works against our regarding the joint narrative as some sort of Sherlockian solution pieced together once all the evidence has been gathered” (125).

created, but rather exposing its constructedness—Rosa is able to undermine the deterministic nature of narrative and cause it to emerge as a living performance, “elapsd and yet-elapsing.”

Thomas Sutpen actually has his own experience with such an attenuation of time in his move to the plantation, but he rejects it in favor of a purposive account, a ‘design’ which gives him the illusion of mastering time and narrative. Travelling to the plantation is an extended moment of relation in which “he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why. He was just there, surrounded by the faces, almost all the faces which he had ever known, always known” (236). Enmeshed in a network of sustained relation, the young Sutpen exists in a ‘elapsd and yet-elapsing’ time, but his inability to accept difference dooms him to rejecting this mode of living in favor of a heroic, self-articulate and self-fathering narrative. His moment of clarity and loss of ‘innocence’ comes when, being dismissed by the “monkey nigger” at the house, he recognizes that his consciousness of his social world, imbedded as it has been within his family, has not led him to see their own ‘abject’ position (obviously this is flawed, given that he compares it to a slave’s ‘elevated’ position); instead, he has what he believes is a moment of insight, “he himself seeing his own father and sisters and brothers as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing them all the time—as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them, who would in turn spawn with brutish and vicious prolixity” (245). Thus Sutpen rejects one “innocent” and narrow worldview for another; he rejects his own father and searches for another, more able to give him social prestige¹⁴². Thus when he rejects his son (Charles Bon), he creates yet another son who must choose between mutually exclusive worldviews, and a second son (Henry) who will be

¹⁴² Joseph Boone, in his discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!*, also diagnoses Sutpen’s obsession with generations as the necessary repetition of sameness: “Sutpen’s determined effort to produce a male dynasty that will immortalize his name and confirm his status, however, hides a much more pressing psychological imperative, one related to his society’s construction of manhood: for Sutpen uses his children as a means of imposing his ego on the external world, re-creating its otherness in his own image” (1069).

raised in an opposing condition to his own, but structurally stuck with the same need to reject his father. Because there is no context for difference, they all end up repeating the same mistake, and attempting to “father” their own knowledge of the world, unable to see (at least, unable to see in time to prevent catastrophe) that the very agents of difference are already around them, in parents, siblings, or servants.

The difficulty in Sutpen’s ‘innocence’ is that he wants to pass it off as impersonal, a ‘design’ which *must* exist in order to rectify and justify his existence, but it is actually quite volitional and involves a consistent choice to reject difference and assert himself as father:

All of a sudden he discovered, not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, had to do it whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life, never live with what all the men and women that had died to make him had left inside of him for him to pass on, with all the dead ones waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right, fix things right so that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead. And that at the very moment when he discovered what it was, he found out that this was the last thing in the world he was equipped to do. (229)

By casting his ‘purpose’ in absolute, eternal and genealogical-imperative terms, Sutpen excuses himself in advance for whatever means he will use to accomplish these ‘ends.’ But to Rosa, it is obvious that this narrative is one that can only be traded between men drinking whisky, and has no effect on his actions, because when he returns from the war to his daughters,

He wasn’t there. Something ate with us; we talked to it and it answered questions; it say with us before the fire at night and, rousing without any warning from some profound

and bemused complete inertia, talked, not to us, the six ears, the three minds capable of listening, but to the air, the waiting grim decaying presence, spirit, of the house itself, talking that which sounded like the bombast of a madman who creates within his very coffin walls his fabulous immeasurable Camelots and Carcassnoenes (167)

Sutpen's self-narrative doesn't allow him to grieve, because it does not recognize loss, only frustration; he wants to maintain something that has been rendered obsolete, and in so doing he instrumentalizes the only "minds capable of listening" and puts them back into their place, rejecting their efforts to create a livable reality. This is what undoes him with his fateful "naming" of Charles Bon, as well as his instrumentalization of Wash and Milly Jones—wishing to assert himself as the 'father' of the narrative, he deprives himself of both daughters and sons.

The biblical proportions of *Absalom, Absalom!* become clear in the self-styling of Sutpen as a generative god because the myth of the self-generating man is impossible and unsustainable; while being indentured to an increasingly weighty past can lead to stagnation, as Quentin finds, and John Sartoris recognizes in *Flags in the Dust*, "the man who professes to care nothing about his forbears is only a little less vain than he who bases all his actions on blood precedent" (97). This is an apt description of Sutpen, whose anxiety about producing his own name, making his own 'brand' and recognizing only such sons as conform to *his* vision of success leads him to outrageous and self-defeating vanity¹⁴³. His sons inherit his 'legacy' only insofar as they reproduce the very conditions for further sons to attempt to 'generate' their own narratives of parthenogenesis. Quentin, the son most unable to resist the accumulated narratives of his past, looks at Shreve and thinks "*He sounds just like Father*" (188), and ties that resemblance quite directly to Sutpen, who stands (as Jason Compson, too, would in just a few months' time), with

¹⁴³ Celia Britton, in "Ancestral Crimes in the Novels of Faulkner, Glissant, and Condé," points out that "the tragedy in Faulkner's novel is in actual fact precipitated not by Eulalia's racial status per se but by its consequence, that is, Sutpen's decision (although he does not see it as a choice) to repudiate both her and their child" (225).

son gone, vanished, more insuperable to him now than if the son were dead since now (if the son still lived) his name would be different and those to call him by it strangers and whatever dragon's outcropping of Sutpen blood the son might sow on the body of whatever strange woman would therefore carry on the tradition, accomplish the hereditary evil and harm under another name and upon and among people who will never have heard the right one (188-89)

Henry's birthright, if anything, is in becoming his father through the repudiation of his father, as Sutpen himself accomplished the "hereditary evil and harm under another name" from *his* father, and rejected *him* as insufficient for his needs. Thus the legacy of fathers comes to be their downfall, their rejection at the hands of their sons; this inability to accept difference (because the trouble is never in the sons themselves, but in the *idea* of the sons which doesn't conform to the reality desired) is what drives the dynamo of self-generation, one which can only self-destruct. Quentin's grandfather recognizes this as Sutpen visits his office during the war, and he sees his ill-mannered swagger reduced,

not because he was chastened by misfortune or spent or even war-wearied but as though even while riding he was still bemused in that state in which he struggled to hold clear and free above a maelstrom of unpredictable and unreasoning human beings, not his head for breath and not so much his fifty years of effort and striving to establish a posterity, but his code of logic and morality, his formula and recipe of fact and deduction. (287)

Because Sutpen wishes to establish his *validity* more than even his *posterity*, he reduces the complex social terrain in which he lives to a simplistic crowd of "unreasoning human beings," and casts himself as the sole enlightened male who can navigate their impossible demands. Casting himself as the hero of his own narrative, he can only attempt to preserve an inhuman

method, based on abstraction, and negate the human reality which he will not accept. Thus, unlike David, he will never weep for lost sons, or attempt to sacrifice himself for them¹⁴⁴.

This stands in stark contrast to Judith, who casts convention aside when Charles' son returns with a pregnant wife and says (in Shreve's estimation), "*I was wrong. I admit it. I believed that there were things which still mattered just because they had mattered once. But I was wrong. Nothing matters but breath, breathing, to know and to be alive*" (216). Another 'barren' spinster like Rosa, Judith also comes to a surprising repudiation of what would seem to be a bedrock value of the Jefferson community, namely racial purity. Unfortunately, Charles is too much the son of his father, as his father was too much the son of his, to accept such a renegotiation of values, and pursues the same self-destructive end (which also, like his grandfather, involves repudiating the feminine in the form of his 'aunt' Judith, as well as his wife). This claustrophobic masculinistic rhetoric, premised on the rejection of difference and acceptance of a bitter heritage of violence, is the narrative trap in which Quentin is also encased, as he wonders, listening to Shreve as he has listened to his own father, "*am I going to have to hear it all again he thought I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do*" (289). Quentin's sense of impotence against his father's narrative is slowly ameliorated over the course of the novel, until finally at the end he admits, *unlike* his father, that he doesn't know (Jason Compson sprinkles his narratives liberally with assumptions and self-congratulatory citations), to which Shreve responds, "Yes. You dont know. You dont

¹⁴⁴ This nuance is lost on some commentators, like Wendell Johnson, in his Biblical need to find a 'generational link' between a lost South and its mythic heritage; initially puzzled by the lack of an exact correlation for the Biblical Absalom in Faulkner's novel, he attempts to recuperate it by claiming that "it is the voice of the visionary author, William Faulkner, haunted by the past; he is the son of the southern myth who becomes its father" (190).

even know about the old dame, the Aunt Rosa” (378), leaving the indeterminate novel without a distinctive ‘heir’ to the knowledge it has performed¹⁴⁵.

However, the Quentin of *The Sound and the Fury* resembles Sutpen far more than he does the Quentin of *Absalom, Absalom!*; his ‘vision’ of the afterlife is populated with exclusively male Confederate heroes:

I always thought of them as being together somewhere all the time waiting for old Colonel Sartoris to come down and sit with them waiting on a high place beyond cedar trees Colonel Sartoris was on a still higher place looking out across at asomtehing and they were waiting for him to get done looking at it and come down Grandfather wore his uniform and we could hear the murmur of their voices from beyond the cedars they were always talking and Grandfather was always right. (176)

Unlike the vision Shreve paints of Wash and Sutpen being ‘reconciled’ after death (“*the demon would say, ‘What was it Wash? Something happened. What was it?’*” (*Absalom, Absalom!* 194)), Quentin here makes a sort of eternal Civil War in which the same male exploits are performed again and again, with the same uniforms and the same old patriarchal order being reaffirmed as “always right” (in direct contrast to his admission, quoted above, that he “doesn’t know”). To gain this, Quentin believes he must, like his Civil War heroes, father self-defeating narratives which have definite terminations. This is the motivation behind his attempt to ‘own’ and rewrite Caddy’s sexuality:

we did how can you not know it if youll just wait Ill tell you how it was it was a crime we did a terrible crime it cannot be hid you think it can but wait Poor Quentin youve

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Boone reads the relation between Shreve and Quentin as merely another avatar of Henry and Bon (forgetting that the “Henry and Bon” to which readers have access is actually a creation of Shreve and Quentin), and argues that “their creative dialogue begins to repeat the pattern—and contradictions—of homosocial bonding characterizing the world of Sutpen and his progeny, as their ‘marriage’ of words is transformed into a struggle for mastery” (1082). I consider this an insufficient reading, precisely because of their co-creative performance.

never done that have you and Ill tell you how it was Ill tell Father then itll have to be because you love Father then well have to go away amid the pointing and the horror the clean flame Ill make you say we did Im stronger than you Ill make you know we did you thought it was them but it was me listen I fooled you all the time it was me (149)

Here the very function of narrative becomes equated with sexual knowledge; Quentin threatens to *make* her know, to make her ‘confess’ that which was *not*, but should have been, in his mind. For him, the ‘reality’ of sexuality is in its confession, not its deployment. He attempts to write her into a “terrible crime” which she will not be able to escape, enveloping her once again within the family, inscribing her sexuality exclusively in familial terms, and forcing her to accept both his own ‘fatherhood’ (that is, interpretation of her sexuality), as well as their Father’s. But she resists; she makes him feel her blood while he says “Dalton Ames” and she says, of him, “hes crossed all the oceans all around the world” (150), uniting the ubiquity of water with the unassimilable stranger, the one who will never be familiar, and who transgresses the clannish identity of Jefferson. Quentin’s homicidal feelings for Dalton show the all-encompassing, difference-eradicating need to ‘father’ narratives which Sutpen also so consistently employs.

However, even within *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin is able to recognize the potential for different outcomes and different interpretations; these come through Benjy and Dilsey. As he remembers Benjy’s renaming, he oddly enough *doesn’t* provide him with a ‘father,’ leaving his parentage ambiguous:

Benjamin the child of. How he used to sit before that mirror. Refuge unfailing in which conflict tempered silenced reconciled. Benjamin the child of mine old age held hostage into Egypt. O Benjamin. Dilsey said it was because Mother was too proud for him. They come into white people’s lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white

facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope; the rest of the time just voices (170)

Dilsey's perspective, her insistent difference, comes in many ways to form the moral backbone of the novel¹⁴⁶, but it is significant that it is always in conjunction with and conversation with others, rather than simply as the result of her own thinking. She doesn't attempt to 'father' her own narrative, but rather seems to exist as the midwife to it, especially in her experience at the sermon. Reverend Shegog, unlike his most obvious counterpart, Reverend Hightower, who tries to 'grandfather' himself in all his sermons, is able to facilitate a 'we' experience unique in the Yoknapatawpha County saga for its *negation* of egotism and openness to reinterpretation:

The congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words ... Dilsey sat bolt upright, her hand on Ben's knee. Two tears slid down her fallen cheeks, in and out of the myriad coruscations of immolation and abnegation and time. (294-95)

Unlike nearly every 'mob' experience in every other novel—and it should be noted that these are almost exclusively the purview of white people—this co-constitutive moment in the church, among a seemingly closed community, for a seemingly normative purpose, allows for non-hierarchical communication. It is an intensely revelatory experience for Dilsey, who comes to understand, unlike Jason or Quentin, what the beginning and the ending of the Compson narrative might mean—not for herself, in other words, but for the narrative itself.

¹⁴⁶ Françoise also comes into Marcel's family life in a similar, bewildering way, though her difference is staged in terms of class rather than race; he recognizes the rigidity of her difference right from the outset, and the moral 'code' it expresses, not in the language of moral critique, but through insistent relational difference: "Ce code, si l'on en jugeait par l'entêtement soudain qu'elle mettait à ne pas vouloir faire certaines commissions que nous lui donnions, semblait avoir prévu des complexités sociales et des raffinements mondains tels que rien dans l'entourage de Françoise et dans sa vie de domestique de village n'avait pu les lui suggérer; et l'on était obligé de se dire qu'il y avait en elle un passé français très ancien, noble et mal compris" (32)

Dilsey's moment in the church is an example of a perspective which comes to *undermine* its own normative potential, to read against the grain. This is also the case with Rosa's Sutpen narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!*; from the first pages of the novel, Quentin is confronted with the fact that he must actually "listen" to her. Unlike his father's narrative, which is so familiar and normative that he feels that he "*knew it already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow*" (222), Rosa's insistent voice is not simply a vehicle for thought, but "talking in that grim haggard amazed voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound and the long-dead object of her impotent and yet indomitable frustration would appear" (1-2). The "self-confounding" voice is one which, like Dilsey's, reads against its own grain, effacing itself and un-explicating everything that otherwise could be nailed into a definitive order. This is why narratives resist the expectations of confession—namely, that you construct a narrative after the fact in order to remove the 'sin' of the event—like Rosa's voice, events do not end discretely, nor do they fully constitute the subject to which they ought to refer¹⁴⁷. This too is what Charles Bon accomplishes in pursuing Judith and seeking recognition from Sutpen while still acknowledging and supporting his octoroon wife; it is self-confounding, but it is generative—he produces the Jim Bonds who will in the end, according to Shreve, "conquer the western hemisphere" (395). Though Shreve seems to say this ironically, it is quite literally true that Jim Bonds is the only male to survive the end of the Compson and Sutpen lines. Although Jason Compson believes that Charles "came into that isolated puritan country household almost like Sutpen himself came into Jefferson: apparently complete" (94), he

¹⁴⁷ Robert Parker, in *Absalom, Absalom!: The Questioning of Fictions*, analyzes the normative attempts, especially by Quentin, Shreve, and Jason Compson, to integrate a (feminine) self-confounding narrative to their own ends, and he concludes that with Rosa's climatic confrontation with Clytie over Henry, she breaks the novel-long pattern of obsession and repetition, creating "a willfulness that cannot be contained, a repetition that is no longer so repetitive, at once bounded and breaking its bounds, closing and opening, making an end to the novel by grafting onto it a beginning of something that goes beyond its own recirculation of generation trying impossibly to repeat generation" (166).

acknowledges the ‘completion’ represented by his own son, rather than abandoning him, and in so doing, he sets the groundwork for Judith and Clytie’s convention-breaking rescue and reclamation of his son.

Rosa’s explanation is littered with admonitions to Quentin to pay attention, because what she expected and what she saw were such different things; she seems to assert that only through allowing your expectations to be confounded can you actually read the situation accurately and avoid repeating the same outcome. As she explains seeing Ellen and her children riding up to the church, she explains that she had assumed that the ‘demon’ Sutpen was allowing them “at least to approach the vicinity of salvation, to at least give Ellen one chance to struggle with him for those children’s souls on a battleground where she could be supported not only by Heaven but by her own family and people of her own kind ... That is what I expected. This is what I saw” (18). What she sees is Judith’s rage at being circumvented in her desire to rush the horses at breakneck speed, and so the Rosa who is telling it must acknowledge the *mistake* of her reading; wishing to make a narrative of ‘salvation’ and freedom, she ignores the fact that Judith is not remotely interested in being saved. Thus when Rosa orders the inscription for Judith’s tombstone, she erases Sutpen’s influence (only “*Daughter of Ellen Coldfield*”) and makes it, instead of a tale of heroism (as Sutpen’s wishes to be), an admonition to the ‘reader’: “*Pause, Mortal: Remember Vanity and Folly and Beware*” (220). On the surface Rosa may seem to be criticizing the ‘demon’ Sutpen once again, but in reality, it seems to be a warning to those who are confident in what they ‘expect’ and never learn to ‘see.’ To pause is to stop a narrative from propelling itself to a supposedly necessary end; it is to pivot in a new direction. In fact, her epitaph in many ways describes the project of the novel as a whole; it is a “pause,” for the purpose of extending “mortal” time, allowing the “remembering” to become real again, and to admonish the present.

Thus Rosa's reading and telling confirms that knowledge comes too late for the 'protagonist' but not for the *reader*; for her, the only way out of the "was"/ "is"/ "again" dilemma is to insist on a careful reading of what "was" so that it doesn't have to be "again," at least not in the same way. Quentin recognizes this as he listens to his father explaining how the tombstones were dragged across the South: "he could see it; he might even have been there. Then he thought *No. If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain*" (198). Only through exteriorizing and narrating it, by making of what "is" a "was," can Quentin see it 'plainly' and decipher what is essential. This is also the case in *The Sound and the Fury*, as Benjy recalls the interaction between Quentin and his father over his fighting at school:

Hello, he said. Who won. "Nobody." Quentin said. "They stopped us. Teachers." "Who was it." Father said. "Will you tell." "It was all right." Quentin said. "He was as big as me." "That's good." Father said. "Can you tell what it was about." "It wasn't anything." Quentin said. "He said he would put a frog in her desk and she wouldn't dare to whip him." "Oh." Father said. "She. And then what." "Yes, sir." Quentin said. "And then I kind of hit him." We could hear the roof and the fire, and a snuffling outside the door. "Where was he going to get a frog in November." Father said. "I dont know, sir." Quentin said. (67-68)

Though this narrative certainly shows Jason Compson's obsession with "she" as the root of all male violence (which carries over into his interpretation of the Sutpen saga), it also shows him trying to help Quentin become a better 'reader' of his situation; rather than reacting as would be expected, he should 'see' what was really going on—that the boy was trying to get a rise out of him, having no real ability or intention of putting a frog in the teacher's desk. Since Quentin was so triggered by the need to protect "her," he never even considered whether she was in need of

protection, and thus carried through the same silly schoolyard narrative to its foregone conclusion.

Quentin obviously doesn't learn the lesson from his father, because the same impulse leads him to repeat to Caddy again and again that Herbert is a "blackguard" whom she can't marry, because of his cheating at Harvard, to which she replies "*well what about it I'm not going to play cards with [him]*" (123). It seems like a simplistic response, but really it is an insightfully pragmatic one, and shows the mistake in Quentin's logic, the assumption being that cheating at cards leads necessarily to the disqualification from marriage. Caddy's pragmatic and relational understanding is demonstrated throughout the Benjy section as well, during her argument with Quentin over getting her dress wet; he claims that Caroline will whip her, and Caddy responds, "she's not going to do any such thing." Caddy said. 'How do you know.' Quentin said. 'That's all right how I know.' Caddy said. 'How do you know.' 'She said she was.' Quentin said. 'Besides, I'm older than you" (17). Quentin assumes that Caroline's threats hold water (which they clearly do not), and ends up resorting to completely irrelevant assertions of superiority, whereas Caddy's shrewd pragmatism about people leads her to recognize the small possibility of her mother following through with anything; it is an epistemology based not on logic, but on human relations, and it serves her far better than Quentin's serves him. The structure of narrative allows it to privilege this mode of relation, to perceive objects and people as not anchored to denotative meanings, but imbedded in a network of relations. It becomes, like life, or virginity, a negative state, the 'extra' interpretation and examination that goes on between and around the events; this is why Benjy is able to retain his value only within the context of the narrative, because what he values is always that which is inaccessible to others: "he could not remember his sister but only the loss of her, and firelight was the same bright shape as going to sleep, and

the pasture was even better sold than before” (340). To identify with loss, with silence and with time, is to find yourself existing only in the telling, the performance, and not outside of it.

This is what Rosa avails herself of as well in *Absalom, Absalom!*; where Jason Compson views her as deficient for her ‘lack’ of carnal knowledge, she resists what “they will have doubtless told you” with her assertion about that “*which only virgins know*”, explaining: “*I lurked, unapprehended as though, shod with the very damp and velvet silence of the womb, I displaced no air, gave off no betraying sound, from one closed forbidden door to the next and so acquired all I knew of that light and space in which people moved and breathed*” (150). Rosa reverses the discourse on virginity which is so damning to Quentin, asserting that although it may be a ‘negative’ state, it allows her to access knowledge through the examination of the relations in which others are implicated. Virginity also allows her to retain her “*one anonymous climaxless epicene and unravished nuptial—not that widowed and nightly violation by the inescapable and scornful dead which is the meed of twenty and thrity and forty, but a world filled with living marriage like the light and air which she breathes*” (150). Like Shreve’s vision of a ‘marriage’ of listening and telling, this is an experience which is agentive, anonymous, and non-hierarchical; Rosa is able to experience her body without reference and loyalty to a patriarchal formation always already rendered precarious and problematic by its implication in the social world. Thus while Charles Bon’s body (which she never sees) may not precisely ‘exist,’ it is therefore able to—unravished—exist outside of a teleological narrative structure. She comments after burying him, and seeing all traces vanish: “*That was all. Or rather, not all, since there is no all, no finish*” (155). Like Proust’s Albertine¹⁴⁸, Charles’ disappearance is the inverse of Sutpen’s

¹⁴⁸ In both cases, it requires the death of the beloved to come to this contingent insight; as Marcel realizes when he receives a telegram supposedly ‘from’ Albertine after her death, “en regardant sa charmante et énigmatique figure je me demandais si elle aussi aimait les femmes ...si tout cela constituait des caractères morphologiques de la femme qui aime les femmes... Hélas, je ne le saurais jamais” (2094), he simply never *can* know.

emergence; he retains his anonymity and independence, rather than relinquishing it to become intelligible and demonic.

What I have termed the “Compson problem” revolves on this axis of teleology, epistemology, and relation—who is included within the ‘we’ of a narrative, and how can they ever come to express it without simply recycling the same problematic structures that led to the ossified and unfruitful ‘we’ in the first place? Quentin wonders this as soon as he begins hearing Rosa speak: “why tell me about it? ... What if it did destroy her family too? It’s going to turn and destroy us all someday, whether our name happens to be Sutpen or Coldfield or not” (7). Seeing himself as an outsider, implicated in the generalized ‘destruction’ but not in the ‘we’ of the Sutpen narrative itself, he is able to dispassionately imagine them as lifeless, dimensionless photographs: “Quentin seemed to see them, the four of them arranged into the conventional family group of the period, with formal and lifeless decorum” (8). But the drama of *Absalom, Absalom!* is propelled by the fact that not only is he wrong about their lifelessness, but also about the *very number* included within the “family group”. Jason Compson makes the same errors, even when he acknowledges the complex forces which drag the family apart:

The destiny of Sutpen’s family which for twenty years now had been like a lake welling from quiet springs into a quiet valley and spreading, rising almost imperceptibly and in which the four members of it floated in sunny suspension, felt the first subterranean movement toward the outlet, the gorge which would be the land’s catastrophe too, and the four peaceful swimmers turning suddenly to face one another, not yet with alarm or distrust but just alert, feeling the dark set, none of them yet at that point where man looks about at his companions in disaster and thinks *When will I stop trying to save them and save only myself?* (73)

Again, the miscounting of “four” rather than five (Clytie) or six (Charles) or seven (his mother), or even more (Wash, Rosa, even Quentin and Shreve), is precisely what precipitates the ‘catastrophe’: the rigid sense of self-identity within the ‘we’ that does not allow them to express anything to each other but platitudes or violence.

Throughout *Absalom, Absalom!*, the question of who understands and is able to accept each other drives much of the action. Jason Compson, viewing the primary conflict as being between fathers and sons, makes much of what Sutpen or Henry ‘must have’ known before and after the conflict; Shreve and Quentin, perceiving the crux of the drama to be between Henry and Bon, give them their entire focus, Shreve again and again calling attention to Bon; “think of his heart then” (354); while Rosa examines the conflict through daughters and sisters, foregrounding her confrontation with Clytie, the request from Ellen, and the position of Judith. It seems significant that the one who clearly has the least accurate idea of what was ‘really’ going on is also the one most invested in establishing his credentials through documents and citations: Jason Compson. Shreve, Quentin, and Rosa all share the role of co-creators¹⁴⁹ and allow themselves to be implicated within the narratives they tell, and thus their expressions of it come to be “we” rather than “they,” and the hope in each case is that through that process of very contingent explication, they can avoid the problems that attend any initial decision to make an ‘us’ and ‘them.’

The Sound and the Fury is even more straightforward, making each section a very discrete and identifiable demonstration of “we,” “I,” and “they.” Although Benjy’s section is

¹⁴⁹ Unfortunately, some critics are unable to recognize Rosa’s resistance and difference; Margaret Bauer claims that *Absalom* “illuminates authorial validation of the misogynistic attitudes of some of Faulkner’s characters. Rosa Coldfield, Quentin’s first source of information about the Sutpens, indeed, the person who calls his attention to the family, is not only his most unreliable source but also a somewhat unlikable and unsympathetic character ... she is treated to some extent as the comic relief of the novel” (126). Not only is this patently inaccurate (Rosa is *not* Quentin’s first source of information, and his father is shown to be far more unreliable than Rosa), it ignores the nuance of Faulkner’s layers of narrative. In fact it replicates Jason Compson’s simplistic reading.

technically an “I,” in reality he pushes against this by including so many different characters in various configurations of “we” throughout the section; Caddy, Quentin, Jason, Versh, T.P., Luster, and others (which is revolutionary in its own way, since Benjy is essentially the only adult white male to include a black person in a “we” assertion). Interestingly, perhaps the only person not to be included in “we” is his own mother; all the others, interacting with or caring for him in some way, no matter what motivation they might have for doing so, are included in his “we.” And Caroline Compson is also the only one who never perceives *herself* as belonging to any “we,” except to Jason IV; Quentin picks up on this in his memory of the confrontation between his parents over Caddy’s sexual activity:

any live man is better than any dead man but no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man *Done in Mother’s mind though. Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned* you are confusing sin and morality women dont do that your mother is thinking of morality whether it be sin or not has not occurred to her Jason I must go away you keep the others I’ll take Jason and go where nobody knows us so he’ll have a chance to grow up and forget all this the others dont love me they have never loved anything with that streak of Compson selfishness and false pride Jason was the only one my heart went out to without dread (102)

Matched perhaps in her totalizing of others only by her husband himself, and creating a distinct and permanent separation between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ Caroline’s bigoted worldview is nevertheless undermined by Quentin’s comment that “no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man.” Able to see, through his mother, that any one brand of clinging identity is as neurotic as the other, Quentin recognizes that “*we were all poisoned*” but that they have had different reactions to it. Yet he too clings to an exclusive “we” with Caddy, which is what dooms

him¹⁵⁰. Jason IV, the most “I”-centered character in the novel, ends up nevertheless also considering the claims of “we” and is nearly undone by it. Standing at his father’s grave with the disgraced Caddy, “I didn’t say anything. We stood there, looking at the grave, and then I got to thinking about when we were little and one thing and another and I got to feeling funny again, kind of mad or something, thinking about now we’d have Uncle Maury around the house all the time, running things” (203). Drawn almost against his will into a ‘we’ with Caddy (likely remembering both confrontations, such as his whipping by their father (65), as well as intimacy, like sitting together with her on their father’s lap (72), though both of these are remembered by *Benjy*, who provides a narrative consistency that his brothers seem to lack), Jason IV has to work himself out of this “funny” feeling by asserting a more easily-instrumentalized ‘we’—himself and his mother—and eventually coming back to the “I” that is so familiar and comfortable to speak from. Even Dilsey, who recognizes better than anyone how she has been exploited by them, refuses to allow Luster to claim independence from them: “Dese funny folks. Glad I aint none of em.’ ‘Aint none of who?’ Dilsey said. ‘Lemme tell you something, nigger boy, you got jes es much Compson devilment in you es any of em” (276). She recognizes that “Compson” isn’t an exclusive term—it has no necessarily biological or relational component—and that identifying herself against it (as do Quentin, Jason, Caddy, and Roskus) will do nothing; her sense of herself is contingent and non-reactionary, as evidenced by her response to Benjy’s name-changing, which almost everyone else views as apocalyptic and paradigmatic:

Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither. Folks dont have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey

¹⁵⁰ Philip Weinstein, in *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*, argues that Faulkner uses Quentin to represent unspeakability *through* language rather than on stage, as it were: “he had to articulate—yet as though it were happening without his narrator telling it—the subject careening between discontinuous spaces and times, immersed in the force field of absent others” (147).

when they's long forgot me. How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said. It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out. Can you read it, Caddy said. Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here. (58)

Although this may seem like an internalization of the 'owning' that the Compsons continue to exert over their former slaves, it is a more pragmatic and agentic perspective; she makes far more out of her inability to read than the rest of the Compsons do with their 'superior' learning and knowledge. The fact that Faulkner ends the "Compson" genealogy with Dilsey, who is "not Compson," speaks to this strategic spanning of "we" identities and her confidence in expressing a consistently moral point of view.

The black members of the Compson family are reminders that the 'we' to which the white ones cling is fractured and dispossessed, even when they seem to themselves to be in control. Thus Quentin's 'I' is undone by a glance from Deacon, when he is trying to instrumentalize him to deliver his suicide note to Shreve: "suddenly I saw Roskus watching me from behind all his whitefolks' claptrap of uniforms and politics and Harvard manner, diffident, secret, inarticulate and sad" (99). What Quentin sees is not so much the Other as *how he himself is perceived*; he sees himself as a 'you' instead of an I (borrowing from Woolf's language in Peggy's interaction with the poet), and it is a discomfiting moment as well as a reminder of what he is losing, or has already lost. This flash of insight gives him a perspective on his complicity in using others as a "means" to an "end"; the juxtapositioning reveals to him how what he believes to be a stable subject position (white Southern male) is not parodied, but mourned, in the attire of Deacon. And seeing himself regarded as a 'them' through those he has always considered to be simply 'them' reinforces his melancholy belief that he is doomed while everything else continues.

Faulkner's juxtapositional technique is used again and again to reveal the similarities between different contexts of knowledge and relation as well as to demonstrate how an examination of the unfitting 'ends' to which people are assigned in utilitarian notions of identity can unravel the unethical 'means' such notions employ to keep those contexts of knowledge separate. Thus Quentin's thoughts about Caddy and Herbert are juxtaposed with his interaction with the boys at the swimming hole, and their micro-aggressions and ostracizations of each other, and his memories of his failed suicide pact with Caddy butt up against the legal farce with the "poor little sister" of Angelo; and thus Benjy moves directly from Caddy's marriage to Damuddy's funeral, or from Caddy's comment, while they are going through the fence, about the slaughter of the pigs, to the trapped position of Mrs. Patterson on the fence, grasping for the letter. And the final section of *The Sound and the Fury* begins with "a moving wall of gray light out of the northeast which, instead of dissolving into moisture, seemed to disintegrate into minute and venomous particles" (265), then gives the description of Benjy as "a big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or could not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it" (274). These descriptions are apt in a novel in which the three brothers' points of view will not and can not 'cohere' to each other or to the 'frame' which supports it; they must be sutured and stitched together by the reader, made to cohere in a meaningful way.

While such unmatched 'ends' of each of the narratives may seem to defy coherence, it is actually the only way to allow such fragments to retain their distinctness, and what it most resembles is the embroidery of Narcissa and Horace's aunt in *Flags in the Dust*: "she could never bring herself to trim any of them to any pattern, so she shifted and fitted and mused and shifted them like pieces of a puzzle picture, trying to fit them to a pattern or to create a pattern about

them without cutting them” (160). The elements of narrative are also not patterned in advance, and the pattern must be made through constant adaptation and musing¹⁵¹; this is what Rosa accomplishes as well through her stitching of the trousseau for the wedding which never will take place: “whipping lace out of raveled and hoarded string and thread and sewing it onto garments while news came of Lincoln’s election and of the fall of Sumpter and she scarce listening, hearing and losing the knell and doom of her native land between two tedious and clumsy stitches on a garment which she would never wear and never remove for a man whom she was not even to see alive” (78). The *end* of the narrative is inessential here, but rather the method and means by which she clumsily makes *ends meet*. Jason Compson, who is narrating this section, gives a broad judgment about the quality of anything Rosa could have made, commenting to Quentin, “and you can imagine too what Miss Rosa’s notions of such garments would be, let alone what her notion of them would look like when she had finished them unassisted” (77). Leaving Mr. Compson’s imaginations aside (what qualifications does *he* possess for judging something he has neither seen nor attempted to make?), we have Miss Rosa’s own assertion about how ‘fitting’ her own sewing is, as she explains to Quentin that when she went out to the Sutpen plantation after Charles’ murder she took only the inherited dresses from Ellen, since “the garments which I had been fortunate enough to inherit from my aunt’s kindness or haste or oversight were long since worn out” (138). For Rosa, the clothing is not judged on its ‘absolute’ quality or fit, but rather on what *use it can provide within its context*. This separates Jason Compson and Rosa as well; Compson who remains detached and considers the ‘aesthetic’ value of the Sutpen saga, against Rosa who enlists Quentin in order to quite pragmatically confront the unmatched ‘ends’ of the story which are still unravelling and coming together.

¹⁵¹ Andrea Dimino also takes Aunt Sally’s haphazard but consistent method as paradigmatic for Faulkner’s narrative method: “this patchwork art of the moment militates against the oppressive linearity of genealogical creation” (359)

Rosa's sewing resembles Charles' own perspective, according to Shreve; unlike Sutpen, who wishes to make a universally-acknowledged and aesthetically sound "design," Charles knows enough about the relational world to accept a contingent, but viable, victory: "so if he just didn't make the mistake of believing that he could beat all of it, if he just remembered to be quiet and be alert he could beat some of it" (324). Like Rosa, he deals with unmatched and ill-fitting 'ends,' but he also combines them into something that endures long after the Sutpen mansion is a pile of ashes. He endures because he accepts being 'mixed' rather than insisting on absolutes which exist only in delusional patriarchal concepts of purity. This is similar to the insight that Ratliff has at the end of *The Mansion*; after spending nearly three entire volumes fighting against (and begrudgingly admiring) Flem Snopes for his ruthlessness and calculation, he sees Flem killed by Mink, the utterly unaesthetic and unheroic relative who lurks at the end of his own rope, and he considers that it is only the narrative itself which grants meaning to them: "all of us mixed up in it—us and Linda and Flem and that durn little half-starved wildcat down there in Parchman, all mixed up in the same luck and destiny and fate and hope until cant none of us tell where it stops and we begin" (374). Ratliff here accepts what he has previously tried to force—the end, the result, and the narrative. He learns here what Faulkner was trying to explain since at least *The Sound and the Fury*; namely, that it is the fabric of the narrative itself which holds them together, and which provides meaning and means, rather than ends; or perhaps it provides, through its ends, a reliable and universal method for examining the means by which they come about.

The 'fabric' of the narrative is also problematized and interrogated by the Yoknapatawpha County novels that are structured around fractured, disparate perspectives. These fall into two main categories: those that feature different narrators for each chapter,

generally titled accordingly, and those that are narrated from a 3rd-person perspective, with numbered chapters, which focus on different characters in different contexts. My argument is that both of these methods of fracturing are intended to examine the ‘fabric’ of narrative, and show that knowledge and experience are communicated in explicable, if often belated, ways.

Light in August, which I would consider the finest and most thorough of the novels in the second category, thematizes this suturing effect as Reverend Hightower remembers discovering his father’s ‘uniform’ from the Civil War:

He did not know what it was, because at first he was almost overpowered by the evocation of his dead mother’s hands which lingered among the folds. Then it opened, tumbling slowly. The garment was almost unrecognizable with patches. Patches of leather, mansewn and crude, patches of Confederate grey weathered leafbrown now, and one that stopped his very heart: it was blue, dark blue; the blue of the United States.

Looking at this patch, at the mute and anonymous cloth, the boy, the child born into the autumn of his mother’s and father’s lives, whose organs already required the unflagging care of a Swiss watch, would experience a kind of hushed and triumphant terror. (469)

The cloth, with its imperfect and crude stitching, must come undone in order for him to recognize how much strategic restructuring has *already* been done, how much recombination of binary oppositions in the work of making a livable reality (and it is worth noting that Jason Compson’s method could never produce such an insight, because such a humble object would never attain the ‘aura’ of an aesthetic object or a document). Much like Hightower’s final vision of the merging and blending of Joe Christmas and Percy Grimm’s faces—“two faces which seem to strive (but not of themselves striving or desiring it: he knows that, but because of the motion and desire of the wheel itself) in turn to free themselves one from the other, then fade and blend

again” (492)—it shows not reconciliation, as they maintain their distinction, but rather shows how they can be used to make ‘ends’ meet¹⁵².

This is a perhaps-overlooked method that Faulkner uses time and again; the structure of his novels tend to deflate the tragic potential of the events they represent: *The Sound and the Fury* begins and ends with Benjy, triumphant in establishing himself in his rituals where all his family fails; *Absalom, Absalom!* begins and ends with Quentin’s connections and realizations, and not Sutpen’s or even Henry and Clytie’s demise; *Light in August* begins and ends with Lena, and not Joe Christmas. In each case, the centrality of tragedy is displaced, and especially in the case of *Light in August*, there is a concerted effort to recuperate a comedic tone instead, with the furniture dealer explaining to his wife how Lena is able to continue her travels. The tale becomes doubly sexualized, as his wife asks about the bizarre hitchhikers he has picked up: “*what was it he aimed to do?* the wife says. *You wait till I come to that part. Maybe I’ll show you, too . . .* *What was it?* the wife says. *I just showed you once. You aint ready to be showed again, are you? I reckon I dont mind if you dont*” (498-99). The narrative itself takes on a performative sexual dimension as the furniture dealer demonstrates what the narrative can’t ‘tell’; he ‘shows’ her what Byron *didn’t do*, couldn’t do, and thus the desire implicit in the story is detached, becomes extrinsic to it as a sort of erotic interlude in the couple’s life as well. He concludes: “yes, sir. You cant beat a woman. Because do you know what I think? I think she was just travelling. I dont think she had any idea of finding whoever it was she was following . . . And so I think she had just made up her mind to travel a little further and see as much as she could” (506). Although the seeming focus of the novel on Joe Christmas and his failed attempt at self-authorship would

¹⁵² There have been many critical attempts to force contemporary categories of identity onto Hightower, Christmas, and Grimm; John Duvall characterizes it as “the homophobia of homosexual panic that is figured through homoerotic images” (63). Relevant as the “panic” of homophobia is to the castration of Christmas, I ultimately find his reading to be extremely reductive to the complexity of the ‘blurring’ of categories of embodiment and identity that Faulkner seems to be attempting here, after the violence is accomplished.

suggest the foreclosure of any hope for resolution, Lena's placid continuity, and her trajectory which has not an *end* but a *process*, suggests that through the vehicle of the novel itself, ends can be negated, undermined, and produced as means instead¹⁵³. Faulkner is able to escape the confines of the family saga or estate novel through such nomadic means, and he shows the endurance of temporary, abject, or negligible narratives even with the backdrop of such violent and attention-grabbing events like the murder and lynching (both of which are staged in domestic settings).

Lena and Joe represent two different modes of transience and the focus on their negotiations of the social space of Jefferson do much to show Faulkner's examination of the 'ends' of narrative. Both of them are closely tied to roads, the transgressive 'means' which bisect Jefferson and connect it with other realities. For Lena, the road is a depersonalized and empowering space for her self-actualization; it represents quite literally the attenuation of time before the 'end' of her pregnancy, and from the first pages of the novel it is quite obvious that she is adept at apprehending the possibilities that transportation and a nomadic social relation entail: the wagon seems "suspended in the middle distance forever and forever, so infinitesimal in its progress, like a shabby head upon the mild red string of road ... So that at last, as though out of some trivial and unimportant region beyond even distance, the sound of it seems to come slow and terrific and without meaning, as though it were a ghost travelling a half mile ahead of its own shape" (8). Lena considers the vehicle not as a means of transportation, but as an experience of time, without beginning or end; she can see what it means to be "full" and then "empty" of her presence, and how it can continue infinitely without progressing. This is

¹⁵³ Valérie Loichot, in *Orphan Narrative: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Perse*, examines the complex interaction between Christmas and his social world, but also suggests that through his death, the consistent oppressive process of being 'read' by others is reversed, arguing that he "finally becomes the subject he was always yearning to be. His subjectivity comes with the returned gaze: it is now Christmas's turn to brand the white collective as they had branded and created him" (155).

metonymic for narrative itself, which also forecasts itself far in advance, deposits itself prematurely, and similarly “collects” and “empties” itself of readers and listeners, without actually terminating. Motherhood here represents the ultimate transgressive potentiality; the end contained within the beginning, emerging and continuing something against the volition of its principal actor (this is why Quentin is also so unnerved by sexuality, virginity, and pregnancy, because it cannot be cleanly dealt with; he wishes that “things just finished themselves” (*The Sound and the Fury* 79)). But for Joe Christmas, the road represents a paranoid independence, an exile from the ‘stifling’ domesticity or institutionalization he’s known, and yet it seems to remain an end in itself, and therefore has an end for him. After murdering McEachern, he contemplates the road which will “run for fifteen years” (223) for the first time: “the road curved on, moonblanched, bordered at wide intervals by the small, random, new, terrible little houses in which people who came yesterday from nowhere and tomorrow will be gone wherenot, dwell on the edges of towns. They were all dark save the one toward which he ran” (211). This shows the difficulty of writing a novel about a single family, a single house—it cannot represent *all* experience, and it presupposes a stability which those like Joe do not have, always running towards or from a house, and rarely contained within it.

As I Lay Dying also examines the narrative potential of roads, as the posthumous journey of Addie Bundren dramatizes the supposedly neutral social relations that these routes display. From the first page of the novel, Darl calls attention to the negotiation between individual knowledge and collective activity that such routes represent: “the path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laidby cotton... worn so by feet in fading precision” (3). Like Joe Christmas wearing the path between the cabin and the planing mill smooth, the recurrent action of bodies on space shows the

tendency to fall into well-worn grooves; a tendency that narrative itself displays¹⁵⁴. *As I Lay Dying* complicates this tendency by showing, chapter after chapter, the totally irreconcilable viewpoints that each character creates, even when traversing the ‘same’ events. In problematizing this, the novel forces the reader to continually re-examine the means by which narrative is created, and the ends it serves; this resembles the journey across the flooded river, in which all known markers are submerged and the traditional hierarchies are inverted. Tull, perhaps the most conventional of narrators in the novel, notices this as he reflects on the bridge: “the other end coming up outen the water like it wasn’t the same bridge a-tall and that them that would walk up outen the water on that side must come from the bottom of the earth. But it was still whole...it kind of lived” (138). Although submerged, it is still intact; like the novel itself, there is a structure, but the fractured and inverted perspectives require you to *submit to the experience* rather than assuming you can continue with the same conventions. Darl, watching Tull and Jewel dive in the river, also reflects on this: “from here they do not appear to violate the surface at all; it is as though it had severed them both at a single blow, the two torsos moving with infinitesimal and ludicrous care upon the surface ... As though the clotting which is you had dissolved into the myriad original motion, and seeing and hearing in themselves blind and deaf; fury in itself quiet with stagnation” (163-64). Seeing the “I” as a “clot,” an obstruction to circulation and motion, rather than as the primary source of life, Darl emphasizes the potential of narrative, when removed from a position of egotism, to engage with primary and universal experience.

¹⁵⁴ Marcel realizes this as well when the Verdurins take possession of La Raspelière; the Cambremer, who own it, are disconcerted to find the Verdurins showing their guests all sorts of unexpected and beautiful views and walks on the property; he remarks that they “habitaient le pays de tout temps mais ne le connaissaient pas. Il y avait du vrai dans cette assertion. Par routine, défaut d’imagination, incuriosité d’une région qui semble rebattue parce qu’elle est si voisine, les Cambremer ne sortaient de chez eux que pour aller toujours aux mêmes endroits et par les mêmes chemins. Certes ils riaient beaucoup de la prétention des Verdurin de leur apprendre leur propre pays. Mais, mis au pied du mur, eux, et même leur cocher, eussent été incapables de nous conduire aux splendides endroits, un peu secrets, où nous menait M. Verdurin” (1506).

