THE "KNOCKINGS AND BATTERINGS" WITHIN: LATE MODERNISM'S REANIMATIONS OF NARRATIVE FORM

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation corrects the notion that fiction written in the late 1920s through the early 1940s fails to achieve the mastery and innovation of high modernism. It posits late modernism as a literary dispensation that instead pushes beyond high modernism's narrative innovations in order to fully express individuals' lived experience in the era between world wars. This dissertation claims novels by Elizabeth Bowen, Evelyn Waugh, and Samuel Beckett, as exemplars of a late modernism characterized by invocation and redeployment of conventionalized narrative forms in service of fresh explorations of the dislocation, inauthenticity, and alienation that characterize this era. By deforming and repurposing formal conventions, these writers construct entirely new forms whose disfigured likenesses to the genres they manipulate reveals a critical orientation to the canon.

These writers' reconfigurations of forms—including the bildungsroman, the epistolary novel, and autobiography—furthermore reveal the extent to which such conventionalized genres coerce and prescribe a unified and autonomous subjectivity. By dismantling these genres from within, Bowen, Waugh, and Beckett reveal their mechanics to be instrumental in coercing into being a notion of the subject that is both

limiting and delimited. These authors also invoke popular forms—including the Gothic aesthetic, imperial adventure narrative, and detective fiction—to reveal that non-canonical texts, too, participate in the process by which narrative inevitably posits consciousness as its premise.

I draw upon Tyrus Miller's conception of late modernism to explicate how these authors' various engagements with established forms simultaneously perform immanent critique and narrative innovation. This dissertation also endorses David Lloyd's assertion that canonical narrative forms are instrumental in producing subjectivity within text and thereby act as a coercive exemplar for readers. I invoke several critics' engagements with conventional genres' narrative mechanics to explicate this process. By examining closely the admixture of narrative forms that churns beneath the surfaces of these texts, I aim to pinpoint how the deformation of conventionalized forms can yield a fresh and distinctly late modernist vision of selfhood.

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For my family

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> "I swear that each of us keeps, battened down inside himself, a sort of lunatic giant—impossible socially, but full-scale—and that it's the knockings and batterings we sometimes hear in each other that keeps our intercourse from utter banality"
> -Elizabeth Bowen, *The Death of the Heart*

> "It was as though the whole reasonable and decent constitution of things, the sum of all he had experienced or learned to expect, were an inconspicuous, inconsiderable object mislaid somewhere on the dressing table; no outrageous circumstance in which he found himself, no new, mad thing brought to his notice, could add a jot to the all-encompassing chaos that shrieked about his ears"
> -Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*

> "And I, what was I doing there, and why come? These are things that we shall try and discover. But these are things we must not take seriously"
> -Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*

Each of these passages expresses the distinctly late modernist intuition that in the mid-twentieth century, the boundaries of the self are becoming increasingly troubled. In Bowen's, Waugh's, and Beckett's novels from the late 1920s through the late 1940s, selfhood is not a deep well of knowable consciousness residing within; rather, subjectivity is experienced as an affliction with which authors, narrators, and characters must grapple. This depiction of the fraught nature of being is distinct from the autonomous and self-authenticating subjectivity posited and perpetuated in both the works of classic modernist fiction and other canonical narrative forms. By acknowledging the "lunatic giant" that lurks beneath the performance of selfhood that culture and narrative require, Bowen, Waugh, and Beckett pursue subjectivity as a

question rather than as an extant and embodied phenomenon. By enlisting and reanimating the forms that coerce this outmoded conception of subjectivity into being, these authors welcome the "all-encompassing chaos" that afflicts those living in the years between world wars. Each of these author's narrative methods "seeks to discover" a literary means to free that lunatic giant from the constraints of narrative convention. The result is a rigorous dismantling of canonical novel forms that, in turn, dismantles the reified conception of the subject as it had heretofore been configured in fiction.

This dissertation attempts to account for the confounding formal strangeness that characterizes this radical reconfiguration of selfhood as represented in fiction. Written in an era when both modernist and pre-modernist narrative formal conventions were clearly delineated and firmly entrenched, Bowen's, Waugh's, and Beckett's novels construct complex interrogations of the problem of narrative conventionality. By deforming and repurposing formal conventions, these writers construct entirely new forms whose disfigured likeness to the genres they manipulate reveals a critical orientation to the canon. These writers examine and undermine narrative conventions' destructive power to coerce and prescribe a unified and autonomous subjectivity that no longer resonates with individuals' lived experience in the 1930s and 40s.

The texts that I examine in this project are all emphatically strange; they do not conform to many of the critical and readerly expectations of unity and formal cohesion by which ideas about "good literature" are formulated. Rather, they invoke conventionalized forms only to wrench them into shapes ideally suited to explorations of specifically late modernist configurations of selfhood and of the historical developments that nurture these configurations. As a result, Bowen's style is both seemingly innocuously

Edwardian and uncannily attuned to the shadow-side of modernity; Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* is a satirical send-up that somehow pinpoints the tragic vacuity at the heart of the stories by which modern individuals make sense of their lives; Beckett's trilogy is stylistically unrecognizable as anything but Beckett's, yet precisely and painstakingly engages and undoes some of Western literature's most recognizable narrative forms to mount a radical new vision of human consciousness. In every case, these novels are often jarring and lack formal cohesion; such are the trademarks of their simultaneous invocation and critical redeployment of canonical forms.

These novels' insightful attunement to the unique challenges that confront individuals during this era is reflected in their authors' attention to the dynamic relationship between surface and depth. This is the controlling thematic by which they and their narrators seek to understand the disparity between the deep well of interiorized subjectivity posited by previous literary forms and a growing sensation that this notion no longer resonates with their experiences of selfhood in the mid-twentieth century. Each of these texts' authors focuses upon the dynamic interplay between the performance of self coerced by narrative and their respective conceptions of what it means to be a self living during the mid-twentieth century. Bowen's attention to surface and depth reveals the lurking complexity that characterizes the experience of being; Waugh's indicates that emptiness lies at the heart of the late modern self; Beckett reveals that a truly rich vision of selfhood must exceed the bounds of narrative.

These authors formally enact the interplay of surface and depth by undermining conventionalized narratives from within. Each of these novels appears to be one kind of book on its surface, but a complex engagement with both historical circumstance and

narrative convention roils beneath. Below the surfaces of these texts, a timely engagement with the issues of the late modernist era is ongoing; the formal recalibrations and deformations that these authors perform reveal new configurations of selfhood that defy the prescriptions of both modernism and older conventional narrative forms. These formal redeployments furthermore reveal the destructiveness of narrative conventions that, by the late 1920s, have come to act as constraints upon writers, narrators, characters, and readers. These novels' "strangeness" resides precisely in their uncanny attunement to the narrative conventions' inadequacy to the task of expressing consciousness in all its richness.

By examining closely the admixture of narrative forms that churns beneath the surfaces of these texts, I aim to pinpoint how the deformation of conventionalized forms can yield a fresh and distinctly late modernist vision of selfhood. Paradoxically, it is precisely these novels' invocations of untimely and outmoded forms that facilitate both their critique of previous forms' investment in interiority and their innovative depictions of the human self. These texts, which so little resemble their modernist progenitors, manage to posit a radically nuanced understanding of selfhood that is precisely resonant with the era in which they were written, and yet they call upon highly conventionalized forms—the bildungsroman, the epistolary novel, autobiography, the Gothic, the imperial adventure narrative, detective fiction—to do so. This project seeks to peer beneath the surfaces of these texts in order to theorize how Bowen, Waugh and Beckett perform this feat.

Tyrus Miller's conception of late modernism elucidates the character of the strange corpus of fiction that emerged in the years after modernism's apex in the mid-

1920s. Miller pinpoints the late modernist era's most salient development as a breakdown of distinction "between subject and object, between spectator and spectacle, between producer and consumer" (43). This breakdown constitutes the contextual and affective basis of late modernism, and takes shape in fiction as a vision a "general depersonalization and deauthentication of life in modern society" (42). In the novels I examine, this breakdown takes various forms: the vast discrepancy between the veneer of selfhood one performs and the complex reality of individual consciousness in Bowen's work; Waugh's revelation that individuals' lives are merely rote performances of outmoded scripts; Beckett's mode of narration, which indicates the extent to which narrative subjectivity is an enacted performance. These depictions vigorously resist the conventional function of narrative as an ongoing revelation of authentic and autonomous subjectivity. Rather, they endorse and enact a late modernist dispensation that seeks to express the ongoing deauthentication of life and its progressive transformation into spectacle. This radical project requires a profound reformulation of those conventionalized narrative techniques—both modernist and pre-modernist—that placed faith in, and sought to narratively plumb, the depths of the self. The result is a corpus of "unseasonable forms" that represent breaking points and "points of nonsynchronism" in the broad narrative of literary history (Miller 12).