Faulkner uses the abject position of the Bundrens to interrogate the problematic means by which social norms are created; the end of the novel in particular highlights this. Cash very flatly describes the re-construction of the Bundren home around another female: “then I see that the grip she was carrying was one of them little graphophones. It was for a fact, all shut up as pretty as a picture, and everytime a new record would come from the mail order and us setting in the house in the winter, listening to it, I would think what a shame Darl couldn’t be to enjoy it too. But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life” (260-61). The novel shows the horrific reality of the rapid shifts in who is included in “we”; here, Darl and Addie are elided, and a new Mrs. Bundren included, in a matter of just a few paragraphs¹⁵⁵. The social consensus, streamlined and institutionalized, has allowed the abject experiences to be “shut up as pretty as a picture,” put into a box, into a new set of ossified relation, without traces of the violence which created them. But the novel resists this folding, constantly snagging on the question of “we” and how it is understood; Darl shows this in particular as he remembers the family’s reaction to Jewel’s absence one morning after a long period of ‘sleeping spells’; “now it was like we had all---and by a kind of telepathic agreement of admitted fear---flung the whole thing back like covers on the bed and we all sitting bolt upright in our nakedness, staring at one another and saying ‘Now is the truth. He hasn’t come home. Something has happened to him. We let something happen to him’” (134). Darl shows that ‘we’ is constituted retrospectively, and through confrontation with unconscious conformity; ‘we’ is what happens when all the individual ‘I’s have been pursuing their own separate narratives: ‘we’ is the remainder, which is generally horrific.

¹⁵⁵ Kevin Railey, in *Natural Aristocracy*, also highlights the elision of Darl and Addie as showing the family’s capitulation to middle-class values. He says, “in order to become part of that larger community of the town, the Bundrens, with the exception of Darl, reject their potentially subversive position in relation to liberal ideology. They choose to replace Addie with material objects—commodities—in order to achieve social status as members of this new middle class” (92). Though it seems deterministic in its materialist orientation, the insight seems accurate.

Thus the grotesque visceral realities that *As I Lay Dying* portrays are not gratuitous and salacious; they are the means by which Faulkner interrogates the construction of social consensus, showing how little it holds up to the reality of the abject. Vardaman's insistence on a visceral, physical order of reality consistently undermines the social conventions of death; Tull remarks, after Vardaman's rampage against Peabody's mules and boring holes in Addie's coffin:

I be durn if it didn't give me the creeps. Now and then a fellow gets to thinking. About all the sorrow and afflictions in this world; how it's liable to strike anywhere, like lightning. I reckon it does take a powerful trust in the Lord to guard a fellow, though sometimes I think that Cora's a mite over-cautious, like she was trying to crowd the other folks away and get in closer than anybody else. But then, when something like this happens, I reckon she is right. (70-71)

Because Vardaman's actions undermine the pious discourse around death, Tull has to cling all the more tightly to his wife's abstractions, and suppress his own half-admitted recognition that there is abjection and decay at the base of human life, rather than salvation. Vardaman's dissociative thoughts about what his mother "is" revolve around his inability to reconcile the physical corpse with the set of relations he attaches to her; his assertion, "*my mother does not smell like that*" (196), and Darl's insistence that "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother" (95) both center on the fact that social conventions are at odds with the physical reality of death. The women who register their protest against Anse and the entire network of male supporters he finds in his grotesque burial journey are also quite astute about the way that social consensus covers violence and degradation; at Samson's farm, his wife's outburst demonstrates this: "who cares about him?" she says, crying. 'I just wish that you and him and all the men in the world that torture us alive and flout us dead, dragging us up and down the country ... Don't you

touch me!” (118). She pinpoints precisely the social mechanisms that Anse is exploiting and the ‘end’ result, whereas the men simply allow them to be; like Tull observing Anse attempting to ‘compose’ himself as a suitor while his wife is *de*-composing, the social consensus requires suppression of those unbearable and abject realities.

Light in August also demonstrates the posthumous influence of bodies themselves; both Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas exert an abject and undermining effect on the social consensus about their deaths. Byron’s description of the retrieval of Miss Burden’s nearly-decapitated corpse illustrates this resistance: “the cover fell open and she was laying on her side, facing one way, and her head was turned clean around like she was looking behind her” (92). The unnatural ability to look backwards, to regard from the end of her life those who continue after her, unsettles the easy narrative which her gruesome death would seem to justify. Her body exposes the limits to the logic which supposedly governs rituals of death and mourning¹⁵⁶. The violent death of Joe Christmas also unravels the attempts of his murderers to make a simple “end” of the offender they see in him and marks them in profound psychological ways; as they watch,

His face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will

¹⁵⁶ Like Addie and Joanna, the body of Temple Drake’s baby in *Requiem for a Nun* also provides the impetus for the critique of the social values which Nancy so willfully undermines. In his analysis of the text, Sean McCann discusses how the structure of Temple and Gowan Stephens’ conflict also exhibits this tendency to bury the uncomfortable truth beneath a veneer of respectability, which Temple resists; her insistent difference is “a struggle between a vision of civic obligation that rests on powerful norms of racial and gender hierarchy and a challenge to those norms whose very indifference to the pretenses of conventional morality threatens to reveal Mississippi’s social order as a cynical and predatory regime” (61).

contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant.

(465)

Though these self-promoted vigilantes have perceived their role as being that of divine justice marking and punishing its victims, the human connection of their violence undoes the abstraction they have engaged in; they are marked *by him* far more permanently than his body is by them. His agony, while excruciating, is short in duration, and has an end, while theirs, in attempting to make a clean 'end' of the 'criminal,' continues to pervade their consciousness. This is also, interestingly, the case with Rev. Hightower himself, who is confronted here at the end with a sudden, powerful, and unexpected feeling of guilt towards the wife he has instrumentalized throughout her miserable life:

Perhaps in the moment when I revealed to her not only the depth of my hunger but the fact that never and never would she have any part in the assuaging of it; perhaps at that moment I became her seducer and her murderer, author and instrument of her shame and death. ... And the Face: "It was not to accomplish that that you accepted her. You took her as a means toward your own selfishness. As an instrument to be called to Jefferson; not for My ends, but for your own." "Is that true?" he thinks. "Could that have been true?" He sees himself again ... making it appear that he resigned his pulpit for a martyr's reasons, when at the very instant there was within him a leaping and triumphant surge of denial behind a face which had betrayed him. (488-89)

The aesthetic object of the photograph which records his demonic pleasure in her death, and the memory of his own selfish ends, unravel the narrative he has built throughout his abject life as a bachelor in Jefferson; her persistent difference, the unassimilable aspect of her death and life,

causes him to undermine the easy moral reading he was tempted to make of her, and he must rewrite the narrative, literally ef-facing it, erasing his own horrific face.

This moment of insight comes after a lifetime of ignoring her presence, and being caught up in the hypermasculine¹⁵⁷ narrative of Confederate glory that has led him to Jefferson in the first place. He views marriage as “not men and women in sanctified and living physical intimacy, but a dead state carried over itno and existing still among the living like two shadows chained together with the shadow of a chain” (480), and sees in her merely an opportunity to settle himself in Jefferson in a house in order to relive his grandfather’s death: “I have never seen it, but I know exactly how it will look” (483). On the train to Jefferson he can’t stop talking about his grandfather: “his voice was high, childlike, exalted. Already his wife was clutching his arm: *Shhhhh! Shhhhhhh! People are looking at you!* But he did not seem to hear her at all. His thin, sick face, his eyes, seemed to exude a kind of glow. ‘That was it’ (485). He indulges in an event-and-cataclysmic, cyclical view of history, and a phallogentric one, where the exploits of his dead grandfather fascinate him enough to entirely ignore the woman next to him. Revered Hightower, prior to this, and throughout his ‘exile’ from the church, still lives in a delusional world of self-authored reality; he believes he has moved ‘beyond’ time, feeling a rhythm of worship each Sunday; “he could know immediately upon the thought just where, in his old life, he would be and what doing ... *Miss Carruthers* (she was his organist and she has been dead almost twenty years) *is among them; soon she will rise and enter the organloft* ... as though it had waited for his signal, the music begins” (366). Faulkner is quite clear in his dismissal of Hightower’s naïve belief that things repeat and renew themselves; his belief that he can sense and to some extent

¹⁵⁷ Alfred López, in “Queering Whiteness, Queering Faulkner: Hightower’s ‘Wild Bulges,’” acknowledges Hightower’s obsession with symbols of masculinity, but chooses to read, entirely on the basis of the similarity of ‘bugles’ to ‘bulges,’ an entire coming-out drama in Hightower’s “limited, incomplete reckoning with his long-suppressed sexuality” (75). Such a reading not only flattens this dialogue with his dead wife into a monologue, it also participates in the glorification of homosocial/erotic imagery that Faulkner so clearly criticizes.

control the rhythm of the town is belied by his total isolation from it, and the fact that he seems aware of neither Miss Carruthers' death nor his wife's. The persistence of the music lulls him into a sense that his experience is meaningful, like his reading of Tennyson: "soon the fine galloping language, the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and dehydrated lusts begins to swim smooth and swift and peaceful. It is better than praying without having to bother to think aloud. It is like listening in a cathedral to a eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not understand" (318). Such a reading practice, meaningless and repetitive as it is, seeks to minimize and 'dehydrate' reality, giving it a narcotic effect¹⁵⁸, instead of heightening and enlivening experience or coming to a fundamental critique of the world as it is.

The danger of not-reading is one that Joe Christmas realizes too late as well, when he receives what he assumes is just an submissive, feminine 'summons' but which turns out to be far more than that: "*you should have read that note* thinking, I am going to do something" (276). Joe's experience of reality is shaped by his sense of a pervasive masculine reality that underlies whatever he does; as a child, the janitor who watches him is the most familiar person in his life because despite the fact that he has barely spoken a word to him, "the man was a more definite person than anyone else in his life, not excepting the girl Alice. Even at three years of age the child knew that there was something between them that did not need to be spoken. ... *That is why I am different from the others: because he is watching me all the time* He accepted it" (137-38). His acceptance of this pervasive 'order' of reality is further reinforced by his sense of complicity and understanding with McEachern, with the rituals of meaningless Bible reading and bursts of violence which they both consent to, both which also revolve around the repudiation of women:

¹⁵⁸ This is the reading practice that Narcissa employs in *Flags in the Dust*, to disastrous results: "she held her consciousness deliberately submerged as you hold a puppy under water until its body ceases to resist. And after a time her mind surrendered wholly to the book and she read on" (162).

There was a very kinship of stubbornness like a transmitted resemblance in their backs. ... the two backs in their rigid abnegation of all compromise more alike than actual blood could have made them ... McEachern took from the wall a harness strap. It was neither new nor old, like his shoes. It was clean, like the shoes, and it smelled like the man smelled: an odor of clean hard virile living leather. ... His voice was not unkind. It was not human, personal, at all. It was just cold, implacable, like written or printed words. (148-49)

Where the “Compson problem” seems to be constant anxiety about inheritance and fate, the “adoption” problem seems to be that it reproduces *better and more completely than reproduction ever could*; Joe becomes the hard, inflexible, violent man that his adopted father was, a similarity highlighted by his flight from the murder, as he runs for the horse “with something of his adopted father’s complete faith in an infallibility in events” (207). Like his first “adoptive” father, Doc Hines, McEachern also uses religiously fanatic language to curse women, and Joe’s almost-initiation into sexuality ends up reverting back to these same curses as he kicks the Negro girl instead of raping her; fighting with the other boys to negate the troubling reality of sexuality; when McEachern comes, he welcomes the beating he’ll receive with relief, “as the whole situation were perfectly logical and reasonable and inescapable. Perhaps he was thinking then how he and the man could always count upon one another, depend upon one another; that it was the woman alone who was unpredictable” (159). His experience in the closet, with the Negro girl, with the waitress, and even with the first woman who accepts his own “confession” as an invitation; all of these seem to confirm to him that reality is male¹⁵⁹, and that at the base of it is

¹⁵⁹ This also seems to be why, in *Somode et Gomorrhé*, Marcel finds reassurance in the homosocial and performative world of “Sodom” and cannot even “imagine” Gomorrah; indeed, as Anne Carson succinctly observes in *The Albertine Workout*, “Marcel never says the word ‘lesbian’ to Albertine. He says ‘the kind of woman I object to’ (13).

an abject and irrational feminine sexuality which must be embraced and punished at the same time.

Darl, too, struggles with a sense of isolation and helplessness against a predetermined and repetitive reality; watching his brother Cash on top of his mother's soaked, rotting casket, he considers "how do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls... If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time" (206-208). While Darl wishes to escape from a fairly male-coded sense of apocalyptic time and his vision of bodies seems to string them into causal nets, Dewey Dell's pregnancy makes her constantly aware that things are *not* finished, are *not* unraveled, but instead unceasingly implicated by each other: "I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. ... *That's what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events*" (120-21). Rather than an cycle of event and cataclysm, Dewey Dell's sense of time is that it is constantly impregnated, embodied, and relational; she cannot escape being caught up in her mother's womb even after her death, by the baby which is in her own; she says that "the process of coming unalone is terrible" (62) and feels "like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth" (64). Darl's dreary unravelling has a sort of melancholy teleology, but Dewey Dell's position doesn't allow her to be able to tell the 'end' from the beginning; she is implicated in a net of taboos and pleasures with sexuality, and the warp and woof of it is relational and contingent:

It's because I am alone. If I could just feel it, it would be different, because I would not be alone. But if I were not alone, everybody would know it. And he could do so much for

me, and then I would not be alone. Then I could be all right alone. I would let him come in between me and Lafe, like Darl came in between me and Lafe, and so Lafe is alone too. He is Lafe and I am Dewey Dell, and when mother died I had to go beyond and outside of me and Lafe and Darl to grieve. (58-9)

Although the vagueness of her pronouns complicates any certain pronouncement, she seems to be acknowledging that her pregnancy involves a violation which can never be expressed unless “everybody” knows, but even “everybody” knowing would not be the same kind of knowing as she must have, and therefore it would isolate her once again. She is stuck in the same position as Addie, who struggles to reconcile language (especially its social deployment) with the physical reality of conception and childbirth; “I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a ” (173). Against an explicatory, text-centered male reality, Addie and Dewey Dell level a criticism in both their content and method of ‘delivery.’

As I Lay Dying allows, through its structure, voices and perspectives to ‘live’ which have no viability or recognition in the social ‘reality’ which surrounds them. Addie’s chapter in particular highlights this tension—how can a dead woman ‘speak’? And yet she does, she avails herself of a position that is impossible for her to inhabit, and uses it to attempt to make a new and different mode of communication and understanding. The interplay between linguistic and physical realities is particularly potent in her section of *As I Lay Dying*, as her knowledge and expression are directly linked to the conception and birth of her children¹⁶⁰:

And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words dont ever fit

¹⁶⁰ Barbara Ladd, in her analysis of the novel in *Resisting History*, comments on the placement of her ‘monologue’ within the novel, suggesting that “there is something darkly comic in Addie’s inspired monologue, in the middle of her journey, on re-creating the world in the transgressive sex act—bringing word, body, and act together again to make ‘deed’” (19).

even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not ... We had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching. (171-72)

Her rebellion against the physical system of reproduction and the linguistic system of articulation is one and the same; to “mother” becomes an abdication of physical control, a reliance on abstraction, like words. She considers that by submitting to the available terms of expression, sexual and verbal, people are always “fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother” (174). Recognition, figured here quite literally as filiation, is not a simple matter of matching realities; it is the creation of a fictional relation, the assumption that there is a prior reality to which the events correspond, especially in a paternalistic mode of creation from the father's ‘fiat’¹⁶¹. Thus her abject physical reality, though silent, is obstinately irreducible; she refuses to be translated, and can therefore only be interred.

Darl, the son whom Addie renounces and repudiates, is also the most similar to her, in his ability to avail himself of details and descriptions to which he has no ‘real’ access. This is different from his siblings, like Jewel or Vardaman, who use narrative to explore the subjunctive; “if it had just been me” (15); Darl uses narrative to articulate and examine the possibilities and the incongruities of what *is* (resembling Musil's “ekstatisches Leben” in its incorporation of affect and body, more than the more intellectual “Möglichkeitssinn” of the subjunctive mood);

¹⁶¹ Wesley and Barbara Morris, in *Reading Faulkner*, discuss the paradox of genealogy and writing, and although they do not analyze it in gendered terms, they suggest that it has much to do with the ‘chaos’ which Addie represents, against the supposedly placid surface of masculine lineage: “genealogical narrative ruptures its own boundaries, traces its own digressions in the very branchings of descent that destroy and sense of strict linearity” (100).

like Addie, he stretches out the moment of possibility and analyzes it¹⁶², as he considers her dying from afar:

In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not. Beyond the unlamped wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are *was*, it is not. Yet the wagon *is*, because when the wagon is *was*, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel *is*, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am *is*. (80-1)

Though the syntax and repetition are complex, his line of thought is intelligible (this is also the case with Vardaman and Dewey Dell; I would argue that they all destabilize signification through their syntax, unlike Jewel, Tull, Anse, or Cash who use simple syntax to come to what are actually unintelligible conclusions); like Marcel, he wonders how it is that the dreaming self re-enters and is re-integrated into the real, but his mother's impending-or-already-accomplished death creates insecurity and anxiety about the implications of what "is" and "was". His ultimate fate of incarceration does little to discount the insight he gains into the possibilities of narrative to "empty" and to "fill" moments with potentialities not available to the origin-and-end-driven

¹⁶² This bears almost uncanny similarities to Marcel's analysis of his anxieties and pleasures preparing to sleep in the 'strange room' in *Doncières*: "Il en est du sommeil comme de la perception du monde extérieur. Il suffit d'une modification dans nos habitudes pour le rendre poétique" (810).

hero's cycle¹⁶³; in fact, his ability to so completely critique his circumstances is unique among all the narrators in the novel.

Joe Christmas is also, like Darl, a character doomed to annihilation in the social realm, and yet he is also able to come to remarkable insights about the world around him in his final days. Although he runs from the murder he commits, he finds at the end of his week-long run, "I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years," he thinks. "But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo" (339). For one who has been trapped in an either/or binary throughout his life, and running from it, his acceptance of his 'insider' status is significant; he does not consent to the horrific social conditions, but recognizes that he is implicated within them rather than existing outside of them. Although the potential for difference is eventually annihilated, in the fabric of the novel, it is sustained and smoothed out to an enormous canvas before it is shredded. Christmas, contemplating murdering Brown, and thereby destroying the one person who really 'knows' about his biracial identity, he has a moment of extraordinary insight;

Then it seemed to him that he heard it. Then it seemed to him, sitting on the cot in the dark room, that he was hearing a myriad sounds of no greater volume—voices, murmurs, whispers: of trees, darkness, earth; people; his own voice; other voices evocative of names and times and places—which he had been conscious of all his life without knowing it, which were his life, thinking *God perhaps and me not knowing that too*
 He could see it like a printed sentence, fullborn and already dead *God loves me too*
 like the faded and weathered letters on a last year's billboard *God loves me too* (105)

¹⁶³ Arnold Weinstein, in *The Fiction of Relationship*, also acknowledges how Darl radically destabilizes the concept of a unitary self; "the fissuring of identity that closes Darl's career stems unmistakably from his 'availability,' his ceaseless and helpless forays into others; and Faulkner gives us thereby a haunting picture of knowledge as loss, of connection as erosion, of entry and exit being one and the same thing, for we can move into the other only by leaving ourselves" (187).

Though the paper, the printed word, here is “fullborn and already dead” rather than living or developing (or perhaps, like a seed, it is “fullborn” and must actually “die” *in order to create something living*), it represents a moment of possibility enabled by the narrative even though it is destroyed in the ‘world’ of the narrative¹⁶⁴. Christmas is able to reach outside of the paranoid view he has always maintained and consider human connection and relation, and himself imbedded within it.

This experience is extended as he leaves before dawn and breakfasts under a tree, where he pulls out a vaguely pornographic magazine to read:

He had previously read but one story; he began now upon the second one, reading the magazine straight through as though it were a novel. Now and then he would look up from the page, chewing, into the sunshot leaves which arched the ditch. ‘Maybe I have already done it,’ he thought. ‘Maybe it is no longer now waiting to be done.’ ... Then he read again. He turned the pages in steady progression, though now and then he would seem to linger upon one page, one line, perhaps one word. He would not look up then. He would not move, apparently arrested and held immobile by a single word which perhaps not yet impacted, his whole being suspended by the single trivial combination of letters in quiet and sunny space, so that hanging motionless and without physical weight he seemed to watch the slow flowing of tie beneath him, thinking *All I wanted was peace.* (111-12)

Christmas reads in order to stop the flow of time, but the process of reading itself leads him to question what the entire sense of narrative progression *is*, and whether it can ever be as

¹⁶⁴ Philip Weinstein examines Christmas’ conflicted identity and argues that Faulkner deliberately contrasts the “communal judgment,” that is, everything said about him, the unrealities and fables and judgments that will condemn him, with the “not I,” the Joe Christmas of the deliberative and extended narratives, a “gap between such communal fables of unreality and the speechless real erupting in the present” (189).

deterministic as it seems in such banal and lurid stories¹⁶⁵. His consumption of the ‘trashy’ magazine mixes with his guilt and the need to confess and ‘expose’ himself as well, and it leads him to consider what his moral position is before the letters of judgment and violence that will be issued against him have ‘impacted.’ The reading practice he employs allows him to interrogate the present, and come to an understanding of the way that narrative functions.

Such remarkable readings are able to reclaim interpretation from a ‘consensus’ which the text otherwise would tend to reinforce. This is what Vardaman’s queer logic does, as he fixates again and again on the toy train in town and considers the various explanations that others have given him as to why he can never have it. “Why aint I a town boy, pa?’ I said. God made me. I did not said to god to made me in the country. If he can make the train, why cant He make them all in the town because flour and sugar and coffee” (66). Though it isn’t formed as a logical syllogism—or, I would argue, precisely *because* it is not articulated in that restrictive mode—the connection is very cogent: the economic conditions which produce ‘flour sugar coffee’ also ensure that there will always be town people and country people, and that he will remain a producer of the goods which others will sell back to him; he will remain where “God made me” because the gods that he use his labor to enable the construction of toys he can never access.

Although the 1st-person position of all the narrators in *As I Lay Dying* would seem to emphasize a ‘confessional’ mode of narrative, Darl’s pervasive and queer usurpation of others’ narratives also serves to reclaim interpretation from ‘confession,’ in particular from its tendency to subsume experiences into packaged ‘events’ and make simple lines of motivation ‘account’

¹⁶⁵ Faulkner seems to be especially concerned about reclaiming quotidian texts from easy readings, and opening them to indeterminacy and surprising depth; this is what happens in *The Unvanquished* as they read from the recipe book instead of eating: “What shall we read about today?” she said. “Read about cake,” I said. . . . “Cokynut cake, Granny.” He said coconut cake every time because we never had been able to decide whether Ringo had ever tasted coconut cake or not...Now and then I used to try to help him decide, get him to tell me how it tasted and what it looked like and sometimes he would almost decide to risk it before he would change his mind. Because he said that he would rather just maybe have tasted coconut cake without remembering it than to know for certain he had not.” (21-22). They end up, through the cake, considering complex questions of memory, perception, and ontology.

for them. Darl's final journey on the train does a great deal to unravel this expectation of intelligibility:

They pulled two seats together so Darl could sit by the window to laugh. One of them sat beside him, the other sat on the seat facing him, riding backward. One of them had to ride backward because the state's money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state's money which is incest. A nickel has a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back. I don't know what that is. Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. In it it had a woman and a pig with two backs and no face. I know what that is. "Is that why you are laughing, Darl?" (254)

Unlike *Flags in the Dust* or *Sartoris*, the war here is totally elided as an explanatory mechanism for mental instability, reduced to a lower-case noun in an incidental prepositional phrase. It would be easy to make a historical novel of *As I Lay Dying*, reducing Darl to a tragically simple shell-shocked soldier, but Faulkner resists it; he constantly sets typologies against each other and shows how little they explain about human action and experience.

Light in August also shows the paucity of typological readings, setting the instrumental and deterministic binaries of Joe and Joanna next to each other; she attempts to 'reconcile' his biracial heritage into one simple identity by encouraging him to call himself a negro and attend one of the historically black colleges and become a 'savior' to 'his' people, while he, from the first seduction, is bewildered and unnerved by her failure to conform to gender roles, thinking after the first time "my God. How little I know about women, when I thought I knew so much. . . . it was like I was the woman and she was the man" (235). Finally, after enough role-playing and inversions to excite even a Proustian character, he decides to split her into discrete 'phases' and call them 'sisters': "that still, cold, contained figure of the first phase who, even though lost and

damned, remained somehow impervious and impregnable; then it would be the other, the second one, who in furious denial of that impregnability strove to drown in the black abyss of its own creating that physical purity which had been preserved too long now even to be lost” (260-61). His typology fails to account for the complexity of her attraction and conviction, however, and he ends up fulfilling her prophecy that they would either die or live together. And although they are fit into simplistic categories (‘violated white woman’ and ‘depraved nigger,’ respectively) in the social ‘real,’ the negotiations and insecurities they engage in are preserved in the text, reclaiming them from a ‘consensus’ and working against a ‘confession’ of some essential and irreducible identity.

This is where the ‘town’ novels crack under pressure; the voice of Jefferson that is represented through them is inconsistent, but it is almost never self-critical, and Faulkner wishes to draw attention to this through narratives of social violence such as the lynching of Goodwin in *Sanctuary* or the murder of Christmas in *Light in August*. By showing the abstractions necessary to justify such actions, Faulkner criticizes the horrific reality of the sorts of Nietzschean ‘strong’ uses of history which bludgeon events and people into categories in an attempt to close the open wounds of gendered, racial, and class violence. Percy Grimm is able to enact the ‘heroism’ of his own narrative through the adoption of a dogma which grants him a retrospective identity; born as he was ‘too late’ for the Great War, he wishes to create his own, and although his sense of self is fragile and tentative as Joe Christmas’, the resurgence of the “Real” of racial violence allows him to retroactively ‘become’ a war hero by castrating and murdering Christmas:

He could now see his life opening before him, uncomplex and inescapable as a barren corridor, completely freed now of ever again having to think or decide, the burden which he now assumed and carried as bright and weightless and martial as his insignatory brass:

a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men. (451)

Percy Grimm shows the very real limit to the value of Nietzschean usage of history; the retrospective narrative can only account for the self, and must suppress all others according to its inconsistent dogmas: “the town had suddenly accepted Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence” (457). Even Gavin Stevens, who defends Joe Christmas at his farce of a trial, ends up using elements of white supremacist logic in his explanation to a legal friend, claiming that “it was the white blood which sent him to the minister...and then the black blood failed him again” (449). Attempting to make discrete categories and assign them characteristics is the purview of typology, and it fails to account for the complexities that Christmas’ identity negotiates.

The attempt to make a clear-cut ‘case’ out of incredibly complex social events is shown throughout *Light in August* to be short-sighted and inaccurate. The town engages in a virtuous display of outrage for the woman they never knew: “she lives in the big house alone, a woman of middleage. She has lived in the house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction. A Yankee, a lover of negroes, about whom in the town there is still talk of queer relations with negroes in the town and out of it” (46). They consider her a ‘stranger’ although she has been born there and lived there all her life, but Faulkner points out that there is something more than indifference beneath the imputation of an outsider’s status: “even though she is but a woman and but the descendant of them whom the ancestors of the town had reason (or thought that they had) to hate and dread. But it is there: the descendants of both in their relationship to one another’s ghosts” (47).

The reason they want to view her as a stranger (up until her death, which gives them a grim ‘Roman holiday’) is that her presence ‘within’ them, the fact of her relation to them, that the violence her brother and grandfather faced under Sartoris has led them to be marked by each other, is a uncanny and indeterminate reality that still lives. She acknowledges this when she tells Christmas the story, concluding: “so I suppose that Colonel Sartoris was a town hero because he killed with two shots from the same pistol an old onearmed man and a boy who had never even cast his first vote. Maybe they were right. I dont know” (249). She wishes to distance herself from ‘them’ from the same fear that acknowledging her intimate connection and implication with them would form an ethical imperative she is uncomfortable accepting.

One of the remarkable things about constructing a complex social universe like Yoknapatawpha County is that it allows Faulkner to deconstruct the concept of ‘stranger’; as with the Burdens and Jefferson, the moral universe is populated with neither absolute nor relative values, but merely with *relatives*: people who are irreducible to categories and circumstances and who therefore retain, unexpectedly, stupidly, and even unconsciously, something which cannot be subsumed into any aesthetic or ethical creation. This is what Hightower realizes as he contemplates Byron’s interest in Lena’s pregnancy; he recognizes that, unlike his own marriage, which was begun and ended with impersonal abstraction, that unlike the Kantian categorical imperative to which he so disasterously clung, Byron’s universe is not populated by strangers, but by interest:

“I still cannot see what you have to worry about,” Hightower says. “It is not your fault that the man is what he is or she what she is. You did what you could. All that any stranger could be expected to do. Unless. . . .” His voice ceases also. Then it dies away on that inflection, as if idle thinking had become speculation and then something like

concern. Opposite him Byron sits without moving, his face lowered and grave. And opposite Byron, Hightower does not yet think *love*. (82)

The logic of rational ethical action falls away when the universe is not assumed to be a collection of *strangers*, but of those for whom partialities and affections and repulsions exist. Hightower realizes, too late as usual, that love is not an additive, but that desire or indifference are tangled up in every supposedly detached or 'ethical' action.

Faulkner shows a consistent interest in those who reinscribe abstract ideas of justice, equity, or morality, in personal terms rather than 'critical' jargon; Mink Snopes is an example of this; at the end of *The Mansion*, he is left sitting alone in the collapsed cellar of his house, forced to contemplate the ragged ends of the narrative now that they have been torn apart¹⁶⁶. It is a moment of melancholy realization, when Mink must finally let go of his obsessive belief in "Them," his name for the abstract and impersonal forces which he feels are always at work to determine the course his entire life, and he must instead embrace a tentative and problematized "us" as he begins to feel, for the first time,

the Mink Snopes that had had to spend so much of his life just having unnecessary bother and trouble, beginning to creep, seep, flow easy as sleeping; he could almost watch it, following all the little grass blades and tiny roots, the little holes the worms made, down and down into the ground already full of the folks that had the trouble but were free now, so that it was just the ground and the dirt that had to bother and worry and anguish with the passions and hopes and skeers, the justice and the injustice and the griefs, leaving the

¹⁶⁶ Kevin Railey argues that Faulkner uses Mink Snopes to end the trilogy because he shows the failure of both 'town' and 'country' to provide an adequate human social vision; "for Faulkner, they have been led astray, on one hand, by the values of an aristocracy of wealth that imprisons people in an exploitative system that disregards the valued of day-to-day human interconnections and the obligations that should bond people together in some ordered hierarchy and, on the other, by the inefficacies of a cowardly humanism that rationalizes the personal pursuit of inner culture as an ideal pastime while ignoring the quality of the social and cultural life of a community" (166).

folks themselves easy now, all mixed and jumbled up comfortable and easy so wouldn't nobody even know or even care who was which any more, himself among them, equal to any, good as any, brave as any, being inextricable from, anonymous with all of them.

(435)

This belated sense of equality is a condition of accepting his implication with “us”, or a “them” which includes himself. Acknowledging that everything he has wished to keep so frantically separated is “mixed,” Mink is able to walk away from the trauma, rather than returning obsessively to it, as he did earlier.

This division between intimacy and punishment is also at work in *As I Lay Dying*. Addie Bundren, in her initial position as a teacher, uses her hierarchical authority to enforce conformity as she revels: “I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them. When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever” (170). She wishes to transmit herself physically, mothering them through violence and blood, and demanding submission to her authority; this contrasts with her actual motherhood, in which children such as Darl are able to resist her control and displace her locus of physical threat and authority¹⁶⁷. But even when Darl is, retrospectively, made into a scapegoat for all the outrageous conditions of Addie’s abject journey to the grave, Cash comments: “sometimes I aint so sho who’s got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint. Sometimes I think it aint none

¹⁶⁷ In *The Town*, Labove also wishes to enforce the ‘seed’ of his knowledge with Eula: “you are not afraid. That’s what you have got to learn. That’s one thing I am going to teach you, anyway.’ He had taught her something else, though he was not to find it out for a minute or so yet. She had indeed learned one thing during the five years in school and was presently to take and pass an examination on it ... ‘Stop pawing me,’ she said. ‘You old headless horseman Ichabod Crane” (120, 122). Eula avails herself of the right to interpretation outside of the ‘sanctioned’ and monastic scholarly world which Labove adores in his fanatic’s zeal for authority. She resists the ‘lesson’ he is trying to teach her and becomes an agent of difference.

of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way (233). He sees how viciously and personally Dewey Dell and Jewel attack Darl, and how Anse has his own motivations for tucking him away; he recognizes that it is only through a social contract, through the repeated “telling” that anyone is impugned or disciplined. Cash’s insight is that it is through abstractions that morally reprehensible actions are brought to pass and to be accepted in a social context¹⁶⁸. He even admits “when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way” (233).

Cash betrays an intimate knowledge of Darl’s thinking, showing the difficulty of making abstract claims about experiences and phenomena that are negotiated in a familial context. Darl’s description of some of the prohibitions and pleasures that are associated with his experience of sexuality in a familial context:

Water should never be drunk from metal. And at night it is better still. I used to lie on the pallet in the hall, waiting until I could hear them all asleep, so I could get up and go back to the bucket. It would be black, the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I caould see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank. After that I was bigger, older. Then I would wait until they all went to sleep so I could lie with my shirt-tail up, hearing them asleep, feeling myself without touching myself, feeling the cool silence blowing upon by parts and wondering if Cash was yonder in the darknes doing it too. (11)

¹⁶⁸ This is similar to Brichot’s jargon-rich and content-poor defense of his part in Mme Verdurin’s staged accusation of Charlus by Morel; he defaults to Kant in trying to justify himself to Marcel: “le devoir moral,’ me dit-il, ‘est moins clairement impératif que ne l’enseignent nos Éthiques. ... Il est évident, d’une part, que je ne puis refuser à notre excellente hôtesse le léger service qu’elle me demande, en conformité pleinement orthodoxe avec la morale traditionnelle” (1815-16). Through his tortured logic, and abstract jargon, he is able to justify himself, but the force of Marcel’s narrative undermines the ethical position he wishes to establish, and shows it for the pettiness and self-interest it covers.

The pleasure he is experiencing could be called masturbatory, but to label it specifies it unnecessarily, since the pleasure he obtains actually centers around the experience of “feeling myself without touching myself,” valuing the incorporation of environment into self, through a ritual of prohibition and enforced silence which heightens his senses, and his experience of pleasure. Unlike Jewel, whose “rutting” revolves around the accomplishment of a specific end, Darl revels in the means by which sexual meaning is created. It is no accident that Darl’s intensest experiences of sexuality are in close proximity to his siblings, specifically Cash, with whom he shares a psychic bond. When Jewel’s “rutting” begins, Cash is worried that it might be a married woman; Darl says that it would be “safer” that way, but Cash struggles to articulate why he wishes it not to be that same story of adultery, so Darl fills in for him: “that’s what he was trying to say. When something is new and hard and bright, there ought to be something a little better for it than just being safe, since the safe things are just the things that folks have been doing so long they have worn the edges off and there’s nothing to the doing of them that leaves a man to say, That was not done before and it cannot be done again” (132). For Darl, this is an acknowledgment that his queerness, which to him seems to be a mark of ingenuity of great value, cannot be incorporated into the ‘safe’ purview of social norms, and that even if his life is consigned to the margins, he can still avail himself of the opportunity to create that difference, through narrative.

Darl’s narrative ends, in fact, with events which he clearly does not witness; while on the train to Jackson, he narrates:

The wagon stands on the square ... It looks no different from a hundred other wagons there; Jewel standing beside it and looking up the street like any other man in town that day, yet there is something different, distinctive. There is about it that unmistakable air of

definite and imminent departure that trains have ... Darl is our brother, our brother Darl.

Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson. (254)

Though of all his siblings, only Vardaman actually says “our brother Darl” (250), Darl’s own narrative of the family continues in his absence, and insistently includes himself within that absence, inhabiting it like Addie. He is thus able to continue a critique of normative understandings of sexuality and ‘family,’ which he has asserted throughout the text, flatly stating uncomfortable truths again and again: Vardaman tells him that his mother is a fish, “‘Jewel’s mother is a horse,’ Darl said. ‘Then mine can be a fish, cant it, Darl?’ I said. Jewel is my brother. ‘Then mine will have to be a horse, too,’ I said. ‘Why?’ Darl said. ‘If pa is your pa, why does your ma have to be a horse just because Jewel’s is?’ ‘Why does it’ I said. ‘Why does it, Darl?’ Darl is my brother” (101). Darl’s point is that there is no necessary (*Notwendig*) correlation between either fantasies or realities of relations and what the structure of a family may dictate that is articulated. Thus figured, it becomes an arena for the preservation of the queer, rather than only the flight from it.

This seems to be one of the motivations for Faulkner’s interest in the grotesque, especially the domestic grotesque: scenes of horror enacted in ordinary homes. While there is certainly a Gothic heritage at work, the interest in the macabre is in disturbing those things which should be most familiar and rendering them the most queer. Thus, in *Light in August*, Joe Christmas and Miss Burden are unable to produce living offspring (despite her claim to the contrary); after the first torrents of their sexual affair have passed, and she begins to pray, he refuses to consent to her incorporation of him into a religious narrative he has resisted all his life:

“No,” he said. And she would listen as quietly, and he knew that she was not convinced and she knew that he was not. Yet neither surrendered; worse: they would not let one

another alone; he would not even go away. And they would stand for a while longer in the quiet dusk peopled, as though from their loins, by a myriad of ghosts of dead sins and delights, looking at one another's still and fading face, weary, spent, and indomitable.

(279)

Unable to produce living offspring, they produce only ghosts; the stunted narratives of the past come to stand in for the lack of posterity. Caught up in the irreconcilable and violent histories of their families, they can produce neither *narratives* of difference nor *agents* of change. As an unwanted and 'queer' child, Christmas does not wish to participate in the cycle of generation and violence he has known, therefore his most transgressive moments come not through his sexuality but through his *narrative*; in his experiences with the prostitute in the small town as a teenager, Faulkner clearly distinguishes between the intimacy involved in linguistic vs. sexual disclosure as the prostitute takes Joe back to her room for the first time:

He said, "Here? In here?" It was the first time he had ever seen a naked woman, though he had been her lover for a month. But even then he did not even know that he had not known what to expect to see. That night they talked. They lay in the bed, in the dark, talking. Or he talked, that is. All the time he was thinking "Jesus. Jesus. So this is it." He lay naked too, beside her, touching her with his hand and talking about her. (195)

Talk about her eventually turns to talk about him, and the nakedness of this mode of talking is what becomes the most transgressive aspect of their liason, and what she ends up wishing to punish in him the most viciously. This is also the case with his affair with Miss Burden; confronted with her physical, sexual reality, he is bewildered, but when they move past the silent grappling, "she had an avidity for the forbidden wordsymbols; an insatiable appetite for the sound of them on his tongue and on her own. She revealed the terrible and impersonal curiosity

of a child about forbidden subjects and objects; that rapt and tireless and detached interest of a surgeon in the physical body and its possibilities” (258). But the exploration of possibilities becomes delimited as she subordinates him to a simple racial fantasy, reducing him to a physical reality once more as she breathes “Negro! Negro! Negro!” (260). The queer and transgressive potentiality of their sexual relation ends up stumbling on the fact that they cannot make their bodies legible to each other outside of the social scripts available to them.

However, because Faulkner chooses to end the narrative not with Christmas’s death but with the birth and ‘escape’ of Lena’s baby, he emphasizes a continuation and an ‘inheritance’ that takes place through the *narrative* and not through *lineage*. Mrs. Hines, also childless, is nevertheless able to ‘deliver’ both the actual baby as well as ‘deliver’ Christmas from an anonymous, ignoble fate. Consistently negated and abused, she surprises the doctor who comes too late to deliver Lena’s baby when “he saw that her face was not stupid, vacuous. He saw that at the same time it was both peaceful and terrible, as though the peace and the terror had both died long ago and come to live again at the same time... Then this faded. While he watched, the life, the vividness, faded, fled suddenly from a face that looked too still, too dull to ever have harbored it” (397). Like the baby, whole and healthy, she is also able for the first time to create a whole narrative of Joe’s life when she tells it to Hightower; Gavin remarks that for the first time she found “someone to whom she could tell it, who would listen to her. Very likely that was the first time she had ever told it. And very likely she learned it herself then for the first time, actually saw it whole and real at the same time with Hightower” (447). Hightower becomes midwife to both the baby and the ‘truth’ about Joe Christmas, and although Christmas is murdered in his house, the fact that his weak protest is registered within the novel shows that something *does* remain. Stevens comments about Mrs. Hines; “I believe that all she wanted was

that he die ‘decent,’ as she put it. Decently hung by a Force, a principle; not burned or hacked or dragged dead by a Thing” (445). Although the town’s narrative can only ever reassure itself of its moral superiority, the fabric of the text allows for ‘another’ life for those queer, ignoble, and abject lives in whom Faulkner takes such consistent interest.

Thus it is perhaps unsurprising that he would choose to focus on the violent heritage of being “burned or hacked or dragged dead by a Thing” in his decentralized familial and town tales in *Go Down, Moses*; Faulkner deliberately places the violent lynching of Rider alongside Samuel Worsham Beauchamp, who, as the son ‘sold into Egypt’ by the McCaslin clan, is *not* lynched, but rather “decently hung by a Force.” Whereas Joe Christmas’ death seems ‘justified’ by the town, here the town, represented by Gavin Stephens and the newspaper editor, are forced to acknowledge and confront their complicity in the supposedly ‘unbiased’ justice that Samuel has faced. While *Light in August* seems to interrogate and undermine the ethical position of the *accused*, *Go Down, Moses* shows little interest in justifying him, instead focusing on the social foundations of the system which produces the accusation itself; the question is not whether or not he was justified, but as the census taker asks, “if they dont know who you are here, how will they know—how do you expect to get home?” (369). While Gavin consistently focuses on the legality and justice of Samuel’s death, the women critique that very attempt to separate himself from it, calling out “Pharaoh” as much in him as in the Edmondses. When he talks to Miss Worsham about it, he suddenly realizes “realized that she was not looking at him, not seeing him in the least. ‘It’s terrible.’ ‘So is murder terrible,’ Stevens said. ‘It’s better this way.’ Then she was looking at him again. ‘I wasn’t thinking of him. I was thinking of Mollie” (375). She then simply says “he must come home” (376), emphasizing the fact that she, like Mrs. Hines, does not wish to quibble about the justice of the system, but rather focus on its effects, on how and why it

deploys its violence, and how to reclaim both the bodies and the narratives of those it destroys. The fact that Faulkner dedicated the novel “To Mammy; Caroline Barr,” certainly suggests that he wished to interrogate the systemic racial oppression from which he has profited, and examine how the unacknowledged ‘others’ are always already implicated in the narratives of ‘family’ and ‘home.’¹⁶⁹

Go Down, Moses is in this way a curiously liminal novel: it exists between the family saga and the town. In focusing in particular on the black Beauchamps rather than the white McCaslins, it suggests a mode of identity less fixated on houses and inheritances than the Compson or Sutpen narratives, but one able to situate the reading in multiple tellings which undermine each other, rather than leading to one ‘town’ perspective. “Pantaloons in Black” dramatizes this, showing Rider’s inability to deal with his economic enslavement to the Edmondses when the personal value in his life, embodied in his wife, Mannie, is gone. While the ‘town’ story of Rider, as told by the deputy to his own wife, condemns him for not being ‘human’—“they look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes” (154)—the *narrative* emphasizes the total failure to understand that the deputy represents. At the funeral, Rider is overcome by grief, and buries his wife furiously: “the grave, save for its rawness, resembled any other marked off without order about the barren plot by shards of pottery and broken bottles and old brick and other objects insignificant to sight but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no

¹⁶⁹ This is not to suggest that Faulkner is ‘absolved’ from complicity in this system by dedicating a book to her after her death; I register Édouard Glissant’s outrage at the ‘incorporation’ of former slaves into the benevolent white ‘family’ as he observes the Faulkner portraits at Rowan Oak: “partout les portraits ou les premières photographies des membres de la lignée, y compris, dans le hall d’entrée, celles raides et dignes d’une mammy et d’un maître d’hôtel noirs, dont à l’évidence on aurait voulu nous persuader qu’ils avaient fait partie de la famille” (23).

white man could have read” (135). The deputy and his posse of white men cannot read anything but what they value and therefore consistently ignore the narratives which are right in front of them. Rider demonstrates an alternate reading of his circumstances, and a criticism of the system which has produced them, especially as he returns ‘home’ to something that no longer exists: “when he put his hand on the gate it seemd to him suddenly that there was nothing beyond it. The house had never been his anyway, but now even the new planks and sills and shingles, the hearth and stove and bed, were all a part of the memory of somebody else” (139). Unlike the Compsons, who are still a place-name even decades after the destruction of the family home, Rider recognizes that he is cynically replaceable in the plantation economy; in fact, it is the very virulence and strength he represents to that economy that he is unable to escape. Masculinity seems to entrap him, as he longs to escape his body and rejoin Mannie; it is also what motivates the white deputy’s ‘bragging’ speech about the lynching to his wife. However, she rejects it completely, as he asks her what she thinks and she ignores him, saying “I’m going to clear this table then and I’m going to the picture show” (159). Deflating the heroic posture of her husband, she literally walks out of the narrative of masculine racial violence, and out of the home.