Because it is historically complicit in coercing and policing a prescriptive and delimiting conception of subjectivity, narrative itself is where this deflation of form necessarily begins. David Lloyd's analyses of bildungsroman and autobiography in particular reveals late modernists' reasons for laying siege to these genres and others invested in depicting autonomous and unified subjectivity. In *Nationalism and Minor*

Literature (1987), Lloyd argues that aesthetic culture itself has historically invoked a concept of man in general as not merely a producer of form, but as "producer, in particular, of the forms of himself through an aesthetic labor that transcends specific economic or political determinants. That is to say, aesthetics posits the universal formal identity of the human" (6). Culturally esteemed forms, including those that Bowen, Waugh and Beckett invoke and deform, posit a notion of humanness that, by virtue of its canonicity, becomes an exemplar to readers. The effect of this universalized notion of identity upon "real people" is central to Lloyd's analysis: the notion of culture perpetuated by the canon "is at once aesthetic and political" and "involves crucially a notion of historical development that provides the rationale for both the integrity of the canon and the integration of the State" (6). The formulation of subjectivity coerced into being by canonical texts therefore has ramifications beyond the pages of literature; it not only facilitates the reification of aesthetic judgments but also makes readers complicit in the articulation of the bounds of a subjectivity that is at once individually constraining and universally prescribed and applied.

The late modernist texts I examine in this dissertation work to dissolve the powerful mandate of development that underpins both the ascription of canonicity and the coercion of subjectivity. They do so by invoking precisely the narrative forms that enact this mandate and wrenching them into new iterations that undermine it from within. These canonical forms belong to the canon of "major literature," as Lloyd defines it: "a major literature is established as such precisely by virtue of its claim to representative status, of its claim to realize the autonomy of the individual subject to such a degree that that individual subject becomes universally valid and archetypal" (19). Bowen's,

Waugh's, and Beckett's respective deformations of canonical forms undermine precisely these forms' claims to realize a vision of autonomous and universal subjectivity: bildungsroman, autobiography, the epistolary novel and the modernist travel narrative all undergo this critical reformulation. These authors' experiments with popular literary forms also resist literature's "major function:" the Gothic, the imperial adventure narrative, and detective fiction are each repurposed to undo the ascription of deep interiority that major literature insists upon.

The resulting texts defy the defining features of major literature by manifestly resisting not only the "production of an autonomous ethical identity for the subject," but also the requirement that the literary work itself "be autonomous, both self-contained and original" (Lloyd 19). The explicit derivativeness of Bowen's, Waugh's, and Beckett's novels from canonical forms prevents these ascriptions of autonomy and originality; as Miller points out, late modernist fiction embodies "'the force of *exception'* within history's tendency to conserve institutions and processes in the midst of historical change" (Miller 12, italics in original). These writers' strange and estranging forms actively resist the canon's conservation of outmoded conceptions of aesthetic value that perpetuate a conception of human subjectivity that does not resonate amidst an increasing depersonalization and deauthentication of life (Miller 42). Bowen, Waugh and Beckett furthermore insist upon a reconfiguration of narrative commensurate to the cultural, historical, and psychic realities of the mid-twentieth century.

This radical reconfiguration is, importantly, also a response to classic modernist fiction's enactment of the functions of major literature. These late modernists' work exhibits a negatively critical orientation to the masterworks of high modernism that,

despite their radical narrative and formal innovations, perpetuate a notion of subjectivity that purports to be both authentic and knowable. Indeed, the depiction of characters' deepest selves is in many ways high modernism's crowning accomplishment. By contrast, in the novels I examine, Bowen, Waugh, and Beckett undercut the investment in interiority that is modernist narrative's hallmark and instead reach back further into literary history for canonical forms that can be redeployed in service of a new configuration of selfhood that is more precisely late modernist. The result is a set of texts that appear incongruous to the mid-twentieth century; they are untimely, unseasonable, and nonsynchronous (Miller 12).

These works little resemble the masterworks of modernism wherein narrative plumbing of complex "selves"—Stephen Dedalus, John Dowell, Clarissa Dalloway, Mrs. Ramsay—result in unified and formally masterful depictions of specific humans' consciousness. Rather, these writers' attunement to the flattening of their own historical present into a scenario results in texts that exhibit a lack of symmetry and formal balance (Miller 44, 13). I argue that late modernism's often formally jarring and confounding aesthetics should be read not as failure to achieve modernism's formal virtuosity, but as a "reaction to a certain type of modernist fiction dominated by an aesthetics of formal mastery" (Miller 18). These writers sought to depict the progressive "derealization of reality" that afflicted their era; as a result, their novels invoke, deform, and repurpose seemingly untimely forms (Miller 44). By revealing these redeployments of canonical forms to be capable of profound and timely insight, Bowen, Waugh and Beckett "deflate the category of form as a criterion for judging literary works" (Miller 18). These authors confront the challenge of developing a new configuration of narrative that befits the

historical, psychic, and cultural conditions of late modernism; in so doing, they construct a body of work that challenges the reified categories upon which our valuations of literature are based and insists upon narrative's potential to offer radical insight into the experience of being a self in the world.

In my second chapter, I examine the dynamic relationship that exists between the formally conventional surfaces of Bowen's novels *The Hotel* (1927) and *The Death of the Heart* (1938) and the complex configurations of selfhood in evidence beneath these surfaces. Bowen invokes the distinctly twentieth century phenomena of cosmopolitanism and the dislocation wrought by international mobility as premises for her investigation of the nature of selfhood in this era. In Bowen's depiction, cosmopolitan mobility provokes existential anxiety that can be ameliorated neither by secure national identifications nor personal or familial associations. Bowen's characters—be they homeless orphans or wealthy dowagers—are universally traumatized by their lack of "place" in the world. The trauma provoked by their rootlessness makes apparent the absence of deep and mobile interior subjectivities; there is no autonomous and consistent "self" to provide these characters security in the midst of profound dislocation.

For Bowen, such dislocation is a salient feature of existence in the mid-twentieth century. This is manifested in her novels' invocations and revisions of the female bildungsroman, the epistolary novel form, and women's autobiographical writing. Each of these genres' premise is to narrate the transformation of an underdeveloped individual into a self-authenticating and socially sanctioned subject. Bowen depicts her characters' total unmooring from secure identifications by undermining each of these genres from within. Sydney's coming-of-age in *The Hotel* is initially configured according to the

contours of a female bildungsroman; it purports to narrate her development into a mature, married, and coherent individual. Bowen undercuts this developmental arc by insisting upon Sydney's alienation not only from the institutions that mandate it, but from her own life: toward the end of *The Hotel,* Sydney "could see her life very plainly but there seemed no way back into it, the whole thing might have been painted on canvas with a clever enough but not convincing appearance of reality" (198). The female bildungsroman plot would have Sydney coming into increasing knowledge of her deep self, but Bowen's reconfiguration of this genre rather reveals that Sydney's fundamental dislocation provokes awareness that her life itself is a veneer that merely covers over the emptiness at her core.

Bowen's specific reformulation of the female bildungsroman form is furthermore a critique of high modernism's rejection of it. Bowen does not merely reject the form in order to reveal its developmental arc's oppressiveness; she rather reformulates the female bildungsroman to plumb the discrepancy that exists between one's selfhood and the performance of self that the genre mandates. I compare Sydney's coming-of-age in *The Hotel* to the protagonist's in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* in order to show how Bowen's recalibration of the female bildungsroman undoes the form's investment in the "dark places of psychology" which is, for Woolf, where subjectivity resides (108). In this sense, Bowen, like Waugh and Beckett, pursues a literary means by which to represent the increasingly troubled consciousness of those late modernist selves whose experience of being is misrepresented by canonical modernist conceptions of deep, interiorized subjectivity.

Bowen's invocations of female autobiographical writing and the epistolary novel form in her novel *The Death of the Heart* emphasize writing's role in the coercion of subjectivity. Portia, the young woman at the center of this novel, attributes profound importance to the act of composition. Her diary exists at the center of this text, and letters between various characters provoke much of the novel's intrigue. Portia's diary attempts to inscribe a selfhood that enacts the historical role of women's autobiography which posits "that a reality, hidden behind appearances, is independent of its inscription and its reading, and that representation in autobiography corresponds to it. In addition, these narratives presume that autobiographers are the source and center of the meaning of their texts" (Nussbaum xii). However, it is not the consummation of autonomous identity that is depicted in Portia's diary, but her fraught and finally failed attempt at discursive self-creation. This "failure" nurtures Portia's growing awareness of the incommensurability of her consciousness and the conception of self that autobiographical writing demands.