In “The Fire and the Hearth,” gender and race are similarly compounded; whereas Miss Belle Worsham, raised together with Molly, comes to her aid, the “bitter fruit” of the McCaslin heritage seems to repeat a cycle of close boyhood friendship and deep adult animosity for the men: Carothers Edmonds, raised side by side with Henry, lasts for almost seven years, “then one day the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him” (111). To regard himself as a ‘pure’ Edmonds/McCaslin, Roth has to reject the black mother and, by extension, treat black women as slaves of his will; this requires him to

look on Henry, and Tomey's Turl, and Lucas, as aberrations he is unwilling to acknowledge except with money. The truth of the conflict between his father and Lucas comes to him all at once, as suddenly as the desire to reject Henry: "*it was a woman*, he thought. *My father and a nigger, over a woman. My father and a nigger man over a nigger woman*" (115). This realization leads him to assert himself even more decisively against Lucas, siding with Molly when she says she wants a divorce and lecturing the much-older Lucas about his 'duties' to his wife:

His stare was as steady as Edmonds' was, and immeasurably colder. "Listen," Edmonds said. "You're getting along. You aint got a lot more time here. You said something about father a minute ago. All right. But when his time came and he laid down to die, he laid down in peace. Because he never *had anything* Jesus, he had almost said it aloud. *Damn damn damn* he thought *had anything about his wife in her old age to have to say God forgive me for doing that*. Almost aloud; he just caught it. (121)

At the moment at which he wants to boldly assert his superiority over the 'uppity' black man, Edmonds realizes that his own father—his own family history—complicates the moral issue of Lucas' position. He catches himself before admitting that what has gone on before has been an unjust and biased narrative; to admit that would be to erode the confidence that he requires to maintain his socio-economic standing. Roth realizes that his father didn't care for his mother, never spoke of her, and was never in the position that Lucas is in; combining this with the insight from "Delta Autumn," where Roth has fathered a mixed-race Beauchamp son of his own, it is clear that he cannot avail himself of the father's position with Lucas; as with 'improvements' to the land, or the possession of the house, he must accept his inability to control him.

Lucas represents a self-ratifying and insistent difference in a racist society; though he shows little development in his later avatar in *Intruder in the Dust*, in "The Fire and the Hearth"

he must also come to his own peace with women, admitting himself unable to know or to control them. His daughter's actions undo his 'perfect' moonshine setup, and his wife's, the ultimate get-rich scheme of finding buried gold. Roth represents to him the unresolvable conflict over women, as every time he looks at him he remembers the night of his birth:

He would never forget it—that night of early spring following ten days of such rain that even the old people remembered nothing to compare it with, and the white man's wife's time upon her and the creek out of banks until the whole valley rose ... even before daylight he was in the water and crossed it, how he never knew, and was back by dark with the doctor, emerging from that death... which he had entered not for his own sake but for that of old Carothers McCaslin who had sired him and Zack Edmonds both, to find the white man's wife dead and his own wife already established in the white man's house. It was as though on that luring and driving day he had crossed and then recrossed a kind of Lethe, emerging, being permitted to escape, buying as the price of life a world outwardly the same yet subtly and irrevocably altered. (46)

The similarities to the flood and death of the mother in *As I Lay Dying* are striking, but here the white woman's death brings a black step-mother, which 'alters' the world he thought so stable. In Lucas' mind, the only reason for Molly to stay and tend to Zach's baby would be because she has become his mistress, and in order to restore the 'world' he (like Jewel) must 'reclaim' the body from its dispersal and 'own' it again. As he goes, armed, to the Edmonds house, he and Zach fight over two essentially interchangeable cylinders: "I'm a man too. I'm more than just a man. The same thing made my pappy that made your granmaw. I'm going to take her back" (47). The pistol and McCaslin's penis are, in this worldview, the only 'things' that matter, but when the pistol misfires and they are both still alive, Lucas is confronted with the impossibility of

asserting ownership over Molly in the first place: “*Women, he thought. Women. I wont never know. I dont want to. I ruther never to know than to find out later I have been fooled*” (59).

Relenting here and accepting a contingent position rather than an absolute one—as the ‘owner’ or ‘master’ would have required—he demonstrates a surprising ability to shift and change, which he also shows as he relents to Nat and to Molly. As with *Intruder in the Dust* as well, Lucas is able to rout tragedy by his self-awareness but also by strategic and rapid changes.

Lucas is able to do this through the deftness of his manipulation of both familial and town social contexts; he knows exactly what he must say and to whom in order to get what he wants; yet he stages these in dramatic reversals, long after a ‘simple’ and earlier answer might have had the same result. In *Intruder in the Dust*, rather than telling Gavin Stephens about the murder, he has Chick go and actually dig up the body; rather than swindling the salesman with the ‘divining machine’ right away, he waits until he can extract repayment from him; and he waits until he is actually in court, during both the divorce and the moonshining incident, to produce the reversal. In so doing, he actually inverts the logical structure which has led to private confessions and public lynchings in the cases of Joe Christmas, Goodwin, and Nancy, Temple’s maid; by awaiting a public hearing, he ‘legitimizes’ acts and documents which would never be seen as sufficient when carried or told by a black man on his own. Unlike the Compsons, who in their self-perception as explained in the “Appendix” to *The Sound and the Fury*, feel like they must accept a “split personality” (327) because of their always-split loyalties and inheritance, Lucas is able to live with a proud and insistent difference and yet continue to survive with strategic and sometimes drastic changes. Roth considers that he “*is both heir and prototype simultaneously of all the geography and climate and biology which sired old Carothers and all the rest of us and our kind, myriad, countless, faceless, even nameless now except himself who fathered himself,*

intact and complete, contemptuous" (118). To "father himself" is *not* in the same terms as Sutpen, who insists on supplanting his father; rather, Lucas is able to get past his ancestry, "he resisted it simply by being the composite of the two races which made him, simply by possessing it" (104). Instead of viewing himself, like Charles Stuart Compson, as doomed to a perpetual existential crisis, Lucas makes a livable reality out of the conditions he has. And he does this through existing more as a reading *practice* than as a distinct and insistent reader. When Edmonds reflects on all the conflicts he has had with Lucas, he "he would never pay for the good and simple reason that Lucas would not only outlive the present Edmonds as he had outlived the two preceding him, but would probably outlast the very ledgers which held the account" (116-17). Lucas outlasts the records because he exists as a method, a relation, and a reading practice; he is able to retain his knowledge and therefore scratch from the records whatever interpretation and truth is necessary for him to continue¹⁷⁰.

This is what Isaac McCaslin realizes about Lucas as well; in "The Bear," when he recalls his adolescent discovery, while examining the ledgers kept by his uncles, of his family's horrific history as slaveowners, he sees what he would write of Lucas, and how Lucas' view of him affects him as well:

Not *Lucius Quintus @c @c @c*, but *Lucas Quintus*, not refusing to be called Lucius, because he simply eliminated that word from the name; not denying, declining the name itself, because he used three quarters of it; but simply taking the name and changing, altering it, making it no longer the white man's but his own, by himself composed,

¹⁷⁰ He continues, as Gavin remarks to Chick in *Intruder in the Dust*, because he resists both (racist) oppressive Southern narratives and (also racist) recuperative Northern ones; "*and you say At least we perish in the name of humanity and we reply When all is stricken but that nominative pronoun and that verb what price Lucas' humanity then*" (217). Gavin, descendent of slave-owners himself, recognizes in a perhaps problematic and incomplete way, but in a relational one at the very least, that appealing to Humanity or Moral Decency can only reinscribe the same means and often repeats the same ends; only interrogation of the "we" and resistance to the clean and whitewashed morality tale will lead to a different end.

himself selfprogenitive and nominate, by himself ancestry, as, for all the old ledgers recorded to the contrary, old Carothers himself was. (281)

Lucas—unlike his oldest siblings who died as infants but were named dutifully “Amodeus” and “Carolina” McCaslin after their ‘liberators’—names himself, writes himself into existence, along with an insistent reading practice to accompany it. Whereas Isaac’s inheritance is signed away in florid IOU’s from his uncle, Lucas is able to translate the inheritance of exploitation into useful provisions for his own future and is therefore not so much authored as merely created; he is able to make his own ending on his own terms¹⁷¹. This is Faulkner’s strategy throughout *Go Down, Moses*; he ‘authors’ characters through others and through themselves, showing the conflicted practices and readings they generate. In particular, by adding such weight to Isaac McCaslin by writing “Was” and “The Bear” to add to the five other stories already published, he shows an interest in reclaiming and problematizing the single story, moreso than even the imbedded layers of Coldfield, Compson, and Sutpen narratives in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Indeed, “Was” itself is an exposition in plurality, from the first introduction to Isaac,

a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one this was not something participated in or even seen by himself, but by his elder cousin, McCaslin Edmonds, grandson of Isaac’s father’s sister and so descended by the distaff, yet notwithstanding the inheritor, and in his time the bequestor, of that which some had thought then and some still thought should have been Isaac’s, since his was the name in which the title to the land had first been granted from the Indian patent and which some of the descendants of his father’s slaves still bore in the land. But Isaac was not one of these. (3)

¹⁷¹ Thadious Davis takes Lucas’ ancestor, Tomey’s Turl, as paradigmatic for the ability to generate his own interpretive discourse, but I think the commentary is applicable to Lucas as well: “Tomey’s Turl’s hybridity—his status as both black and white, as both within and without familial structures—combines with his willful transgression of cultural constrictions, social domination, and political economy to open a critical space for reading *Go Down, Moses* as a miscegenated text, one whose form and logic resist containment and defy boundaries” (11).

Isaac is an uncle rather than a father, a reader rather than a participant, a pensioner rather than an inheritor; in so doing, he makes of every story, every text, and every person not a single text, but a palimpsest, overlaid with fraught histories. It is a mode of reading he learns early, as he looks up at the ledgers, thinking that “they probably contained a chronological and much more comprehensive though doubtless tedious record than he would ever get from any other source” (268). Like Rosa, this is what he “expects,” but what he actually finds is far more fractured and heartbreaking than he thought; instead of one ‘hand’ he sees two; his father and his uncle, arguing over the implications of the record:

*Eunice Bought by Father in New Orleans 1807 \$650 dolars. Marrid to Thucydus 1809
Drownd in Crick Cristmas Day 1832 and then the other hand appeared ... June 21th 1833
Drownd herself and the first: 23 Jun 1833 Who in hell ever heard of a niger drownding
him self and the second, unhurried, with a complete finality; the two identical entries
might have been made with a rubber stamp save for the date: Aug 13th 1833 Drownd
herself and he thought But why? But why? (266-67)*

Though the dueling ‘hands’ certainly enact their own Rosa-esque ‘self-confounding’ narrative, Isaac must read beyond what they write and examine its implications, as

*Turl Son of Thucydus @ Eunice Tomy born Jun 1833 yr stars fell Fathers will and
nothing more, no tedious recodrding filling this page ... just Fathers will and he had seen
that too: old Carothers’ bold cramped hand far less legible than his sons’ even and not
much better in in spelling, who while capitalising almost every noun and verb, made no
effort to punctuate or construct whatever, just as he made no effort either to explain or
obfuscate the thousand-dollar legacy to the son of an unmarried slave-girl, to be paid only
at the child’s coming-of-age, bearing the consequence of the act of which there was still*

no definite incontrovertible proof that he acknowledged ... *So I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger* he thought. *Even if My son wasn't but just two words. But there must have been love* he thought. (269-70)

Trying to recuperate the past, Isaac must recognize that “love” cannot justify anything, and finally “looking down at the yellowed page spread beneath the yellow glow of the lantern smoking and stinking in that rank chill midnight room fifty years later, he seemed to see her actually walking in the icy creek on that Christmas day six months before her daughter’s and her lover’s (*Her first lover’s* he thought *Her first*) child was born” (271). His reading practice has brought him, like Quentin, to recognize the horrific truth and to some degree to ‘perform’ it, but here, in choosing to remember, to read carefully and personally, he embraces her suicide and therefore makes of it a means *instead of an end*; he makes it a means to repudiate the heritage which would be his, and he chooses knowledge over power.

Thus as Isaac talks with Cass about why he is repudiating his birthright, he calls a number of other texts, mostly biblical, to his defense: “if he could see Father and Uncle Buddy in Grandfather He must have seen me too. —an Isaac born into a later life than Abraham’s and repudiating immolation: fatherless and therefore safe declining the altar because maybe this time the exasperated Hand might not supply the kid—‘ and McCaslin ‘Escape:’ and he ‘All right. Escape” (283). He recognizes that he is *not* Isaac, both because he declines the ‘altar’ which seems to be the necessary step to inheriting the violence and exploitation, as well as because he recognizes the Ishmael of his family and reintegrates him into the McCaslin narrative; by not passing on the history of violence between brothers, he does not produce a Jacob/Esau, nor give a ‘promised’ land to his descendants. If Canaan exists, it is a mixed-race Canaan, populated with Beauchamps and Edmondses and not McCaslins. What brings this about is the simple desire to

read exactly, precisely, what is written, and “out of all that empty sound and bootless fury one silence, among that loud and moiling all of them just one simple enough to believe that horror and outrage were first and last simply horror and outrage and was crude enough to act upon that” (285). For Isaac, this is what it means to be “free” (299) of the violence and cruelty of his plantation heritage; to restore a human connection, and sense of proportion, to race relations.

However, the subtlety of Faulkner’s method throughout *Go Down, Moses* is to not let any pronouncement of ‘freedom’ stand unchallenged; by implicating each character in multiple stories and poses, Isaac’s continued complicity is clear, alongside his generous renunciation. When he goes to deliver his grandfather’s guilt-money to Fonsiba, he is appalled to see her husband not working the land, and proclaiming his ‘freedom’ to do so: “this country will be the new Canaan—‘Freedom from what? From work? Canaan?’ He jerked his arm, comprehensive, almost violent ... ‘What corner of Canaan is this?’ ... ‘Of course her need for food and clothing will stand still while the land lies fallow.’ ‘I have a pension,’ the other said. He said it as a man might say *I have grace* or *I own a gold mine*” (279). Isaac’s horror at the “Canaan” of pensions rather than work is clearly undone by the fact that, in Lucas’ view, he himself has “turned apostate to his name and lineage by weakly relinquishing the land” (40), and because Isaac also chooses to live on a “pension” from his great-nephew. He, like Fonsiba’s husband, accepts a pension to support his wife instead of working for himself and, if this may be laudable in his effort to dis-possess himself, he also contributes essentially nothing to the enterprise of living he so sentimentally clings to elsewhere.

This is also why Isaac’s worldview is so thoroughly dismantled in “Delta Autumn”; prepared to continue in his homosocial paradise of hunting trips until his death (since his wife, like Hightower’s, is safely dead), he settles into a comfortable routine, despite constant

reminders from Roth and others that the world is anything but stable. When Roth's lover brings her child to him, and he realizes that she is not white, he thinks,

Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now! He cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: "You're a nigger!" "Yes," she said. "James Beauchamp—you called him Tennie's Jim though he had a name—was my grandfather." ... "Go back North. Marry: a man in your own race. That's the only salvation for you—for a while yet, maybe a long while yet. We will have to wait. Marry a black man" ... "Old man," she said, "have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (362-63)

Against his decision not to father, she asserts an unapologetic motherhood; she embraces a contingent and agentive love which is not satisfied to simply 'think' its way out of the complex injustices of the past; she acknowledges an anteriority and connection where he sees only a messianic future and necessary severance.

Isaac's position is perhaps untenable, but it resembles his mentor Sam Fathers' decision to erase his own heritage and claim to the land in favor of new 'strangers.' He embraces his own end, and doesn't leave anything but knowledge and method behind. Thus as Isaac revisits the former hunting camp at the end of "The Bear," before the woods are cut down and turned into profit by De Spain (who, like Compson, like Sartoris, like Sutpen, and Snopes, will be undone by his acquisitions and intent to establish himself through them), he finds little to remember:

After two winters' blanketings of leaves and the flood-waters of two springs, there was no trace of the two graves andmyore at all. But those who would have come this far to find them would not need headstones but would have found them as Sam Fathers himself

had taught him to find such: by bearings on trees...the small paper sack of the peppermint candy which Sam had used to love; that gone too, almost before he had turned his back, not vanished but merely translated into the myriad life which printed the dark mold of these secret and sunless places. (328)

Vanishing without a physical trace, Sam survives as a reading practice, as a set of memories and practices which endure in the narratives produced by and about him. And although Isaac's pseudo-environmentalist celebration of 'myriad life' is largely criticized and undermined by Roth's lover in "Delta Autumn," his narrative impact in preserving even that criticism links him to others, like Darl, Hines, Hightower, Burden, Rosa, Quentin, Jason, Gavin, Horace, Jenny, Isaac (and the list goes on), who, in *not* reproducing and therefore having an "end," are therefore able to create narratives that are not merely instrumental. They are able to create narratives which transpose or transplant the end of one mode of life, one family, one region, and connect it to another.

Faulkner did not produce one singular "long novel," in terms of length or scope, and yet his larger project does interrogate both the familial and social worlds in which he was imbedded, and which he himself went to great lengths to recreate (or perhaps de-create). But through his juxtapositioning of formal techniques—pitting family novels against town novels, short stories against trilogies—he offers a cogent vision of living documents, rather than monuments. This seems to be what he is reaching for in *Requiem for a Nun* when he dreams of the "stranger" to travel through Jefferson and consider the past not as a series of resolved realities but as a continual opacity to present consciousness; something which obscures its view:

Suddenly you, a stranger, an outlander say from the East or the North or the Far West, passing through the little town by simple accident, or perhaps relation or acquaintance or

friend of one of the outland families which had moved into one of the pristine and recent subdivisions ... suddenly you would realise that something curious was happening or had happened here: that instead of dying off as they should as time passed, it was as though these old irreconcilables were actually increasing in number ... you would think merely *What? So what?* annoyed and even a little outraged, until suddenly, even while you were thinking it, something has already happened: the faint frail illegible meaningless even inference-less scratching on the ancient poor-quality glass you stare at, has moved, under your eyes, even while you stared at it, coalesced. (217-19)

For Faulkner, belated and sentimental as this 2nd-person appeal may be, it is the only possible method to combat the commodification of history and society plaguing the Jefferson of his day and to get them to recognize what is ‘happening’ before it is too late¹⁷². Through engagement with the obscure, the useless, the failures, the “stranger” could see not one specific ideology of the past, but the effects of successive ideologies, relations, and families on a particular space over time. Such an understanding of the past isn’t the reading of an obscure text but the forceful scratching of a text into *your* reality, as the daughter of the jailor demonstrates through her intentional but meaningless etching: “inscribing at some moment the fragile and indelible signature of her meditation in one of the panes of it (the window): her frail and workless name, scratched by a diamond ring in her frail and workless hand, and the date: *Cecelia Farmer April 16th 1861*” (197). Her hand, like Buddy McCaslin’s, comes to inscribe itself into successive present-s; its very obsolescence causes the contemporary observer, the “stranger,” to reflect on the fact that she will also be superseded and unnecessary unless she integrates herself into another

¹⁷² Robert Parker, in *Faulkner and the Novelistic Imagination*, concentrates on this anxiety about “happening” and asserts that Faulkner’s “novels’ movement from tactical somethings to epistemological somethings, from individual secrets to a larger and more pervasive secrecy, is the movement from the frequent statement that ‘something’ conspicuously indefinite ‘happened’ or ‘is going to happen’ to the sense that, because the indefiniteness of the something is so extreme or prolonged, something more radically indefinite *is* happening” (17).

context, another living narrative mode. For Faulkner, such consistent, differentiated, fractured, and enduring 'scratches' are the only way to make a reality continue, to change not merely the *content* of a worldview but also the *method* of examining it. Like the patched-up coat that the boy Hightower discovers, such artifacts are puzzling and contradictory, offering no single coherent moral standpoint, but in so doing they make 'ends' meet.

Chapter 5. THE CURIUSER CASE OF MARCEL PROUST, OR THE LONG NOVEL THAT WAS

If Faulkner inhabits one end of the spectrum of long novel—Yoknapatawpha County existing between the novels and outside of them rather than within them—Proust certainly sits as a hefty counterweight: his novel, rather than chipping off discrete events and perspectives in subsequent novels, expands in all directions simultaneously, erupting out of its own volumes. *À la recherche du temps perdu* is probably the only modernist work that pushes its ‘length’ into time, space, and form simultaneously. And whereas Yoknapatawpha County’s life is sustained by an enormous cast of characters and narrators, Proust’s world could be said to contain really only one: Marcel himself, out of whom the rest emerge. And yet, for being at opposing ends of this imaginary spectrum, Faulkner and Proust ‘meet’ in their interest in making interventions into the process of narrative itself. As seen by Faulkner’s choice in *Requiem for a Nun* to describe narrative as the scratching of the Other (the past) into the present, and by Marcel’s conception of a ‘living’ book, both authors have a simultaneous fascination with and terror of the generational potential of narrative; that is, how family structures resist both dynasty-building fervor and persistent attempts to control outcomes. Quentin’s obsessive circling around textual incest, or Marcel’s constant need to interact with words, letters, as objects of erotic potential, are tied very closely to the thoroughness of their analytical minds, and the sense of being lost in the narratives themselves. Both Marcel and the narrators of Faulkner’s tales are frequently left attempting to suture together a definitive account of “what happened,” but they are confronted with the constant resistance of the text itself; the aesthetic object, the retrospective account which seemed so easily-examined at the outset, turns out to be both an impediment to narrative as well as the only remnant of the past that resists deformation. Marcel comes to terms with this at the end of

Le temps retrouvé when he reflects back on the only method he sees for narrative to bring life rather than destroy it:

La grandeur de l'art véritable, au contraire, de celui que M. de Norpois eût appelé un jeu de dilettante, c'était de retrouver, de ressaisir, de nous faire connaître cette réalité loin de laquelle nous vivons, ... cette réalité que nous risquerions fort de mourir sans l'avoir connue, et qui est tout simplement notre vie, la vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie, par conséquent, réellement vécue, cette vie qui, en un sens, habite à chaque instant chez tous les hommes aussi bien que chez l'artiste. Mais ils ne la voient pas, parce qu'ils ne cherchent pas à l'éclaircir. Et ainsi leur passé est encombré d'innombrables clichés qui restent inutiles parce que l'intelligence ne les a pas "développés." Ressaisir notre vie; et aussi la vie des autres; car le style, pour l'écrivain aussi bien que pour le peintre, est une question non de technique, mais de vision. Il est la révélation, qui serait impossible par des moyens directs et conscients, de la différence qualitative qu'il y a dans la façon dont nous apparaît le monde, différence qui, s'il n'y avait pas l'art, resterait le secret éternel de chacun. Par l'art seulement, nous pouvons sortir de nous, savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n'est pas le même que le nôtre et dont les paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu'il peut y avoir dans la lune. Grâce à l'art, au lieu de voir un seul monde, le nôtre, nous le voyons se multiplier. (2284-85)

Whereas Faulkner multiplied his narrators and discrete narrative fragments, Marcel believes that it is only through examining the self through an exterior, belated, and aesthetic object that any 'world' can come about. While it may seem contradictory to claim that 'difference' is only enabled by analysis of the *self*, Marcel champions this mode of analysis, this unique "vision"

unrelated to mere “technique,” because it is the only method that is available to ‘tous les hommes’ and therefore the only one worth pursuing.

The drama of the novel is set up from the first pages in young Marcel’s anxiety about how to characterize narrative itself; is the “*lanterne magique*” an *imposition* (false) on reality, an anesthetic which numbs him to it, or ‘another’ life which he can access? His dreams give him the illusion of agency, as he believes, “j’*étais libre de m’y appliquer ou non*” (13), but this detachment is only possible through narrative given/written in *advance* of experience; those which are retrospective do not allow him the choice of detachment. He comes to recognize that this naïve belief in dreams as ‘another’ life is only a way of attempting to control narrative¹⁷³, eventually realizing that “l’*autre vie, celle où on dort, n’est pas – dans sa partie profonde – soumise à la catégorie du temps*” (1495). If it exists outside of time, then it exists outside of the possibility of experience and narrative, and thus he is still left—whatever ‘hero’ he may have played in his dreams—as a frightened boy looking for assurance in the familiarity of his surroundings. Marcel acknowledges that much of his anxiety is over *difference*; an unfamiliar room fills him with terror, and so he must render it familiar, enclose (imprison) it within his habits: “on finit par cimenter ensemble selon la technique des oiseaux en s’y appuyant indéfiniment; où, par un temps glacial le Plaisir qu’on goûte est de se sentir séparé du dehors (comme l’*hirondelle de mer qui a son nid au fond d’un souterrain dans la chaleur de la terre*)” (16). While his energy is expended on building a fortress of sameness from within which he can regard the ‘dehors,’ Marcel must ignore anything that interrupts him, such as unexpected noises, reflections, or the ‘*lanterne magique*’; he wishes to control the space to make it “habitable” (17),

¹⁷³ Leo Bersani, in *Marcel Proust: Fictions of Life and Art*, discusses the role that ‘forgetting’ and becoming confused play, a similar role to dreams in rendering the sense of continuity problematic: “to ‘forget’ the names of objects, while it threatens the coarsest kind of immediate control over the world, therefore makes possible a rare openness to the world, a freshness of impressions that finally give us a more complex control over a world whose variety and particularity defy the names we use to describe it” (201).

and thereby forget it¹⁷⁴. Like Albertine, whom he also ‘imprisons’ in order to forget her—that is, to make her part of his narrative and habits, instead of allowing her to trouble him as an independent being—the rooms also resist this instrumentalization; after Albertine’s disappearance¹⁷⁵, he recognizes how little power ‘habit’ has to force objects to retain their identity over time:

Cette chambre où nous dînions ne m'avait jamais paru jolie, je disais seulement qu'elle l'était à Albertine pour que mon amie fût contente d'y vivre. Maintenant les rideaux, les sièges, les livres avaient cessé de m'être indifférents. L'art n'est pas seul à mettre du charme et du mystère dans les choses les plus insignifiantes; ce même pouvoir de les mettre en rapport intime avec nous est dévolu aussi à la douleur. (1975)

Marcel recognizes here that his earlier attempts to domesticate and habituate space can be undone by *sorrow* (which disrupts the personal interpretation) or *art* (which disrupts the mode of perception). Although the difference he is experiencing is a rather melancholy one, this exteriorization—a making of that which was merely habit into something which is newly, and differently, alive—is central to Marcel’s recognition of his method as an author.

This same contrast between the flattened image of Albertine before and after her disappearance is at work with Gilberte, Odette, Robert, and the Duchess of Guermantes as well; in each case, his forecasted narrative becomes totally subverted and unraveled by the difference he encounters. On his boyhood walks with his father along the ‘côté de Guermantes,’ Marcel thinks of the duchess as a figure in a tapestry (simply a reincarnated Geneviève de Brabant), and

¹⁷⁴ I quoted this section in the previous chapter with regards to Benjy’s method; it is worth noting that Benjy’s is not designed to forestall or erase difference, but operates always belatedly, after the fact, and also centers on “loss,” especially in a familial sense, rather than ownership.

¹⁷⁵ It seems obligatory to at least address what Anne Carson, in *The Albertine Workout*, calls the “transposition theory”—that is, the thesis that Albertine “really” is just Alfred Agostinelli, Proust’s chauffeur and lover—in any study of Proust. I agree with Carson that this theory (and I would add, most all Theories are as well), is “a graceless, intrusive and saddening hermeneutic mechanism” (20)

ties this to his desire to be an author, to impress her with a worthy ‘sujet.’ He wonders whether his father could use his connections to fill in the lack he feels within his talent, but then he thinks, “ma vie actuelle au lieu de me sembler une creation artificielle de mon père et qu’il pouvait modifier à son gré, m’appariassait au contraire comme comprise dans une réalité qui n’était pas faite pour moi, contre laquelle il n’y avait pas de recours, au cœur de laquelle je n’avais pas d’allié, qui ne cachait rien au-delà d’elle-même” (143). He recognizes that there is no ‘outside,’ no artificial life guaranteed by art, and so resigns himself to a mediocre life like other men, unable to produce something which will separate him from them, as being recognized as an ‘artist’ or a ‘genius’ presumably would. Experiences that are prefigured for him, like the photographs of the church of Combray, or the sketches of buildings in Rome, never live up to his expectations, because he wishes to aestheticize them *in advance*; what he finally realizes is that the ordinary, pedantic, even ugly clock-tower of Combray can give him a more genuine insight than these because he doesn’t regard it “comme un spectacle, mais y croire comme en un être sans equivalent.” (61). Later, as he looks at Elstir’s paintings in the duchess’s house, he is moved when he finds “dans deux tableaux (plus réalistes, ceux-là, et d’une manière antérieure) un même monsieur, une fois en frac dans son salon, une autre fois en veston et en chapeau haut de forme dans une fête populaire au bord de l’eau où il n’avait évidemment que faire, et qui prouvait que pour Elstir il n’était pas seulement un modèle habituel, mais un ami, peut-être un protecteur, qu’il aimait” (1070). Like the clock tower, the man resists instrumentalization or flattening into a ‘model,’ because he is, for Elstir, “sans equivalent.” This makes Elstir’s paintings all the more valuable to Marcel; regardless of their ‘absolute’ value—so debated between the collector Swann and the conservative Guermantes—they have a personal value because they break the aura of ‘Art’ and make a simultaneously personal and aesthetic object.

There is nothing intrinsic in either sorrow or art to magically enable difference in all circumstances; in fact, Marcel shows how damaging both can be when taken out of a personal context. In the middle of his conflicted and unhappy relationship with Albertine, he wants to imagine a “monde intellectuel” where they exist merely as characters in a novel, and that “il suffirait peut-être d'un petit mouvement de ma volonté pour atteindre ce monde réel, y rentrer en dépassant ma douleur comme un cerceau de papier qu'on crève, et ne plus me soucier davantage de ce qu'avait fait Albertine que nous ne nous soucions des actions de l'héroïne imaginaire d'un roman après que nous en avons fini la lecture” (1601). To reduce his sorrow, he wishes to intellectualize Albertine, to make her merely an imaginary heroine whose actions don't concern him once he's shut the book, the “petit mouvement” being the violence of making her into an impersonal object instead of a living relation. This impersonality is what Charlus insists on again and again as well; ever the taxonomist, he divides the world neatly into categories of the real and the pretentious, the inverted and the straight man, and, during the Dreyfus affair, the Frenchman and the Jew. He calls the street where Bloch lives a “Judengasse,” but defends himself, saying, “je ne m'occupe de tout cela qu'au point de vue de l'art” (1586). Like his interest in the ‘beautiful’ dead on both sides of the trenches of WWI, his attempt to aestheticize, to subordinate particulars into a system of abstract, impersonal values, always fails, because it cannot endure longer than the moment of its assertion. Like an endlessly-presentist avant-garde, such a myopic conception of the aesthetic does not allow for a genealogy, a study of the duration of objects, relations, and interpretations over time¹⁷⁶. Marcel notices that the image of the beloved is subject to this as well, because it is continually ‘revised,’ altered and ‘restored’; against this there is “le

¹⁷⁶ Max Saunders, in his discussion of Ruskin and Proust in *Self-Impression*, discusses the inversion of the aesthetic in the *Recherche* in comparison with *Contre Saint-Beuve*; he argues that “while it starts by narrating epiphanies, the narrative becomes the search for a way to understand them, which turns out to be the method of recreating them as art. In order to tell this story, he has to incorporate the intellectual quest within the aesthetic” (99), thereby acknowledging the need for a historicization, a genealogy.

souvenir cruel, lui, n'est pas contemporain de cette image restaurée, il est d'un autre âge, il est un des rares témoins d'un monstrueux passé" (497). Artifacts of suffering, of art, from another era, these 'cruel' memories, because they are personal, and because they break the myth or consensus of the present, are the only ones able to preserve difference.

In Faulknerian terms, the value of Proust's narrative is that it consistently undermines the ontological value of "is" and insists on the persistence of "was"; it allows for resurgence, for that which "was" to be "again," yet with the constant reminder that only through the mediation of a retrospective account is the "again" possible (and therefore it does not really live "again," but rather, lives differently). Proust structures his novel around confrontations with time because these painful episodes remind the reader that the centrality of one's own narrative is undercut by the endless progression of time; yet it is only through time that the meaning of any experience can become clear. The dangers of an all-absorbing present are shown as Marcel returns from the sanatorium to find that society has shifted, and narratives have as well; the division of the 'Guermantes way' from 'Swann's way' which forms the backbone of the first half of the *Recherche* is obliterated in a single sentence: "la réalité, d'ailleurs insignifiante, de ce temps lointain était tellement perdue que quelqu'un ayant demandé non loin de moi si la terre de Tansonville venait à Gilberte de son père M. de Forcheville, quelqu'un répondit: 'Mais pas du tout! Cela vient de la famille de son mari. Tout cela c'est du côté de Guermantes'" (2372). To those wishing to start their own narratives of social success, the past can become infinitely mutable (or rather, they wish to believe that it can be); this is the constant conflict between the Verdurins, who want to deform it to suit their aspirations, and the Guermantes, who want to use it to reaffirm their own primacy. Those who control narrative seem to also control the perception of reality, like Mme de Villeparisis whose less-than-fashionable salon becomes perceived as the

center of a glittering circle after she publishes her memoirs. Marcel, in talking to Cottard about the duchess of Guermantes, realizes that those, like Swann, possessing real taste and discernment are unable to control their own reception:

Tel homme a passé sa vie au milieu des grands de la terre qui n'étaient pour lui que d'ennuyeux parents ou de fastidieuses connaissances, parce qu'une habitude contractée dès le berceau les avait dépouillés à ses yeux de tout prestige. Mais, en revanche, il a suffi que celui-ci vînt, par quelque hasard, s'ajouter aux personnes les plus obscures, pour que d'innombrables Cottard aient vécu éblouis par des femmes titrées dont ils s'imaginaient que le salon était le centre des élégances aristocratiques. (1420)

The skewed picture that Cottard gives is the result of the energetic narratives of both the established but 'ennuyed' aristocrats' prejudice (disguised as reticence), and the promotional tactics of the Verdurin, who collect disciples such as Cottard precisely because they have tremendous advertising value and little ability to distinguish between social milieus. Whatever the 'real' situation may have been, in other words, in the end all that matters is what has been written about it, and ignorant partisans such as Cottard can bend values to reflect their prejudices, while nuanced narratives of change are ignored or suppressed.

Much of the nuance of Proust's engagement with time is erased in translation; as a *Recherche du temps perdu*, the "temps" itself is constantly doubled; it is not merely a chronological succession of abstract time, but also the "temps," the weather, the atmospheric conditions which he seeks to recreate and re-engage with, in order to confront the homogenizing tendency of retrospective narrative. Looking at past events with a clinical eye such as Cottard, he is only able to see a succession of dead selves, forgotten and discarded, inaccessible. His constant guilt about not working is also caught up in this anxiety about abstract time. But it is the

rebirth of atmospheric conditions which allows for the re-membering of his body, the reconciliation via narrative of past, rendered alive because it relies on fragments of the real:

La moindre parole que nous avons dite à une époque de notre vie, le geste le plus insignifiant que nous avons fait était entouré, portait sur lui le reflet des choses qui logiquement ne tenaient pas à lui, en ont été séparées par l'intelligence, qui n'avait rien à faire d'elles pour les besoins du raisonnement, mais au milieu desquelles ... le geste, l'acte le plus simple reste enfermé comme dans mille vases clos dont chacun serait rempli de choses d'une couleur, d'une odeur, d'une température absolument différentes ... et nous donnent la sensation d'atmosphères singulièrement variées. ... Oui, si le souvenir, grâce à l'oubli, n'a pu contracter aucun lien, jeter aucun chaînon entre lui et la minute présente, s'il est resté à sa place, à sa date, s'il a gardé ses distances, son isolement dans le creux d'une vallée ou à la pointe d'un sommet; il nous fait tout à coup respirer un air nouveau, précisément parce que c'est un air qu'on a respiré autrefois, cet air plus pur que les poètes ont vainement essayé de faire régner dans le Paradis et qui ne pourrait donner cette sensation profonde de renouvellement que s'il avait été respiré déjà, car les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu'on a perdus. (2265)

Like his emphasis on a 'living' work, such a conception of the aesthetic is not detached, but completely contingent; it is mediated by the body, and transmitted through involuntary means. The 'temps' (time) is lost because it is not a paradise that can be owned or displayed; it relies on affects, relationships, and sensations, which is why the analogous experiences of 'temps' (weather)—the sense of cycles that return those sensations to the body, and narrative—allow that 'temps' to be regained, if only ever after the fact. Marcel's model for this, his aunt Léonie, enables him to become aware that cycles of return, combined with analysis, grant meaning to

experience in the first place. Her shut-in life (so similar to Proust's own in his final years), is structured around slight variations in the otherwise homogeneous stream of days: "le retour de ce samedi asymétrique était un de ces petits événements intérieurs, locaux, presque civiques qui, dans les vies tranquilles et les sociétés fermées, créent une sorte de lien national et deviennent le thème favori des conversations, des plaisanteries, des récits exagérés à plaisir; il eût été le noyau tout prêt pour un cycle légendaire si l'un de nous avait eu la tête épique" (95). Here the seemingly silly fuss that Léonie sets up over her 'different' Saturdays becomes the basis of narrative itself, and one which he hints (with a mixture of irony and earnestness) could take on 'epic' proportions. Only through the expectation of sameness and the anticipation of difference can stability and change work together to form the foundation of language, community, history.

But it is only through these moments of interruption that narrative becomes possible; Marcel considers "que nous ne revivons pas nos années dans leur suite continue, jour par jour, mais dans le souvenir figé dans la fraîcheur ou l'insolation d'une matinée ou d'un soir, recevant l'ombre de tel site isolé, enclos, immobile, arrêté et perdu, loin de tout le reste" (1053). Narrative order is an imposition, but it is only through the isolation and loss of time that it becomes possible to understand the meaning of any experience or relation; analysis requires the separation of time and space. Elstir is instrumental in this (as is Bergotte), because through him he recognizes that the aesthetic object does not conquer life or replace it, but rather enables the viewer to problematize his or her relationship with 'reality'; for the young Marcel, this allows him to bathe in an atmosphere "féconde en joies" because Elstir's paintings give him "les rares moments où l'on voit la nature telle qu'elle est, poétiquement, c'était de ceux-là qu'était faite l'œuvre d'Elstir" (657). The recognition that there is never "la nature telle qu'elle est" is profound; it is always mediated, and the work of art that allows the viewer to examine their *own*

construction of reality is the most ‘fecund,’ because, as he realizes when he sees his grandmother after an absence, the “être aimé” is a construction which you must be trained (by separation or the estrangement of art) to un-see, or to see with difference rather than possession (853). Marcel also realizes this through his two viewings of *La Berma*; his first experience of the textual reality of the play led him to believe that he could “immobilize” her movements, and he is disturbed by how quickly everything goes by, while on his second visit, he realizes that “c’était le résultat fugitive, le but momentané, le mobile chef-d’œuvre que l’art théâtral se proposait et que détruirait en voulant le fixer l’attention d’un auditeur trop épris” (786). The narrative art, whether in theater or in the novel, exists in time, and he realizes that it is only through time that they are able to grant meaning to events; what destroys these works of art is not their subjection to time, but rather the attempt, on the part of the viewer or critic, to make them endlessly present.

Music is another frequent source of fascination for Marcel, because it has a relation to time analogous to narrative, particularly in the distance between the ‘reality’ of the printed notes and the ‘reality’ of the experience of hearing them. The phrase of Vinteuil resurfaces as a constant reminder of the implications of this conflict; looking back at Swann’s first experience with the phrase, Marcel reflects that “peut-être est-ce parce qu’il ne savait pas la musique qu’il avait pu éprouver une impression aussi confuse, une de ces impressions qui sont peut-être pourtant les seules purement musicales, inévitables, entièrement originales, irréductibles à tout autre ordre d’impressions” (173). While the experience of hearing, elapsing in time, is like trying to build a foundation underwater, “en fabriquant pour nous des fac-similés de ces phrases fugitives,” the more ‘stable’ order of reality, the notes on the page, is also unsatisfactory because “il avait devant lui cette chose qui n’est plus de la musique pure, qui est du dessin, de l’architecture, de la pensée” (173). The phrase of Vinteuil raises the question: is the aesthetic

object exterior, or does it only exist within the viewer? Marcel's own first experience with the phrase leaves him just as confused; Odette plays it for him, but "elle me resta presque tout entière invisible... Pour n'avoir pu aimer qu'en des temps successifs tout ce que m'apportait cette Sonate, je ne la possédai jamais tout entière: elle ressemblait à la vie" (423). Like life, the experience of the phrase resists attempts to sketch it out or reduce it; like narrative, it must be *gone through* instead of just viewed. But precisely because the meaning only becomes clear retrospectively, "nous l'aimerons plus longtemps que les autres, parce que nous aurons mis plus longtemps à l'aimer" (423). Thus, as he experiences the phrase within different contexts, it takes on different meanings (unlike with Swann, who sees it as a fixed entity); hearing the septet for the first time, he recognizes that he's regarded Vintueil's works "comme à des univers aussi complètement clos qu'avait été chacun de mes amours" (1792), but that seeing the connection between the phrases, he is able to see the connection between his 'amours' as well. He recognizes that the pleasure he gets in listening to the phrase isn't something inherent to the music itself, but in the *method of listening* that Vintueil invites him to experience: "il aurait fallu trouver, de la fragrance de géranium de sa musique, non une explication matérielle, mais l'équivalent profond, la fête inconnue et colorée (dont ses œuvres semblaient les fragments disjoints, les éclats aux cassures écarlates), le mode selon lequel il 'entendait' et projetait hors de lui l'univers" (1885)¹⁷⁷. The aesthetic object is, in this conception, never discrete or complete; it is always an attempt to invite another into a mode of seeing, to point out something that can never be evident without the intervention of difference.

Thus for Marcel the value of an aesthetic experience generally has no relation whatsoever to its perceived social or economic value, and his moments of insight are democratically banal (a

¹⁷⁷ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, in *Proust as Musician*, also highlights this: "what is of crucial importance in the septet, then, is not the effort of will, the 'analytical forms of reasoning,' but the specificity that the work displays in relation to all the others at one and the same time as it shares a stylistic relationship with them" (61).

cup of tea, paving stones, the odor of a bathroom). Thus he also rejects what he believes a cynical economist would assume about Bergotte for his extravagances; “aussi Bergotte se disait-il: ‘Je dépense plus que des multimillionnaires pour des fillettes, mais les plaisirs ou les déceptions qu'elles me donnent me font écrire un livre qui me rapporte de l'argent.’

Économiquement ce raisonnement était absurde, mais sans doute trouvait-il quelque agrément à transmuter ainsi l'or en caresses et les caresses en or” (1740). The ‘surplus’ value in this transaction is precisely that which could never be anticipated: the pleasure of retrospective contemplation, the pleasure of the creation of narratives, and the engagement with memory or self-examination which that entails. This is the pleasure which Marcel finds at the end of his *Recherche*; in the moments in the library when he is caught up in one sensory memory after another, the pleasure multiplies out of control, and he remains powerless with joy: “cette contemplation, quoique d'éternité, était fugitive. Et pourtant je sentais que le plaisir qu'elle m'avait donné à de rares intervalles dans ma vie était le seul qui fût fécond et véritable” (2269). The only sort of pleasure which leads to anything stable is this retrospective, unexpected, and breathlessly prolific method he discovers; it is the only positive pleasure, since almost all other pleasures he has found to be negative (i.e. having not *yet* lost that which he desires, he *must* be happy). He thinks back to some of the seemingly meaninglessly complex works of art he has seen, and considers that this is the sole means by which his own narrative could be expressed: “elles composaient un grimoire compliqué et fleuri, leur premier caractère était que je n'étais pas libre de les choisir, qu'elles m'étaient données telles quelles. Et je sentais que ce devait être la griffe de leur authenticité” (2272). This ‘spell-book’ (“grimoire”) requires incantations, but the meaning of their words does not ‘automatically’ or unproblematically open to his ‘Sesame’; he emphasizes that it is not a matter of will, because to write in this mode is to make connections

which generate self-examination in the reader/viewer, and although it is impossible to control these effects, that very lack of control is the mark of the authenticity of the experience itself.

Thus the messy process of narration becomes for Proust, as for Faulkner, the examination of how the means accomplish their ends, and what those ends can possibly mean. The novel which Marcel realizes he must compose is at complete odds with the novel others have always imagined he would write¹⁷⁸; he is confronted with this fact as Odette comes to ‘confess’ all her past affairs, believing that what he most needs is “content”—presumably, juicy facts of her sexual adventures and saucy responses—but “elle se trompait, non qu'elle n'eût de tout temps abondamment fourni les réserves de mon imagination, mais d'une façon bien plus involontaire et par un acte émané de moi-même, qui dégageait d'elle à son insu les lois de sa vie” (2382). While concentrating on the content of these narratives, Odette is off the mark, but Marcel recognizes that what has happened *within* him, as a result of his relationship with her, can provide him with a method that explicates the laws of how we construct narratives in the first place. He finds that to begin he must interrogate the *ends* of narrative; not in paranoia of their termination, but in the process by which one end becomes distinct from the other. His earlier experiences with grief over his grandmother’s death also point to this; indifferent to her death in the moment, he is made to undergo the experience after the end, through an aesthetic object, her photograph. Tortured as he is by the realization that she underwent a great deal of pain to produce the photograph which, at the time, only annoyed him, he recognizes that it is only through such reminders of her absence that he can combat his attempts to reduce her to a one-dimensional memory:

¹⁷⁸ Germaine Brée, in *Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time*, characterizes his form as revolutionary: “Proust defines the creative principle which gives its form to the novel: it is an individual grasp of a meaning in life derived from the author’s personal experience...Proust no longer assumes, as did the realistic writer, at least in theory, that his novel is an imitation of reality. His esthetic theory claims for the novel the right to be instead, like music or poetry, a recreation of reality” (237).

Je la voyais toujours malade, mais en voie de se rétablir, je la trouvais mieux. Et si elle faisait allusion à ce qu'elle avait souffert, je lui fermais la bouche avec mes baisers et je l'assurais qu'elle était maintenant guérie pour toujours. J'aurais voulu faire constater aux sceptiques que la mort est vraiment une maladie dont on revient. Seulement je ne trouvais plus chez ma grand'mère la riche spontanéité d'autrefois. Ses paroles n'étaient qu'une réponse affaiblie, docile, presque un simple écho de mes paroles; elle n'était plus que le reflet de ma propre pensée. (1347)

Marcel must recognize that she “is” no more, and that nothing within *him* can restore to her the living spontaneity and impulse that she possessed when alive. However, through confrontation, involuntary as always, with artifacts (exterior objects such as the photograph), he can come to see the operation of larger ‘laws’ of personality, relationship, and experience; he can perceive the means by which she operated once he accepts her necessary ‘end.’

The difficulty with such “instantées,” such snapshots of life, is that all that remains is the *reflection* or analysis of the experience, not the moment, or the relation, itself. Because Marcel experiences Albertine as a fractured, differentiated band of ‘jeunes filles’ and not a single entity, when he approaches her for a kiss, he wishes to prolong and diversify each moment, arresting the ‘gesture’ like a photograph, and approaching it from different angles: “j’avais voulu les faire tenir toutes en quelques seconds pour recréer expérimentalement le phénomène qui diversifie l’individualité d’un être et tirer les unes des autres, comme d’un étui, toutes les possibilités qu’il enferme, dans ce court trajet de mes lèvres vers sa joue, c’est dix Albertines que je vis” (1029). While he is unable to do this in the present, with the aid of narrative, analysis, and memory, he can retrospectively compare and examine her, though only after she is gone. Thus while such aesthetic objects allow him to re-encounter the past, they cannot revivify his relation or restore

him to what he *now* recognizes was happiness. After Albertine's disappearance, he is confronted with the immutable reality that nothing survives the holocaust of time:

Lié qu'il était à toutes les saisons, pour que je perdisse le souvenir d'Albertine il aurait fallu que je les oubliasse toutes, quitte à recommencer à les connaître, comme un vieillard frappé d'hémiplégie et qui rapprend à lire; il aurait fallu que je renonçasse à tout l'univers. Seule, me disais-je, une véritable mort de moi-même serait capable (mais elle est impossible) de me consoler de la sienne. (1968)

Like Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury*, he considers the impossibility of erasing the repetition of time—impossible because it only leaves the option of ending *yourself* in time—though he, unlike Quentin, rejects this. He realizes that he must find an entirely new mode of reading, to renounce the conception of time he has had before, and create a new way of seeing. In order to deal with the fact that all narratives continue despite the ending of individuals within them, he must end all of the “mois” and “Albertines” that, wraith-like, appear with each season and memory.

To create his own method of seeing (and *representing* that seeing), Marcel cannot rely on anyone else; the only durable methods are those which do not seek to replicate what they lack according to fixed conventions and genres (like Odette, the Verdurins, or Morel), but rather those, (like Octave, Verdurin's nephew and golf-player from Balbec), who transform personal experience into new and vibrant aesthetic objects. At the end of the novel, Octave resurfaces as a brilliant designer, producing exceptional works of ‘genius’ but retaining a total lack of social refinement. Marcel reflects that “les chefs-d'oeuvre peut-être les plus extraordinaires de notre époque sont sortis non du concours général, d'une éducation modèle, académique, à la Broglie, mais de la fréquentation des ‘pesages’ et des grands bars” (2061). He recognizes that there is no

favored model of transmission, but rather that *anyone* who struggles against the conditions they are granted can eventually come to exert a critical and creative voice. This is possible in the most obscure of circumstances, such as those of the shut-in Léonie, or the poverty-stricken professor of piano who taught the princess of Laumes and others; because she was meticulous, even in her abject state, “sa méthode, son beau son, renaissaient parfois sous les doigts de ses élèves, même de celles qui étaient devenues pour le reste des personnes médiocres” (267). Like Mme de Villeparisis’ floral watercolors, whose attention to detail is not learned at the Academy but developed as a result of the method of ‘seeing’ that Schlegel taught her as a young girl (956), something living is able to be transmitted when the student can recognize and practice a method which is creative rather than imitative in nature, and which deflects the hero-worship of a ‘master’ and a ‘school of’ into a focus on the work itself.

For Marcel, this method, this reading practice, is developed only when the viewer is able to regard the aesthetic object as comprehensible and human, rather than enshrouded by the mystery of Art. His second viewing of La Berma causes this recognition, as he remembers his first viewing and how he assumed that he, as a spectator, would merely become a plate upon which the ‘heavenly’ bodies of the actresses, through their movements and sounds, would inscribe themselves. On this second viewing, “tout cela avait quitté le monde de l’absolue et n’était plus qu’une chose pareille aux autres” (780). Approaching it without preconceptions about its value, and viewing it as an equal instead of a disciple, he is astounded by the genius expressed in her living interpretation;

Tout cela, voix, attitudes, gestes, voiles, n’était, autour de ce corps d’une idée qu’est un vers (corps qui au contraire des corps humains n’est pas devant l’âme comme un obstacle opaque qui empêche de l’apercevoir mais comme un vêtement purifié, vivifié, où elle se

diffuse et où on la retrouve), que des enveloppes supplémentaires ... l'interprétation de la Berma était autour de l'œuvre, une seconde œuvre, vivifiée aussi par le génie. (783)

When he is implicated and addressed by La Berma through her work, he is able to see her intention and performance creating *another* work of art through the performance, the irreducible, embodied *living* of it. This is what Marcel also ends up advocating as the reading method to employ for his own book; he imagines his readers not as reading a stable, dead text, but as reading themselves *through* his text:

De sorte que je ne leur demanderais pas de me louer ou de me dénigrer, mais seulement de me dire si c'est bien cela, si les mots qu'ils lisent en eux-mêmes sont bien ceux que j'ai écrits (les divergences possibles à cet égard ne devant pas, du reste, provenir toujours de ce que je me serais trompé, mais quelquefois de ce que les yeux du lecteur ne seraient pas de ceux à qui mon livre conviendrait pour bien lire en soi-même). (2390)

This reading practice is performative and invites difference and self-examination rather than detachment and study; it recognizes that, like Marcel himself, any practice which would seek to comment on his *Recherche* must make a 'second work' of that explication, because for him the journey is never elsewhere but always further interior¹⁷⁹; "il n'y a pas besoin de voyager pour le revoir, il faut descendre pour le retrouver" (816). To 'descend' within (a frequent refrain throughout the novel) is always a retrospective act, and interacts in complex ways with sensory perception, memory, and agency, but through the intervention and difference of a text, it can break the artificial sense of wholeness that accompanies the self and make a fragmented, but authentic, examination.

¹⁷⁹ Alain de Botton, in his tongue-in-cheek study *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, discusses Proust's relation to reading, and his attempt to break the aura of genius, "because in his view, books could not make us aware of enough of the things we felt. They might open our eyes, sensitize us, enhance our powers of perception, but at a certain point they would stop, not by coincidence, not occasionally, not out of bad luck, but inevitably, by definition, for the stark and simple reason that *the author wasn't us*" (179).

The aesthetic object thus becomes central to the ability to read the self; not because it elevates, but because it exteriorizes the self; as Marcel notes early in the novel, “notre coeur change, dans la vie, et c’est la pire douleur; mais nous ne la connaissons que dans la lecture, en imagination: dans la réalité il change, comme certains phénomènes de la nature se produisent, assez lentement pour que, si nous pouvons constate successivement chacun de ses états différents, en revanche la sensation même du changement nous soit épargnée” (76). Because the self constantly wishes to efface its fragmentation through a recuperative sense of wholeness, it is only objects which retain their indifference that can allow him to *read* himself. He describes the Vinteuil phrase as one such ‘witness’ to different periods of his life in which he has heard it, and which retains its difference: “la petite phrase au contraire, quelque opinion qu’elle pût avoir sur la brève durée de ces états de l’âme, y voyait quelque chose, non pas comme faisaient tous ces gens, de moins sérieux que la vie positive, mais au contraire de si supérieur à elle que seul il valait la peine d’être exprimé” (280). In opposition to his adolescent tendency to identify himself with the protagonists of all he reads, and to cast himself as the ‘hero’ of his own narrative, the exteriority of the musical phrase constantly pulls him out of the “intoxication” of the present; because it gives a different mode of seeing, it can exercise a different value system, one which operates belatedly, but which recognizes and celebrates difference. The self which results from this is neither sentimentally nostalgic nor blindly amnesiac; Marcel later categorizes this as a sort of library of experience in which nothing is sequential, and if it is palimpsestic in nature, it is only because the texts constantly rewrite each other: “cette superposition n’est pas immuable comme la stratification d’une montagne. Perpétuellement des soulèvements font affleurer à la surface des couches anciennes” (2014). Much like the literal “couche ancienne” which he inherits from Léonie, and gifts to the brothel, the reading practice required to make these

documents legible—to make them ‘affleurer’ instead of simply instrumentalizing them—is one which accepts a fragmented, incoherent self rather than an insistently indivisible one.

Because the “documents” of memory are so instable, he characterizes the work of memory as “toujours rétrospective, elle est comme un historien qui aurait à faire une histoire pour laquelle il n'est aucun document” (1713). The necessity of retrospective collection and evaluation is not, to him, a lamentable fact, but rather the only way to a living mode of creation instead of a museum of stuffed figures¹⁸⁰. While it may end up being a vast collection of nothingness punctuated with moments of intense meaning, the ‘history’ or the ‘recitation’ is the only thing that can give it meaning and shape, and it is only through loss that the narrative is enabled. The loss of his grandmother, and especially the death of Albertine, drives this home; obsessed as was by her affairs with women, after her death he is confronted with being able to only access the facts, and remaining unsure of how to explicate them:

Dans notre mémoire il y a une lacune, il n'y a pas trace de cela. Et bien souvent nous n'avons pas fait assez attention, au moment même, aux choses qui pouvaient déjà nous paraître importantes, nous n'avons pas bien entendu une phrase, nous n'avons pas noté un geste, ou bien nous les avons oubliés. Et quand plus tard, avides de découvrir une vérité, nous remontons de déduction en déduction, feuilletant notre mémoire comme un recueil de témoignages, quand nous arrivons à cette phrase, à ce geste, impossible de nous rappeler, nous recommençons vingt fois le même trajet, mais inutilement: le chemin ne va pas plus loin. Avait-elle rougi ? Je ne sais si elle avait rougi, mais elle n'avait pas pu ne pas entendre, et le souvenir de ces paroles l'avait plus tard arrêtée quand peut-être elle avait été sur le point de se confesser à moi. Et maintenant elle n'était plus nulle part,

¹⁸⁰ Gene Moore, in *Proust and Musil: The Novel as Research Instrument*, suggests that “the illusion of continuity is maintained by the consistently retrospective point of view of the narrator, and by the perpetual analysis which reduces any given moment in the text to the status of an incremental piece of evidence, typical in itself” (23).

j'aurais pu parcourir la terre d'un pôle à l'autre sans rencontrer Albertine. La réalité, qui s'était refermée sur elle, était redevenue unie, avait effacé jusqu'à la trace de l'être qui avait coulé à fond. (1987-88)

In the absence of artifacts, objects, or memories of difference, reality becomes “unite”: it becomes a blank surface upon which the individual narrative can easily be inscribed. It is only through retrospective accounts, and the difference they encounter, that this can be counteracted.

Proust's novel, while acknowledging its own inability to recall, is also meticulous in its depiction of individuals engaging in conscious or unconscious amnesia, and cataloging the effects that this ‘unified’ surface produces. The Duchess is attractive to Marcel precisely because she seems, initially, to be easily read, a “petit volume,” interchangeable with any of the others, of knowledge about the faubourg Saint-Germain (773). But when he hears her speak, he realizes the mistake in his assumption:

Non seulement elle ne s'attardait pas à des explications retrospectives, à des demit-mots, à des sourires ambiguës, à des sous-entendus, non seulement elle avait dans son affabilité actuelle, sans retours en arrière, sans réticences, quelque chose d'aussi fièrement rectiligne que sa majestueuse stature, mais les griefs qu'elle avait pu ressentir contre quelqu'un dans le passé étaient si entièrement réduits en cendres, ces cendres étaient elles-mêmes rejetées si loin de sa mémoire. (1041)

In Nietzschean terms she is employing a “strong” use of history, bending it to her needs and will, but it makes an inhabitable place: majestic, but unlivable and cold. The constant evolution of characters who become that which they most vehemently hated—Legrandin a snob, Robert a homosexual, Bloch a sycophant, Gilberte a socialite, Swann a conceited partisan—attests to the fallibility of this model of narrative; it only reproduces problems over the long term, and can

only be counteracted by a long-term narrative. Marcel, as he forgets Albertine, finds that eventually it becomes easy to assert a new selfhood: “ces nouveaux ‘moi’ qui devraient porter un autre nom que le précédent, leur venue possible, à cause de leur indifférence à ce que j'aimais, m'avait toujours épouvanté... au contraire, il m'apportait avec l'oubli une suppression presque complète de la souffrance, une possibilité de bien-être” (2052). Memory and history, embodied in phrases, gestures, and actions, if suppressed, can make an easy “bien-être” which entices him, but such a proceeding requires him to make a smooth surface of his tumultuous and differentiated past, which he ultimately rejects.

Thus one of the major divisions in the novel is between those who are able to accept, live with, and remember suffering, and those who can or will not; like Swann, for whom Odette comes to represent a “blessure” (293), Marcel values those who do not attempt to efface the ‘wound’ of history. Inverting the normative, Nietzschean usage of strength and inflexibility¹⁸¹, he considers instead how the ‘strong’ users of others, such as the Verdurin, are really the least hardy, and that those who recognize and accept constant deception, such as Swann, are far more aware of their own strength; “dans l'humanité la règle – qui comporte des exceptions naturellement – est que les durs sont des faibles dont on n'a pas voulu, et que les forts, se souciant peu qu'on veuille ou non d'eux, ont seuls cette douceur que le vulgaire prend pour de la faiblesse” (1542). Those who remain only themselves, in this model, are the weak; those who recognize and are willing to suffer, to adapt, are able to accept difference and to continue when paradigms shift. During Albertine’s ‘captivity,’ he finds himself tortured by the constant inability

¹⁸¹ Richard Rorty, in his essay “Self-Creation and Affiliation: Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger,” discusses the crucial difference between Nietzsche and Proust as being in the fact that Nietzsche always wanted to link himself to those he viewed as strong, the “larger-than-self hero, in terms of whose career they define the point of their own” (100), whereas Proust “managed to debunk authority without setting himself as authority...the result of all this finitization was to make Proust unashamed of his own finitude. He mastered contingency by recognizing it ... He turned other people from his judges into his fellow sufferers, and thus succeeded in creating the taste by which he judged himself” (103).

to ‘know’ whether she has been faithful to him or not, and recognizes that memory can inflict just as much suffering, or more, as the act itself:

On n'a pas besoin d'être deux, il suffit d'être seul dans sa chambre, à penser, pour que de nouvelles trahisons de votre maîtresse se produisent, fût-elle morte. Aussi il ne faut pas ne redouter dans l'amour, comme dans la vie habituelle, que l'avenir, mais même le passé, qui ne se réalise pour nous souvent qu'après l'avenir, et nous ne parlons pas seulement du passé que nous apprenons après coup, mais de celui que nous avons conservé depuis longtemps en nous et que tout à coup nous apprenons à lire. (1667)

What he realizes here, and elsewhere, is that the meaning of the event, which forces itself upon him through suffering, is not in the act, nor within himself, but rather in the *reading practice* he employs; he has to learn *how* to read the events, and while this is usually far too late to do anything about the situation itself, this ability to read has the potential to transform, where the ability to react, or to act, can only live according to known paradigms.

Thus another hallmark of this transformative reading practice is its ability to accept and recognize stupidity, nullity, and weakness, rather than attempting always, like Mme Verdurin or Charlus, to remain on ‘top’ of the interpretation. This is at the core of Marcel’s realization that he *can* write the work he has always despaired of being able to express: “les êtres les plus bêtes par leurs gestes, leurs propos, leurs sentiments involontairement exprimés, manifestent des lois qu'ils ne perçoivent pas, mais que l'artiste surprend en eux. À cause de ce genre d'observations, le vulgaire croit l'écrivain méchant, et il le croit à tort, car dans un ridicule l'artiste voit une belle généralité” (2289). Through exploration of the stupid, the pretentious, the ill-informed, and so forth, the novelist can see laws operating, but only retrospectively. The journalistic, society-columnist mode of splitting hairs operates through a rigid hierarchy of values, and is obsessed

with the present, whereas Marcel is embracing a mode of retrospective examination that requires narrative after reality has shifted and the people themselves have become matters of indifference. It is only through this separation that he can break free from the systems of value he has known and articulate difference instead¹⁸². As he contemplates the work which he now feels able to write, he reflects back on the reading of *François le Champi* which he realizes has defined much of how he approaches the world¹⁸³; although he realizes how fundamentally he has ‘misread’ most of the events and figures of his life, it is *only through misreading* that he is able to *re-read* them. Without the belated aspect of narrative, its revisionary potential, he would be caught in an endless present, like most of *le monde*, totally unable to distinguish or question himself. Because he was incapable of describing what was happening to him as it happened, the retrospective narrative makes him question his mode of perception and invent a new method for reading: “si je ne pouvais apporter ces changements et bien d'autres (dont la nécessité, si on veut peindre le réel, a pu apparaître au cours de ce récit) dans la transcription d'un univers qui était à redessiner tout entier, du moins ne manquerais-je pas avant toute chose d'y décrire l'homme comme ayant la longueur non de son corps mais de ses années” (2399). To reconstruct narrative *through* time, rather than in spite of it, allows him to create “the real” as it undergoes modification instead of treating it as a stable, unquestionable, and pervasive backdrop. The transcription is a painful process, and involves accepting isolation, but it also allows him to regain that which he has lost.

¹⁸² This is also the surprising reality of Bayard Sartoris in *The Unvanquished*; the only Sartoris able to unlearn the self-destructive cycles of valor and violence, he refuses to embrace violence when his father is murdered. The narratives he has known all emphasize retribution, “yet already I was beginning to realise, to become aware of that which I still had no yardstick to measure save that one consisting of what, despite myself, despite my raising and background (or maybe because of them) I had for some time known I was becoming and had feared the test of it ... if I am going to do what I have taught myself is right or if I am just going to wish I were” (247-48). To unlearn what he has “always been” he must embrace the nullity of his own existence, must become willing to not be the hero of his own narrative, and yet not simply reject his heritage (which is another way of accepting it); instead he accepts it as a wound, rather than trying to cover it up with a new dogma.

¹⁸³ Jeffrey Johnson notes that it is not until Marcel encounters the book that his previous sensory experiences come into focus; he says that “*François le Champi* provided the necessarily external prompt which re-cast all his thoughts in a new light...Everything that had happened to him since [the initial reading as a boy] in terms of love could be traced to this event” (133)

For Marcel, the truly transformative work of art has humility as one of its necessary components; it must be beautiful according to its method and its human focus, and not because of critical acclaim:

Ce qui lui répond de nouveau, c'est une voix aiguë, c'est un ton curieusement questionneur, c'est l'impression despotique causé par un être qu'on ne connaît pas, toute matérielle, et dans laquelle aucun espace vide n'est laissé pour la "largeur de l'interprétation." Et à cause de cela ce sont les œuvres vraiment belles, si elles sont sincèrement écoutées, qui doivent le plus nous décevoir, parce que, dans la collection de nos idées, il n'y en a aucune qui réponde à une impression individuelle. (784)

He recognizes here the total inability of a critical vocabulary to account for individual beauty; that which is original is not conducive to easy subsumation into generic categories, or blasé platitudes about "style" and "pathos" and "grandness of interpretation." None of these are able to bring the viewer into consideration of the work itself, and the attendant social paranoia about having the 'correct' interpretation prevents the viewer from seeing in the first place. Like Swann learning the difference between the idea of love and its actual deployment, here the work of art is only valuable and transformative through its inability to express itself in categorical terms, or as Marcel expresses it later, in regards to Bergotte, "les artistes qui nous ont donné les plus grandes visions d'élégance en ont recueilli les éléments chez des gens qui étaient rarement les grands élégants de leur époque" (2150). Marcel's examination of the delusional, narrow-minded, or humble people around him brings him to larger considerations of human potential than the supposedly grand narratives of social elites.

Thus it is frequently the plainer, less intelligent, and more abject characters (often women) who offer some of the most outstanding criticisms of the systems in which they live.

Françoise, despite being ‘instrumentalized’ by the concierge, who likes to get a rise out of her by exaggerating war reports, ends up, via these false means, at a far more moral position than the entire social *monde*¹⁸⁴; “du reste, Françoise commençait à être reprise par moment de son pacifisme de Combray. Elle avait presque des doutes sur les ‘atrocités allemandes’ ... ‘Nous ne valons pas mieux qu’eux. Si nous étions en Allemagne, nous en ferions autant.’” (2245).

Françoise is the only character besides Charlus (who has his own hardly-disinterested reasons for considering German boys the equal of French ones) to voice this remarkably sage position in the context of her class, age, social connections, and the rampant propaganda and misinformation that surrounds her¹⁸⁵. She levels a criticism that requires setting aside conventions and examining the particulars which are available to her, a reading practice which Marcel also champions in his discussion of how to read people not as generic “ends” but as always-surprising and individual means to understanding:

C’est ainsi que bâille d’avance d’ennui un lettré à qui on parle d’un nouveau ‘beau livre,’ parce qu’il imagine une sorte de compose de tous les beaux livres qu’il a lus, tandis qu’un beau livre est particulier, imprévisible, et n’est pas fait de la somme de tous les chefs-d’œuvre précédents mais de quelque chose que s’être parfaitement assimilé cette somme ne suffit nullement à faire trouver, car c’est justement en dehors d’elle. (521)

This is one mode of critiquing the power of judgment; rather than perceiving the unknown as a logical and easily-assimilable ‘composite’ of all that has come before—thereby subordinating particulars into transparent generalities—this mode of reading requires the recognition of a

¹⁸⁴ Vincent Descombes, in *Proust: philosophie du roman*, in a restrictive, derivative reading of the novel, cannot account for Françoise’s ability to critique, claiming instead that she merely represents a ‘cosmology’ of thought: “les idées de Françoise ne sont pas ses idées, celles qu’elle s’est formées. Ce sont les idées qu’on a chez elle” (179).

¹⁸⁵ This bears some noteworthy similarities to Simon’s deadpan comment to Bayard when he tells him he needs money to repay a loan: “you does de same thing ev’y day. Aint lendin’ out money yo’ main business?” (*Flags in the Dust* 261). The artlessness of the question shows how transgressive it is; he levels the separate arenas in which he and Bayard “should” be considered—by a racist, patriarchal society, and, like Françoise, articulates it flawlessly.

contingent, related, but distinct “outside,” something or someone who can never be assimilated nor completely apprehended but which exerts an influence on the creation of objects and relations. Marcel here argues against the “beau livre” as an end, perceived as a product, because such a mode is easily extrapolated into a hierarchy, like a social hierarchy, in which ‘types’ are identified and genres codified. This does violence to the co-constructive view of means as existing without ends; this is the conflict between the taxonomist and the novelist, between the critic and the creator.

To subordinate a narrative to an end is, in Marcel’s view, to kill it, and then stuff it; the taxonomist becomes the taxidermist when he attempts to elucidate the ‘point’ of a narrative, to explicate the ‘pay-off’ in a reading. With such an end in mind, narrative becomes dead and instrumentalized; this is why Marcel constantly valorizes the *travail* over the *œuvre*, and why he circles around those who from the critic’s perspective are ‘unable’ to complete, but who in reality are the only ones who have found a living method of transposition. He compares Wagner’s universe to other 19th-century authors and artists, and says that their works remained “toujours incomplètes, qui est le caractère de toutes les grandes oeuvres du XIXe siècle dont les plus grands écrivains ont manqué leurs livres, mais, se regardant travailler comme s'ils étaient à la fois l'ouvrier et le juge, ont tiré de cette autocontemplation une beauté nouvelle extérieure et supérieure à l'oeuvre, lui imposant rétroactivement une unité, une grandeur qu'elle n'a pas” (1723). The method of “autocontemplation” is something that is only possible in the fragment, which can then be stitched into a larger fabric, rather than insisting on its own completion. Similarly, Bergotte continues to fascinate Marcel even after his death because his persistent effort to continue to question and contemplate leaves him without an ‘end’; he exists as a means, and his books, or rather his ‘work,’ become a still-living reality, requiring the *reader* to

assimilate them into a new world: “l'idée que Bergotte n'était pas mort à jamais est sans invraisemblance. On l'enterra, mais toute la nuit funèbre, aux vitrines éclairées, ses livres, disposés trois par trois, veillaient comme des anges aux ailes éployées et semblaient, pour celui qui n'était plus, le symbole de sa résurrection” (1744). To be “resurrected” rather than mounted on display as a taxodermical model means embracing a contingent view of authorial intent, allowing mistakes and inconsistencies to demonstrate a living reality rather than a sealed hermeneutic universe. This is why Proust has to end up embracing inconsistencies in his created universe instead of attempting, like a careful scholar, to iron them out. Marcel comments on the role played by such ‘mistakes’ and considers that it is far better to rely on constant errors than to subordinate all queer and messy narratives into a totalizing end: “cette perpétuelle erreur, qui est précisément la ‘vie,’ ne donne pas ses mille formes seulement à l'univers visible et à l'univers audible, mais à l'univers sentimental, à l'univers historique, etc. ... Nous n'avons de l'univers que des visions informes, fragmentées et que nous complétons par des associations d'idées arbitraires, créatrice de dangereuses suggestions” (2036). To attempt to impose a structure with absolute consistency is to make a dead world—this is the world of the scholar or the critic, which requires coherence—whereas in the creative universe, the means are constantly evolving, and the ends spin out into fragments or come into provisional and strategic coherence before scattering again.

Like the fourteen-year-old Sutpen setting out with a ‘design,’ the Marcel who begins the narrative chronologically is one who, unlike the Marcel who writes the novel, attempts to continually read in advance, to forecast his own end; only through the intervention of others, in often banal circumstances, is he able to *not* write the self-defeating, prophetic *Bildungsroman* that an eternal boy like Sutpen attempts. Albertine is the first to offer open resistance to his

normative and phallogocentric self-narrative; when she invites him to her rooms at the Grand Hotel, he hurries up “avec un sentiment inconnu de tout-puissance, et d’entrer enfin dans un héritage qui m’eût de tout temps apparentu. Puis tout à coup je pensai que j’avais tort d’avoir des doutes, elle ma’avait dit de venir quand elle serait couchée. C’était clair, je trépignais de joie” (728). The assumption that what her invitation means “c’était clair” is the phallogocentric assumption (perfectly encapsulated in his characterization of it as “héritage”) that also underlies Charlus’ assumption that Marcel ‘knows’ what he is offering when he invites him to his rooms, and it is not until she pulls the rope in alarm that he notices he may have misread the situation, and that the ‘end’ was not at all clear from the beginning. This is what the long party at the Prince de Guermantes at the end of the novel demonstrates: namely, that nothing is clear from the outset, and that the most logical and rational explanations fail to create living narratives of reality: “mais à vol d’oiseau, comme fait le statisticien qui néglige la raison sentimentale, les imprudences évitables qui ont conduit telle personne à la mort, et compte seulement le nombre de personnes qui meurent par an, on voyait que plusieurs personnes, parties d’un même milieu dont la peinture a occupé le début de ce récit, étaient parvenues dans un autre tout différent” (2341). The narrative which does not forecast the end from the beginning is the only one able to deal with the deformations which society undergoes even as it preserves a veneer of sameness. He recognizes that the ‘statistical’ account can only arrest discrete points of identity in time, but what underlies and motivates the measurable phenomena it tracks is rarely obvious, or articulate. Only through the retrospective account can these discrete moments be made meaningful, as he discovers after Albertine’s death, when all that remains of her are fragments: “grande faiblesse sans doute pour un être de consister en une simple collection de moments; grande force aussi; il relève de la mémoire, et la mémoire d’un moment n’est pas instruite de tout ce qui s’est passé

depuis; ce moment qu'elle a enregistré dure encore, vit encore, et avec lui l'être qui s'y profilait. Et puis cet émiettement ne fait pas seulement vivre la morte, il la multiplie” (1963). Because narrative is temporal, it is the only thing that can deal with temporal beings; only through confrontation with the moments can the ends of narrative and its means be reconciled¹⁸⁶.

The necessity of length, contradiction, and continuity are also thematized in his discussion with Albertine of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy: “si je t'ai dit que c'est de roman à roman la même scène, c'est au sein d'un même roman que les mêmes scènes, les mêmes personnages se reproduisent si le roman est très long” (1887). Without the necessary length and depth of an ‘endless’ narrative, in other words, the reader could easily mistake each creation for something ‘new,’ whereas for Marcel, the author’s life-work, the *travail*, rather than the *œuvre*, is a process of problematizing any assumptions about character, about teleology, and destiny (although I would argue that this is also a simplification of the distinct form of Dostoyevsky’s separate novels, a problem which plagued me in my initial attempts to compare Proust and Faulkner). Without this length, there is the easy interchangeability of Mme Cambremer’s avant-garde, “on recommandait de ne pas fatiguer l'attention de l'auditeur, comme si nous ne disposions pas d'attentions différentes dont il dépend précisément de l'artiste d'éveiller les plus hautes” (1371). For all the registers of technologies of speed throughout the novel, Proust continually comes back to the necessity of duration, length, and sustained attention. He recognizes, through his experiences with the Duchess, that it is from the end of an epoch, a relationship, or a reading, that examination becomes possible; during the moment, “ces particularités forment, chez toutes les personnes, un système de regards, de discours, d'actions, si cohérent, si despotique, que quand nous sommes en leur présence il nous semble supérieur au reste” (1182). The power of

¹⁸⁶ Walter Kasell, in *Proust's Strategy of Reading*, remarks that “the figure of Albertine shares many qualities with a fictional text, defying approach and retaining always the ability to defeat the reader’s expectations, changing its form, its direction, and its significance” (68).

this deformative reading dissipates with time, and the reader who is able to sustain the length of the reading and comprehend the critique can resist the sense that she or he is within the privileged circle of the ‘superior.’¹⁸⁷

That such a reading must be “endless” becomes clear to Marcel as he sees the seemingly impenetrable society of the Guermantes breached and then denigrated by Mme de Cambremer, or Gilberte; he realizes that his own conception of their status has been the result of his own ‘beginning’ with them, that there are no absolute values, and instead that everyone merely judges according to their entrance into the social narrative: “tout ce qui nous semble impérissable tend à la destruction; une situation mondaine, tout comme autre chose, n'est pas créée une fois pour toutes, mais, aussi bien que la puissance d'un empire, se reconstruit à chaque instant par une sorte de création perpétuellement continue, ce qui explique les anomalies apparentes de l'histoire mondaine ou politique au cours d'un demi-siècle” (2109). The perpetual creation of society can be lamentable and disconcerting to those who find their own ‘ends’ in it, but it exists outside of human volition and reconstitutes itself after every apparently cataclysmic event; there is no end to it. But whereas Faulkner’s characters almost universally perceive this impersonal aspect of life, and of narrative, in a paradigm-collapsing despair, Marcel realizes that, unlike Swann, he does not need to take this view; where Swann can only look backwards, Marcel takes pleasure in the revenants from his past, tangled as they are with new sensations of the present: “je comprenais que la vie pût être jugée médiocre, bien qu'à certains moments elle parût si belle, parce que dans le premier cas c'est sur tout autre chose qu'elle-même, sur des images qui ne

¹⁸⁷ Antoine Compagnon’s *Proust Between Two Centuries* examines the critique that Proust levels against the avant-garde, precisely on this question of duration and social position. He links Proust’s fragmentary and involuntary memories to Benjamin’s “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” and contrasts that sense of continuity with Mme de Cambremer’s amnesiac avant-garde; he says that she “is not stupid, as Proust points out: indeed, she has more intelligence than she know what to do with, but it is a useless intelligence because it is misplaced, applied to artistic concerns. She is not stupid but she is a snob, that is, she claims to have made a break with her ancestors. Her interest in the avant-garde and her snobbery are one and the same thing ... No one can escape tradition” (265).

gardent rien d'elle qu'on la juge et qu'on la déprécie” (2264). The attempt to artificially stimulate memory, so familiar to him through Swann’s melancholy portraits of Odette or the obsessive playing of the phrase of Vinteuil, cannot resuscitate life, and only serve to confirm a hopeless sense that any meaning in events or relations will be swept away by time. But for Marcel, to *regain* time means to allow even mediocre memories and sensations to, without volition, multiply and extend their meaning into the present, gaining pleasure and power from their imbeddedness in a continually-unfolding narrative.

The *Recherche* is not a project of lament for a lost ‘paradise’ of society; as Marcel points out again and again, all paradises are lost, and although the different groups he studies are not interchangeable, his extensive ‘reading’ of them allows him to see how similarly they operate. This seems to be the motivation for his, within the context of the novel, seemingly bizarre ‘reportage’ of “Un Amour de Swann”; it allows him to examine his *own* process of self-narrative. The vulgarity of the Verdurin clan is established from the first page: “pour faire partie du ‘petit noyau,’ du ‘petit groupe,’ du ‘petit clan’ des Verdurin, une condition était suffisante mais elle était nécessaire: il fallait adhérer tacitement à un Credo ... tout ‘nouvelle recrue’ à qui les Verdurin ne pouvaient pas persuader que les soirées des gens qui n’allaient pas chez eux étaient ennuyeuses comme la pluie, se voyait immédiatement exclue” (157). But what Swann, and eventually Marcel, comes to realize is that *every* social group operates according to more or less the same principle of exclusion. His grandmother brings this to his attention when he forces her to come with him to the Champs-Élysées and she steps into the bathroom to have a stroke; he stands outside and listens to the conversation between the “marquise” of the bathrooms and a police officer, finally watching her turn away a woman because “ce n’est pas le genre d’ici” (984). His grandmother emerges, and, anxious as ever to reassure him and efface herself, tells

him, “j’ai entendu toute la conversation entre la ‘marquise’ et le garde, me dit-elle. C’était on ne peut plus Guermantes et petit noyau Verdurin. Dieu! qu’en termes galants ces choses-là étaient mises” (984). She points out to him through this that the ‘height’ of the society doesn’t count, only the rules which constitute it, and that the more exclusive any social group is, the more petty it becomes, forced to make artificial distinctions. This what Proust demonstrates again and again; those unable to recognize the means by which they operate are doomed to only ever understand one context and remain in one ‘côté’: this is at stake in Cottard’s ‘reading’ of Charlus, and Charlus’s ‘reading’ of ‘invertis’, it underlies the strict divisions the petit bourgeoisie and aristocracy maintain in Balbec, the tacit acceptance and expulsion of Swann, the shuffling of Combray society, or Bergotte’s judgments about new writers. In each case, the inability to recognize that you are merely one ‘genre’ among others leads to the assumption that only your terms of intelligibility are valid. But what Marcel comes to realize is that even in these seemingly rigid divisions, allowing himself to be propelled (in time and in social space) through them has given him insight into *how* they function.

Proust constantly confronts readers with their expectation that they are in control of the ‘real’; the novel becomes an artificial world that shows the artificiality and in-humanness of the ‘real’ world, in order to problematize our reading of it. In Combray, he reflects on the difference between what he learns on his walks with his father and grandmother, and what he learns in quiet contemplation and reading in his room:

Cette obscure fraîcheur de ma chambre était au plein soleil de la rue, ce que l’ombre est au rayon, c’est-à-dire aussi lumineuse que lui, et offrait à mon imagination le spectacle total de l’été dont mes sens si j’avais été en promenade, n’auraient pu jouir que par morceaux; et ainsi elle s’accordait bien à mon repos qui (grâce aux aventures racontées

par mes livres et qui venaient l'émouvoir), supportait pareil au repos d'une main immobile au milieu d'une eau courante, le choc et l'animation d'un torrent d'activité.

(74)

Whereas the conventional view would take the experience of 'outside' as the more complete, Marcel recognizes that his immobility is essential for a grounded reading of reality, rather than moving freely through it, which fragments the experience. This is why Léonie, a shut-in as well, is the only one able to read "la chronique quotidienne mais immémoriale de Combray" (50); only through her constant commentary, observation, and interaction with the elements and people she hears, smells, and sees, is she able to give a far more comprehensive and imbedded account of Combray than any of the 'active' agents of it¹⁸⁸. Marcel finds that whatever the particular reasons for anyone's engagement with a text may be, *how* they read and what they *do* with that reading makes all the difference. While his grandmother gives him the George Sand novels for their 'intellectual' profit (40), it is actually the personal dimensions, their implication within his relationship with his mother and grandmother, which become more meaningful and accrue generative connections which an 'intellectual' endeavor could never create. This is what he notices after Albertine's death, as he cannot even look at a simple map of France without being assaulted by memories and associations: "à partir d'un certain âge nos souvenirs sont tellement entre-croisés les uns avec les autres que la chose à laquelle on pense, le livre qu'on lit n'a presque plus d'importance. On a mis de soi-même partout, tout est fécond, tout est dangereux, et on peut faire d'aussi précieuses découvertes que dans les *Pensées* de Pascal dans une réclame pour un savon" (2013). The danger of reading is that you become implicated in it, if you employ a

¹⁸⁸ She even seems to suggest to him the title of the work; when Françoise patiently discusses the minutiae of the village with Léonie, she apologizes: "Mais je vous fais perdre votre temps, ma fille." 'Mais non, madame Octave, mon temps n'est pas si cher ; celui qui l'a fait ne nous l'a pas vendu" (53). The concept of time not being 'lost' in conversations and minutiae seems to inform the decision to term his work a "recherche."

method which engages all of your senses, memories, and perceptions. The fecundity can be overpowering and enervating, as it is here in Marcel's grief, but it can also be productive to the point at which the entire *Recherche* is enabled by this singular reading practice.

Marcel stands out, in a novel of collectors and curators, as one who does *not* collect 'beautiful' works of art or literature. In fact, against this collector's fetishism, he remarks that memory encases images of the past and stores them, but they cannot be recalled at will, "de même qu'on dépose à la Bibliothèque nationale un exemplaire d'un livre qui sans cela risquerait de devenir introuvable" (512). This 'library' of the mind becomes a repository exterior to the will—it preserves by taking things *out of circulation*—and thus a reading practice which retrieves and examines these is the only one capable of examining reality. That process involves painful self-examination, and has nearly endless variables outside of the individual's control, in order to actually recall and create what has been. After losing Albertine, a far more devastating loss than that of his mother at dinner with Swann, he must similarly confront the way that texts come to embody relations and experiences, but this time not in creating certainty, as it was with his mother; now he must confront difference, and become not the hero of the novel, but the observer of it. This is the position he is forced into as he reads Aimé's letter about all of Albertine's alleged lesbian affairs:

J'ai pu éprouver devant les images, insignifiantes pour d'autres, que m'évoquait la lettre d'Aimé, une souffrance inattendue, la plus cruelle que j'eusse ressentie encore, et qui forma avec ces images, avec l'image hélas, d'Albertine elle-même, une sorte de précipité comme on dit en chimie, où tout était indivisible et dont le texte de la lettre d'Aimé, que je sépare d'une façon toute conventionnelle, ne peut donner aucunement l'idée, puisque

chacun des mots qui la composent était aussitôt transformé, coloré à jamais par la souffrance qu'il venait d'exciter. (1991)

The text *becomes* the suffering itself, inseparable from it, as his reading generates constant anxiety and guilt over Albertine. He realizes that his attempts to read himself into various narratives with Albertine have been self-serving, and that “la connaissance est non des choses extérieures qu'on veut observer, mais des sensations involontaires” (1727). In other words, knowledge isn't “out there” in things, but within the *practice* which examines that exteriority and makes an account of it, while preserving its difference.

This is in stark contrast to the reading practice employed by the Verdurin clan; as Marcel realizes on his first visit to La Raspelière, if he advances an opinion that is contrary to the Credo, he will be mocked, because not only the same *texts* must be read in the ‘noyau,’ but they must come to the same *conclusions* as well. Against Marcel's recognition of his own self-serving readings, Mme Verdurin has a horrific sort of “logique sentimentale, peut-être, plus élémentaire encore, une sorte de réflexe nerveux, qui la poussait, pour égayer sa vie et préserver son bonheur, à ‘brouiller les cartes’ dans le petit clan, faisait-elle monter impulsivement à ses lèvres, sans qu'elle eût le temps d'en contrôler la vérité, ces assertions diaboliquement utiles, sinon rigoureusement exactes” (1840). Able to make things fit, to control them, and force the reading practices to a horrific utility, Mme Verdurin's practice is a whitewashing, a wholesale bleaching of materials, a mechanical and dogmatic processing; she weaves a fabric of ‘vraisemblance’ that allows nothing to retain any of its difference¹⁸⁹. The clan enforces a reading practice which

¹⁸⁹ Faulkner's “Jefferson” representations frequently depict the horrific effects of this mutually-reassuring reading; in *Sanctuary* he shows the quick reversal of moral judgment on Goodwin, as all the townspeople “jumped on him. The good customers, that had been buying whiskey from him and drinking all that he would give them free and maybe trying to make love to his wife behind his back. You should hear them down town. This morning the Baptist minister took him for a text” (123). To be “taken for a text” means to be reduced to a dogma, a credo, like that of the Verdurin, that can only, in a circular fashion, ever come to reaffirm itself.

confirms its own interpretation, and yet reassures the ‘reader’ that they are in the majority, or part of the favored elite (depending on the orientation of the clan and the fashion of the day) in their reading. The Dreyfus affair throws this reality into sharp relief for Marcel, who sees both sides employ their ‘common sense’ reading of the ‘plain facts’ of the case to completely opposite ends. Marcel discusses how insidious the self-assured “lecture de bon sens” can be, as these uncritical readers are the most likely to consider themselves nuanced:

Il faut d'ailleurs reconnaître que cette subtilité des hommes politiques, qui me servit à m'expliquer le milieu Guermantes et plus tard d'autres milieux, n'est que la perversion d'une certaine finesse d'interprétation souvent désignée par “lire entre les lignes.” Si dans les assemblées il y a absurdité par perversion de cette finesse, il y a stupidité par manque de cette finesse dans le public qui prend tout “à la lettre.” (1110)

The belief that you are the sole reader capable of ‘reading between the lines’ is, in this view, perhaps the best way to recognize that you are unable to read at all. Appealing to the finesse of the individual reader is the best way for clan identity to assert its normative practice, as can be seen in the Verdurins, the Guermantes, and Charlus’ clan of inverts. This is also what motivates Cottard in his ‘diagnosis’ of Albertine’s sexuality; reading her body as a text, and employing his medico-biological discourse to read the ‘simple truth’ inscribed there, he remarks to Marcel: “tenez, regardez, ajouta-t-il en me montrant Albertine et Andrée qui valsaient lentement, serrées l'une contre l'autre, j'ai oublié mon lorgnon et je ne vois pas bien, mais elles sont certainement au comble de la jouissance. On ne sait pas assez que c'est surtout par les seins que les femmes l'éprouvent. Et, voyez, les leurs se touchent complètement” (1356). Cottard’s self-assurance is evident as he merely ‘describes’ the biological results of attraction, and yet the ‘truth’ of what he diagnoses is not separate from the discourse; it *is* the discourse. The willful characterization of

‘deviance’ is the oldest trick of the clan, dating from the days of Swann: reading in any deviation a pathological tendency, and never coming to any understanding of how reality might be characterized differently.