The epistolary novel form also posits a deep well of knowable subjectivity; Bowen exploits this convention by undermining the genre's usual function of revealing "the subjective and private orientations of the writer both towards the recipient and the people discussed, as well as the writer's own inner being" (Watt 191). Rather than penetrating to the core of Portia's deepest subjectivity, letters in *The Death of the Heart* reveal the unacknowledged emptiness that hovers beneath the surface of individuals' efforts to address themselves to others. Both women's autobiography and the epistle demand an enactment of selfhood that Portia comes to recognize is compelled by social obligation but in no way encapsulates her experience of being. Bowen's deformation of

these highly conventionalized forms thereby interrogates the status of subjectivity that is conventionally reified through textual convention. The result is a distinctly late modernist critique of the epistolary subject.

Bowen's complex reconfigurations of canonical forms enact the function of "minor literature" that Lloyd theorizes. By revealing these forms' complicity in positing and modeling a formulation of subjectivity that no longer resonates with individuals' experience, Bowen commences the "questioning of the founding principles of canonical aesthetic judgments" (Lloyd 23). Because Bowen invokes these seemingly outmoded forms, her novels do not capitulate to standards of aesthetic quality that, by the late 1920s, were well codified. Her novels' insistence upon the prescriptiveness of these forms furthermore reveals their delimiting effect upon the literary imagination. Her work, paradoxically by re-making old forms, makes possible a new vision of selfhood that exceeds the strictly circumscribed possibilities made possible in major literature. As Lloyd's formulation of minor literature enables us to understand, Bowen's work does not fail to represent the "attainment of the autonomous subjectivity that is the ultimate aim of the major narrative;" rather, her method actively and artfully resists this representation (22).

In my third chapter, I analyze the formal methods by which Waugh's 1934 novel *A Handful of Dust* thematizes the surface vs. depth dynamic that characterizes the late modernist sensibility in fiction. Waugh's satire points up the extent to which his characters are oriented toward shallow investments and pursuits; the novel's satirical form also dictates that inner lives remained unexplored. His deployment and reformulation of the Gothic—a form particularly attuned to issues of authenticity and

fakery—is a crucial aspect of this investigation of surfaces. The Gothic facilitates Waugh's revelation of the dynamic by which individuals living during this era paper over the ongoing crisis of the subject. The Gothic Revival home that is the centerpiece of Tony's life—and of his narrative—embodies the failure of attempts to cover over fraught realities with seemingly authentic trappings.

Importantly, Waugh's specific use of the Gothic reverses the use to which it was often put by modernism. Using T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) as an exemplary text, I argue that while modernists invoked the fearsome aspects of the Gothic to depict a generalized dread of the future, Waugh's satire flattens this affect, revealing a yet more profoundly disturbing phenomenon: the vacuity of those living in the era of late modernism limits their capacity to be haunted. Certainly, Waugh's invocation of the Gothic—an apparently untimely and seemingly "unmodern" aesthetic—makes *A Handful of Dust* one of the "unseasonable forms" of late modernism (Miller 12). But Waugh's redeployment of this aesthetic facilitates his revelation that individuals living in the era of late modernism are devoid of the autonomous subjectivity prescribed by those narrative forms that posit and model the development of autonomous and self-authenticating subjectivities.

Waugh's novel also depicts the increasing penetration of individuals' lives by a sense of lived mimesis that characterizes the 1930s and 40s (Miller 42). The novel's central character continues to organize his life according to the scripts inherited from his nineteenth century forebears; though historical and cultural reality no longer sustain them, he inhabits the roles of aristocratic estate owner and imperial adventurer. Tony turns to the Gothic Revival and the medieval as a means by which to manage the modern