This instance stands in sharp contrast to Françoise’s encounter with the medical textbook; Françoise, who has had nothing but disdain and contempt for one of the housemaids who is pregnant (even going so far as constantly ordering asparagus because she knows it makes her feel sick and loudly complaining when her contractions cause her to groan loudly) is *stopped* by her reading, and transformed. When the maid is in labor, Françoise is sent to fetch the book; when her prolonged absence is noted, Marcel goes to find her, and sees her “lisait la description Clinique de la crise et poussait des sanglots maintent ... ‘est-il possible que le Bon Dieu veuille faire souffrir ainsi une malheureuse creature humaine?’” (104). Where the social context, especially within the tight hierarchy of domestic staff, was unable to bring her to consideration of human reality, reading was¹⁹⁰. The process of reading *broke* her sense of ‘common life’ and, in opposition to the clan-driven consumption of events and circumstances, she finds a human reality totally different from what she expected, through the medical textbook. Marcel’s mother is also able to read in this mode; whereas his grandmother’s sisters can only talk to each other, and do not understand Swann at all (because Swann’s self-deprecating manner also cannot explain itself), his mother asks about Gilberte, and even when she is interrupted, “elle tire de cette contrainte même une pensée delicate de plus” (29); she is able to read a reality that is fundamentally different than her own in Swann’s daughter, but which is explicable through the process of reading him. Françoise and Marcel’s mother are both readers who examine the means and *come to a different end*, or at least a different meaning to the same end.

¹⁹⁰ Dilsey’s ‘reading’ of Rev. Shegog’s sermon also seems to demonstrate this ability to read differently, as does the librarian’s reading of the magazine article featuring Caddy alongside a Nazi general; in both cases, they read a sympathetic human context into situations which have their own ends.

This is what Marcel comes to as well in his extended examination of ‘inverts’; he explains at length the painful story of two homosexual neighbors who meet and couple in their youth, but are unable to live together, and so end up pursuing ‘normal’ bourgeois lives next to each other, painfully close. Marcel compares his perspective on them to jellyfish—though they initially disgusted him, after reading Michelet, he sees the beauty in them—his point is that through the process of reading he has also come to appreciate the beauty of the homosexual relationship described¹⁹¹, specifically by seeing it as interacting comparatively with other texts and narratives:

Ce Roméo et cette Juliette peuvent croire à bon droit que leur amour n'est pas le caprice d'un instant, mais une véritable prédestination préparée par les harmonies de leur tempérament, non pas seulement par leur tempérament propre, mais par celui de leurs ascendants, par leur plus lointaine hérédité ... Dès que j'eus considéré cette rencontre de ce point de vue, tout m'y sembla empreint de beauté. (1229)

Seeing them in a human context, Marcel is able to recognize their plight and sympathize with it, reading against the grain; rather than being in the realm of the fantastic and unreal, reading comes to be the most essential access to reality, “car certains romans sont comme de grands deuils momentanés, abolissent l’habitude, nous remettent en contact avec la réalité de la vie” (2027). Because reading has the ability to rupture our sense of time, and put us in contact with narratives and contexts far removed from our own, it is able to render our own conception of reality more fluid and contingent.

¹⁹¹ Simon Porzak’s “Inverts and Invertebrates: Darwin, Proust, and Nature’s Queer Heterosexuality” looks at the way that the ‘re-reading’ of the jellyfish (specifically through its close reading of Darwinian evolutionary texts that emphasize the queer status of some invertebrates in terms of sexual dimorphism and reproduction) allows Marcel to encounter surprising difference: “Rereading the very naturalness of any sexuality allows us not only to demonstrate the contingency and bizarreness of our contemporary forms of heterosexuality, but also to discover the universal, improbable, and altogether queer forms of heterosexuality that are all of nature’s inconceivably complex interrelations” (27).

Marcel recognizes this potential as he reads the extract from the Goncourt journal about the early stages of the Verdurin clan; he sees in its pages a living reality detached from his own, and recognizes that he cannot describe or view things in the same manner as the Goncourts, and so he considers,

Car peut-être j'aurais pu conclure d'elles que la vie apprend à rabaisser le prix de la lecture, et nous montre que ce que l'écrivain nous vante ne valait pas grand'chose ; mais je pouvais tout aussi bien en conclure que la lecture, au contraire, nous apprend à relever la valeur de la vie, valeur que nous n'avons pas su apprécier et dont nous nous rendons compte seulement par le livre combien elle était grande. (2148-49)

Reading, seen in this way, has tremendous transformative value; it can reveal, retrospectively, the value and possibility in a broad range of experiences and perspectives, but not as the result of the 'genius' of the author, but rather through the confrontation between reality and perspective that they embody¹⁹². This is why *Françoise le Champi* becomes such a formative text for Marcel; not because of its 'absolute' value, but rather because it retains for him associations of the past, and is caught up not simply as a document, interchangeable with any other, but as a memory of encountering the process of reading and comprehending at work:

La littérature qui se contente de 'décrire les choses,' d'en donner seulement un misérable relevé de lignes et de surfaces, est celle qui, tout en s'appelant réaliste, est la plus éloignée de la réalité, celle qui nous appauvrit et nous attriste le plus, car elle coupe brusquement toute communication de notre moi présent avec le passé, dont les choses gardaient l'essence, et l'avenir, où elles nous incitent à le goûter de nouveau. (2277)

¹⁹² Unfortunately, Gerald Gillespie's interpretation of Proust in *Proust, Mann, Joyce in the Modernist Context*. buys into the overwhelming myth of the author-genius, as he characterizes the Goncourt 'quotation' as being "mere pastiche" and claims that "Proust mimics or parodies entire structures of narration as enormous subtexts generic in scope and subsumed in him and his book" (298).

Such a literature requires exposure over time, which multiplies and complicates its engagement with the present because it encounters a new ‘present’ and a new ‘reader’ each time.

The Duchess also shows him the importance of prolonged reading; “Mme de Guermantes, au déclin de sa vie, avait senti s'éveiller en soi des curiosités nouvelles. Le monde n'avait plus rien à lui apprendre. ... En revanche, lisant, allant au théâtre, elle eût souhaité avoir un prolongement de ces lectures, de ces spectacles” (2367). As she prolongs her reading and viewing, she is able to retain a curiosity and exposure to new things which few others are able to sustain. This is also the case with Bergotte, who dies in the museum before Ver Meer’s *View of the Delft* because his curiosity has been piqued by an article about its exactitude and beauty;

Il passa devant plusieurs tableaux et eut l'impression de la sécheresse et de l'inutilité d'un art si factice... Enfin il fut devant le Ver Meer, qu'il se rappelait plus éclatant, plus différent de tout ce qu'il connaissait, mais où, grâce à l'article du critique, il remarqua pour la première fois des petits personnages en bleu, que le sable était rose, et enfin la précieuse matière du tout petit pan de mur jaune. ... “C'est ainsi que j'aurais dû écrire, disait-il. Mes derniers livres sont trop secs, il aurait fallu passer plusieurs couches de couleur, rendre ma phrase en elle-même précieuse, comme ce petit pan de mur jaune.” (1743)

Although there is a certain melancholy recognition here in this moment of death, Marcel seems to also point to the fact that Bergotte is capable of re-reading, of coming to a new understanding through sustained and comparative viewings¹⁹³. He recognizes the ‘artificial’ aspects of his own

¹⁹³ Phillippe Chardin, in his *Proust ou le bonheur du petit personnage qui compare* also highlights the contradictory but omnipresent comparative energy of the novel; he notes that Proust asserts the irreducibility of his work on the one hand, but on the other, continually “proposer les rapprochements les plus paradoxaux et les plus incongrus entre des œuvres appartenant à des époques, à des genres, à des traditions nationales ou à des arts complètement hétérogènes! Ainsi encore l’euphorie de comparer a pour envers glauque chez Proust, dans l’amour-jalousie, le désespoir d’être ‘comparable’” (228). Applied to Bergotte, this seems fitting as well; his melancholy resignation to being reducible, comparable, to other melodramas coming at the same moment he forges a comparative link.

writing, and wishes to alter his conception of the task before him. The work of art, in all its complexity and diversity, gives him desire and energy to complete his work, even if his health does not grant him time to carry it out.

Through this recognition of the necessity of human understanding, Marcel is able to level many of the problematic hierarchies which have led him to disqualify himself as a creator before; he realizes that even in his pursuit of ‘frivolous’ women, there is a great deal of widely-applicable human drama: “l’important n’est pas la valeur de la femme mais la profondeur de l’état” (655). This allows him to push back against a hierarchical and progressive consideration of art, and assert that there is no ‘advancement’ in art, only a succession of those able to see and express what they see at work. Swann is the first to point him to this as he praises the anonymous stone-cutters and sculptors of the church in Balbec: “comment, me dit-il, vous avez été déçu par ce porche, mais c’est la plus belle Bible historiée que le peuple ait jamais pu lire. ... C’est fou, c’est divin, c’est mille fois supérieur à tout ce que vous verrez en Italie où d’ailleurs ce tympan a été littéralement copié par des sculpteurs de bien moins de génie” (660-61). Swann valorizes a different mode of reading which involves adaptation to local circumstance: individual minds apprehending and creating and criticizing a myth in their own community, without reference to any other school of thought or aesthetic ideal. Though ‘inaccurate’ in many ways, the figures of the Balbec church represent a far more vibrant and thoughtful examination of the Christian figures they depict than the ‘sanctioned,’ curated, and utterly instrumentalized works of the Italian ‘masters.’ The Duke, and to some extent Charlus as well, cannot comprehend this; speaking of Elstir’s paintings, he remarks, “ce qu’on apprécie là dedans, c’est que c’est finement observé, amusant, parisien, et puis on passe. Il n’y a pas besoin d’être un érudit pour regarder ça” (1130). Believing that his credentials as an ‘erudite’ observer allow him to determine the

absolute value of the paintings, he can only recycle the same tired valorization of old ‘masters’ and ends up selling his Elstirs for a mock Velasquez. Thus because there is no possibility for a “School of” Balbec statues, they resist classification and subordination to abstract principles and show instead the individual human practice of discourse and creation at work.

Marcel, who was taught to value philosophical discourse and aesthetic principles, in the end comes to disavow them as irrelevant to a living work of art:

Une oeuvre où il y a des théories est comme un objet sur lequel on laisse la marque du prix. Encore cette dernière ne fait-elle qu'exprimer une valeur qu'au contraire en littérature le raisonnement logique diminue. On raisonne, c'est-à-dire on vagabonde, chaque fois qu'on n'a pas la force de s'astreindre à faire passer une impression par tous les états successifs qui aboutiront à sa fixation, à l'expression. (2274)

When an author fixates on a ‘sujet,’ or a critic on some ephemeral (or worse, merely self-determined) quality of language or theory of expression, all that follows is derivative and circular, only going, like the faculty of reason itself, to prove that it has the validity it claims to possess, and saying nothing about the human condition¹⁹⁴. Like Brichtot, or Norpois, these technically impeccable but depressingly vapid ‘creators’ are unable to produce anything except self-congratulating discourse amenable to closed (and generally male) societies of ‘experts’; against this his contrasts Jupien’s reading ability:

Je ne connaissais pas d'homme qui, sous le rapport de l'intelligence et de la sensibilité, fût aussi doué que Jupien; car cet ‘acquis’ délicieux qui faisait la trame spirituelle de ses propos ne lui venait d'aucune de ces instructions de collègue, d'aucune de ces cultures

¹⁹⁴ Judith Ryan, in her analysis of empiricism in modernism in *The Vanishing Subject*, argues that for Proust, “as the novel progresses, the individual subject becomes increasingly unbounded, and the characters become set of complexly self-reflecting projections of the narrating imagination. This tendency towards unlimited expansion subverts the narrative quest for a single explicative theory underlying the complexities of experience” (187). Ryan, despite her lucid claim, then undoes it by attempting to pin Proust to various thought traditions of his day.

d'université qui auraient pu faire de lui un homme si remarquable quand tant de jeune gens du monde ne tirent d'elles aucun profit. C'était son simple sens inné, son goût naturel, qui de rares lectures faites au hasard, sans guide, à des moments perdus, lui avaient fait composer ce parler si juste où toutes les symétries du langage se laissaient découvrir et montraient leur beauté. (2240)

Being 'sans guide' is taboo in an Academy-sanctioned literary landscape, but it is the only way to find an independent and valuable mode of reading. For Marcel, meaningful modes of looking are imbedded in humble, but thoughtful, people in whatever situation they are in, and can do far more to show how works of art are created and received than the artificial mode of reception of the Academy. This is why at the end of the performance of *La Berma*, "j'aurais mieux aimé connaître leur [princesse et duchesse de Guermantes] jugement sur *Phèdre* que celui du plus grand critique du monde. Car dans le sien je n'aurais trouvé que de l'intelligence, de l'intelligence supérieure à la mienne, mais de même nature" (789). Although he doesn't yet know the Duchess, he values in advance—perhaps for its transgressive potential to reach outside of the discourse he has known—her personal, but different, opinion; in asking these women, he would be able to find out more about the work of art itself, whereas all that the 'grand critique' would be able to teach him is about his own theory of art.

This is what Odette is able to teach Swann as well; at first, he is charmed when she takes him to popular (i.e. "low-class") plays and events she is accustomed to:

C'était pour la douceur d'être initié dans toutes les conceptions d'Odette, de se sentir de moitié dans tous ses goûts. Ce charme de le rapprocher d'elle, qu'avaient les ouvrages ou les lieux qu'elle aimait, lui semblait plus mystérieux que celui qui est intrinsèque à de plus beaux, mais qui ne la lui rappelaient pas ... il pensait que les objets de nos goûts

n'ont pas en eux une valeur absolue, mais que tout est affaire d'époque, de classe, consiste en modes, dont les plus vulgaires valent celles qui passent pour les plus distinguées. (202)

Through Odette, he is able to see the operation of a different value system, and critique his own; unfortunately he comes to abandon his own initial position entirely, as does Odette, who realizes that there is more social prestige associated with some plays and salons than others. She fixates on the need to 'market' herself, and arrests herself into a constant, artificial work of art; by the second volume of the *Recherche*, he remarks that "Odette s'était enfin découvert, ou inventé, une physionomie personnelle, un 'caractère' immuable, un 'genre de beauté,' et sur ses traits décousus ... lui avaient composé tant bien que mal, selon son humeur et selon sa mine, un visage épars, journalier, informe et charmant – avait appliqué ce type fixe, comme une jeunesse immortelle" (488). Her consciousness of participating in a "genre" results in the artificial, preservative measures she takes; unlike her gender-bending portrait by Elstir, she now wishes to assert a fixed and unambiguous 'character' to the world, rendering herself incapable of the spontaneous, generous and unconscious beauty which is what attracted Swann to her in the first place. This is what Marcel sees at work in the Duke as well—wishing so much to assert himself as a man of importance and taste, he becomes the lead in a genre of contemporaries as forgettable as they are expendable; stilted and self-serving, the social reality in which he moves is unvarying, or as Marcel discusses in relation to the Verdurin salon, "le monde étant le royaume du néant, il n'y a, entre les mérites des différentes femmes du monde, que des degrés insignifiants, que peuvent seulement follement majorer les rancunes ou l'imagination de M. de Charlus" (1811). Only someone with a taxonomy of perjoratives like Charlus would be able to distinguish between the utterly forgettable genres; however, through the *narrative* of that social

reality, the normative force of that generic demon can be resisted, and the operation of human reality can be interrogated in its most petty and widespread forms.

This is why figures like Charlus and Françoise continue to fascinate Marcel; they take their own social situations and apply to them a willful and deforming viewpoint, but in so doing, reveal how a method accomplishes its ends. Françoise's almost 'prophetic' powers of divination, though misapplied, tend, "comme les fables auxquelles Platon croyait, à une fausse conception du monde et à des idées préconçues" (1024); she becomes a philosopher not in the objects of her study, but in the method she employs. Marcel, denigrating Plato, elevates the method of inquiry and narrative he pursues, linking it to Françoise and her also-deformed worldview, but thereby showing how that very deformation may be vital to coming to any understanding of how human relations operate¹⁹⁵. This is the conclusion he comes to with Swann and Odette; although Swann's moment of insight involves denouncing Odette as a woman "qui ne me plaisait pas, qui n'était pas mon genre!" (305), he shows how the process of discarding a genre- and type-based social viewpoint can lead to unexpected insights. Marcel considers, at the end of his work, the effect that Odette, the woman not of the 'right' genre, can have: "une femme qui est notre genre est rarement dangereuse, car ou elle ne veut pas de nous, ou nous contente et nous quitte vite, ne s'installe pas dans notre vie, et ce qui est dangereux et procréateur de souffrances dans l'amour, ce n'est pas la femme elle-même, c'est sa présence de tous les jours, la curiosité de ce qu'elle fait à tous moments" (2381). To constantly circle in the easy zone of predictable outcomes and already-affirmed realities is sterile; the dangerous incorporation of difference, through the

¹⁹⁵ Vincent Descombes, despite what I characterized earlier as a "simplistic" reading of Françoise, does recognize that Proust's strategy insists on narrative over philosophy; he argues that "les critiques nous dissent que Proust a transpose sa pensée, déjà formulée théoriquement, dans une narration. Ma thèse a été que ce n'était pas exact, pour deux raisons. D'une part, plusieurs idées de l'essai ne peuvent recevoir aucune transposition narrative, à moins d'être grandement corrigées ou prises pour de simples façons de parler... Mais il y a plus: le roman pris comme roman offre les éléments d'une autre philosophie et peut faire l'objet d'une lecture philosophique à *part* de l'essai dont il est censé illustrer les dogmes" (293).

dissolution of ‘genre,’ is the only method which can procreate. Because the outcome is not known in advance, this cross-pollination of genres and species is dangerous and yet it is the only method which can produce hardy, original subjects.

This is at the root of Marcel’s criticism of Charlus’ increasing fixation with particular ‘types’ and ‘situations’; the inverts he is pursuing can only ever duplicate what he has already known, and thus he is attracted to endless clones of himself. This tendency is what Proust rails against in his excoriation of critics, who, in his view, can only ever approach a work of art with a view of what has already been done and said, and are incapable of experiencing it, like the general public, as a work fundamentally different from that which it has already read:

Leur logomachie se renouvelle de dix ans en dix ans (car le kaléidoscope n'est pas composé seulement par les groupes mondains, mais par les idées sociales, politiques, religieuses qui prennent une ampleur momentanée grâce à leur réfraction dans les masses étendues, mais restent limitées malgré cela à la courte vie des idées dont la nouveauté n'a pu séduire que des esprits peu exigeants en fait de preuves). Ainsi s'étaient succédé les partis et les écoles, faisant se prendre à eux toujours les mêmes esprits, hommes d'une intelligence relative. (2283)

Like M. de Norpois—with his diplomatic jargon and aversion to saying anything which hasn’t already been established—the economy of criticism relies on currency of sameness, which must be duplicated and printed again and again to retain its value. It can neither create originals, nor view anything without subordinating it to abstract principals. Odette notices this about Swann’s writing; knowing little about the content of his art critiques, she “se plaignait que quand Swann faisait métier d’écrivain, quand il publiait des études, on ne reconnût pas ces traits-là autant que dans ses lettres ou dans sa conversation où ils abondaient. Elle lui conseillait de leur faire la part

plus grande. Elle l'aurait voulu parce que c'était ceux qu'elle préférait en lui" (376). Although Swann clearly ignores this advice as a charming but useless comment of the uninitiated, Marcel recognizes that this is a structural problem of genre writing: separation from the self seems necessary to remain objective, but it can only lead to ossification and abstraction. Only through his experience of juxtapositional social worlds—the Swanns *and* the Guermantes, Gilberte *and* Albertine—as well as of disparate professional contexts—soldiers, collectors, musicians, prostitutes—is Marcel able to reclaim his own voice. As with Swann and the Duchess, who, although they have a remarkably similar style and an uncanny ability to complement each other, do not attempt to copy each other, and can produce originals which interact in new and unexpected ways. It is only through the narrative that these unmatched 'ends' can be placed in a productive, and in that sense, dangerous, context together.

Writing in any genre assures that whatever is expressed will not undermine the power structures which dictate what discourse is authorized, and what is not. This is what M. de Norpois deploras about everything 'modern' when he reassures himself and Marcel that his negative judgment about his poem was 'correct': "il me semble que notre temps fait une confusion de genres et que le proper du romancier est plutôt de nouer une intrigue et d'élever les cœurs que de figoler à la pointe sèche un frontispiece ou un cul-de-lampe" (916). He deploras the elevation of style and interiority, and wishes for a merely descriptive account which will reassure him of the validity of his own perspective. Marcel considers this judgment at the end of his work and rejects it vehemently once again; he argues that those who go looking for a 'subject' and never think critically about the method or stance which their narration takes "voulait que le roman fût une sorte de défilé cinématographique des choses. Cette conception était absurde. Rien ne s'éloigne plus de ce que nous avons perçu en réalité qu'une telle vue

cinématographique” (2275). Marcel isn’t denigrating the cinematic mode so much as recognizing that it is a mode of perception, a willful one, and that anyone believing that there is a simple and neutral ‘reality’ to be recorded or accessed will never be able to produce anything that can stand up to scrutiny. Thus while figures such as the Duchess can have a deformative and regressive view, they are also, through their consistent opposition to what is assumed to be ‘common’ and ‘real,’ able to create a generative potential. She does end up championing some of the only truly new developments in art and literature, even if it is only as a favor to a friend or out of spite: “ces jugements subversifs, isolés et malgré tout justes, sont ainsi portés dans le monde par de rares personnes supérieures aux autres. Et ils y dessinent les premier lineaments de la hiérarchie des valeurs telle que l’établira la generation suivante au lieu de s’en tenir éternellement à l’ancienne” (908). A generative reading can be deferred—can require another *generation* to see any results—but Marcel recognizes that this is the only way in which a transformation of values and judgment becomes possible. Though he also sees how willfully the Duchess rewrites her past—as she wishes to present herself as an eternal champion of new and aspiring actresses in the last volume, when she spent much of the first three excluding them—he recognizes that it is not so much *what* one reads as *how* it is read, and an inclusive reading practice can make of even the most banal or moralistic works something new.

The frequent recurrence of Balzac suggests that Proust is calling attention to the ‘how’ over the ‘what’ there as well (as a side note, the fact that Balzac chose to stage *La Comédie humaine* in many separate novels adds another layer to Proust’s choice, unlike Faulkner, to write just one). When Charlus talks about Balzac on the train, or at the party, he does it with an assurance that he understands the meaning of every episode and with confidence that the desired novelistic ending (especially as he quotes it to the young boys at the Saint-Euverte party) will

come about. Gilberte also uses Balzac at Tansonville to try to talk to Marcel about Robert's homosexuality, and he in turn tries to use it to interrogate her about Albertine's claim that Gilberte herself was "mauvaise genre":

Justement, reprit Gilberte, le livre que je tiens parle de ces choses. C'est un vieux Balzac que je pioche pour me mettre à la hauteur de mes oncles, la Fille aux yeux d'Or. Mais c'est absurde, invraisemblable, un beau cauchemar. D'ailleurs, une femme peut, peut-être, être surveillée ainsi par une autre femme, jamais par un homme. – Vous vous trompez, j'ai connu une femme qu'un homme qui l'aimait était arrivé véritablement à séquestrer ; elle ne pouvait jamais voir personne et sortait seulement avec des serviteurs dévoués. – Hé bien, cela devrait vous faire horreur à vous qui êtes si bon. Justement nous disions avec Robert que vous devriez vous marier. Votre femme vous guérirait et vous feriez son bonheur. – Non, parce que j'ai trop mauvais caractère. – Quelle idée ! – Je vous assure ! J'ai, du reste, été fiancé, mais je n'ai pas pu me décider à l'épouser' ... C'était, en effet, sous cette forme trop simple que je jugeais mon aventure avec Albertine, maintenant que je ne voyais plus cette aventure que du dehors. (2138)

When regarded as a simple narrative, especially as here, as a narrative with a clear *moral* and pedagogical purpose, it becomes utilitarian, and elides the possibility of difference (other than as a "beau cauchemar"); Gilberte flattens Balzac's novella into a titillating and sin-laden adventure, regarding it as well from the perspective of "du dehors" rather than from within. It also *ends* at the point at which a moral is assigned; here the fantasy of a successful heterosexual romantic coupling comes to suggest the end of narrative, the end of the painful, queer rupture that Albertine has embodied for him, and the start of another series of lies, as Gilberte and Robert's marriage demonstrates.

Much of the *Recherche* is devoted to introspective examination of how to characterize and represent queer or non-normative lives and desires within narratives that seem to demand such closure. Given the trajectory of two of the queer characters, Morel and Andrée, who both end up in heterosexual marriages, there's an obvious social pressure behind what Andrée claims was Albertine's 'true' desire to marry Marcel, to save her from the alleged traffic in 'laundresses' she had established with Morel: "elle espérait que vous la sauveriez, que vous l'épouseriez. Au fond, elle sentait que c'était une espèce de folie criminelle" (2056). This panic to affirm a heteronormative narrative is behind Charlus' violent attacks on men who proposition him under the wrong circumstances, and behind Robert's continual denial of his homosexuality. Marcel mourns for the loss of his friendship and confidence, now that Robert feels compelled to perform a paranoid heterosexuality; he recognizes that because of this pressure, and because he has had to learn the 'truth' about Robert from others, "nous n'avons plus aucun moyen, l'heure est passée de le faire savoir à notre âme; ses communications avec le réel sont fermées; aussi ne pouvons-nous jouir de la découverte, il est trop tard" (2123). This is a recognition that alterity is constantly under threat of annihilation, and it is generally only *after* its end that it can be examined. Thus to represent and value the difference that queer lives enact means undermining the structure of narrative itself. The eruption of the discourse of inversion in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* insists on thematizing erasure in order to allow for the possibility of discourse to arise; he notes that taboos and threats of violence do nothing to 'destroy' Sodom and Gomorrah, they merely force their inhabitants underground, and require them to erase themselves to survive: "se sont fixés sur toute la terre, ils ont eu accès à toutes les professions, et entrent si bien dans les clubs les plus fermés que, quand un sodomiste n'y est pas admis, les boules noires y sont en majorité celles de sodomistes, mais qui ont soin d'incriminer la sodomie, ayant hérité le

mensonge qui permet à leurs ancêtres de quitter la ville maudite” (1232). To treat alterity as something which has been destroyed merely eradicates the possibility of its expression, not the reality of it. “Inversion,” in Proustian terms, is a human reality, and the question is only whether you will allow it to enrich and inform narrative, or whether you will continue to drive its expression into successive and unsuccessful closets¹⁹⁶.

While Albertine is the most consistent reminder of this anxiety about narrative and reality, Marcel recognizes that all those who feel compelled to lie (or find pleasure in it) are “êtres de fuite” (1671) who remain insistently different, and require a different conception of the universe: “ce n’est pas un univers, c’est des millions, presque autant qu’il existe de prunelles et d’intelligences humaines” (1746). Through constant self-examination and the haunting and necessarily-belated readings of those others (as well as attempts to see from different “prunelles” and “intelligences”), Marcel recognizes that *only* through these mediocre, often self-interested, but enigmatic “êtres en fuite” can he come to a different mode of narrative:

Le mensonge, le mensonge parfait, sur les gens que nous connaissons, sur les relations que nous avons eues avec eux, sur notre mobile dans telle action formulé par nous d'une façon toute différente, le mensonge sur ce que nous sommes, sur ce que nous aimons, sur ce que nous éprouvons à l'égard de l'être qui nous aime, et qui croit nous avoir façonné semblable à lui parce qu'il nous embrasse toute la journée, ce mensonge-là est une des seules choses au monde qui puisse nous ouvrir des perspectives sur du nouveau, sur de l'inconnu, qui puisse éveiller en nous des sens endormis pour la contemplation d'univers que nous n'aurions jamais connus. (1766)

¹⁹⁶ Pericles Lewis, in his discussion of Proust in *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel*, examines the persistent disavowal of identity politics in his treatment of Jews and homosexuals and concludes that it “suggests a radical instability of political identity in modern society, an instability not based on some essence of Judaism or homosexuality which resists the ‘communitarian’ logic of mass or democratic society, but based on the existence of differences within such a society that cannot be easily homogenized” (166).

Like the novel itself, the lie is a micro-deformation of reality which allows the hearer/viewer to recognize the deformations he or she is always already enacting upon it. This is the only way that Marcel is able to deal with Albertine's disappearance; he accepts her insistent difference and unassimilability into narrative as a painful but necessary mental state:

J'aurais pu déduire diverses conséquences de ce caractère subjectif de mon amour, et, qu'étant un état mental, il pouvait notamment survivre assez longtemps à la personne, mais aussi que n'ayant avec cette personne aucun lien véritable, n'ayant aucun soutien en dehors de soi, il devrait, comme tout état mental, même les plus durables, se trouver un jour hors d'usage, être 'remplacé,' et que ce jour-là tout ce qui semblait m'attacher si doucement, indissolublement, au souvenir d'Albertine n'existerait plus pour moi. (2023-24)

Regarding her as a "mental state," he is able to see how her disappearance will give him an 'end' without erasing her entirely; her possibility still exists within the things she has touched and affected, and yet she retains her difference¹⁹⁷. Because queer lives such as Albertine's are so often forcibly erased, the act of erasure and disappearance takes on significant weight; to Charlus, it becomes a matter of equal importance that human "masterpieces" (i.e. the beautiful soldiers of both armies in WWI) are being destroyed alongside architectural masterpieces (2207). The battle of Méséglise, which Gilberte tells him about, annihilates the Guermantes estates and reduces Combray to shambles, and yet the narrative is able to recuperate these losses by inscribing their erasure in another form.

¹⁹⁷ This is reminiscent of Gavin's lament for Eula, for the inarticulate possibility she embodied: "because who would miss a dimension? Who indeed but would be better off for having lost it, who had nothing in the first place to offer but just devotion, eighteen years of devotion, the ectoplasm of devotion too thin to be drowned by scorn, warned by hatred, annealed by grief. That's it: unpin, shed, cast off the last clumsy and anguished dimension, and so be free" (*The Town* 288). He fantasizes about what it would mean to "cast off" this dimension entirely, but the news of her suicide reinforces his belief in the viability and centrality of this seemingly negligible "dimension."

Thus although Albertine disappears, her persistence as a memory—one that is never fully assimilated into the narrative—allows her erasure to persist; her existence from the first pages is multiplied and fractured by participating in the band of ‘jeunes filles’ rather than as a single individual. Whereas Bloch’s assertions that all young girls are simply ‘waiting’ for sex leads him to view them all as prostitutes, at Balbec he is confronted with a different value system; there seems to be something at work with the ‘jeunes filles’ beyond simple sexual gratification: “pour les belles filles qui passaient, du jour où j’avais su que leurs joues pouvaient être embrassées, j’étais devenu curieux de leur âme. Et l’univers m’avait paru plus intéressant” (564). Regarding them not as objects, but as ‘souls,’ Marcel finds something different in their beauty than merely a means to an end; he finds in them such unique and irreconcilable ends that the ‘jeunes filles’ can never be assimilated into one narrative: “c’est pour cela que les femmes un peu difficiles, qu’on ne possède pas tout de suite, dont on ne sait même pas tout de suite qu’on pourra jamais les posséder, sont les seules intéressantes. Car les connaître, les approcher, les conquérir, c’est faire varier de forme, de grandeur, de relief l’image humaine” (1027). Because he is forced to continually confront Albertine as a composite image, he finds a human shape which has an unexpected and irreducible surplus value; she detaches herself from the exclusively sexual context and breaks down the barriers of distinction between the worlds he has known¹⁹⁸. These considerations lift the anonymity of ‘strangers’ and estrange those who seem familiar and easily-accessible; he recognizes this early on in his walks on the Guermantes way, as he spots, outside what he assumes is a brothel, a woman “qui sans doute était venue, selon l’expression populaire ‘s’enterrer’ là, goûter le plaisir amer de sentir que son nom, le nom surtout de celui dont elle n’avait pu garder le coeur, y était inconnu, s’encadrait dans la fenêtre qui ne lui laissait pas

¹⁹⁸ William Carter, in *The Proustian Quest*, discusses the “femme-paysage” dilemma Marcel faces; “he identifies each desired girl’s ‘soul’ with a particular essence of a city or landscape that he yearns to explore. He imagines sexual contentment as a voyage, but, like Baudelaire’s voyager, the protagonist never finds what he seeks” (27).

regarder plus loin que la barque amarrée près de la porte” (141). Although she is ‘trapped,’ in more ways than one, Marcel also recognizes that she is exerting a certain freedom through her instrumentalization; like the ‘jeunes filles,’ she retains her difference as well, even in a somewhat ‘abject’ state, from a societal perspective.

Thus, when Marcel comes to ‘interring’ Albertine in his apartments, he must also confront this impossibility of owning or consolidating her; initially, he views his situation in an egocentric manner, thinking of himself as Orestes being pursued by the ‘furies’ of her alleged lesbianism, and regarding the ‘captivity’ of his suffering as “une ‘terra incognita’ terrible” (1593). However, what he eventually comes to realize, long after her disappearance and death, is how very ‘known’ the imprisonment to which he has subjected her is. He recognizes his own role in instrumentalizing her when he attempts to use another girl as a surrogate for his despair; seeing a young girl on the street, he (in his account, at least) merely offers her money to brighten her day, rather than demanding sex from her. He ends up in court with her parents, and in an episode eerily reminiscent of Quentin’s court appearance for ‘molesting’ the Italian girl, Marcel must defend himself for a crime he didn’t commit, all the time recognizing that he *is* implicated in another, unknown crime:

Il y a des moments de la vie où une sorte de beauté naît de la multiplicité des ennuis qui nous assaillent, entrecroisés comme des leitmotive wagnériens, de la notion aussi, émergente alors, que les événements ne sont pas situés dans l'ensemble des reflets peints dans le pauvre petit miroir que porte devant elle l'intelligence et qu'elle appelle l'avenir, qu'ils sont en dehors et surgissent aussi brusquement que quelqu'un qui vient constater un flagrant délit. Déjà, laissé à lui-même, un événement se modifie, soit que l'échec nous l'amplifie ou que la satisfaction le réduise. Mais il est rarement seul. (1937)

The “Wagnerian” drama is in the ironic and fitting fact that in having “imprisoned” Albertine, he has escaped without consequence, but in his (likely) singular episode of a genuinely *non*-sexual interaction with a young girl, he is forced to stand trial for his debauchery. In this way, belatedly, but not without import, he must confront his own actions, and the narratives he has constructed about Albertine. Reading her letters, and listening to the conflicting “facts” about her life, he realizes “que le système des causes nombreuses d'une seule action, dont Albertine était adepte dans ses rapports avec ses amies quand elle laissait croire à chacune que c'était pour elle qu'elle était venue, n'était qu'une sorte de symbole artificiel, voulu, des différents aspects que prend une action selon le point de vue où on se place” (2067), and concludes that, “si les actes restent ainsi incertains, comment les personnes elles-mêmes ne le seraient-elles pas ?” (2068). He realizes that there are never simply acts or events, that instead there is a system of motivations and circumstances that surround every person which make universalizing and abstract judgments impossible; Marcel finds that the world is occupied by humans, not concepts, and that he has wasted a great deal of potential pleasure and security by confusing the two.

The moral dimension of this attempt to understand is clear as Marcel tries (at least in part) to come to terms with Albertine’s bisexuality¹⁹⁹; he stages his own ‘realistic’ encounter as he pays some ‘laundresses’ to do ‘what Albertine did’ while he watches, and he realizes that he is unable to comprehend “une sensation que nous n’éprouvons pas” (2018). This leads him to consider what it is that he thinks anyone ever could ‘disclose’ to him about Albertine:

Les romanciers prétendent souvent, dans une introduction, qu'en voyageant dans un pays ils ont rencontré quelqu'un qui leur a raconté la vie d'une personne. Ils laissent alors la

¹⁹⁹ Alison Finch, in her discussion of “Love, Friendship, and Sexuality” in Proust, demonstrates the many critical attempts to ‘settle’ Albertine into either/or categories, which do not do justice to the complex slippage that her (likely) bisexuality represents. She argues that the way Albertine negotiates her status as Marcel’s ‘amie’ has “serious (‘grandes et fâcheuses’) consequences. For it gives birth to an almost family feeling, a moral kernel, which will always subsist in his love for her” (180).

parole à cet ami de rencontre, et le récit qu'il leur fait, c'est précisément leur roman. Ainsi la vie de Fabrice del Dongo fut racontée à Stendhal par un chanoine de Padoue. Combien nous voudrions, quand nous aimons, c'est-à-dire quand l'existence d'une autre personne nous semble mystérieuse, trouver un tel narrateur informé ! Et certes il existe. Nous-même, ne racontons-nous pas souvent, sans aucune passion, la vie de telle ou telle femme à un de nos amis, ou à un étranger, qui ne connaissaient rien de ses amours et nous écoutent avec curiosité ? L'homme que j'étais quand je parlais à Bloch de la princesse de Guermantes, de Mme Swann, cet être-là existait qui eût pu me parler d'Albertine, cet être-là existe toujours... mais nous ne le rencontrons jamais. Il me semblait que, si j'avais pu trouver des femmes qui l'eussent connue, j'eusse appris tout ce que j'ignorais. Pourtant, à des étrangers il eût dû sembler que personne autant que moi ne pouvait connaître sa vie.

(2019)

He recognizes that the wish to find an 'omniscient' narrator is flawed, and that the omniscient narrator is within ourselves, as we attempt to disclose our experiences. But it is intentionally staged here in his attempt to learn that which he *cannot* learn, as he attempts to come to terms with the absolute sexual difference that Albertine represents, and to understand what she may have felt²⁰⁰. The consideration of narrative as an individual negotiation of meaning brings him, surprisingly, to an ethical consideration of how to accept and disclose difference.

Proust refuses, however, to disclose that difference, or to give parameters in which one comes to recognize it as such; throughout the *Recherche*, in fact, it is often *not* the 'inversions'

²⁰⁰ Eveline Killian, in her comparative analysis of Proust and Dorothy Richardson, aligns herself with other commentators on Proust who find him 'insufficiently' queer, and criticize the position he takes with his jealousy of Albertine, asserting that, unlike Richardson, "the heteronormative order offers him subject positions into which he can comfortably settle without compromise: the bachelor who entertains occasional heterosexual affairs, the invalid, the secluded writer. In other words, he is not really perceived as an outsider at all ... queer time in the *Recherche* only surfaces in isolated instances and does not unfold a sustained impact on the novel as a whole" (352). This kind of comparison tends to only posit a sort of 'paradise' of queerness which requires adherence to particular—and retrospective—norms and dogmas to be included in the (artificial) category.

which render the most surprising results. Situations such as Mlle Vinteuil and her ‘amie’ who replicate the sadistic aspects of a dysfunctional heterosexual affair as a “*privilège des méchants*” (136) show that any formation of human intimacy can flatten difference and subordinate it into an ossified structure, whereas the truly transgressive moments of sexuality are those which maintain difference, in whatever guise. Marcel experiences this disruption of his simplistic moral universe early, in his first meeting with Odette (at that point just the ‘*dame en rose*’), at his uncles house; trained to see a cardboard cutout of immorality in the ‘*cocotte*,’ he instead becomes fascinated by her complex reality: “*et pourtant en pensant à ce que devait être sa vie, l’immoralité m’en troublait peut-être plus que si elle avait été concrétisée devant moi en une apparence spéciale, - d’être ainsi invisible comme le secret de quelque roman ... me faisaient malgré moi considérer comme un jeune fille de bonne famille, qui n’était plus d’aucune famille*” (69). Instead of seeing the Other, the spectacle or adultress from the pages of a novel, he finds something entirely different: a cousin, a woman of perhaps a good family like his own, barred from that family by conventions²⁰¹. She unsettles his sense of the world, even mentioning his father, with words of praise, which lead him to reconsider how his own family may be situated within the world. And this willingness to examine and come to a different conclusion is the most ‘transgressive’ act, far more than an illicit encounter with her would have been. Marcel also notices how language exercises this normative function as well as he analyzes the “*Amour de*

²⁰¹ Eve Sedgwick’s discussion of Proust in *Epistemology of the Closet* excoriates readers who attempt to discount the specificity of the ‘spectral’ closet she sees at work in Charlus and Albertine (but *not* Odette, as I would remark); “I know from some experience of interacting with people about this and related material how well lubricated, in contemporary critical practice and especially that of heterosexual readers, is the one-way chute from a certain specificity of discourse around gay issues and homophobia, by way of a momentarily specific pluralizing of those issues, to – with a whoosh of relief – the terminus of a magnetic, almost religiously numinous insistence on a notional ‘undecidability’ or ‘infinite plurality’ of ‘difference’ into whose vast and shadowy spaces the machinery of heterosexist presumption and homophobic projection will already, undetected, have had ample time to creep” (247). While acknowledging the nuance and intelligence of her reading, I would suggest that Proust’s insistent inversion would also identify the “homosexist presumption and heterophobic projection” at work in this very statement as well, and my own point would remain that an examination and interest in difference is possible, whether hetero-, homo-, bi- or pan-sexual, but only on a personal, and not a theoretical level.

Swann”; he realizes that no sexual reality is reducible to speech and legible in the same terms to everyone. Through Odette and Swann’s sex-talk about “faire catleya,” he realizes that “cette manière particulière de dire ‘faire l’amour’ ne signifiait-elle pas exactement la même chose que ses synonymes” (193). In other words, there really are no ‘synonyms’ for sexuality; it is an experience that is constructed anew (or at least *ought* to be), re-negotiated and renamed, in the unique verbal and physical reality of any couple.

But Proust also realizes that this is possible for some identities and not for others, or that there are always those willing to exploit contexts of knowledge to diminish and ostracize others, as “la société place successivement de façon différente des éléments qu’on avait crus immutables et compose une autre figure” (413). In such a mode, which he terms ‘journalistic,’ there are always casualties of the fight over legibility; this is the case with Jews throughout the novel, who are only ‘tolerated’ to the point at which they chafe against that toleration, and begin to ‘misbehave,’ at which point they are called out. This is the case with Swann, but also with Bloch, whose inability to read his environment contrasts so greatly with Marcel’s anxiety. When the Duke says appalling things at Mme de Villeparisis’, he is forgiven and excused, but when Bloch continually stumbles socially, the duchess begins whispering about him with “la gaieté curieuse et malveillante qu’inspire un groupement humain auquel nous nous sentons radicalement étrangers” (935). She holds the ‘truth’ of his identity because she is able to disclose it and make it stick, whereas anything Bloch says about her will merely be read as gossip. Marcel realizes this when Gilberte tells him her parents have forbidden her to play with him because he’s rumored to be hysterical and immoral, and he recognizes that even if he writes to defend himself, “la lettre que je lui écrivis, aussi ardente et aussi sincère que les paroles que j’avais dites à M. de Norpois, n’eut pas plus de succès” (392). Like the judgments about La Berma from Norpois, or

the psychologist's dismissal of Marcel's grandmother's illness as merely mental, those with 'authority' need only refer to their own notes, and can force others to fit into a context which does not allow them to read back against those who have set them in it.

Charlus is a fascinating liminal figure in this regard, as he both suffers from being labelled, as well as indulges in nearly constant labelling of others to suit his belief in a hypermasculine reality. Marcel recognizes this from the first time he sees Jupien and Charlus having sex²⁰²; while *he* as the spectator is able to see a scene "empreinté d'une étrangeté, ou si l'on veut d'un naturel, dont la beauté allait croissant" (2112), *Charlus* is only able to see beauty in sameness, or as Marcel comments, "l'inverti se croit seul de sa sorte dans l'univers; plus tard seulement, il se figure – autre exagération – que l'exception unique, c'est l'homme normal" (1259). Once he has gathered evidence that there is a pervasive sexual reality assimilable to his own, Charlus simply suppresses difference according to his new dogma. Marcel condemns this aspect of the 'race' of the inverts, not based on their sexuality, but on their Charlusian need to extinguish difference,

[Ils] formant une franc-maçonnerie bien plus étendue, plus efficace et moins soupçonnée que celle des loges, car elle repose sur une identité de goûts, de besoins, d'habitudes, de dangers, d'apprentissage, de savoir, de trafic, de glossaire, et dans laquelle les membres mêmes qui souhaitent de ne pas se connaître aussitôt se reconnaissent à des signes naturels ou de convention, involontaires ou voulus. (1221)

The obsession with an ossified identity leads to exploitative ventures like Jupien's brothel, in which the members of different classes are kept separate so that they can preserve the fantasy of

²⁰² Cyrania Johnson-Roullier, in *Reading on the Edge*, discusses the way that this observation comes to modify the earlier dichotomies, set up from the first pages of the novel, between reading/seeing and understanding: "with the narrator's realization of the existence of homosexuality in Jupien, and, more important, in the Baron de Charlus, it becomes obvious that the imagination plays a primary role not only in the way in which one conceives the identity of another human being, but the way in which the *sexual* identity of another human being is conceived" (62).

particular modes of difference while maintaining a rigid hierarchy conforming to a masculine-feminine binary. When a bomb forces the patrons, so carefully separated, into close and visible proximity, “beaucoup d'hommes, qui n'avaient pas voulu fuir, s'étaient réunis. Ils ne se connaissaient pas entre eux, mais étaient pourtant à peu près du même monde, riche et aristocratique. L'aspect de chacun avait quelque chose de repugnant” (2238). They find each other repugnant because they recognize the similarity of their situations and desires, finding instead of a unique and perverse sexuality an all-too-commodified and profitable system of exploitation. Unlike Marcel, who sees beauty in difference, Charlus demands absolute conformity to his fantasies, as he complains to Jupien “je ne le trouve pas assez brutal. Sa figure me plaît, mais il m'appelle ‘crapule’ comme si c'était une leçon apprise” (2223), and loathes anything that destabilizes his sense of the supremacy and divinity of the homosexual male. This is why he is so delighted when Mlle Vinteuil and her partner don't come to Mme Verdurin's party, as she remarks to Marcel, “elles le scandalisent énormément. Il a déclaré que leurs moeurs étaient à faire peur. Vous n'imaginez pas comme le baron est pudibond et sévère sur le chapitre des moeurs.” (1814). For Charlus, lesbians confound the orthodoxy of male supremacy and the centrality of male sexuality, and should, more than anything else, be demonized and eradicated. He speaks knowledgeably about the ‘science’ of sexology, which tortures Marcel, because it is not a theoretical question for him, but a real one, namely, “qu'est-ce que la femme peut représenter d'autre à Albertine?” (1835). He must consider her difference, and her longing for difference, and is tortured by the realization that he cannot fulfill her by himself.