vacuity of his time, which is marked by an obsession with fashion, décor, and trends. The pursuit of commodities, however, carries through his own engagements with the past; his apparently Gothic sensibility is characterized by a distinctly contemporary preoccupation with *things*. Tony's naïve but persistent perception of himself as a nineteenth century estate owner provokes his personal downfall, revealing the expiration of this narrative. He furthermore perceives of himself as a competent imperial adventurer on the model of the nineteenth century's "boy-heroes" who were "pathfinders for the Empire and civilization," but finds that his adventure far from English shores rather makes manifest his total inadequacy as an agent of civilization (Brantlinger 30). By revealing the profoundly negative consequences that result from Tony's rote enactment of outmoded scripts, Waugh indicates the destruction wrought by individuals' circumscription by narrative. Paradoxically, as is true of both Bowen's and Beckett's work, Waugh's depiction of this dangerous circumscription is facilitated through his own invocation and repurposing of the very narratives that circumscribe his characters' lives. *A Handful of Dust*'s ending magnifies the destruction resulting from blind adherence to ideologically empty narratives when Tony becomes entrapped in a "living death" that is both instigated and perpetuated by narrative. As I argue, Tony's subservience to conventionalized narratives results in his immurement within the nineteenth century narratives by which he tried, and failed, to instill his life with significance.

Waugh's denigration of narrative convention is not, however, an endorsement of modernism's radical techniques or sensibilities. *A Handful of Dust*'s orientation to the dynamic by which individuals cover over the emptiness that lurks within the self distinguish it from its modernist forebears, which sought to deeply plumb characters'

extant subjectivities. For Waugh, individuals' unreflective enactment of roles is endemic to the mid-twentieth century; his narrative method therefore departs from modernist practices in order to account for the lack of deep interiority beneath these performances. By contrasting Tony's experience of travel abroad with the one depicted in Virginia Woolf's earlier novel *The Voyage Out* (1915), I show how Waugh revises this modernist narrative arc to culminate not in an epiphany of self-knowledge but rather in the reader's recognition that there is no deep self for Tony to know. I also compare Tony's journey into a heart of darkness to Charlie Marlow's in Conrad's 1899 novella. The two texts initially construct their protagonists' adventures as journeys backward in time; unlike Marlow's *Heart of Darkness,* however, Tony's temporal orientation is entirely dismantled as a result of his journey away from England. The contraction of empire mandates that the narrative of English superiority by which he understands both his cultural and existential status to be secured is no longer resonant. As a result, Tony becomes entirely disoriented from time itself and, as a result, from his own life, which his traumatic journey transforms into a "company of phantoms" (200). Waugh recalibrates these modernist narratives of foreign encounters in order to express the crisis these encounters provoke in the mid-twentieth century: a realization of the total lack of ideological justification for the narratives by which individuals previously made sense of their lives. Waugh's novel reveals that adherence to conventionalized narrative renders those living during the late modernist era both devoid of self and unable to imagine stories beyond those by which they are circumscribed; this is the truly horrifying lesson of Waugh's Gothic finale.

My fourth chapter argues that Beckett's trilogy—particularly its first novel, *Molloy*—systematically invokes and dismantles the protocols of the bildungsroman and autobiographical forms to reveal both their coercion of narrative subjectivity and readers' complicity in this process of coercion. Both bildung and autobiography depict a narrator's or protagonist's ongoing development of an autonomous subjectivity that is socially sanctioned and facilitates his or her integration into culture. This form's developmental arc is organized according to a set of conventions by which a narrative's central character progresses from youthful ignorance, through trials, and into a phase of culturally sanctioned development. I invoke Patrick Bixby's analysis of Beckett's reformulation of bildung to show that *Molloy*, wherein its two narrators, Molloy and Moran, instigate developmental journeys only to forestall progress at every turn, confronts the "developmental narrative of modernity, interrogating the concepts of identity and identification, while challenging the necessity of assimilation and accommodation" (33). By dismantling the form that mandates and models these concepts, Beckett reveals the extent to which the form itself coerces its narrators into enacting the prescriptive formulation of subjectivity inherent to bildung even as they resist this performance.

Part I of *Molloy* is Molloy's first-person narration of a personal journey. As such, it explicitly invokes the precepts of autobiographical writing. As Lloyd argues, autobiographical writing both produces and mandates a limited and delimiting notion of selfhood. Because autobiographical texts are devoted "to producing the individual as *autonomous,* that is, as self-authenticating and self-authorizing," autonomy then comes to be understood as the goal and end of individual development (Lloyd 162, italics in

original). Beckett's rendering of Molloy's autobiography, however, subverts Molloy's personal, physical and—most importantly for my argument—narrative autonomy, thereby undermining the universal and archetypal notion of individuality that the form conventionally prescribes. By making autobiography both the vehicle for and the object of his critique of this prescriptive subjectivity, Beckett exposes the methods by which the form typically coerces a self-authenticating and self-authorizing subjectivity into being.