Charlus, ever the champion of boys' clubs, also discounts the possibility that women's perspectives could disrupt the phallogentric “franc-maçonnerie” he sees as ruling all the houses of Europe; he assures his male listeners—naively—that war is ‘impossible’ because the Emperor

of Germany is also homosexual. M. de Vaugoubert also plays into this through his patronage of young homosexuals in his embassy, “extrêmement médiocres, en sorte que, si l'on cherchait quel avait pu être le motif du choix qui s'était porté sur elles, on ne pouvait découvrir que l'inversion” (1266). When one secretary stands out, partly for his competence, Charlus scoffs and tells Vaugoubert that the difference is that he's heterosexual; the competent secretary “fut bientôt remplacé par une Excellence nouvelle qui assura l'homogénéité de l'ensemble” (1266). The political “franc-maçonnerie” requires homogeneity, and exercises its expulsionary function to ensure it. When Marcel brings up some of the political commentary of the duchess or other women, Charlus laughs, saying “ma belle-sœur est une femme charmante qui s'imagine être encore au temps des romans de Balzac où les femmes influaient sur la politique. Sa fréquentation ne pourrait actuellement exercer sur vous qu'une action fâcheuse” (970). Unable to comprehend a world in which women can exert more than a purely decorative effect, Charlus contradicts his own admiration for the Balzacian universe in which he considers the duchess to delusionally live²⁰³. Like M. de Norpois, the language of these homosocial goups is “raffiné,” but requires everyone to employ “la même méthode de lecture” (944).

It seems that only when Charlus is in mixed company that he champions readings which break out of a rigid antiquarian mode. During their first stay at Balbec, Marcel's grandmother is criticized by Mme de Villeparisis for perpetually reading Mme de Sévigné; when Mme de Villeparisis wonders how the mother-daughter “amour” could possibly be meaningful or interesting enough to justify such prolific letter-writing (which is, by assumption, always illicit), Charlus responds,

²⁰³ Janet Beizer, in *Family Plots: Balzac's Narrative Generations*, she discusses this conservative impulse to ‘father’ texts and concludes that already in the trajectory of Balzac to Zola—not to mention Proust—there is “a metaphorical shift from male potency toward female fecundity and a correlative shift from narrative dissemination to narrative flow” (185), suggesting that Charlus' prejudice is already antiquated by the reality of French literary history.

Mais l'important dans la vie n'est pas ce qu'on aime...c'est d'aimer. Ce que ressentait Mme de Sévigné pour sa fille peut prétendre beaucoup plus justement ressembler à la passion que Racine a dépeinté dans *Andromaque* ou dans *Phèdre*, que les banales relations que le jeune Sévigné avait avec ses maîtresses. De même l'amour de tel mystique pour son Dieu. Les démarcations trop étroites que nous traçons autour de l'amour viennent seulement de notre grande ignorance de la vie. (603)

Charlus obviously has little interest in the particularities of mother-daughter relations, but his elevation of method over object is an inclusive gesture, attempting to expand the understanding of love from an exclusively heteronormative romantic fixation into a celebration of any sort of desire which elevates experience from the banal, physical reality into a productive linguistic fury²⁰⁴. Marcel also realizes that this quotidian sort of love is what he was actually looking for in Albertine; he was searching for “un être avec qui je pusse causer de tout, à qui je pusse me confier. Me confier? Mais d'autres êtres ne me montraient-ils pas plus de confiance qu'Albertine? Avec d'autres n'avais-je pas des causeries plus étendues? C'est que la confiance, la conversation, choses médiocres, qu'importe qu'elles soient plus ou moins imparfaites, si s'y mêle seulement l'amour, qui seul est divin” (1978). Here he recognizes that the intimacy of daily relations may well eclipse that of sexuality, precisely because they are mediocre and imperfect, rather than manicured and instrumentalized. This again resembles his grandmother, with her interest in antique furniture that falls apart when you sit on it, but which preserves a sense of the past, as well as her love of the bell tower of Saint-Hilaire, which she believes is a work of genius because

²⁰⁴ Elisabeth Ladenson, in *Proust's Lesbianism*, makes a great deal of this interchange as signaling a mother-daughter bond which excludes Marcel and sets up a “Gomorrah” discourse outside of phallogocentric performativity: “Because the grandmother is not presented as subject to the binary logic of paradox which governs the double nature of the invert, Proust never invites us to re-read this scene in terms of what it reveals about the grandmother herself. Such a re-reading would necessarily call into question the purity of maternal love as textualized in Sévigné's letters, suggesting that the grandmother also sees the letter writer's passion for her daughter as an example of same-sex love rather than simply the most canonically privileged example of maternal devotion” (122).

“elle semblait prendre conscience d’elle-même, affirmer une existence individuelle et responsable” (59). She values it not because it is impeccable, but because its deformity shows that it has come to a consciousness of itself, and carries its own identity; outside of an economy of mere use-value, the tower, like Séveigné, has been able to elevate itself into an articulation of relation not easily instrumentalized²⁰⁵.

This is what he comes to realize about Elstir’s marriage; initially confused by the painter’s attraction to a woman too plain, in Marcel’s estimation, to ‘deserve’ it, he eventually comes to recognize that her proximity and familiarity makes her a conduit of beauty to Elstir, and that the true artist “continuera pourtant à les rechercher, heureux de se trouver près d’eux à cause du plaisir spirituel, amorce du travail, qu’ils éveillent en lui” (669). Albertine, through her absence rather than her presence, comes to represent this ability to “nous mettre une femme dans la peau” (2297) which he saw at work in Elstir’s marriage. He quite literally wishes to ‘place’ her ‘within’ him in one of their first sexual encounters, as she lays on his bed in an inversion of their earlier positions (in which he attempted to violate her). He considers:

Certes je n’aimais nullement Albertine: fille de la brume du dehors, elle pouvait seulement contenter le désir imaginative que le temps nouveau avait éveillé en moi et qui était intermédiaire entre les désirs que peuvent satisfaire d’une part les arts de la cuisine et ceux de la sculpture monumentale, car il me faisait rêver à la fois de mêler à ma chair une matière différente et chaude, et d’attacher par quelque point à mon corps étendu un corps divergent, comme le corps d’Ève tenait à peine par les pieds à la hanche d’Adam.
(1020)

²⁰⁵ Michael Lucey, in his discussion of sexuality in Proust, interrogates the connection between the interest in particularities of language and style and the ‘disclosure’ of sexuality; “these socially circulating patterns of speech are the raw materials available for crafting or figuring a first person in different circumstances ... the composition of the novel reveals its interest in the processes of enunciation and figuration through which first persons come to be” (217).

Though there is certainly an instrumentalization of the female body in his description of her, it is also clearly marked as a desire to *incorporate* difference; not to regard it from outside, but to bring it into himself, like a culinary masterpiece, a sacramental consumption which does not actually reduce the ‘object,’ but instead changes the ‘subject.’ Whereas heteronormative pressure is assumed to require endless reproduction of the same, here it shifts, and becomes an incomplete possession or consumption; it becomes an addition, like Swann’s perception of Odette, “il sentait qu’une nouvelle personne s’était ainsi ajoutée à lui, sa vie lui paraissait plus intéressante” (188). Although Odette ends up causing him constant jealousy, and Swann desires to know everything about her, “inversement il lui était arrivé depuis de revenir de l’Odette de Crécy, peut-être trop connue des fêtards, des hommes à femmes, à ce visage d’une expression parfois si douce, à cette nature si humaine” (253). When he returns to the human image of her, rather than the possessive one, he is able to consider her as something outside of himself, comprehensible and beautiful on her own terms, rather than his.

This is also what Albertine enables in Marcel through her refusal to ‘confess’ the ‘truth’ of her queer relations with others. When he wonders, “pourquoi ne m’avait-elle pas dit : ‘J’ai ces goûts’ ? J’aurais cédé, je lui aurais permis de les satisfaire” (1985), he eventually recognizes that such a question and answer are possible only in retrospect, and he never would have asked or accepted an answer to it at the time: “je voyais maintenant que nous ne sommes pas libres de ne pas nous les forger et que nous avons beau connaître notre volonté, les autres êtres ne lui obéissent pas” (1985). Because she refused to ‘obey’ him and asserted her independence and difference, he finds himself unable to reconstruct a narrative about her, and he recognizes eventually that if she lives, it is only ‘within’ him: “le regret d’Albertine, parce que c’était lui qui faisait naître en moi le besoin d’une soeur, le rendait inassouvissable. Et au fur et à mesure que

mon regret d'Albertine s'affaiblirait, le besoin d'une soeur, lequel n'était qu'une forme inconsciente de ce regret, deviendrait moins impérieux” (2005). He recognizes that the need to find an interlocutor, a ‘sister’ to whom he can confess his desire and her sins, underlies his obsession with her, and that although her difference is what makes him able to forget her, it is also what renders her lifelike, and not merely an infinitely mutable extension of himself (which is what he assumes a sister would be, although Eleanor, Tony, Agathe, Caddy, and Judith’s positions in their respective families would suggest that this is a rather naïve view). This brings back the close proximity of familial and sexual relations; whereas the conventional view separates them, Marcel shows that the queerest relations are frequently within and not outside of the family. As with Mlle Vinteuil and her ‘amie,’ their affair takes place not in the bohemian circles of Paris, but in domestic Combray; “elles se produisent chaque fois qu’a besoin de se réserver la place et la sécurité qui lui sont nécessaires, un vice que la nature elle-même fait épanouir chez un enfant, parfois rien qu’en mêlant les vertus de son père et de sa mère, comme la couleur de ses yeux” (124). Like Stein’s assertion that “it takes time to make queer people, and to have others who can know it, time and a certainty of place and means” (*The Making of Americans* 21), Marcel also comes to the conclusion that what is needed to enable new modes of narrative which take account of queer lives and irreconcilable difference is not a flight from the family, but a trenchant, genealogical engagement with it.

The attempt to maintain a distinction between the queer and the familial and therefore fleeing from it is what Morel represents; when the upper-class brothel established in Mainville attracts the Prince of Guermantes to Morel, he invites him back to his villa, where the shimmering unreality of the bordello disappears because the Prince decorates (as do almost all the Guermantes) with family portraits:

Quand Morel se trouva seul et voulut regarder dans la glace si sa mère n'était pas dérangée, ce fut comme une hallucination. Sur la cheminée, les photographies, reconnaissables pour le violoniste, car il les avait vues chez M. de Charlus, de la princesse de Guermantes, de la duchesse de Luxembourg, de Mme de Villeparisis, le pétrifièrent d'abord d'effroi. Au même moment il aperçut celle de M. de Charlus, laquelle était un peu en retrait. Le baron semblait immobiliser sur Morel un regard étrange et fixe. Fou de terreur, Morel ... se mit à courir à toutes jambes sur la route. (1568)

The domestic scene, and the photographs of the family, remind Morel that his liaison with the Prince is, in more senses than a merely sexual one, a *liason*—it creates links, relations, which can be traced along familial lines. Like Jupien's brothel, such a deracinated and exploitative sexual venture wishes to negate all familial relations, and make universal subjects of desire. But Marcel, like Morel, also realizes that the lines between 'anonymous' and familial sex are untenable when he gifts Léonie's couch to the brothel and remembers "que c'était sur ce même canapé que, bien des années auparavant j'avais connu pour la première fois les plaisirs de l'amour avec une de mes petites cousines avec qui je ne savais où me mettre et qui m'avait donné le conseil assez dangereux de profiter d'une heure où ma tante Léonie était levée" (459). As the site of both carnal knowledge and prohibition, the family shapes not just normative but all sexual expression: Marcel notices that Robert, Charlus, the Prince, and many other Guermantes, enact the same double lives, in the same terms, and with the same results, whereas the Courvoisier family reacts differently; believing himself to be an aberration, the Vicomte de Courvoisier marries, like Robert and Charlus, however: "puis un de ses cousins lui enseigna que ce penchant est assez répandu, poussa la bonté jusqu'à le mener dans des lieux où il pouvait le satisfaire. M. de Courvoisier n'en aima que plus sa femme, redoubla de zèle prolifique et elle et lui étaient cités

comme le meilleur ménage de Paris” (2136). On the one hand, this seems to illustrate Judith Butler’s thesis that heterosexuality is an “incessant and panicked imitation of its own naturalized idealization” (“Imitation and Gender Insubordination” 314), rather than the reverse, but on the other, it also refutes the pretention of such theories of sexuality that would iron out familial difference into a bland and universal ‘social’ effect.

Indeed, from the first pages of the novel, Marcel recognizes that this tension between social conception of sexuality and familial; it is desire, prior to sexual expression, which is viewed as the most transgressive, because the intra-familial is an affection that cannot be accepted on its own terms, without becoming either pathologically sexual or disinterestedly social: “elle est entrée en nous avant qu’il ait encore fait son apparition dans notre vie, elle flotte en l’attendant, vague et libre, sans affectation déterminée, au service un jour d’un sentiment, le lendemain d’un autre, tantôt de la tendresse filiale ou de l’amitié pour un camarade” (34). The polyvalent sort of love he describes here, indistinct, and inconsistent in terms of categories and taxonomies which any sexologist worth his salt would be able to construct, is exactly the sort of “état anormal” (463) that he realizes is at work in his obsession with Gilberte. He discovers through Gilberte, and through Swann, that although this ‘love’ is a transgressive state, it is only through that transgression that anyone can gain knowledge about the social reality in which he or she lives, and can read against the normative accounts which pervade a discourse of sexuality confined to either self-serving and -consuming eroticism or financial and social vampirism. At the end of his disastrous love of Gilberte he has a bitter sort of knowledge: “je sentais que ceux qui aiment et ceux qui ont du plaisir ne sont pas les mêmes ... quelle que fût la chose que j’aimerais, elle ne serait jamais placée qu’au terme d’une poursuite douloureuse au cours de laquelle il me faudrait d’abord sacrifier mon plaisir à ce bien supreme, au lieu de l’y chercher”

(514). Marcel's discovery here is that the renunciation of pleasure is actually the only way to discover it; the journey from desire to satisfaction requires you to renounce the 'homeland' of fantasy in which your stable perspective will be reaffirmed, and instead, you must venture out and generally be disappointed in the objects and events and people you find—because the exercise of their reality is not subject to your will, as fantasy is—and yet, because of that independence of self, you can recover it at the end, unexpectedly, by loving, and being caught up in the memory. He cannot have the pleasure when he wants it, but he can have the pleasure after learning disappointment, through a recuperative and differentiated narrative of the events which are already accomplished. Albertine shows him this, as he recognizes far too late that what he was really looking for all along with her “c'était le calme (nous dispensant de chercher le bonheur en nous-mêmes) qui naît d'un sentiment familial et d'un bonheur domestique” (1726). Like Eleanor in *The Years*, his fantasies of other, noble, and overpowering places, give way to a “domestic, near” desire for new modulations of 'home.'

Marcel's family instigates this epiphany, as he recognizes that his need to have Albertine sleep with him resembles his demand that his mother come to him as a child, the only difference being that “je ne savais plus dire: 'Je suis triste” (1686); he finds himself upbraiding Albertine for her over-sensitivity, just as his father had upbraided him, and he realizes that his obsession with staying 'captive' in his rooms has been learned from Léonie. Initially he is unnerved by this resemblance, complaining that “tout mon passé depuis mes années les plus anciennes, et par delà celles-ci, le passé de mes parents, mêlaient à mon impur amour pour Albertine la douceur d'une tendresse à la fois filiale et maternelle. Nous devons recevoir dès une certaine heure tous nos parents arrivés de si loin et assemblés autour de nous” (1661). This, in other words, is an uncanny (*unheimlich*) revenant of the past, a monstrous creation; however, he eventually realizes

that even when the ‘same’ words come from his mouth that came from his father’s, it is *not* an exact copy: “c’est peut-être la vérité humaine de ce double aspect: aspect du côté de la vie intérieure, aspect du côté des rapports sociaux, qu’on exprimait dans ces mots, qui me paraissaient autrefois aussi faux dans leur contenu que pleins de banalité dans leur forme” (1684). Here the two “côtés” are mediated by the family; it stands between the *social* and the *personal*, between the interior narrative and the social narrative, and must, like the two “côtés” of the Guermantes and the Swanns, be analyzed genealogically, from the position of one inside the field of relations but outside of the time being examined.

Léonie provides a fascinating and early test case in this dilemma of inside and outside; she, like Proust, is a shut-in, obsessively interested in the tiniest bit of gossip, constantly aware of and yet resistant to the passage of time, and meticulously self-observant of every sensation that comes across her; “et à défaut de confident à qui les communiquer, elle se les annonçait à elle-même, en un perpétuel monologue qui était sa seule forme d’activité. ... je l’entendais souvent se dire à elle-même: ‘Il faut que je me rappelle bien que je n’ai pas dormi’” (49). Like Marcel, she narrates to herself, a spoken novel not of events but of sensations and relations; however, she retains a grounded position as she, like Marcel, “descendant en intérieur,” comes to re-evaluate what she knows. He marvels at her ability to ‘read’ the very scents in the air, a scent which decades later he still can recall; the air of her room seems to him to still linger and has the ability to “nous enchantment des mille odeurs qu’y dégagent les vertus, la sagesse, les habitudes, toute une vie secrète, invisible, surabondante et morale que l’atmosphère y tient en suspens; odeurs naturelles encore, certes, et couleur du temps comme celle de la campagne voisine, mais déjà casanières, humaines et renfermées... saisonnières, mais mobilières et domestiques” (48). The sensitive ‘reader’ of these airs is able to perceive a human reality beneath them; unlike the

stranger, the passerby, the expatriate, or the flâneur so attractive to the cosmopolitan mindset, this is a mode of narrative which relies on the *domestic*, the shut-in, the immobile but deeply-penetrating gaze. To make a trenchant genealogy, in other words, the narrator must be situated in a particular location—one certainly not uncontested, nor unproblematic, but a particular, familiar location from which to begin the narrative. This is not to suggest that the outcomes can be known in advance; as Marcel learns from his attempts to narrate ‘un amour de Swann,’ the position of a “personne supplémentaire, distincte de celle qui porte le même nom dans le monde” (375) is of one who never assumes fixity but always analyzes the emergence of the ‘human roots’ that connect every group. As he realizes from Elstir’s paintings, to look closely at any human means you have to recognize their potential for infinite mutability, “tout comme tel dreyfusisme, tel cléricisme soudain, imprévu, fatal, tel héroïsme nationaliste et féodal, soudainement issus à l’appel des circonstances d’une nature antérieure à l’individu lui-même, par laquelle il pense, vit, évolue, se fortifie ou meurt, sans qu’il puisse la distinguer des mobiles particuliers qu’il prend pour elle” (698). The ‘anterior’ nature is familial, and requires a genealogical account to access it, to explain not the emergence of an individual, or describe the dispersion of a social world, but to examine the means by which such concepts of ‘individual’ and ‘society’ are learned and transmitted, and to what ends they are deployed.

This is why Marcel has such a horror of the *Bildungsroman*; it subordinates the messiness of experience into a teleology of development, and substitutes an end for a means²⁰⁶. It also elides the very realities which could leverage a criticism against that normative account, that is, through the narratives of families. These histories can certainly be normative in their own right,

²⁰⁶ Liesl Olson, in *Modernism and the Ordinary*, argues that Proust’s insistence on protracting the narrative and forestalling an ‘ending’ “can be viewed not only as a refutation of teleology, but as a response to the everyday’s inability to be evened out or organized... Ordering time and seeing an end to time—measure and teleology—are closely related, in the sense that an end retrospectively allows the imposition of order on what precedes it” (151).

but they also have the potential to include and interrogate the queer alternatives which are always elided in a progress-driven narrative. Marcel notices this as he hears Charlus give his Guermantes-inflected history of France, which decenters the political and economic hierarchy of Great Men and ends up, instead, valorizing and enabling women, families, and every queer coincidence which led to the retrospectively cleaned-up and ideologically purer (therefore non-familial) versions contained in History:

Un grand événement historique n'apparaissait au passage que masqué, dénaturé, restreint, dans le nom d'une propriété, dans les prénoms d'une femme, choisis tels parce qu'elle est la petite-fille de Louis-Philippe et Marie-Amélie ... Telle l'aristocratie, en sa construction lourde, percée de rares fenêtres, laissant entrer peu de jour, montrant le même manque d'envolée, mais aussi la même puissance massive et aveuglée que l'architecture romane, enferme toute l'histoire, l'emmure, la renfrogne. Ainsi les espaces de ma mémoire se couvraient peu à peu de noms qui, en s'ordonnant, en se composant les uns relativement aux autres, en nouant entre eux des rapports de plus en plus nombreux, imitaient ces oeuvres d'art achevées où il n'y a pas une seule touche qui soit isolée, où chaque partie tour à tour reçoit des autres sa raison d'être comme elle leur impose la sienne. (1158)

The revaluation of values is not a subjective, deformative, and “strong” use of history in the Nietzschean sense, because it is familial; it also illuminates larger historical events as they register in events of individual communities and families. The “romanesque” architecture of this history renders it opaque instead of artificially clear; like the etchings on the glass in the Jefferson jail, it does not efface itself as a narrative, rather, it constantly obstructs its own view, and prevents the reader from identifying an easy narrative of progress. It is also not available to the person living it; as Charlus tells Marcel, the “treasure” of his experiences and perspective is

“une sorte de dossier secret et inestimable, que je n’ai pas cru devoir utiliser personnellement, mais qui serait sans prix pour un jeune homme” (966). The ‘dossier’ cannot be read by Charlus himself, because he cannot escape his implication within it; thus the structure Marcel envisions resembles a dense, massive crypt of individual lives and deaths, pierced here and there by individual narratives, enclosing the dead of the past, but accessible to generations of new, related, humans. The length and complexity of these shut out the easy ‘illumination’ of artificial light, but they provide a structure that a viewer can trace and examine when she enters into it.

The ability of genealogy to subvert ends and turn them into an examination of means is what Marcel realizes is the advantage of these long histories; this becomes more obvious in contrast with the short and self-serving histories he encounters at the final party at the Prince de Guermantes’. As he witnesses Bloch and his American friend, who treats the evening as a sort of Berlitz school for the ‘idiom’ of fashionable society, willfully mischaracterize the past, and satisfy themselves with easy answers, resisting a long history, he considers:

Cet oubli si vivace qui recouvre si rapidement le passé le plus récent, cette ignorance si envahissante, créent par contre-coup une valeur d’érudition à un petit savoir d’autant plus précieux qu’il est peu répandu, s’appliquant à la généalogie des gens, à leurs vraies situations, à la raison d’amour, d’argent ou autre pour quoi ils se sont alliés à telle famille, ou mésalliés, savoir prisé dans toutes les sociétés où règne un esprit conservateur, savoir que mon grand-père possédait au plus haut degré, concernant la bourgeoisie de Combray et de Paris, savoir que Saint-Simon prisait tant que, au moment où il célèbre la merveilleuse intelligence du prince de Conti, avant même de parler des sciences, ou plutôt comme si c’était la première des sciences, il le loue d’avoir été “un très bel esprit, lumineux, juste, exact, étendu, d’une lecture infinie, qui n’oubliait rien, qui connaissait les

généalogies, leurs chimères et leurs réalités, d'une politesse distinguée selon le rang, le mérite, rendant tout ce que les princes du sang doivent et qu'ils ne rendent plus. Il s'en expliquait même et, sur leurs usurpations, l'histoire des livres et des conversations lui fournissait de quoi placer ce qu'il trouvait de plus obligeant sur la naissance, les emplois, etc." Moins brillant, pour tout ce qui avait trait à la bourgeoisie de Combray et de Paris, mon grand-père ne le savait pas avec moins d'exactitude et ne le savourait pas avec moins de gourmandise. Ces gourmets-là, ces amateurs-là étaient déjà devenus peu nombreux. (2335)

The interest in genealogies which for him is in the process of decline corresponds to the rise in the individualistic novel of development, of the deracinated individual pursuing his own narrative outside of a social context, and this is what Proust resists; his novel requires length and dedication, but it enables a methodology which creates an outsider only insofar as it enables *any* individual to perceive their imbeddedness within a larger, longer, history than that of their own life or family²⁰⁷. This is why the Comte de Crécý is so delighted by Marcel's visits, because he recognizes distinctions between the families and thus gives him "une occasion de causer, en même temps, des sujets qui lui étaient chers et dont il ne pouvait parler avec personne" (1570). Such a conversation, and such a reading, must by their nature be "infinie" in order to be valid.

Thus, in his earlier trip to Balbec, he finds the Comte de Crécý delighted to find in Marcel someone who 'knows' that there is a distinction between the Guermantes and the

²⁰⁷ Eve Sedgwick, in her discussion of Proust's epiphany at this party in her chapter on "Paranoid and Reparative Reading" in *Touching Feeling*, takes his discussion of succession and death as central to her concept of "reparative" readings which embrace difference rather than replicate, in a paranoid fashion, the same; she points out that "the complete temporal disorientation that initiates him into this revelatory space would have been impossible in a heterosexual *père de famille*, in one who had meanwhile been embodying, in the form of inexorably "progressing" identities and roles, the regular arrival of children and grandchildren" (148). Thus the queer genealogist is, for her, the only one capable of suturing narratives, and has that capacity by his non-participation in heterosexual generation. Although I laud her attempt to recuperate and re-examine reading practices, I find her emphasis on an absolute, ontologically-privileged queerness to be essentialist, again signaling a "heterophobia," as though something inherent in the (artificial, constructed) category of 'straight' father makes it "impossible" to consider or foster difference.

Cambremers, while the rest of society perceives a seamless tradition; it is only through examining the “mille nuances, mille raisons” (2332) that underlie the shift, that narrative can throw off the burden of ‘events’ and encounter ‘means.’ This is why Marcel cannot begin his work until he is able to incorporate and understand difference; he is confronted with this as he talks with Gilberte at Tansonville about how he loved her. Gilberte explains that she is surprised, because when she gestured at him,

“Vous m'avez regardée d'une façon si méchante que j'ai compris que vous ne vouliez pas.” Et tout d'un coup, je me dis que la vraie Gilberte – la vraie Albertine – c'étaient peut-être celles qui s'étaient au premier instant livrées dans leur regard, l'une devant la haie d'épines roses, l'autre sur la plage. Et c'était moi qui, n'ayant pas su le comprendre, ne l'ayant repris que plus tard dans ma mémoire mémoire – après un intervalle où par mes conversations tout un entre-deux de sentiment leur avait fait craindre d'être aussi franches que dans les premières minutes – avais tout gâté par ma maladresse. Je les avais ‘ratées’ plus complètement. (2126)

For the first time, Marcel must confront his own memory with difference, and examine the narrative he has constructed according to another “côté”; it makes of Gilberte and Albertine not simply interchangeable types, but living realities, and reduces his own importance as a narrator and explicator of his past. The fact that they have a shared history, a place and a family connection in common, is what enables this recognition. Without a shared history, reality becomes infinitely mutable, like Marcel’s experience of the Verdurin salon, when he is called upon by Morel to modify his history and assure Mme Verdurin that his lies about Marcel’s family and his own father’s position in it are true. She believes it, but, “comme elle n'avait pas de tact, haïssait les familles (ce dissolvant du petit noyau), après m'avoir dit qu'elle avait autrefois

aperçu mon arrière-grand-père et m'en avoir parlé comme de quelqu'un d'à peu près idiot qui n'eût rien compris au petit groupe et qui, selon son expression, 'n'en était pas,' elle me dit: 'C'est, du reste, si ennuyeux les familles, on n'aspire qu'à en sortir' (1441). Mme Verdurin identifies the family as the most formidable enemy to the instrumentalizing, typologizing, and ahistorical “petit noyau” is the family, because of its queer ability to both preserve and seek to eradicate difference, and above all, its long history and consciousness which sets it at odds with an amnesiac society²⁰⁸.

For the *Recherche* is, from the first pages, a family narrative; Marcel's first lessons in narrative come from Léonie and Françoise, and his first considerations of style are the “périphrases ingénieuses” (28) of his grandmother's sisters. Against the perpetual social movement, there exists only the solidity of a reading practice, one that he sees at work in the closed society of Combray, and among the members of the Guermantes clan:

Désertée dans les milieu mondains intermédiaires qui sont livrés à un mouvement perpétuel d'ascension, la famille joue, au contraire, un rôle important dans les milieu immobiles comme la petite bourgeoisie et comme l'aristocratie princière ... Elle avait de ces parents-là une connaissance familiale, quotidienne, vulgaire, fort différente de ce que nous imaginons, et dans laquelle, si nous nous y trouvons compris, loin que nos actions en soient expulsées comme le grain de poussière de l'œil ou la goutte d'eau de la trachée-artère, elles peuvent rester gravées, être commentées, racontées encore des années après que nous les avons oubliées nous-mêmes, dans le palais où nous somme étonnés de les retrouver comme une lettre de nous dans une précieuse collection d'autographes. (1037-38)

²⁰⁸ Ironically, Mme Verdurin's aspirations land her in the *family* of the Guermantes, where, as Serge Gaubert, in *Proust ou la roman de la différence*, notes, “elle simule une singularité alors que, princesse de Guermantes, elle n'est plus que l'incarnation momentanée de ce titre plus ancien qu'elle, et qui lui survivrait” (198).

Marcel is surprised by this realization, but it fits into his own method; what urges him to his work, and what sustains his examination of the context in which he lives is his own family's reading practice—namely, the commentary of his mother and grandmother, the world of discussion and quotation they initiate with each other and with him (and, significantly, excluding him at times as well). The family is central to narrative because, although it immobilizes, it also installs stories in the first place; it is the practice ground for a formation of judgment and perception. This is what Marcel also notices about the Bloch family:

Dans la famille la plus proche, on se plaisait d'autant plus avec lui que si, dans la 'société,' on juge les gens d'après un étalon d'ailleurs absurde et selon des règles fausses mais fixes, par comparaison avec la totalité des autres gens élégants, en revanche dans le morcellement de la vie bourgeoise, les diners, les soirées de famille tournent autour de personnes qu'on déclare agréables, amusantes, et qui dans le monde ne tiendraient pas l'affiche deux soirs. (609)

Because the family allows for the contemplation of the means by which distinctions are made, it becomes an alternative society (which is why it is so transgressive to Mme Verdurin); it is easy to see the operation of arbitrary rules within the family, and therefore it also provides a space where those arbitrary rules can be picked apart, something not available in “typical” social relations, reliant on scripts and hierarchies as they tend to be.

The ‘training’ that a family gives its members also plays an important social role, in granting an ‘outside’ to social, political, or economic relations that tend to emphasize adherence to their own creeds; it includes many who do not fit into a cohesive ideological scheme. Marcel is surprised to hear the duke, otherwise so vulgar, employing gracious manners at the duchess’ dinner, and he reflects:

Même chez tels personnages de la cour de Louis XIV, quand nous trouvons des marques de courtoisie dans des lettres écrites par eux à quelque homme de rang inférieur et qui ne peut leur être utile à rien, elles nous laissent surpris parce qu'elles nous révèlent tout à coup chez ces grands seigneurs tout un monde de croyances qu'ils n'expriment jamais directement mais qui les gouvernent. (1068)

He acknowledges an anteriority that has no discernable 'utility' in the present; it reveals the fact that old prejudices and customs have long lives, but because of this, they can also outlast and resist pernicious 'new' doctrines and practices. Charlus recognizes this as he deplores the social changes brought out by the war; accused of Germanophilia, he lashes out at the pervasive amnesia of the social world, and that it has embraced generals and militarists of any class standing:

Nos nationalistes sont les plus germanophobes, les plus jusqu'aboutistes des hommes... Mais après quinze ans leur philosophie a changé entièrement. En fait, ils poussent bien à la continuation de la guerre. Mais ce n'est que pour exterminer une race belliqueuse et par amour de la paix. Car une civilisation guerrière, ce qu'ils trouvaient si beau il y a quinze ans, leur fait horreur. (2209)

Charlus recognizes how easy it is to take any philosophical or ideological position and twist it to the demands of the moment; but what he valorizes, the old blood of the Guermantes, and their incestuous network of relations, also displays that bellicocious tendency.

The danger of this mode of transmission is that it can easily become ossified into a Buddenbrooks-ian insistence on sameness and discipleship; when the name becomes a 'brand' rather than a negotiated reality, the Guermantes lose their ability to make living connections. This is at the base of Charlus' heartbreakingly wrong-headed attempts to 'father' Morel, Jupien's

niece, and even to some degree Marcel himself. Trying to confer some of his aristocratic titles onto Morel, he runs into this dilemma, because “son nom d'artiste diplômé, Morel, lui paraissait supérieur à un ‘nom.’ Et quand M. de Charlus, dans ses rêves de tendresse platonique, voulait lui faire prendre un titre de sa famille, Morel s'y refusait énergiquement” (1516). Both fixated on the supposedly inherent value in their conception of their own ‘names,’ Morel and Charlus are at cross purposes; Charlus admires Morel’s viciousness and wants to reward him for his masculine ‘valor,’ and yet craves tenderness, while Morel admires Charlus’ pride and name but wishes to denigrate that name in order to make his own ascendant. The obsession with outward forms is at odds with what their intended results could ever achieve. Marcel notices that this is what creates complacency in art as well; “un grand artiste préfère à la société de génies originaux celle d’élèves qui n’ont en commun avec lui que la lettre de sa doctrine et par qui il est encensé, écouté” (480). The society of ‘disciples’ which this requires can never produce anything new, because it is a reinforcing loop of congratulatory feedback; instead, “toute nouveauté ayant pour condition l’élimination préalable du poncif auquel nous étions habitués et qui nous semblait la réalité même, toute conversation neuve, aussi bien que toute peinture, toute musique originales, paraître toujours alambiquée et fatigante. Elle repose sur des figures auxquelles nous ne sommes pas accoutumés” (439). This longing for repetition of forms and realities which are familiar is the reason that originality is so tenuous and impossible; it is always on the verge of eradication, because to recognize it as a mode of living you must be willing to concede to a criticism of your perception of reality. Otherwise nothing can be learned from it, as can be seen from Charlus’ attempts to ‘refine’ Morel; all that Morel is able to learn is prejudice, not the content or the method behind that ‘prejudice,’ which means that all of Charlus’ exquisite teachings “appliqués à la lettre par Morel ils devenaient burlesques” (1574). This is also like the ambassadrice of

Turkey who learns the jargon and prejudices of the aristocracy, seeking to ingratiate herself with them, and, since she lacks any established familial relation with them, is “perpétuellement dans l'erreur” (1160).

The patriarchal ‘franc-maçonnerie’ that underlies ultra-normative groups like the Verdurin, the Dreyfussards, or Charlus’ brand of ‘invertis’ relies on a logic which replaces the family of origin—because of its alleged impurity, frivolity, or banality—with a new family of sameness; this is what the incompetent psychiatrist du Boulbon subjects Marcel’s grandmother to during his ‘diagnosis.’ He is confident that her ailments are just ‘in her head,’ and when she objects to his characterization of her condition, he says, “supportez d’être appelée une nerveuse. Vous appartenez à cette famille magnifique et lamentable qui est le sel de la terre” (979) . This is the logic of every ‘family’ of sameness; they each perceive themselves to be the ‘salt of the earth,’ different from all others but the same among themselves. The results of this are the disastrous institutions and hierarchies based on discipleship, and the quite-literal nepotism that seems to order the social universe. Faulkner coins the term “foster-uncleship” in *The Mansion*²⁰⁹, but it seems even more apt in the context of the Faubourg Saint-Germain:

On n'est pas toujours impunément le neveu de quelqu'un. C'est très souvent par son intermédiaire qu'une habitude héréditaire est transmise tôt ou tard. On pourrait faire ainsi toute une galerie de portraits, ayant le titre de la comédie allemande *Oncle et neveu*, où l'on verrait l'oncle veillant jalousement, bien qu'involontairement, à ce que son neveu

²⁰⁹ Gavin notices this about the Snopes clan; that it can only reproduce itself exactly through males, and so a figure like Linda destabilizes the foundations of fatherhood and authority; he claims that there is a sort of “foster-uncleship” that goes on throughout the clan to rectify and provide a line of authority for all the absent Snopes fathers; “but foster-uncleship only to *he*: never *she*. . . as if *Snopes* were some profound and incontrovertible hermaphroditic principle for the furtherance of a race, a species, the principle vested always physically in the male, any anonymous conceptive or gestative organ drawn into that radius to conceive and spawn, repeating that male principle and then vanishing” (121). Linda’s contested biological heritage, and her disputed status as ‘foster’ child of Flem, means that she undermines this principle of male authority, and her ultimate trajectory as heir of not only the Snopes, but de Spain, Compson, Varner, and other fortunes and destinies suggests that her ability to change outcomes is the result of her constant effort to fight against assumed heritages and to make a new identity.

finisse par lui ressembler. J'ajouterai même que cette galerie serait incomplète si l'on n'y faisait pas figurer les oncles qui n'ont aucune parenté réelle, n'étant que les oncles de la femme du neveu. Les Messieurs de Charlus sont, en effet, tellement persuadés d'être les seuls bons maris, en plus les seuls dont une femme ne soit pas jalouse, que généralement, par affection pour leur nièce, ils lui font épouser aussi un Charlus. Ce qui embrouille l'écheveau des ressemblances. (1281)

This mode of transmission is normative and form-driven, and it enforces itself through the uncle's insistence on sameness, subscribing to a short-sighted belief that a woman is merely a passive vessel through which the traits of the male can be passed on²¹⁰.

Marcel recognizes this after his grandmother's death; wishing to avail himself of her perspective in order to cover his grief, he thinks, "les expressions de son visage semblaient écrites dans une langue qui n'était que pour moi; elle était tout dans ma vie, les autres n'existaient que relativement à elle, au jugement qu'elle me donnerait sur eux; mais non, nos rapports ont été trop fugitifs pour n'avoir pas été accidentels. Elle ne me connaît plus, je ne la reverrai jamais" (1341). He recognizes that to attempt to 'own' her and to 'replicate' her would destroy the very spontaneity and vivacity which characterized her. Unfortunately his mother does not come to this same realization, as she begins to speak, dress, and act like her mother: "le mort saisit le vif qui devient son successeur ressemblant, le continuateur de sa vie interrompue. Peut-être le grand chagrin qui suit, chez une fille telle qu'était maman, la mort de sa mère, ne fait-il que briser plus tôt la chrysalide, hâter la métamorphose et l'apparition d'un être qu'on porte en soi" (1337).

²¹⁰ In the similarly homosocial environment of the MacCallum world, there is also a pervasive assumption about the instrumentalization of the heterosexual male to accomplish the sameness they all crave; all the brothers "would sit in silence, looking at Buddy's lean, jack-knifed length with the same identical thought, a thought which each believed peculiar to himself and which none ever divulged—that someday Buddy would marry and perpetuate the name" (*Flags in the Dust* 381). The bachelors 'choose' the male most similar to their father to continue the 'name,' according to the same logic of replication rather than reproduction.

While he stages it in terms of a metamorphosis, there is an element of violence apparent in the ‘briser’ of the cocoon from which one might have emerged metamorphosized, unique. This is a parasitic sort of survival, in which the child then becomes the ‘host’ of the parent, but of course (as with Caroline and Jason ‘Bascomb’), they can only ‘host’ *one* of their two parents, and must purge themselves of precisely that which was a *combination* in their own parent. The Séveigné letters are the strongest sign of the faults of this imitative, non-agentive process of transmission; his mother begins carrying them everywhere and reading them not because she likes them or finds in them a fruitful, affectionate, and critical method (as her mother did), but rather because she wants to read them flatly, to instrumentalize them as a way to get back to her mother, to read the letters to ‘ma fille’ as from her own mother. Thus in seeking to become her mother *she becomes the opposite*; her mother who was original, forward-driven and clear-thinking, is infinitely diluted and parasitically revenant in the daughter who cannot read anything for herself.

This is also the case with Robert de Saint-Loup and his own father; while Marcel admires Robert’s father for his wide human comprehension and humor, Robert despises him for not being ‘intellectual’ and ‘proletariat’ enough, thus submitting himself to a regime of readings (prominently and, unsurprisingly, featuring Nietzsche) that will differentiate him from his conservative family. Marcel shakes his head at this dogmatic and self-defeating approach, and wonders what his father would have thought:

Il n’avait guère eu le temps de connaître son fils, mais avait souhaité qu’il valût mieux que lui. Et je crois bien que contrairement au reste de la famille, il l’eût admiré, se fût rougi qu’il délaissât ce qui avait fait ses minces divertissements pout d’austères méditations, et sans en rien dire, dans sa modestie de grand seigneur spirituel, eût lu en cachette les auteurs favoris de son fils pour apprécier de combien Robert lui était

supérieur. Il y avait, du reste, cette chose assez triste, c'est que si M. de Marsantes, à l'estprit fort ouvert, eût apprécié un fils si différent de lui, Robert de Saint-Loup parce qu'il était de ceux qui croient que le mérite est attaché à certaines forms d'art et de vie, avait un souvenir affectueux mais un peu méprisant d'un père ... il n'étais pas assez intelligent pour comprendre que la valeur intellectuelle n'a rien à voir avec l'adhésion à une certaine formule esthétique. (580)

Marcel recognizes the superior intelligence of Robert's father, which consists of being able to recognize the limitations of his own class and time, and through the cultivation of difference (quite specifically, in this case, through an open, relational *reading* practice) to exercise a judgment which opens up critique. However, Robert, in latching onto that critique, despises precisely that which allowed him the opportunity to pursue it (namely, his father's self-deprecation), and in making of his Nietzschean worldview an aesthetic and moral dogma, is *unable* to recognize the limitations of his own situation. And yet Rachel and her 'intellectual' friends despise him for his aristocratic birth and consider him part of "une autre race" (617), so Robert is driven back and forth between these irreconcilable 'côtés.' Marcel recognizes that it is as a result of not identifying with one or the other, in fact, through 'apostatizing' from them, that he is able to actually become a 'true' Guermantes: "s'il n'avait pas, comme il avait fait, aimé quelque chose de plus élevé que la souplesse innée de son corps, s'il n'avait pas été si longtemps détaché de l'orgueil nobiliaire, il y eût eu plus d'application et de lourdeur dans son agilité même, une vulgarité importante dans ses manières" (1066). Marcel's reflections on Robert after his death also center on this question of embodiment and agency: whether he merely 'transmits' an identity greater than his own, or whether his individual resistance is what marks him as a person, apart from the rest of the Guermantes, who have become negligible and self-serving.

As Marcel is brought into contact with the Guermantes clan, he recognizes that their identity as a family goes far beyond just the name, and the shared history: “les Guermantes – du moins ceux qui étaient dignes du nom – n'étaient pas seulement d'une qualité de chair, de cheveu, de transparent regard, exquise, mais avaient une manière de se tenir, de marcher, de saluer, de regarder avant de serrer la main, de serrer la main, par quoi ils étaient aussi différents en tout cela d'un homme du monde quelconque que celui-ci d'un fermier en blouse” (1183). The Guermantes become an identity which is embodied and shared in ways that other modes of identity never can be; their manner of walking, speaking, or eating are so intimate and accidental, and yet so recognizable, that they participate in a collectivity which does not really fit onto a scale of agency or compulsion. Thus for an outsider such as Marcel, their habits and bodies become a way of interrogating the genesis of his own. He recognizes a sacramental aspect to their meetings, comparing them to the first Christians, and considering: “s'ils gardaient là leurs habitudes, était-ce par éducation affinée du gourmet mondain, par claire connaissance de la parfaite et première qualité du mets social, au goût familial, rassurant et sapide, sans mélange, non frelaté, dont ils savaient l'origine et l'histoire aussi bien que celle qui la leur servait, restés plus ‘nobles’ en cela qu'ils ne le savaient eux-mêmes” (1140). They participate in something larger than themselves, which elevates them, because it is agentive; although it ends up reaffirming sameness to a certain degree, it is must be renegotiated in each generation of Guermantes, as heterosexual reproduction requires to some degree the inclusion of difference; he reflects that the name is “un nom collectif, ce n'était pas que dans l'histoire, par l'addition de toutes les femmes qui l'avaient porté, mais aussi au long de ma courte jeunesse qui avait déjà vu, en cette seule duchesse de Guermantes, tant de femmes différentes se superposer” (1154). The name becomes a rich palimpsest of difference, incorporating many women who have modified,

complied, or defied the conventions available to them, and passed on through the bodies of their sons and daughters a heritage of difference *within* the same name.

Although the potential for transformation exists, the uninterrogated and self-conscious family can easily become an agent of normativity. The Duke exhibits this tendency again and again, in his bravado recitations of stories of Guermantes glory; Marcel notices at the first glance that Charlus is one incapable of reading new texts, “comme des souvenirs de l’Antiquité sont une des raisons du plaisir qu’un lettré trouve à lire une ode d’Horace peut-être inférieure à des poèmes de nos jours qui laisseraient ce même lettré indifférent” (598). His adherence to a cult of unchangeability is immediately apparent to the young Marcel in his wish to preserve against decay anything which was beautiful, or personally meaningful, to the Guermantes. This is also the case with the Duchess; Marcel marvels at her language, and the way it preserves elements of a rustic or older French, but once he’s heard her sisters employ the same language, he realizes that “elle avait compris que cette voix discordante c’était un charme, et qu’elle en avait fait, dans l’ordre du monde, avec l’audace de l’originalité et du succès” (1125). Her voice is a calculated effect, one which is known in advance and therefore, in his opinion, not able to actually bring him into contact with anything real from the past. This is the opposite of Françoise, whose ‘errant’ historical sense has her convinced that Saint Louis lives just around the corner in Combray; he sees value in these ‘medieval’ melanges because “ils les tenaient non des livres, mais d’une tradition à la fois antique et directe, ininterrompue, orale, déformée, méconnaissable et vivante” (126). To be living means to be able to be deformed, in other words, and the Duke and Duchess, who despise their servants and do everything they can to undermine them, ignore this proximate source of absolute difference, unlike Marcel, who learns from his servants, saying, “mes domestiques, en se gâtant peu à peu, me les apprirent” (795).

The fact that Marcel includes ‘others’ such as Françoise in his ‘family’ narrative suggests that he recognizes that they also consistently complicate questions of means and ends through their proximity and difference. Early in the *Recherche*, we see Françoise sewing, remaking Léonie’s coat in what turns out to be a surprisingly audacious and charming fashion; Marcel remarks, “elle ne savait rien, dans ce sens total où ne rien savoir équivaut à ne rien comprendre, sauf les rares vérités que le cœur est capable d’atteindre directement. Le monde immense des idées n’existait pas pour elle” (517). Although in his adolescent state, Marcel despised Françoise for not participating in the “immense world of ideas,” and found ways to torture her for her ignorance, his terminal position in the novel recognizes the value in the absolute difference that she represents; she exists outside of the comprehension/incomprehension binary, being able to do, and to produce, by completely different means, something which is of great intellectual value to him. It is an undeniably complex moral position to consider those you are to some degree “instrumentalizing” through their economic subordination; by valuing their “simplicity” do you then merely find justification for keeping them in an inferior social position? Or does the recognition of different means also allow for appreciation of a potentially alternate mode of living, which—without ignoring the real-world conditions which produce it—also allows it to live within the narrative as a vibrant possibility? He remarks that politeness, humility, and deference are some of the first things to be thrown away in a society where there is only “une valeur fiduciaire” (1096) recognized as being ‘real’ or durable.

The fact that Marcel can never permanently fit Françoise into either an idealized or a comic position suggests that she, through her position as an insider and outsider simultaneously, can provide a leverage point against a totalizing social, or interior, narrative. He frequently uses her as a point of contrast to show the function of petty difference in all social classes, but then

her sudden and passionate republican ideals, alongside her deeply-held reverence for ancient family ties, bewilders him. Unlike Aimée, who is attuned to the economic advantage of his ‘masters,’ the vulgar bourgeoisie, Françoise despises and admires the upper classes openly, assured of her own provincial identity: “elle ne pût entendre, sans avoir à réprimer un mouvement de colère, le nom d’un noble, il fallait que la famille dont elle était sortie occupât dans son village une situation aisée, indépendante” (551). Her family’s independence gives her a leverage, makes her service a choice, and allows her an independence of viewpoint; this proximate, and often neglected, but irreconcilable difference is what is necessary to combat the dogmatic and deformative potential of even well-intentioned attempts to overcome barriers. Marcel recognizes this as he discusses why some “inferior” women such as Odette are able to inspire far more fruitful questions through the insecurity about life they create with their lying; “tout cela crée, en face de l’intellectuel sensible, un univers tout en profondeurs que sa jalousie voudrait sonder et qui n’est pas sans intéresser son intelligence” (2069). Though it is problematically phrased and staged within an unequal and normative discourse surrounding gender relations, Marcel’s point is that only through the unassimilable aspect of the ‘lying’ universe are these women able to make the men who admire them confront their expectations and desires as relative rather than absolute. Unable to merely fold their mistresses’ social universes into their own, and confronted with a seemingly bizarre and inconsistent set of motivations, they are continually forced to analyze and come to understand, and even then she remains, if slightly more comprehensible, nevertheless enigmatic.

Françoise’s liminal position is clear in the slow process of Marcel’s grandmother’s death; while she excoriates the family for not mourning in an ostentatious fashion, she abruptly leaves the deathbed to profusely thank the electrician, and Marcel notices something about her: “les

niais s'imaginent que les grosses dimensions des phénomènes sociaux sont une excellente occasion de pénétrer plus avant dans l'âme humaine; ils devraient au contraire comprendre que c'est en descendant en profondeur dans une individualité qu'ils auraient chance de comprendre ces phénomènes" (1002). To Marcel, the naïve novelist is the one who thinks that he gains reality as he expands the social dimensions of the novel, whereas what brings 'reality' is an interrogation of the foundational assumptions that underlie a simple social reality such as that between Françoise and her employers and peers. To see the same people again and again is to confront their difference and to work them out of a *typology* and into a generative *narrative*²¹¹. The more Marcel examines Françoise, the more strange he appears to himself, and that strangeness generates the difference necessary to critique his own context. Albertine also provides him as she avails herself of "notre habitude familiale des citations" (1616) by quoting back to him lines from *Esther* that he has quoted in other contexts. This places his own reading in a relative context, rather than in the position of a despotic and omniscient narrator.

Albertine also allows him to see more about the relativity of his own position in the social world, because she emerges from more or less the same bourgeois class. As he realizes that the 'jeunes filles' are neither, as he'd assumed, pure originary fragments of ancient provinces, nor deracinated iconoclasts, he marvels: "je ne pus qu'admirer combine la bourgeoisie française était un atelier merveilleux de la sculpture la plus variée. Que de types imprévus, quelle invention dans le caractère des visages, quelle décision, quelle fraîcheur, quelle naïveté dans les traits!" (663). Although there is more than a hint of irony about the value of these 'sculptures,' there is also a sense in which Marcel recognizes that he is also a 'product' of these bourgeoisie classes,

²¹¹ Jean-Yves Tadié, in *Proust et le roman*, argues that "le monde des différences est la destruction de celui des types, qu'évoque pourtant la force du singulier: les lois ne sont pas alors le dernier mot de l'art du romancier; boussoles ou cartes pour ne pas se perdre dans le monde de la différence, elles ne dépassent pas le rôle de guide jusqu'à ces monuments distincts que sont les héros... La diversité des personnages reconduit alors à celle de la vision" (211).

that he has issued from this class and is a ‘variation’ of it. The bourgeois family, that bastion of security, is in this model the one most capable of producing unexpected individuality. At the end of his life, he returns to this thought as he considers all those who have emerged from his own social context, and reaches to a biological metaphor to describe what he sees:

J'avais vu que ces cellules morales qui composent un être sont plus durables que lui. ... De même qu'en écoutant parler Cottard, Brichot, tant d'autres, j'avais senti que, par la culture et la mode, une seule ondulation propage dans toute l'étendue de l'espace les mêmes manières de dire, de penser, de même dans toute la durée du temps de grandes lames de fond soulèvent des profondeurs des âges les mêmes colères, les mêmes tristesses, les mêmes bravoures, les mêmes manies, à travers les générations superposées, chaque section, prise à plusieurs niveaux d'une même série, offrant la répétition, comme des ombres sur des écrans successifs, d'un tableau aussi identique. (2317-18)

Marcel recognizes that the social reality in which he was born was never stable or fixed, and that the relations and institutions which formed his sense of reality are in constant modification as well; these “undulations” are transhistorical and cut across families (though they are also enabled by them), and yet they inscribe themselves within them, because it is a ‘cell’ which divides and propagates; it does not reproduce itself exactly, but constantly spawns new genres, new modes of living and perceiving the world²¹².

This is the chaos of heterosexual reproduction; because anxiety about inheritance and stability drive masculinity, the incorporation of the feminine is what causes so much anxiety in patriarchal societies. To combat this chaos, structures such as the “foster-uncleship” of Charlus

²¹² Julia Kristeva, in her analysis of Proust in *Le temps sensible*, discusses the importance of this ever-changing ability of narrative: “synonyme d’abord de révolte, de marginalité et enfin de liberté, la narration Romanesque réalise la singularité de l’individu et dispose la multiplicité de ses masques pour mieux viser une insaisissable, une impossible identité. À la fois ludique et ambitieux, le roman oppose ses simulacres aux normes des morales et des saviors établis, et reconnaît à ses lecteurs des olitudes incompatibles” (389).

are developed, and yet even these are undermined and made into vehicles of difference, as evidenced by the ultimate ‘foster’ daughter of Proust’s work, Gilberte; she inherits Forcheville, Guermantes, and Swann’s fortunes and estates, and yet it is only because she incorporates difference that she is able to resist the assumptions about how those are to be distributed. Marcel considers how the “mélange” of Swann and Odette’s natures could have produced a monster of vulgarity and egotism, and yet it doesn’t:

Depuis le temps que le monde dure, que des familles où existe tel défaut sous une forme s’allient à des familles où le même défaut existe sous une autre, ce qui crée une variété particulièrement complexe et détestable chez l’enfant, les égoïsmes accumulés (pour ne parler ici que de l’égoïsme) prendraient une puissance telle que l’humanité entière serait détruite, si du mal même ne naissaient, capables de le ramener à de justes proportions, des restrictions naturelles analogues à celles qui empêchent la prolifération infinie des infusoires d’anéantir notre planète, la fécondation unisexuée des plantes d’amener l’extinction du règne végétal, etc. De temps à autre une vertu vient composer avec cet égoïsme une puissance nouvelle et désintéressée. Les combinaisons par lesquelles, au cours des générations, la chimie morale fixe ainsi et rend inoffensifs les éléments qui devenaient trop redoutables sont infinies et donneraient une passionnante variété à l’histoire des familles. D’ailleurs, avec ces égoïsmes accumulés, comme il devait y en avoir en Gilberte, coexiste telle vertu charmante des parents; elle vient un moment faire toute seule un intermède, jouer son rôle touchant avec une sincérité complète. (2045)

To consider the “ways” of the Guermantes and Swann families as not ahistorical realities, but as being always-negotiated and renewed in every generation, with new variables and renewed interpretations of the traits and histories which have been passed on, or forgotten, is to see not

absolute trajectories but a register of change²¹³. This updates and changes the terms of the discussion of “autofécundation” from Marcel’s observance of Charlus and Jupien’s intercourse; while he argues that on occasion the ‘autofecundation’ of a Charlus is necessary to “fait rentrer dans la norme la fleur qui en était exaérément sortie” (1210), here he recognizes how even that queer trajectory is entailed within a familial model, one which accounts for difference, hybridization, spontaneous evolution, and adaptation, instead of a model of pedigrees, cloning, and stasis.

For Marcel, the ability to become ‘auto-fecund’ requires another context, another family; his project is enabled by the invitation of the Prince de Guermantes, which he accepts even though he has given up being able to write the work of genius everyone assumes is within him. He says: “j’avais eu envie d’aller chez les Guermantes comme si cela avait dû me rapprocher de mon enfance et des profondeurs de ma mémoire où je l’apercevais. Et j’avais continué à relire l’invitation jusqu’au moment où, révoltées, les lettres qui composaient ce nom si familier et si mystérieux, comme celui même de Combray, eussent repris leur indépendance” (2255). And what he discovers is that the work is not within *him*, but within *others*: the paving stones, Charlus, the phrase of Vinteuil, the Prince’s copy of *François le Champi*, the napkins, all emerge from his association. When he meets Gilberte’s daughter, he mistakes her for Odette, but gives perhaps the most telling (and bizarre) proleptic instance in the novel when he asserts:

Cette fille, dont le nom et la fortune pouvaient faire espérer à sa mère qu'elle épouserait un prince royal et couronnerait toute l'oeuvre ascendante de Swann et de sa femme, choisit plus tard comme mari un homme de lettres obscur, car elle n'avait aucun

²¹³ Moulinoux’s comparative analysis of Proust and Faulkner ignores this aspect, as well as the clear vulgarity of aristocrats such as the Duke, as she claims instead that “both insist upon the collapse of the aristocratic code, and equate the rise of the parvenus with the triumph of vulgarity and immorality. The two-sided Proustian world, namely ‘Swann’s Way’ and ‘the Guermantes’ Way,’ representative of French classes under the Third Republic, calls to mind the opposition between the Sartoris and the Snopeses in Faulkner’s novels” (37).

snobisme, et fit redescendre cette famille plus bas que le niveau d'où elle était partie. Il fut alors extrêmement difficile de faire croire aux générations nouvelles que les parents de cet obscur ménage avaient eu une grande situation.... Comme la plupart des êtres, d'ailleurs, n'était-elle pas comme sont dans les forêts les 'étoiles' des carrefours où viennent converger des routes venues, pour notre vie aussi, des points les plus différents. Elles étaient nombreuses pour moi, celles qui aboutissaient à Mlle de Saint-Loup et qui rayonnaient autour d'elle. Et avant tout venaient aboutir à elle les deux grands 'côtés' où j'avais fait tant de promenades et de rêves – par son père Robert de Saint-Loup le côté de Guermantes, par Gilberte sa mère le côté de Méséglise qui était le côté de chez Swann. ... Déjà entre ces deux routes des transversales s'établissaient. (2386)

Gilberte's daughter takes all of the prestige, wealth, and history of her families and chooses a life of her own; Marcel initially sees an almost apocalyptic merging of his life in her, until he realizes that there were always already "transversales" between them. What he recognizes is that there is a certain inverse relation between the production of art and reproduction; the narrative of the 'côtés' only becomes possible *after* they have been destroyed, and yet through that preservation they come to a new life.

This is what he recognizes about the works of Vinteuil as well; it is his choice to parent, after the death of his wife, which leads him to "renoncé à jamais à achieve de transcrire au net toute son œuvre" (133); however, after his death, it is the daughter who 'consummates' her queer love in defiance of her father's portrait, along with that very lover who ends up transcribing it and preserving the works for future generations. Thus Vinteuil 'wastes' his time on the daughter who ends up 'regaining' that time, but only because she, *unlike* him, makes an 'end' to the biological line. Marcel reflects on this interaction as he listens to the septet:

De relations qui ne sont pas consacrées par les lois découlent des liens de parenté aussi multiples, aussi complexes, plus solides seulement, que ceux qui naissent du mariage. Sans même s'arrêter à des relations d'une nature aussi particulière, ne voyons-nous pas tous les jours que l'adultère, quand il est fondé sur l'amour véritable, n'ébranle pas le sentiment de famille, les devoirs de parenté, mais les revivifie? (1800).

He recognizes here that it is precisely those things which seem to destabilize the 'sanctity' of the family—adultery, homosexuality, premature death—that give meaning to the family in the first place. Not until there is rupture, in other words, is knowledge possible. Those like Charlus, Mlle Vinteuil, or Albertine disrupt the stability and continuity of families, but thereby create it; an assumed and unproblematic line of inheritance would mean endless instrumentalization and manipulation of subsequent generations, whereas contested, problematized, and queer interventions into particular moments and formations of family relations allows for difference to be asserted and preserved.

Thus it is paradoxically only through the destruction of the family that the narrative of the family can come about. Marcel is clear about his choice of posterity, that he chooses an aesthetic over a biological one: "ce qu'on appelle la postérité, c'est la postérité de l'œuvre. Il faut que l'œuvre (en ne tenant pas compte, pour simplifier, des génies qui à la même époque peuvent parallèlement préparer pour l'avenir un public meilleur dont d'autres génies que lui bénéficieront) crée elle-même sa postérité" (423-24). For Marcel, the work of art is the combination of physical and linguistic reality, and it must create its own posterity because it forces a consideration of the past not as a series of easily-assimilable variables but as a language to be slowly learned and deciphered. Marcel perceives this power in Bergotte—a generative rather than imitative power—which is why he, with his gaucheness and unrefined language,

towers over the Académie Française authors with their impeccable pedigrees and vapid works: “le jour où le jeune Bergotte put montrer au monde de ses lecteurs le salon de mauvais goût où il avait passé son enfance et les causeries pas très drôles qu’il y tenait avec ses frères, ce jour-là il monta plus haut que les amis de sa famille, plus spirituels et plus distingués” (441). Regardless of their talent or genius, those who are unable to transform their thoughts into intelligible and accessible works remain doomed to repeat the same genres and conform to the same styles. For Bergotte, as for Marcel, this method, imbedded as it is in the family²¹⁴, is the only one which leads to artistic fecundity rather than sterile cloning, and yet for both Bergotte and Marcel, they stand at the “end” of their family narratives, unable to reproduce physically what they do aesthetically.

What Marcel recognizes about Bergotte comes to him after reading other authors, and struggling to comprehend them; he realizes that this emphasis on ‘understanding’ and deciphering the ‘genius’ of the author is to look at narrative from the wrong end of creation:

Quand il est terminé, le praticien nous dit: ‘Maintenant regardez.’ Et voici que le monde qui n’a pas été créé une fois, mais aussi souvent qu’un artiste original est survenu) nous apparaît entièrement différent de l’ancien, mais parfaitement clair...Telle est l’univers nouveau et périssable qui vient d’être créé. Il durera jusqu’à la prochaine catastrophe géologique que déchaîneront un nouveau peintre ou un nouvel écrivain originaux. (1000)

Despite the deterministic view that the ‘geological’ succession of authors is essentially a universal and inevitable fact, Marcel’s point seems to be that whatever has come before must perish in order to survive in any other form, and that this death renders that which was contained within it lucid and narratable for the first time. Swann calls attention to this when he tells Marcel

²¹⁴ Michael Finn, in *Proust, the Body, and Literary Form*, acknowledges this for Bergotte, but not for Marcel; he calls it a “curious sideways step into heredity ...But it was a one-time experiment” (95).

that he lives for art now that he cannot live for others; “je m’ouvre à moi-même mon cœur comme une espèce de vitrine, je regarde un à un tant d’amours que les autres n’auront pas connus” (1287). Like Bergotte, Swann goes to his death still wrapped up in his ‘travail,’ but it is *after* the end that Marcel, the “stranger,” the sympathetic but exterior reader, can “produce” that which Swann himself could not: “bien qu’il n’eût rien ‘produit’ il eut la chance de durer un peu plus. Et pourtant, cher Charles Swann, que j’ai connu quand j’étais encore si jeune et vous près du tombeau, c’est parce que celui que vous deviez considérer comme un petit imbécile a fait de vous le héros d’un de ses romans, qu’on recommence à parler de vous et que peut-être vous vivrez” (1753). Although Swann’s name, in social circles, becomes corrupted, decayed, and completely elided, it survives through Marcel because it has been transplanted into a new context, one seemingly ‘barren’ but which, precisely because it has ended and been required to be exteriorized, therefore has the potential to make a new life.

This is what Mme Villeparisis realizes as she begins her memoirs; she has plenty of princely relations, but “elle savait qu’elle n’avait pas à se gêner avec des gens pour qui elle n’était pas une femme plus ou moins brillante, mais la sœur susceptible, et ménagée, de leur père ou de leur oncle... mais surtout ils n’étaient plus pour elle qu’un résidu mort qui ne fructifierait plus” (911). Although she relies on her family to provide the structure for her ‘brilliant’ salon, she recognizes that it is only through inviting the new bourgeoisie which her family disdains that she can ensure a legacy. She recognizes, far better than most of the other Guermantes, that remaining within her own confined circle will never connect her to anything new or living²¹⁵,

²¹⁵ The Guermantes who remain intelligible only to themselves end up, much like the nameless ‘foreigner’ of Frenchman’s Bend, existing only as a deformation of the land itself; in *The Hamlet* Faulkner writes: “he was gone now, the foreigner, the Frenchman, with his family and his slaves and his magnificence. His dream his broad acres were parceled out now ... all that remained of him was the river bed which his slaves had straightened for almost ten miles” (3). Like the Guermantes, the family disappears but the name remains, to be deformed and narrated according to the needs of anyone willing to utilize it (like Flem, who uses the old legends about the Frenchman’s gold to dupe even Ratliff himself).

and so she breaks out of it, like Swann, who follows Odette and disdains the Guermantes: “de purs mondains auraient trouvé que ce n’était pas la peine d’y occuper comme lui une situation exceptionnelle pour se faire présenter chez les Verdurin. Mais Swann aimait tellement les femmes, qu’à partir du jour où il avait connu à peu près toutes celles de l’aristocratie et où elles n’avaient plus rien eu à lui apprendre, il n’avait plus tenu à ces lettres de naturalisation” (159). Although his desire is mediated by a number of patently false circumstances, what he recognizes, like Mme de Villeparisis, is that every ‘monde’ or ‘côté’ is always already a ‘noyau’ and only by pursuing something vibrant can he escape the normative potential of that singular group. This is the drama of heterosexual exogamy; the necessary treason against the ‘clan’ in order to make something new.

But interestingly, it is *not* through Swann’s literal posterity that he continues; it is through Marcel, rather than Gilberte, that Swann’s name continues to find resonance and meaning. This is a curious inversion of the bourgeois values of Combray, which seemed so rigid at the outset, as Marcel explains of the Swann of his childhood: “mes parents du reste commençaient à lui trouver cette vieillesse anormale, excessive, honteuse et méritée des célibataires, de tous ceux pour qui il semble que le grand jour qui n’a pas de lendemain soit plus long que pour les autres, parce que pour eux il est vide et que les moments s’y additionnent depuis le matin sans se diviser ensuite entre des enfants” (36). The oddity of his relations speaking of Swann, who *has a daughter*, as ‘celibate,’ is compounded by the way they feel that their own lives are justified by children (and none of them have children). But it comes to a strangely inverted fulfilment as Swann is elided from Gilberte’s life, and Marcel writes his story instead; against the banal bourgeois conception of ‘possessing’ children to fill up hours of the day, it is *not* the child who carries the narrative of Swann, rather it is Marcel who continues to bring him up, and hopes to

preserve and reproduce his merits, surpassing the derivative and normative accounts of his contemporaries. At the end of his work, he reflects back on the importance of his queer relation with Swann and inverts the traditional valuation of production of art, championing the method over the products: “car la faculté de lancer des idées, des systèmes, et surtout de se les assimiler, a toujours été beaucoup plus fréquente, même chez ceux qui produisent, que le véritable goût, mais prend une extension plus considérable depuis que les revues, les journaux littéraires se sont multipliés (et avec eux les vocations factices d'écrivains et d'artistes)” (2283). Like his own experience in being unable to write to Gilberte when he cared for her, and being able to write pages and pages when he is indifferent, Marcel realizes that the truly celibate may be the most apparently prolific writers, whereas those who devote themselves to a work beyond the surface of acts and appearances are able to produce something which, if painful, still endures.

These ‘vocations factices’ are for him the opposite of what he would like to write, namely a novel of personal engagement and pain; he considers entitling it, in fact, “une vocation” (2287), thereby, in his view, elevating the *method* over the content. To be ‘factice’ is to be *created in advance*, whereas for him, the only work of art must always be retrospective; whatever is constructed in advance of itself is, in this model, not worth building, because it limits the interplay of imagination and form. He imagines the immensity of this project:

Que celui qui pourrait écrire un tel livre serait heureux, pensais-je; quel labeur devant lui ! Pour en donner une idée, c'est aux arts les plus élevés et les plus différents qu'il faudrait emprunter des comparaisons; car cet écrivain, qui, d'ailleurs, pour chaque caractère, aurait à en faire apparaître les faces les plus opposées, pour faire sentir son volume comme celui d'un solide devrait préparer son livre minutieusement, avec de perpétuels regroupements de forces, comme pour une offensive, le supporter comme une fatigue,

l'accepter comme une règle, le construire comme une église, le suivre comme un régime, le vaincre comme un obstacle, le conquérir comme une amitié, le suralimenter comme un enfant, le créer comme un monde, sans laisser de côté ces mystères qui n'ont probablement leur explication que dans d'autres mondes et dont le pressentiment est ce qui nous émeut le plus dans la vie et dans l'art. Et dans ces grands livres-là, il y a des parties qui n'ont eu le temps que d'être esquissées, et qui ne seront sans doute jamais finies, à cause de l'ampleur même du plan de l'architecte. (2389)

The litany of verbs suggests the labor involved in such a project, and the necessity of its length, not for gratuitous display, but for the ability to deal with the complexity of beings who exist in time rather than space. The only 'prophecy' available in advance is the inevitable prophecy of The End, as Swann shows in his ironic interruption of the Duchess' egocentric invitation to Venice in the spring: "mais, ma chère amie, c'est que je serai mort depuis plusieurs mois" (1200). It is a shrewd reminder that society will continue after his death, and that her attempts to control time are in vain; there is an end to all narratives, but not to the means by which narratives are created and felt.

In order to construct an 'endless' narrative, the means have to become the ends; they must be sutured together in an architecture that is endless and generative, as is life itself, for as he realizes at the end, in order to stitch together this narrative, it must be "prolongée sans mesure" (2401). To be able to suture such incommensurable 'ends' together, he develops a method revealed to him by Françoise: literally sewing it together.

Je pensais que sur ma grande table de bois blanc je travaillerais à mon oeuvre, regardé par Françoise. Comme tous les êtres sans prétention qui vivent à côté de nous ont une certaine intuition de nos tâches ... je travaillerais auprès d'elle, et presque comme elle (du

moins comme elle faisait autrefois: si vieille maintenant, elle n'y voyait plus goutte), car, épinglant de-ci de-là un feuillet supplémentaire, je bâtirais mon livre, je n'ose pas dire ambitieusement comme une cathédrale, mais tout simplement comme une robe. ... et puis, parce que, à force de vivre ma vie, elle s'était fait du travail littéraire une sorte de compréhension instinctive, plus juste que celle de bien des gens intelligents, à plus forte raison que celle des gens bêtes. ... À force de coller les uns aux autres ces papiers, que Françoise appelait mes paperoles, ils se déchiraient çà et là. Au besoin Françoise pourrait m'aider à les consolider, de la même façon qu'elle mettait des pièces aux parties usées de ses robes ou qu'à la fenêtre de la cuisine, en attendant le vitrier comme moi l'imprimeur, elle collait un morceau de journal à la place d'un carreau cassé. Elle me disait, en me montrant mes cahiers rongés comme le bois où l'insecte s'est mis: 'C'est tout mité, regardez, c'est malheureux, voilà un bout de page qui n'est plus qu'une dentelle, et – l'examinant comme un tailleur – je ne crois pas que je pourrai la refaire, c'est perdu. C'est dommage, c'est peut-être vos plus belles idées. Comme on dit à Combray, il n'y a pas de fourreurs qui s'y connaissent aussi bien comme les mites. Elles se mettent toujours dans les meilleures étoffes.' ... ne ferais-je pas mon livre de la façon que Françoise faisait ce boeuf mode, apprécié par M. de Norpois, et dont tant de morceaux de viande ajoutés et choisis enrichissaient la gelée? (2390-91)

By stitching together materials which are not static because they can be destroyed, discarded, or reused, and sometimes employed in completely different contexts, Marcel transposes the secret, humble, but transformative method of Françoise's sewing into his narrative method²¹⁶. It is, like Dilsey's section at the end of *The Sound and the Fury*, concerned with longevity, endurance, and

²¹⁶ Miguel de Beistegui, in *Proust as Philosopher*, also considers this central to the ethical and formal dimensions of the novel: "something decisive takes place in that space, *between* beginning and end, and in that process that the arche-teleo-logic (the structure and unity) of the novel could neither anticipate nor master" (100).

livability, and not abstract or aesthetic value, and like the coat of Rev. Hightower's father, it is patched together of opposing 'côtés.' The "ends" of these different fabrics of time and narrative are stitched together, and some may decompose before the process is complete, but the importance lies in the process and not the product; this sewing integrates that which is otherwise unassimilable, and makes new ends of it.

This is an embroidered universe, in other words, one which sutures realities incompletely and yet with deft and human means; and in order to include difference and contradiction, as he realizes in his architectural vision of the novel as well, it must also be impossibly long and categorically *without end*. Only the endless work can possibly hope to preserve a living reality:

Un écrivain peut se mettre sans crainte à un long travail. Que l'intelligence commence son ouvrage, en cours de route surviendront bien assez de chagrins qui se chargeront de le finir. Quant au bonheur, il n'a presque qu'une seule utilité, rendre le malheur possible. Il faut que dans le bonheur nous formions des liens bien doux et bien forts de confiance et d'attachement pour que leur rupture nous cause le déchirement si précieux qui s'appelle le malheur. Si l'on n'avait été heureux, ne fût-ce que par l'espérance, les malheurs seraient sans cruauté et par conséquent sans fruit. Et plus qu'au peintre, à l'écrivain, pour obtenir du volume, de la consistance, de la généralité, de la réalité littéraire, comme il lui faut beaucoup d'églises vues pour en peindre une seule, il lui faut aussi beaucoup d'êtres pour un seul sentiment, car si l'art est long et la vie courte, on peut dire, en revanche, que si l'inspiration est courte les sentiments qu'elle doit peindre ne sont pas beaucoup plus longs. (2294)

Although there is an end to the work he describes here, to have it in mind from the outset is to kill the very thing which would grant it life: the exploration of the means by which this 'end' has

come to be apprehended. Marcel turns back to his conception of himself as Scheherazade to describe this negotiation of acceptance and defiance of The End which he describes; in resigning himself to an endless work, he, like Scheherazade, must constantly, daily, undergo an agonizing process of creation which may end in his death; but this renunciation is the only way to make the narrative living: “on ne peut refaire ce qu’on aime qu’en le renonçant” (2397). Like the night in which the tale is told, his experience of the narrative stretches human comprehension to the limit of the intelligible, but only through the daily process of weaving and stitching the tale into being can he possibly hope to examine it fully.

The threat of an ‘end’ which looms over Scheherezade and Marcel seems to be the reason they are able to create enduring narratives; the only aesthetic objects able to escape deformation or instrumentalization seem to be those which bear the marks of their painful creation, those which are marred and flawed. This is Elstir’s influence on Marcel; when Marcel confronts him with his identity as M. Biche, the overblown and naïve painter of the Verdurin circle, Elstir doesn’t apologize or change the subject; he points out instead that the desire to create an ‘impeccable’ biography leads to sterility: “ils pourraient publier et signer tout ce qu’ils ont dit, mais ce sont de pauvres esprits, descendants sans force de doctrinaires, et de qui la sagesse est négative et stérile. On ne reçoit pas la sagesse, il faut la découvrir soi-même après un trajet que personne ne peut faire pour nous, ne peut nous épargner, car elle est un point de vue sur les choses” (678). The only method which can lead to wisdom is, for Elstir, that which is fertile through its very banality and messiness²¹⁷. His emphasis is similar to Bergotte’s, as he nears his own end; he recognizes that what ends up surviving are not works themselves but methods of

²¹⁷ Malcolm Bowie, in his discussion of morality in *Proust Among the Stars*, examines the contradictory ways Proust presents ethical dilemmas throughout the work, and concludes that the intent is to fracture a unitary perspective, and instead create “a series of singular events, discontinuous moments, visionary glimpses, [which] allows the narrator to look with a new clarity of vision at the ship of fools whose company he has sought, but to behold their foibles, lies and cruelties with a forgiving rather than an accusing eye” (207).

reading and communities of readers: “alors la résurrection aura pris fin, car, si avant dans les générations futures que brillent les oeuvres des hommes, encore faut-il qu'il y ait des hommes” (1741). This foreshadows the grief that Elstir feels at the death of M. Verdurin; although they had been estranged for years, “surtout en M. Verdurin il voyait disparaître les yeux, le cerveau, qui avaient eu de sa peinture la vision la plus juste, où cette peinture, à l'état de souvenir aimé, résidait en quelque sorte. ...ce fut pour lui comme un peu de la beauté de son oeuvre qui s'éclipsait avec un peu de ce qui existait dans l'univers de conscience de cette beauté” (2188). In sharp contrast to Mme Verdurin's total callousness at the deaths of any of her “fidèles”—she says, of princess Sherbatoff, “de tristesse, je n'en éprouve aucune” (1782)—Elstir sees the human context that produces and receives works of personal value. This method of examination that a work-in-progress (*travail* rather than *oeuvre*) entails is capable of suturing itself to any human context, because it is based in a relational method, a means and not an end.

Marcel discovers the power of this relational context when he requests an unpublished piece by Bergotte from Gilberte, and she sends him his letter along with it; marked by the postal stamp, his own writing has entered into circulation: “j'eus peine à reconnaître les lignes vaines et solitaires de mon écriture sous les cercles imprimés qu'y avait apposés la poste, sous les inscriptions qu'y avait ajoutées au crayon un des facteurs, signes de réalisation effective, cachets du monde extérieur, violettes ceintures symboliques de la vie, qui pour la première fois venaient épouser, maintenir, relever, réjouir mon rêve” (324). The text has had an ‘end’ as it becomes marked by time, but it also becomes alive for the first time, as it enters into a social intercourse and becomes both more ‘real’ and less ‘personal.’ This is also the value that Robert de Saint-Loup and his friends in the military see in the history given by the commandant; because it is drawn retrospectively, it has the potential to gain a consciousness unavailable to even the most

insightful chronicler: “tout ce que vous lisez, je suppose, dans le récit d’un narrateur militaire, les plus petits faits, les plus petits événements, ne sont que les signes d’une idée qu’il faut dégager et qui souvent en recouvre d’autres, comme dans un palimpseste. De sorte que vous avez un ensemble aussi intellectuel que n’importe quelle science ou n’importe quelle art et qui est satisfaisant pour l’esprit” (829). Because the individual narratives become overlaid by successive authors, and accrued meaning, they are more satisfying than a more objective scientific or artistic account; they have entered into circulation, and therefore lose some of their particularity, but gain the difference necessary to create a narrative that will not be simply instrumentalized.

For a text frequently accused of ‘snobbery,’ there is in fact a profound humility to Marcel’s appeal to a reading public to justify the ‘end’ to which he has condemned himself, and there is an ethical component to his interest in dreams and sleep, as these are not the purview of an elite collection of philosophically-minded intellectuals, but rather a basic human experience which *any* person could come to perceive:

Alors de ces sommeils profonds on s'éveille dans une aurore, ne sachant qui on est, n'étant personne, neuf, prêt à tout, le cerveau se trouvant vidé de ce passé qui était la vie jusque-là. Et peut-être est-ce plus beau encore quand l'atterrissage du réveil se fait brutalement et que nos pensées du sommeil, dérobées par une chape d'oubli, n'ont pas le temps de revenir progressivement avant que le sommeil ne cesse. Alors du noir orage qu'il nous semble avoir traversé (mais nous ne disons même pas nous) nous sortons gisants, sans pensées, un “nous” qui serait sans contenu. (1494)

This characterization of the profound renegotiation of identity in sleep suggests that in every person there is an unacknowledged and constant multiplication and fracturing of what the “je” behind any experience may be, and that, while deconstructing the narrative will not allow for the

recovery of a blissful pre-discursive or pre-identificatory state, it will allow for *resisting the terms of narrative* and approaching it with difference. This is also clear in his experience of having his article published in *Le Figaro*; rather than becoming a matter of colonization, in which his thought and perspective then infect others, he sees how this “pain miraculeux” multiplies and scatters into every possible variation of its form; “c'est la tare originelle de ce genre de littérature, dont ne sont pas exceptés les célèbres Lundis, que leur valeur réside dans l'impression qu'elle produit sur les lecteurs. C'est une Vénus collective, dont on n'a qu'un membre mutilé si l'on s'en tient à la pensée de l'auteur, car elle ne se réalise complète que dans l'esprit de ses lecteurs. En eux elle s'achève” (2033). To “achieve” its existence as a narrative, the connection between reader and author must be stitched together out of many different contexts. This is what Swann is also able to do, to the dismay of all the mondaines who wish to monopolize him; the dream of the “petit noyau,” whether it be that of the Verdurin or the Guermantes, is to limit what can be said, and to constantly reassure themselves that everyone reads the same things in the same way. But Swann, because “il ne s'enfermait pas dans l'édifice de ses relations” (160), resists the glittering accounts of any of the novels of individuals or ‘noyau’s, making of the artificially rigid relations a fluidity of perspectives which can be shared. It leads to his ouster from the Verdurin society, but like Marcel, breaking down the boundaries of the say-able allows him to speak as an outsider while still remaining within the narrative.

Swann also confronts Marcel with the contingency of his own ‘edifice des relations’ when he comes, as Gilberte’s father, to assume Olympian proportions in his adolescent mind. Marcel is forced to combine his initial hatred of Swann (when he detained his mother in Combray) with the exaggerated view he has since taken, and to realize that he *himself* has become precisely the same sort of narrative pidgeon-hole for Swann:

Ce charme singulier dans lequel j'avais pendant si longtemps supposé que baignait la vie des Swann, je ne l'avais pas entièrement chassé de leur maison en y pénétrant; je l'avais fait reculer, dompté qu'il était par cet étranger, ce paria que j'avais été et à qui Mlle Swann avançait maintenant gracieusement pour qu'il y prît place, un fauteuil délicieux, hostile et scandalisé; mais tout autour de moi, ce charme, dans mon souvenir, je le percevais encore. (429)

He must come to terms with his own “pariah” status among the Swanns, a work which is not entirely accomplished in the moment, but must come about through the reconciliation of memory and imagination; memory is able to render that which has since been disillusioned new, but it cannot regain the spontaneity of the impression, and thus is always retrospective. In the present, the desire to make of others a “work of art” leads him, as with his obsession with Mme Guermantes, to unreal expectations; he naively believes that the voyage to the Olympus from which he imagines her reigning is possible: “je me disais que si j'avais été reçu chez Mme de Guermantes, si j'étais de ses amis, si je pénétrais dans son existence, je connaîtrais ce que sous son enveloppe orangée et brillante son nom enfermait réellement, objectivement, pour les autres” (769). But what he realizes is that the attempt to penetrate into their lives and discover “what they really mean” can only lead to a destruction of the work of art he imagines them to embody. However, through the retrospective account of that process of fantasy and disillusionment, he *can* recover a work of art, one which is produced from the meager and ordinary experiences he has shared with them.

His experiences with Gilberte, the Duchess, and Albertine all teach him that enclosing himself in the present—making himself the ‘hero’ of his own tale—will never allow him to access the fulfilment he is seeking: “nous croyions que notre bonheur dépendait de sa personne:

il dépendait seulement de la terminaison de notre anxiété” (1929). Although the necessity of experiencing a termination is melancholy, it also allows for a rupture with the seamless ‘reality’ that desire presents, and this can form the basis for a *different* perspective. He notices this as he prepares for his dinner with Mlle de Stermaria, recognizing in retrospect that his desires for her were the focus of all his attention, while the reality he was encased in was far more interesting than the one he fantasized about:

Quand je me retrouvai seul chez moi, me rappelant que j'avais été faire une course l'après-midi avec Albertine, que je dînais le surlendemain chez Mme de Guermantes, et que j'avais à répondre à une lettre de Gilberte, trois femmes que j'avais aimées, je me dis que notre vie sociale est, comme un atelier d'artiste, remplie des ébauches délaissées où nous avons cru un moment pouvoir fixer notre besoin d'un grand amour, mais je ne songeai pas que quelquefois, si l'ébauche n'est pas trop ancienne, il peut arriver que nous la reprenions et que nous en fassions une oeuvre toute différente, et peut-être même plus importante que celle que nous avons projetée d'abord. (1047-48)

Examining with an “artist’s” detachment, he is able to recognize that it is his desire which makes him want to make a merely instrumentalizing work of art; the desire to achieve perfection, and reassure himself of its value and pleasure, will only find disappointment. As with La Berma, after the fact, however, *another* work of art becomes possible, namely one that takes these women as they are, and makes something of his memory of them; it takes as they were rather than as he wished they would be. It is only through the chaotic and unpredictable turns of social life that these are brought back to him. Whereas a ‘purist’ account of art would narrate according to fixed hierarchies and genres, he shows how the *generative* account takes into consideration the social reality which surrounds and influences every work of art.

This is why Bergotte has so much resonance for Marcel; both of them approach their art with a co-constitutive eye, and focus on the banalities and mediocrities of their social realities: “si c’était la même intelligence que nous avoins lui et moi à notre disposition, il devait, en me les entendant exprimer, se les rappeler, les aimer, leur sourire, gardant probablement, malgré ce que je supposais, devant son œil intérieur, une tout autre partie de l’intelligence que celle dont une découpure avait passé dans ses livres et d’après laquelle j’avais imaginé tout son univers mental” (451-52). Marcel is able to share insights with Bergotte because they share a habit of solitary - reading, so opposed to the sparkling world of wit and ‘esprit’ of the Guermantes; they descend within themselves, and find and detach painful nuggets which have far greater value than the glassy specimens—polished and curated, to be passed among like-minded friends—that the worlds of society or scholarship value. Instead, this interiority is a reading practice that both Marcel and Bergotte can use to explore their own, through the experience of reading or hearing the other’s perspective. This is why the only possible book he can write is what he later describes as “le livre intérieur de ces signes inconnus (de signes en relief, semblait-il, que mon attention explorant mon inconscient allait chercher, heurtait, contournait, comme un plongeur qui sonde), pour sa lecture personne ne pouvait m'aider d'aucune règle, cette lecture consistant en un acte de création où nul ne peut nous suppléer, ni même collaborer avec nous” (2272). Such a work cannot be precisely collaborative, since the authorship remains located within the body of one, but it is *co-creative*, as the reader engages with and examines the viability and applicability of the narrative to her own reality; seen from another angle, it may become easier to live. This is what Marcel tries to convey with his method of setting up ‘côtés’ and then exploding the distinctions between them; like the automobile, which links seemingly impossibly remote places into a single day, the book can also suture realities together, and show a different ‘côté’.

What instigates Marcel's work at the end is an acceptance of his own personal end, and an energy to complete a project "utilizable pour autrui" (2394). At the party which concludes the novel, he is confronted by his mortality when the Duchess calls him her "oldest friend," and he listens to her say once again, "vous êtes toujours le même," then compliment him on the fact that by having no children, he has spared himself the pain of surviving them. He realizes, to his anguish, that "je découvrais cette action destructrice du Temps au moment même où je voulais entreprendre de rendre claires, d'intellectualiser dans une oeuvre d'art, des réalités extra-temporelles" (2311). He discovers, at the same moment that he finds himself able to produce a narrative, that his own narrative will end, that the transcription of life to paper will destroy irrevocably the reality he conveys, and leave nothing living behind. And yet his experiences with his grandmother's death suggest that because a human context remains after death, even a "terminal" illness does not absolutely terminate the meaning, and the 'travail' of the individual. Proust's own battle with a 'terminal' illness seems to weigh down Marcel's description of the bitter knowledge his grandmother has that she will not survive her illness: "c'est une terrible connaissance, moins par les souffrances qu'elle cause que par l'étrange nouveauté des restrictions définitives qu'elle impose à la vie. On se voit mourir, dans ce cas, non pas à l'instant même de la mort, mais des mois, quelquefois des années auparavant, depuis qu'elle est hideusement venue habiter chez nous" (991). This is the melancholy aspect of rendering a human text; it is always terminal; the marks and agonies will "remain with you," marking the text, but also, through that painful process, rendering it alive. Marcel's grandmother also comes to retrospectively 'edit' her end through a corporeal reality that persists and modifies the narrative her life has put forth; he admires in particular her hair: "elle avait les traits délicatement tracés par la pureté et la soumission, les joues brillantes d'une chaste espérance, d'un rêve de bonheur,

même d’une innocente gaieté, que les années avaient peu à peu détruits. La vie en se retirant venait d’emporter les désillusions de la vie. Un sourire semblait posé sur les lèvres de ma grand-mère” (1012-13). Although the recovery of time itself is impossible, narrative allows Marcel to efface (or perhaps “en-face”—that is, to give it human expression) time and recover the gesture, the word, the relation before it became calcified with worry, despair, or hatred²¹⁸. His grandmother, instrumentalized throughout her life, here regains an anterior time, a time before she was “used up”; her body sheds experience and he can read her differently; relinquishing an egotistical account, he is able to view her sympathetically.