For Beckett, the act of narration is a central method by which narrative traditionally posits and mandates subjectivity. Molloy's narration of his journey in search of his mother constitutes Part I of the novel; Part II is the agent Moran's narration of his pursuit of Molloy and of his eventual return home. Both of these autobiographical narratives invoke and problematize the methods by which first person narration typically proceeds. Molloy narrates a running meta-commentary upon the arbitrariness of his own role as the apparent source and end of his own text. By commenting upon the mystery of his own narrative perspective and the process by which he himself is brought into being and "developed" throughout his text, Molloy spotlights the role of narrative itself in creating these phenomena. Moran, because he is a detective commissioned to pursue a target, composes a "report." This report functions as another means by which Beckett reflects upon and undermines the process by which narrative coerces subjectivity into being even as it obfuscates this coercion. Moran's report writes Molloy into being. Furthermore, by adhering to the conventions of report-writing, Moran *becomes* a detective. In this way, Beckett reveals that subjectivity (both that of the narrator and the subjects he seemingly narrates into existence) is not itself the source or end of narrative, but rather one of its effects.

This configuration of narration underscores Beckett's critical orientation to the extant subjectivity that narration typically posits. For Beckett, this notion of subjectivity acts upon readers as both a coercive exemplar and a limitation to their habits of reading. Molloy's and Moran's respective narratives methodically dismantle the conventions by which narrative typically calls into being the appearance of narrating "selves." Beckett's careful reformulation reveals the extent to which readers are in thrall to this "universally valid and archetypal" subjectivity represented in canonical literature (Lloyd 19). Indeed, *Molloy's* violation of narration's conventions undercuts narrative's role as an aesthetic enforcer of cultural norms. It also violates readers' powerful habits of reading; despite the novel's persistent reformulation of conventions, these conventions act as "cerebral reels" that condition readers' reception of Beckett's text (Beckett 112). That its narrators deny their own narrating statuses constitutes a profound disturbance to the cultural role of subject formation that narrative conventionally enacts and prescribes. This violation largely accounts for *Molloy*'s confounding strangeness.

Beckett also invokes the genre of detective fiction, morphing its highly formulaic aspects to reveal both the textual policing of subjectivity that popular genres can perform and the coercive conventionality of narrative's drive toward coherence. Using Tzvetan Todorov's typology of detective fiction as a lens through which to analyze Part II, I argue that Beckett invokes the inherent duality of the form—it consists of a crime and an investigation that yields the detective's composition of a report—to facilitate his meta-commentary on the prescription that narrative must progress toward coherence and resolution. Whereas in a conventional detective narrative the story of the investigation

reveals "whodunit," Moran's narrative neither identifies Molloy's crime nor provides retrospective coherence by "solving" it.

Beckett's trilogy is, nevertheless, a series of prose texts wherein protagonists narrate stories. *Molloy is* a novel, though it undoes the conventions of novel writing more and more vigorously as it tends toward an ending. Through this complex construction of narrative, Beckett pursues a method of creative expression by which a selfhood that exceeds the bounds of narrative convention might be depicted. By exploding the conventions of narrative and narration, Beckett "unwrites" the prescriptive form of autonomous subjectivity that has heretofore been the condition and end of canonical narrative.

Ultimately**,** these novels' relationship to canonical forms is not derivative but rather visionary. In being attentive to the specific methods of revision that these authors enact, I identify the radical potential of their formal reanimations to yield a fresh perspective on the historically specific experience of being during the late modernist era. These novelists' invocation of untimely forms paradoxically facilitates timely and pointed insight into the precise nature of these forms' inadequacy to express this experience. My dissertation insists that, as Susan Osborn claims about Bowen's fiction, these authors' work "offers unfamiliar ways by which we might reconceptualize the relationship between realism and modernism, the ambiguities of identity, and the obscuring effects of many familiar critical assumptions," including those pertaining to canonicity and notions of genre (230). These works' jarring formal incongruities produce a defamiliarizing effect upon both readers and critics; this demands a fresh examination of literary and existential categories whose boundaries could previously be taken for

granted, including modernism, identity, and narrative form. Certainly, this reconceptualization dethrones many foundational assumptions about literature. As my dissertation argues, Bowen's, Waugh's, and Beckett's late modernist novels perform precisely this function.