Unlike his mother’s obsessive reading of Mme de Sévigné, Marcel is able to follow his grandmother’s method of reading and discover different analogous points of reference in her work; in the train on the way to Balbec, she gives him her book to calm him after the disastrous medical advice of their incompetent physician leaves him drunk and sick; as he begins to read, he recognizes that Sévigné appears familiar, because his grandmother

m’avait appris à en aimer les varies beautés, qui sont tout autres. Elles devaient beintôt me frapper d’autant plus que Mme de Séginé est une grande artiste de la même famille qu’un peintre que j’allais rencontrer à Balbec et qui eut une influence si profonde sur ma vision des choses, Elstir. Je me rendis compte à Balbec que c’est de la même façon que lui qu’elle nous présente les choses, dans l’ordre de nos perceptions, au lieu de les expliquer d’abord par leur cause. (519)

Marcel is able to create a fruitful connection between the 18th-century author and the 20th-century painter only through a recognition enabled by his grandmother; the comparison is spontaneous,

²¹⁸ Philip Weinstein, in his discussion of “unknowing” in Proust, highlights the death of his grandmother as showing the process of estrangement at work, that he literally ‘unknows’ his grandmother, is rendered a stranger through the passage of time: “to see her like this is to recognize all human being in space as continuously time-marked, and to realize that the normal time-coefficient for such seeing is long out-of-date” (130).

and unexpected, but it is rendered in familial terms; Elstir and Sévigné are “de la même famille,” an analogy that does no violence to the very different contexts in which they produced their works. He recognizes that this personal dimension is far more fecund than a critical, philosophical, or aesthetic juxtapositioning. As he notices that the salon of the Swanns has a seemingly bizarre heterogeneity of styles, with Swann’s expensive and rare art set next to Odette’s pseudo-Oriental fare, he recognizes the critical account which would place the works in a hierarchy, but “il a au contraire dans mon souvenir, ce salon composite, une cohésion, une unité, un charme individuel que n’ont jamais même les ensembles les plus intacts que le passé nous ait légués, ni les plus vivants où se marque l’empreinte d’une personne” (429). According to this system of valuation, the most ‘curated’ collection will always remain sterile, because it lacks the charm and immediacy of the personal, human needs expressed in the Swanns’ collection. Like his desire to study philosophy as a result of his very human reading of Bergotte (85), such sterile and derivative connections can only disappoint, whereas the personal—generated from a mixture of genres, contexts, and families—can generate new connections.

Following this line of reasoning, he considers the ‘value’ of his experiences among the Guermantes; although the duchess doesn’t know Ver Meer, he thinks, “il n’y a pas de propos, pas plus que de relations, dont on puisse être certain qu’on ne tirera pas un jour quelque chose. Ce que m’avait dit Mme de Guermantes sur les tableaux qui seraient intéressants à voir, même d’un tramway, était faux, mais contenait une part de vérité qui me fut précieuse dans la suite” (1166). There is no absolute judgment, in other words; there are only people, only relations, and they possess the value that we invest in them. Thus he decides to re-read authors he finds unfashionable and stodgy, because the Guermantes crowd continually quotes them. Looking through with the eyes of the duchess rather than his own, he recognizes that “si le monde n’avait

pu au premier moment répondre à ce qu'attendait mon imagination, et devait par conséquent me frapper d'abord par ce qu'il avait de commun avec tous les mondes plutôt que par ce qu'il en avait de différent, pourtant il se révéla à moi peu à peu comme bien distinct” (1167). Whereas he is inclined to look at his experiences—with the madeleine, or the hawthorn bushes—from an egocentric view, looking at them through another perspective renders them “étrangères” (1168); this estrangement allows him to *critique his own reading practice*, because it relativizes the values and insights he has. This is also what the ‘trois arbres’ seen along the road to Hudimesnil show him; while he wants to see a supranatural divinity in them, what they actually do is destabilize his hyperbolic and emotional reading practice:

Trois arbres qui devaient server d'entrée à une allée couverte et formaient un dessin que je ne voyais pas pour la première fois, je ne pouvais arriver à reconnaître le lieu dont ils étaient comme détachés mais je sentais qu'il m'avait été familier autrefois; de sorte que mon esprit ayant trébuché entre quelque année lointaine et le moment présent, les environs de Balbec vacillèrent et je me demandai si toute cette promenade n'était pas une fiction, Balbec un endroit où je n'étais jamais allé que par l'imagination, Mme de Villeparisis un personnage de roman et les trois vieux arbres la réalité qu'on retrouve en levant les yeux de dessus le livre qu'on était en train de lire. (568)

Their reality causes him to question his own; the connection is spontaneous, and corporeal, and it places his blithe concept of reality into question. This reading destabilizes the boundaries between the book you are ‘en train de lire’ and the supposedly ‘real’ reality you are interrupting in order to read it; the narrative becomes incorporated into your own experience of mortality, and not as a fantasy, rather as an important counterbalance to the overwhelming normativity of the perception of the present.

This power of recall, of comparison, is what he recognizes about the impressions he has considered so negligible, but which can come to constitute remarkable art through a rigorous examination of their connections:

Capables d'être utilisées pour cela, je sentais se presser en moi une foule de vérités relatives aux passions, aux caractères, aux moeurs. Chaque personne qui nous fait souffrir peut être rattachée par nous à une divinité dont elle n'est qu'un reflet fragmentaire et le dernier degré, divinité dont la contemplation en tant qu'idée nous donne aussitôt de la joie au lieu de la peine que nous avons. (2287)

The only access to “divinity” or truth is through relations with another person, and contemplation of the meaning of that relation. But he cautions against a too-easy assumption that whatever the present ‘image’ you have of another is the ‘true’ one; a comparative context, a genealogy of ‘images,’ is necessary to undermine the deformative and normative potential of the present. He recognizes this about Robert, and asserts that to counteract it, “nous n'avons qu'à choisir dans notre mémoire deux images prises d'eux à des moments différents, assez rapprochés cependant pour qu'ils n'aient pas changé en eux-mêmes, du moins sensiblement, et la différence des deux images mesure le déplacement qu'ils ont opéré par rapport à nous” (1524). This sort of juxtapositional comparison does a necessary violence to the accretion of unconscious changes, in order to create something new and unexpected; it is a narrative order, rather than a chronological one, a narrative logic, instead of a logic of succession. The implications of this cause him to pause and wonder:

Est-ce parce que nous ne revivons pas nos années dans leur suite continue jour par jour, mais dans le souvenir figé dans la fraîcheur ou l'insolation d'une matinée ou d'un soir, recevant l'ombre de tel site isolé, enclos, immobile, arrêté et perdu, loin de tout le reste, et

qu'ainsi, les changements gradués non seulement au dehors, mais dans nos rêves et notre caractère évoluant, lesquels nous ont insensiblement conduit dans la vie d'un temps à tel autre très différent, se trouvant supprimés, si nous revivons un autre souvenir prélevé sur une année différente, nous trouvons entre eux, grâce à des lacunes, à d'immenses pans d'oubli, comme l'abîme d'une différence d'altitude, comme l'incompatibilité de deux qualités incomparables d'atmosphère respirée et de colorations ambiantes? (1053-54)

The narrative context allows for the resurgence of 'things past' without the compulsory aspect of an endless repetition of the same; they resurface in order to allow for variation and ambience, and they retain their 'incomparability,' as his 'sewing' of fragments attests²¹⁹.

Such a method defies taxonomies and is comparative in that it seeks for non-compulsory connections between vastly different people and objects; it is at variance with the hierarchized 'comparative' reading of society employed by 'le monde.' Marcel is subjected to this when he goes to the restaurant to meet Robert; arriving early, and not looking posh enough to respect, he is seated in a draft, but when Robert arrives, the patron quickly performs an about-face: "en effet, il avait l'habitude de comparer toujours ce qu'il entendait ou lisait à un certain texte déjà connu et sentait s'éveiller son admiration s'il ne voyait pas de différences. Cet état d'esprit n'est pas négligeable car, appliqué aux conversations politiques, à la lecture des journaux, il forme l'opinion publique" (1060). Although this 'comparative' sense is common, it is the opposite of a truly common 'sense,' one which relies on a logic of assent and respects difference when drawing comparative connections. He recognizes this when his mother quotes Sévigné to him to urge him to decide whether to marry Albertine or not: "on peut tout ramener, en effet, si on en

²¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, in his essay "Zum Bilde Prousts," discusses the centrality of analogies and comparisons to the work to 'recover' time: "Es ist die Welt im Stand der Ähnlichkeit, und in ihr herrschen die 'Korrespondenzen,' die zuerst die Romantik und die am innigsten Baudelaire erfaßte, die aber Proust als einziger vermochte, in unserem gelebten Leben zum Vorschein zu bringen. Das ist das Werk der mémoire involuntaire, der verjüngenden Kraft, die dem unerbittlichen Altern gewachsen ist" (365).

considère l'aspect social, au plus courant des faits divers" (1876). The 'social' aspect can make any number of easy correspondences, by-lines and headlines, from any event or relation, but this is not a living comparison. It is a mode of reading which conflates text and interpretation; finding an easily-assimilable (and generally banal) 'connection' in the interpretation and abstraction of texts, it then proceeds to a synthesis on the basis of that interpretation, *without reading the texts themselves*. This is what Marcel is tempted to do with Swann's 'amour,' and as a result of Cottard's 'diagnosis' of her; "au fond, si je veux y penser, l'hypothèse qui me fit peu à peu construire tout le caractère d'Albertine et interpréter douloureusement chaque moment d'une vie que je ne pouvais pas contrôler entière, ce fut le souvenir, l'idée fixe du caractère de Mme Swann, tel qu'on m'avait raconté qu'il était" (1363). These 'recitations' that he has heard, and the interpretative conclusions that Cottard and others have drawn from them, lead him to try to 'apply' them to his own relationship and 'prophecy' the end of it. Like his assumption that the stories Robert has told of the prostitutes he has access to, such a reading—which is a reading *without* reading—leads to a false sense of "tranquillité" (1302). Mme Verdurin's constant assertions and accusations against others resemble this as well; she is a master of "les Arts du Néant" (477) because her comparisons have no substance, and rely on interpretations of interpretations.

The Verdurins, at La Raspelière, have their own 'côtés,' but they are the result of a cynical set of calculations about how best to market the views to entrap and numb the senses. What Marcel recognizes in them is not their absolute value, but the fact that they can connect *anyone*; he realizes as he drives away in the automobile that the 'côtés' he has assumed are so distinct can be connected in a single day: "Beaumont, relié tout d'un coup à des endroits dont je le croyais si distinct, perdit son mystère et prit sa place dans la région, me faisant penser avec

terreur que Madame Bovary et la Sanseverina m'eussent peut-être semblé des êtres pareils aux autres si je les eusse rencontrées ailleurs que dans l'atmosphère close d'un roman" (1511). He realizes that, as with the 'trois arbres,' the line between fiction and reality is thin; the narratives he so enjoys when he assumes they are 'separate' from life are terrifyingly near, could be around any corner, in any house or family. And the value of aesthetic objects is that their exteriority can render seemingly distinct emotions or thoughts mobile, and can connect them. This is what he experiences as he plays Vinteuil's sonata on the piano and is reminded of a chord from *Tristan*:

La musique, bien différente en cela de la société d'Albertine, m'aidait à descendre en moi-même, à y découvrir du nouveau : la variété que j'avais en vain cherchée dans la vie, dans le voyage, dont pourtant la nostalgie m'était donnée par ce flot sonore qui faisait mourir à côté de moi ses vagues ensoleillées. Diversité double. Comme le spectre extériorise pour nous la composition de la lumière, l'harmonie d'un Wagner, la couleur d'un Elstir nous permettent de connaître cette essence qualitative des sensations d'un autre où l'amour pour un autre être ne nous fait pas pénétrer. Puis diversité au sein de l'oeuvre même, par le seul moyen qu'il y a d'être effectivement divers : réunir diverses individualités. ... Même ce qui est le plus indépendant du sentiment qu'elle nous fait éprouver garde sa réalité extérieure et entièrement définie ; le chant d'un oiseau, la sonnerie du cor d'un chasseur, l'air que joue un pâtre sur son chalumeau, découpent à l'horizon leur silhouette sonore. (1722)

For him, the connection between Wagner, Elstir, and Vinteuil assures him that reality is not something separate from the work of art; it references the real without attempting to reproduce it. Music in particular requires the experience to exist in time, to occupy time, and therefore allows for reflection and connection during the process of listening.

This comparative context becomes enriched and deepened as he encounters the unexpected septet of Vinteil; he recognizes the familiar melody, but it is rendered different and enriched by its inclusion in a new context:

La musique de Vinteuil étendait, notes par notes, touches par touches, les colorations inconnues d'un univers inestimable, insoupçonné, fragmenté par les lacunes que laissaient entre elles les auditions de son oeuvre; ces deux interrogations si dissemblables qui commandaient les mouvements si différents de la sonate et du septuor... une même prière, jaillie devant différents levers de soleil intérieurs, et seulement réfractée à travers les milieux différents de pensées autres, de recherches d'art en progrès au cours d'années où il avait voulu créer quelque chose de nouveau. (1795)

The work of art—the universe of sound in which he is implicated—is rendered “nouveau,” unfamiliar, by what he calls a “côté nouveau” (1790), one that estranges it from the rigid system—like that of the “Guermantes” way and “Swann’s” way—he has known previously and expands them in a new context. This is what he finds when he is confronted with Rachel as Robert’s lover; after recognizing her as “Rachel quand du Seigneur” from the brothel he used to frequent, he looks at her face and considers that “l’immobilité de ce mince visage, comme celle d’une feuille de papier soumise aux colossales pressions de deux atmosphères, me semblait équilibrée par deux infinis qui venaient aboutir à elle sans se rencontrer, car elle les séparait” (868). The atmospheric conditions which rage in the different spheres would seem to annihilate the paper, but instead they immobilize it, inscribing with their pressure a narrative which simultaneously separates and combines them. This is the work of art, the retrospective account which is the only one that allows for difference to be preserved, different and warring contexts of knowledge and relation, sutured into one fabric.

But such a triumphant reading risks being instrumentalized as a merely aesthetic experience; Marcel insists, from the first pages of the novel, however, that it is neither through the intelligence nor through the imagination that such an experience is mediated; it is always through the *body*, through the strange synthesis it always already represents, and the alienation and intimacy of experience it provides. He considers that “peut-être l’immobilité des choses autour de nous leur est-elle imposée par notre certitude que ce sont elles et non pas d’autres, par l’immobilité de notre pensée en face d’elles” (15). The action of intelligence is in this formulation rigid and preservative; like the taxonomist/taxidermist, it wishes to arrest ‘des choses’ in particular and eternal definitions²²⁰. But the body *can* recall, and it can make connections that generate new relations and memories; Marcel combines “mon côté ankylosé, cherchant à deviner son orientation, s’imaginait ... et mon corps, le côté sur lequel je reposais, gardiens fidèles d’un passé que mon esprit n’aurait jamais dû oublier” (15). The “côté” here slips from being within his body, a ‘rib,’ to being the ‘side’ on which he rests his body; there is a physical reality to the ‘côtés’ he experiences throughout the novel which resists assimilation in a merely intellectual fashion. Rather, it is an insistently physical connection he makes, from family to family, individual to individual, and body to body. But it is always belated, as the body bears the marks that allow it to ‘tell’ only after the experiences have passed. Thus he can only ever construct a genealogy in retrospect.

This is why Marcel advocates for difficult introspection and truth-telling; to tell the truth in narrative is always too late to change the reality to which it refers, but it can interrupt the seamless ‘vraisemblance’ of the moment/world in which it is *read*, which can be an intervention,

²²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, in *Proust et les signes*, takes the intelligence as being the emphasis throughout Proust: “dans les cas précis du temps qu’on perd et du temps perdu, c’est l’intelligence, seulement l’intelligence qui est capable de fournir l’effort de la pensée, ou d’interpréter le signe. C’est elle qui trouve, à condition de venir ‘après.’ Parmi toutes les formes de la pensée, seule l’intelligence extrait les vérités de cet ordre” (31). Although his emphasis on the retrospective nature of this discovery is certainly accurate, the emphasis on “intelligence” seems quite misplaced.

the only possible intervention. He considers the difference between ‘vraisemblance’ and ‘le vrai’ as he discusses Albertine’s habit of lying about nearly everything:

La sensation du mensonge était donnée par bien des particularités qu'on a déjà vues au cours de ce récit, mais principalement par ceci que, quand elle mentait, son récit péchait soit par insuffisance, omission, invraisemblance, soit par excès, au contraire, de petits faits destinés à le rendre vraisemblable. Le vraisemblable, malgré l'idée que se fait le menteur, n'est pas du tout le vrai. (1736)

Marcel recognizes that the tendency to lie is the same that generates the world of fantasy: the wish to subordinate uncomfortable truths into a seamless fabric of the ‘seemingly true’ reality. But truth is that which punctures the ‘vraisemblable,’ insists on a common ground, refuses to allow multiple worlds, and brings us back into consideration of the one we share²²¹. Marcel considers how the real, the true, might be accessed, and considers the claims of art, but in the end, he recognizes that by whatever means, “le seul véritable voyage, le seul bain de Jouvence, ce ne serait pas d'aller vers de nouveaux paysages, mais d'avoir d'autres yeux, de voir l'univers avec les yeux d'un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d'eux voit, que chacun d'eux est” (1797). What is needed, for an ethical and human consideration of others, is not new worlds, but new *means of seeing the connections in the world we share*; generally we are inclined to ignore or suppress these connections because they show uncomfortable truths, but it is only through this rupture that we can come to see difference in the first place²²².

²²¹ David Ellison, in *The Reading of Proust*, examines the effect that Albertine has on Marcel and argues that whereas prior to her ‘disappearance’ he consistently views her as an “empty sign” that he can fill with whatever he needs, after her death he is confronted with the impossibility of reading, the impossibility of coming to knowledge: “he recognizes that she is not the vivifying presence of life but the absolute enigma of significant opacity: her resistance to all interpretive understanding is a threat to the stability of the protagonist” (176).

²²² For Arnold Weinstein, in *The Fiction of Relationship*, the recognition that there are other contexts of sexuality and communication are, for him, central to this ‘revelation’: “the Proustian new world is the one you have been living in for some time, but the blinders of habit and inertia have prevented you from seeing it. ... Proust moves from revelation to exploration, and he drastically redefines the issues of linkage, kinship, and connection” (268).

After Albertine's death he is confronted with the endless ruptures and discords of the different accounts he hears of her, and he must examine them in an impossible comparative light: "mais alors même qu'on tient ainsi un fait, des autres on ne perçoit que l'apparence; car l'envers de la tapisserie, l'envers réel de l'action, de l'intrigue – aussi bien que celui de l'intelligence, du coeur – se dérobe et nous ne voyons passer que des silhouettes plates dont nous nous disons : c'est ceci, c'est cela ; c'est à cause d'elle, ou de telle autre" (2072). When he looks at the *other side* of the fabric, he is able to see how it is made, but that doesn't suggest that there is simply another 'realer' reality to which it corresponds, rather, the retrospective, comparative account allows him to more fully delve into the beauty and pain of the experience. This is what the Vinteuil septet shows him as well; giving him two points of reference from which to examine Vinteuil's phrase, he is able to see how they interrogate and modify each other, and through the comparative method he can extend his sense of what the phrase means into new directions. He argues, however, that it is not through a pursuit of origins (musicologically) that this explication of the phrase will gain any real meaning; instead,

Celle que donnaient ces phrases de Vinteuil était différente de toute autre, comme si, en dépit des conclusions qui semblent se dégager de la science, l'individuel existait. Et c'était justement quand il cherchait puissamment à être nouveau, qu'on reconnaissait, sous les différences apparentes, les similitudes profondes et les ressemblances voulues qu'il y avait au sein d'une oeuvre, quand Vinteuil reprenait à diverses reprises une même phrase, la diversifiait, s'amusait à changer son rythme, à la faire reparaître sous sa forme première, ces ressemblances-là voulues, oeuvre de l'intelligence, forcément superficielles, n'arrivaient jamais à être aussi frappantes que ces ressemblances dissimulées, involontaires, qui éclataient sous des couleurs différentes, entre les deux chefs-d'oeuvre

distincts ; car alors Vinteuil, cherchant puissamment à être nouveau, s'interrogeait lui-même ; de toute la puissance de son effort créateur il atteignait sa propre essence à ces profondeurs où, quelque question qu'on lui pose, c'est du même accent, le sien propre, qu'elle répond. (1795)

He recognizes that the truly comparative work is done not by musicologists, but by Vinteuil himself; he interrogates himself and invites the listener to examine the process of creation as it goes, and like the embroiderer or dress-maker, he invites the listener to look on the other side of the fabric and see how it is put together.

Marcel confronts this question himself as he gathers the impressions and experiences which allow him to dive back into his own history; he wishes to identify exactly what it is that gives him such an overwhelming pleasure in remembering, and he realizes that it is not simply in the *sensations* themselves, or in the *memories*, but rather,

en comparant entre elles ces diverses impressions bienheureuses et qui avaient entre elles ceci de commun que je les éprouvais à la fois dans le moment actuel et dans un moment éloigné ... au vrai, l'être qui alors goûtait en moi cette impression la goûtait en ce qu'elle avait de commun dans un jour ancien et maintenant, dans ce qu'elle avait d'extra-temporel, un être qui n'apparaissait que quand, par une de ces identités entre le présent et le passé, il pouvait se trouver dans le seul milieu où il pût vivre, jouir de l'essence des choses, c'est-à-dire en dehors du temps... Cet être-là n'était jamais venu à moi, ne s'était jamais manifesté qu'en dehors de l'action, de la jouissance immédiate, chaque fois que le miracle d'une analogie m'avait fait échapper au présent. Seul il avait le pouvoir de me faire retrouver les jours anciens, le Temps Perdu, devant quoi les efforts de ma mémoire et de mon intelligence échouaient toujours. (2266)

The comparative method is what gives him this pleasure; only through establishing what is ‘common’ between these experiences and *not merely the sensory experience itself* can he find lasting pleasure and a productive intervention into his past. There are not ‘successive’ states, rather, they are interposed, and superimposed; only the comparative method allows him to exist ‘outside’ of time. To be outside is not to be ‘above’ it; instead of a hierarchy, he engages in a horizontal relation allowing him to step between moments of time and examine their contradictions and combine rather than suppress “des éléments homogènes” (2267). This is because the reality to which these memories draw him back is not a simple image or text to which he can refer, but rather, “une image offerte par la vie nous apporte en réalité, à ce moment-là, des sensations multiples et différentes,” and these differences are inherent to the objects, and not separable from them; “ce que nous appelons la réalité est un certain rapport entre ces sensations et ces souvenirs qui nous entourent simultanément – rapport que supprime une simple vision cinématographique, laquelle s'éloigne par là d'autant plus du vrai qu'elle prétend se borner à lui – rapport unique que l'écrivain doit retrouver pour en enchaîner à jamais dans sa phrase les deux termes différents” (2280). Because sensations and experiences do not exist outside of time, everything is caught in the complex process of narrative; there is, as discussed earlier, no ‘film’ of life to which we can simply refer, no neutral and universal but ‘exterior,’ technologically-mediated reality. Interrogating the process of representation is what these retrospective, comparative interventions allow Marcel to do, and it is the only way to examine reality because it is through the logic of narrative that we form a concept of reality.

Marcel’s valuation of the comparative reading is established through these moments of sensory connection; these are foregrounded from the first anxious nights in Combray, but the comparative method accrues force as it extends through his work as a way of deferring ‘ends’

and suggesting that these echoes gain pleasure with time and transgress complacent ideas of reality with their force. These are the terms in which he recalls his time with Albertine:

Chaque soir, fort tard, avant de me quitter, elle glissait dans ma bouche sa langue, comme un pain quotidien, comme un aliment nourrissant et ayant le caractère presque sacré de toute chair à qui les souffrances que nous avons endurées à cause d'elle ont fini par conférer une sorte de douceur morale, ce que j'évoque aussitôt par comparaison, ce n'est pas la nuit que le capitaine de Borodino me permit de passer au quartier, par une faveur qui ne guérissait en somme qu'un malaise éphémère, mais celle où mon père envoya maman dormir dans le petit lit à côté du mien. Tant la vie, si elle doit une fois de plus nous délivrer d'une souffrance qui paraissait inévitable, le fait dans des conditions différentes, opposées parfois jusqu'au point qu'il y a presque sacrilège apparent à constater l'identité de la grâce octroyée! (1609-10)

Here the comparative work of memory is transgressive—the sacramental aspect of her sexuality, the ‘daily bread’ of her tongue in his mouth, and the security of being granted companionship for the night, like that which was so comforting in his night with Saint-Loup at Doncières—all the sensations of an interdict and yet familiar sexuality are heightened by the recognition that they affect each other, read each other, and heighten the power of any of the memories to communicate with others. After hearing many of Andrée’s posthumous confessions about her, he still cannot quite understand who she was, nor what precisely she meant to him, but he compares his sense of her past to a monument, demolished, rebuilt, and renovated constantly (2063); he eventually is able to accept that it will never be settled, but always continue as a work in progress, spinning out connections and associations, both pleasurable and painful, as it interacts with an ever-evolving present.

Charlus, like Albertine, has taught him how to examine the process of narrative, and how an insistent difference can allow for new and generative readings of supposedly static and normative texts. Thus he resists the interpretation that he is speaking to an ‘ideal’ or ‘normal’ reader; “en réalité, chaque lecteur est, quand il lit, le propre lecteur de soi-même. L'ouvrage de l'écrivain n'est qu'une espèce d'instrument optique qu'il offre au lecteur afin de lui permettre de discerner ce que, sans ce livre, il n'eût peut-être pas vu en soi-même...d'autres particularités (comme l'inversion) peuvent faire que le lecteur ait besoin de lire d'une certaine façon pour bien lire” (2297). Marcel has learned from Charlus, Albertine, Robert, and others that resistance is not only possible, but necessary for texts to live; they must become mutable, subject to the deformations and excitements of each of their readers, and thereby capable of breathing ‘new’ air²²³. This is the only reason that he begins his work; having always felt incapable of writing because of the expectations around him, it is not until he reads the Goncourt extract that he finds that this capacity for difference may be the impetus for a work even greater than he could imagine:

Ce que racontaient les gens m'échappait, car ce qui m'intéressait, c'était non ce qu'ils voulaient dire, mais la manière dont ils le disaient, en tant qu'elle était révélatrice de leur caractère ou de leurs ridicules ; ou plutôt c'était un objet qui avait toujours été plus particulièrement le but de ma recherche parce qu'il me donnait un plaisir spécifique, le point qui était commun à un être et à un autre. ... ce qu'il poursuivait alors – par exemple l'identité du salon Verdurin dans divers lieux et divers temps – était situé à mi-profondeur, au delà de l'apparence elle-même, dans une zone un peu plus en retrait. ...

²²³ Adam Watt, in *Reading in Proust's À la recherche: 'le délire de la lecture'*, he notes that this mode of reading which emerges in the library of the Prince de Guermantes preserves otherness and implicates the reader: “reading teaches us to see, to feel, to hear otherwise, to experience a new phenomenology of everyday life. By priming our minds and senses, reading enables a new scrutinizing streak in us, which looks inwards and out, bringing to life new worlds, real and imagined” (156)

J'avais beau dîner en ville, je ne voyais pas les convives, parce que quand je croyais les regarder je les radiographiais. (2147)

Marcel recognizes that through a life of treating people as *not* merely decorative, or as means to some utilitarian end, has enabled him to find compelling points of connection; this comparative method allows him to interrogate the methods of self-presentation, and self-understanding, which underlie *every* human relation. And by so doing he enables a work which generates the potential for greater examination, rather than closing it off.

To foster and preserve difference in an aesthetic work is, for Marcel, far more than the valiant effort of a genius; it requires the investment and activity of the reader, the recognition that any human work calls forth a response, and a comparison, in a new context. He understands this as he reads his own words, published in *Le Figaro*; reading as an 'author' only, he sees just the mistakes and missteps, but

en m'efforçant d'être lecteur, si je me déchargeais sur les autres du devoir douloureux de me juger, je réussissais du moins à faire table rase de ce que j'avais voulu faire en lisant ce que j'avais fait. Je lisais l'article en m'efforçant de me persuader qu'il était d'un autre. Alors toutes mes images, toutes mes réflexions, toutes mes épithètes prises en elles-mêmes et sans le souvenir de l'échec qu'elles représentaient pour mes visées, me charmaient par leur éclat, leur ampleur, leur profondeur. (2034)

By reading the text carefully and sympathetically, not as an 'owner' and not as a passive 'receptor,' but as a co-creator of its meaning, he sees it as a 'fait' rather than a 'œuvre'; this allows him to examine its components and not subordinate them to expectations. Dealing with his text in this way prepares him for the 'travail' which will consume both life and art, and will require the intervention and inclusion of difference for a yet-unknown reader. As he waits in the

library of the Prince at the end of the novel, a ray of light illuminates the floor, reminding him of his childhood, and Eulalie's rooms where he had to stay when they feared she had typhoid fever; the memory fills him with far more pleasure than the sumptuous furnishings of the present room:

Ainsi j'étais déjà arrivé à cette conclusion que nous ne sommes nullement libres devant l'oeuvre d'art, que nous ne la faisons pas à notre gré, mais que, préexistant à nous, nous devons, à la fois parce qu'elle est nécessaire et cachée, et comme nous ferions pour une loi de la nature, la découvrir. Mais cette découverte que l'art pouvait nous faire faire n'était-elle pas, au fond, celle de ce qui devrait nous être le plus précieux, et de ce qui nous reste d'habitude à jamais inconnu, notre vraie vie, la réalité telle que nous l'avons sentie et qui diffère tellement de ce que nous croyons, que nous sommes emplis d'un tel bonheur quand le hasard nous en apporte le souvenir véritable. (2273)

The humility of the work of art surprises him; because it is involuntary, and seems negligible, it is difficult to discover how to approach and create it, but once he is able to see how the process of discovery and self-examination can produce a 'reading' which is both profoundly personal and yet valid for others who approach it with a desire to incorporate difference, he is able to create a genealogy that transcends the boundaries of the individual. For Marcel, this multiplication and generation is what marks the validity of his work; through tireless exploration of opposing families, 'ways,' lifestyles, beliefs, and methods, he considers it to be a living fabric:

Comme un seau, montant le long d'un treuil, vient toucher la corde à diverses reprises et sur des côtés opposés, il n'y avait pas de personnage, presque pas même de choses ayant eu place dans ma vie, qui n'y eût joué tour à tour des rôles différents. Une simple relation mondaine, même un objet matériel, si je le retrouvais au bout de quelques années dans mon souvenir, je voyais que la vie n'avait pas cessé de tisser autour de lui des fils

différents qui finissaient par le feutrer de ce beau velours pareil à celui qui, dans les vieux parcs, enveloppe une simple conduite d'eau d'un fourreau d'émeraude. (2344)

As in this passage he weaves together disparate metaphors: the bucket suspended by a winch touches the opposing 'côtés', and filaments fan out (like Woolf's image of the knotted 'I' at the center of a tangled network of lines) in all directions, becoming a 'felt'; the embroidery loses some of its distinctness over time, but then becomes a carpet of grass, a living fabric woven from human strands. In this way, through a surprising juxtapositioning of relations, Proust is able to suture together the 'ends' of narrative into a new, living, differentiated, and vibrant work.

Chapter 6. CONCLUSION: A PLEA FOR COMPARISON

In the conclusion to his passionate defense of a new, global, and comparative context for literary studies in *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova also looks to Proust as the paradigmatic author for the preservation of alterity. He quotes Beckett's quip about the creation of the world and the creation of a pair of trousers, and says that the task of the critic must be to "restore the lost relationship between the world and the trousers of literature, to patiently retie the threads that link these two universes, which otherwise are condemned to exist in parallel without ever meeting each other. Literary theory has long renounced history by pretending that it is necessary to choose between the two, which it holds to be mutually exclusive" (348). Like Françoise patiently sewing together the scraps of Marcel's narrative, this mode of criticism would value both preservation and annihilation. Casanova goes on to articulate a specific relation between literature and history: "literature may be defined—without contradiction—both as an object that is irreducible to history and as a historical object, albeit one that enjoys a strictly literary historicity. What I have called the genesis of literary space is this very process by which literary freedom is invented, slowly, painfully, and with great difficulty, through endless struggles and rivalries" (350). For me, the "critical space" of comparative literature is something which should also be continually reinvented, and must always be a space of contradiction, difficulty, and negotiation, in order to be a living one. And to be a truly 'living' fabric it must, in my view, exist in networks of relation: contingent, personal, and agentive.

Comparative literature, to me, is and must be relentlessly personal; while it seems like it "should" be, and often is, characterized as a failing of the discipline that its practitioners are so limited by their personal knowledge of linguistic, cultural, and literary traditions, to me it is not. In a corporate university model, such an anachronistic practice, which requires years of labor

(especially for language learning) before having anything to show for itself, spreads itself into “unproductively” disparate areas, and ceaselessly defies the call to define its field of study or methodology, is not easily tolerated. And in many ways, it is not being tolerated, whatever the self-congratulatory and glossy 2017 *ACLA State of the Discipline Report* may claim to the contrary²²⁴. The Comparative Literature program which I entered and am now completing is disappearing, or at least fundamentally changing, both in name and in method, and it seems that most of the current attempts to ‘save’ comparative literature require the abandonment of one or both of the terms; either “comparative,” in deference to a more neoliberalistic-friendly “world” literature, flattening into one language tradition that which required painful and extended reading before²²⁵, or “literature,” in the pursuit of theory, cultural studies²²⁶, interdisciplinarity, or any other more attractive moniker. I do not mention this in an elegiac and self-assured attempt to construct my own “Verfall”-laden narrative of institutional decline from the ‘pure’ literary studies of an earlier, more Eurocentric age. I understand that these are probably strategic choices, and they may even be intelligent ones. But, to me, they also seem incredibly insubstantial and meaningless in a broader human context.

Indeed, the comparatists who motivated me to do the painful work of language acquisition and the difficult attempt to resist abstraction and focus on texts were never what I

²²⁴ Ursula Heise’s introduction to the report characterizes the discipline as a “lively spectrum of possibilities” (2), linked as that is to its “institutional presence” (7) and not to what would certainly be viewed as an anachronistic understanding of comparative literature. A “genealogy” of the various prophecied millennial futures of literary studies over the past twenty years—including such buzzwords as Theory, Cultural Studies, Postcolonialism, Digital Humanities, Ecocriticism, Area Studies, or Translation Studies—would show, I think, both a remarkable incoherence (except in the attempts to recast this incoherence as an attractive and productive “perpetual crisis of the humanities”) and a frenzy of fashionable jargon, but little actual transformation..

²²⁵ Rebecca Walkowitz articulates this again and again, linking the ‘disdain’ for literature in translation, or which lends itself to easy translatability to scholarly elitism: “the notion that a text should express individuality through idiolect was institutionalized by modernism and persists with us today. For this reason, when we talk about world literature, we are in fact also talking about modernism. In the view inherited from modernist criticism, literature should be relatively ‘untranslatable’ because thematic innovation ought to be sutured to the sound and sense of a specific language” (“Close Reading in an Age of Global Writing” 172).

²²⁶ Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek argues for the ‘salvation’ of comparative literature through cultural studies, specifically through his ten-step program of “evidence-based theoretical and methodological approach” (258).

would term “strategists,” they were always “humanists.” Humanists are out of favor in the academy, certainly, but I continue to advocate for humanism because to me it is the only sustainable basis for comparison, the only benchmark which does not require subordination to abstract, usually state- or institution-mediated identifiers. This is not to say that the ‘human’ is an uncontested term, but it is to suggest that it is above all an accessible and modifiable one. I choose to believe that comparison happens in every human context, in every family, in every culture. Ming Xie, in *Conditions of Comparison*, says: “I want to argue that comparative literature is in fact the *self*-understanding of literature, and that crucial to the comparative approach is a critical engagement with the notion of *comparativity*” (36). He defines ‘comparativity’ as being

concerned with *how meaning is constituted*. Comparison is conducive to a self-centered or self-superior conception of differences and similarities. Comparativity, by contrast, is concerned with the *irreducible* and a priori character of our comparative operations ... Meanings are not given, or rather not given once and for all. The crucial point here is that in the cultural realm nothing is given once and for all; everything is in principle both *accessible* and *resistant* to human interpretation, and everything is in principle *modifiable*. (39)

I would echo these sentiments in a less theoretical and more personal context; the annihilation of comparative literature seems to show a discomfort with an institutional space in the humanities which resists classification. It shows a strategic effort on the part of institutions, including the ACLA, to dismantle the messy self-determinism and contingency of scholarship produced without, as Woolf would put it, “unreal loyalties” (*Three Guineas* 78) to supposedly-viable sources of funding, publication and tenure.

I admire Gayatri Spivak's relentless attempts to resist many of the "unreal loyalties" through a persistent effort to champion modes of reading and relation that do not fit in the streamlined, product-driven corporate model. Her 2003 book *Death of a Discipline* certainly amplifies the rhetoric of "death" surrounding comparative literature, but she wishes to insist on a more democratic, inclusive reading practice. She writes: "just as socialism at its best would persistently and repeatedly wrench capital away from capitalism, so must the new Comparative Literature persistently and repeatedly undermine and undo the definitive tendency of the dominany to appropriate the emergent. It must not let itself be consistuted by the demands of liberal multiculturalism alone" (100). She recognizes how easily an appeal to "difference" can be commodified and streamlined into a practice of sameness, and how smoothly the subaltern can be subverted. However, unlike Spivak, I do not believe that the solution to such attempts is to emphasize the strategic and somewhat vague "collectivities" she emphasizes throughout the rest of her book; I think that literary studies need to become more personal, not less, and need to shed their ethos of objectivity, philosophy, and rationality in order to actually transform practices of teaching and reading.

I speak from experience in this regard; I didn't become a student of comparative literature because it was strategically attractive, still less because I felt an impassioned call to political activism; I was and remain suspicious of all such appeals. I switched my major from English when I found out that the English department wouldn't count any of my coursework in German literature towards the degree. So I signed up for the introductory course in comparative literature, initially skeptical, as all true believers in a national literature generally are, of its broad claims. One of the first readings was Claudio Guillén's *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*; he defined the impossible, but necessary task of comparison as follows:

Comparatists are those who refuse to devote themselves exclusively to either one of the two extremes of the polarity that concern them—the local or the universal. It is obvious that for them specialization in one nation or one nationality is not sufficient as a task and cannot be sustained as a practical matter. And it is also true that comparatists do not operate within a sphere of extreme worldliness, of uprootedness, bloodless abstraction, a cosmopolitanism carried to the *n*th degree—in a distorted view of things that reflects neither the real itinerary of literary history nor the concrete coordinates of poetic creation.

(6-7)

To me, choosing comparative literature was precisely this: choosing not to choose. It meant existing and reading and writing in a liminal space, not because of its transgressive potential and strategic attractiveness, but because I simply couldn't live in any one discipline. For me, this is the potential of comparative literature: to enable reading—personal, wasteful, guilty, brilliant, abject, problematic, fascinating reading. I became a comparatist because it was the only discipline that truly allowed me to read whatever I wanted, without trying to justify it according to some disciplinary model or put on a sham veneer of bleeding-heart politics²²⁷.

While this is certainly not an unproblematic motivation, I believe there is a certain necessity to conceiving of oneself as insufficiently loyal to any particular formulation. I see a similar push-and-pull effect in Rey Chow's discussion of Auerbach's *Mimesis*; for her, comparative literature is both the agent of oppression and the only discipline of 'tolerance.'

Auerbach's rhetoric, she emphasizes, is radical: "by referring to what he is doing as a 'complete

²²⁷ Spivak addresses this in her most recent piece in *PMLA*, "How Do We Write, Now?"; she discusses her disappointment in the new consensus surrounding appeals to "The Global South," and she suggests that a great deal of it is empty rhetoric: "we decide to define what we are not by a bit of academic tourism, choosing academics to represent the global South at conferences and in journals from countries elsewhere who have class continuity with us and thus resolving our own sense of ourselves as democratic subjects resisting definition by race and gender. Thus our 'we' remains the embarrassed and tacit custodian of a presumed global norm ... I feel out of joint with this phenomenon" (166).

change,' Auerbach intends nothing less than a reconceptualization of literature on the basis of *a common humanity*" (19). Chow then wonders, however, whether there is a "limit to the secularist, modern Western ethics of tolerance, an ethics that aspires to redeeming all of humanity and that nonetheless, *perhaps because of the acquiescence to exclusionism that constitutes its fundamental approach to alterity*, must in the end ban/bar some from entry?" (24). She recognizes that Auerbach is trapped between the impossible dilemma of resisting a normative religious ethos, and creating a humanistic tolerance that doesn't always already rely on some brand of personal, subjective ideology. For Auerbach, this signified the necessity of democracy, inefficient and problematic as it often is, because he hoped that it would also mean that "we won't 'hate whoever opposes us," which Chow says brings home

the kinship between the democratizing impulse and an older human condition, hatred.

That kinship would be a good way of explaining why literature, understood in the broad modern sense of fictional composition, continues to be relevant in one significant sense [those who aren't liberal cosmopolitans fascinate] these would be subjects who refuse to speak or are incapable of speaking other than in their own idioms, whose styles remain elusively antagonistic, idiotic, monolingual, or untranslatable. ... Between the joyously nihilistic destabilization of the human as such and the humanism of the Auerbachian literary paradigm, a rupture persists, prompting a line of flight. Even if minor, this line of flight will likely remain a vital force in comparative literature's continual self-invention.

(25)

The stakes of this embrace of the particular, the contingent, the antagonistic, are obvious; only through the recognition of a fundamental kinship (even if only in the universal hatred that we endlessly demonstrate), can a truly democratic reading of others be enabled.

This strangely hearkens back to one of the foundational texts of comparative literature, Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett's 1886 book *Comparative Literature*. Although he lays out a regressive and dogmatically sequential literary history, his impulse is to allow the organic combinations of comparative thought dictate the trajectory; he defines his method against Kingsley's blithe assertion that "to understand history we must understand men and women," responding:

To understand history we must understand men and women. True; but men and women are exceedingly complex units, and their treatment as purely isolated units would not only fail to contribute to the understanding of history, but would tend to resolve all human knowledge into a mass of disconnected atoms among which all general principles and even thought itself would perish. In order to understand either ourselves or history we must therefore combine and compare these personal units with each other. (23)

Though Posnett certainly could not have anticipated or agreed with the many directions in which this insistence on particularity would take human thought and society, I believe there is validity in his recognition that to compare is to understand ourselves as different and also fundamentally able to think, to connect, and to thematize that difference without subordinating it to dogma.

Posnett, in his progressivist account of literary history, argues that the 'clan' is the ultimate repressor of literary innovation; I would argue that the family forms the psychological and sociological basis for comparison, and needs to be thematized rather than repressed. This is what Stefani Engelstein argues in *Sibling Action*: "the sibling is, however, an ambiguous entity—not self and yet not-quite-other. It therefore marks the contingency and permeability of boundaries, the doubtfulness of integrity, and the insecurity of uniqueness. The structure of outward-branching genealogical systems thus necessarily generates a concept of identity haunted

at every level by the nebulosity of margins” (3). She recognizes that while many see in genealogy a repressive apparatus, a hopelessly flawed search for origins,

What is fascinating about a genealogy, however, as anyone knows who has ever attempted a family tree, is the speed with which it sprouts branches and twigs, endless varieties of great-aunts, stepbrothers-in-law, and third cousins twice removed. Nothing like a line—straight or crooked—a family tree merges complex systems at every reproductive node, and these mergers result in multiple descendants open to their own future mergers. Equally compelling, however, is what any reconstituted genealogy hides and excludes. (6)

This is a different use and understanding of genealogy than that promoted by Nietzsche, Foucault or their philosophical descendants. It is a recognition of affinity and difference at every level of human identity: not something to be posited and clung to, but a foundational condition of human society and reproduction, and a necessary component of any study of culture. Engelstein argues that “the neglected sibling is a model that allows us to deconstruct self/other and gender dichotomies, and to move beyond the mother-child dyad that forms the primary grounds for inter-subjectivity in contemporary debates. Sibling logic instead recognizes the subject as embedded in a transsubjective network of *partial others*, with whom we crucially also share” (28). I would expand this beyond only a sibling relation, but into all the ‘partial others’ explored throughout this dissertation: parents, foster-uncles, servants, visible or invisible ancestors, and so forth; it would also seem to demand the personal and intellectual work involved in a “genealogy.” This radical contingency certainly carries with it the risk of being folded into normative systems, but it also has, in my view, the potential to unfold those norms, in any direction, through any relation, in a way that is available to any human.

Thus although I believe that family relationships themselves ought to be thematized and examined in modernism, what I am ultimately suggesting is not a theme, or a method. It is a theory of difference, one which cannot be separated or abstracted from its subjects; it requires the intervention and examination of those it constitutes as subjects. It is to compare, to read in a genealogical mode, not to discover origins, rather, to create affinities that can enliven and change the way we live now. It recognizes and validates the personal connections which draw us to texts, and asks that we read them with humility and deference. Throughout this study I have pulled on many strands of a bewildering web of individuals, fictional and 'real,' and I plan to continue following those strands to the knots of meaning and speculations about the interstices between them. I can only hope that continuing to compare and to plead with others to compare as well will keep this tiny shred of unproductive reading alive as a possibility for anyone willing to engage in the vulnerable task of opening themselves to it.

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