CHAPTER II

LATE MODERNIST DISLOCATION AND BOWEN'S EVACUATION OF FORM

Introduction

Bowen's early novels explore the lives of mobile and solitary subjects dislocated from their homes and cultures. Her formal techniques, too, provoke in readers the sense of "dislocation" that is a key aim of Bowen's late modernist aesthetic. As a result, critics of Bowen's work have long interpreted her body of work as having a disjunctive relationship with literary history; her texts' apparent likeness to the Edwardian novel of social manners is often interpreted as a reversion to the techniques that her immediate literary predecessors rejected in favor of radical linguistic and formal experimentation. Although recently critics have discovered a uniquely complex version of modernism lurking beneath the surfaces of Bowen's work, her style was initially interpreted as a throwback to nineteenth century realism.[1]

This interpretation is encouraged by Bowen's engagement and revision of a variety of pre-twentieth century forms, including the bildungsroman, the epistolary novel, women's autobiography, the gothic romance, the "Big House novel," and others. By the late 1920s, when Bowen's first novel was published, invocation of these seemingly outmoded narrative forms appeared out of step with the ethos of innovation that ruled early literary modernism. Indeed, when the radical formal experimentation of Woolf,

[1] Early critics including Douglas Hewitt and William Heath classified Bowen as a writer of Edwardian novels of manners. More recent critics including Jed Esty, Susan Osborn, Sinéad Mooney and Victoria Stewart—among a growing number— have queried this classification and situated her fiction within a corpus of modernism. The 2007 publication of a *Modern Fiction Studies* special issue on Bowen's work indicated critical consensus that Bowen's writing is more complex—and more modernist—than earlier critics perceived. Others have delineated yet further categories for Bowen's work to emphasize that her narrative innovations and investments go beyond those associated with classic modernism; chapters on her work in Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge's *British Fiction After Modernism* (2007) and Kristin Bluemel's *Intermodernism* (2009) are two such examples.

Joyce, or Stein is the benchmark of "successful modernism," then use of these old-fashioned narrative techniques can be viewed as "failure." This assessment is reflected in a statement made by Douglass Hewitt who, as recently as 1988, read Bowen as a "minor" novelist who turned her back on technical innovation and wrote delicate small-scale post-Jamesian studies, mostly of children and adolescent girls (198). Careful attention to the particular ways that Bowen deploys old-fashioned forms, however, uncovers a complex engagement with and critique of the modernist techniques that she has often been accused of failing to execute. Read on its own terms, even Bowen's earliest work demands that we expand our vision of modernism in order to account for—and to understand more deeply—those works that perform an immanent critique of modernist ideologies and narrative techniques.

To read Bowen's novels as *both* richly engaging pre-twentieth century forms *and* critiquing high modernist literary practices is to charge readers and critics with a difficult task. Attention to her texts' thematic, linguistic, formal, and aesthetic complexities results in an often estranging and sometimes disconcerting reading experience. Susan Osborn, in a 2007 issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to Bowen's work, identifies several features that pose a challenge to readers and critics: "weird and inconsistent mimeticism," "dramatizations of impasse and non- or dissolved presence" and "elliptical dialogue and lacunae in plotting" (228). Inconsistency, impasse, dissolved presence, and lacunae are narrative strategies indexing the fundamental transformation that late modernist dislocation wrought upon individuals' subjectivities. Bowen's unique style embodies this change. As the medium by which she performs her renovations of pre-modernist forms, this estranging style furthermore reveals the limits of high modernist

efforts to manage dislocation through cosmopolitan poses and radically complex innovations in form.

Bowen is critical of both pre-modernist narrative forms' discursive creation of bourgeois subjectivity and high modernism's investment in depicting characters' deep selves through innovative narrative techniques. From her first novel, *The Hotel* (1927) through her sixth, *The Death of the Heart* (1938), Bowen ironically undercuts high modernist interiority by invoking and revising the very pre-modernist narrative forms that high modernists rejected. By deploying these earlier forms to mount a radically new notion of subjectivity, Bowen reveals their unrealized potential to perform complex narrative work. Bowen's vision of the subject mandates the development of a form that departs from high modernism's orientation toward innovation and its insistence upon robust interiority. Importantly, Bowen engages these pre-modernist forms affectionately; hers is not a parodic redeployment of tired forms. Her restrained version of late modernism, therefore, indicates a complexly layered narrative style that both capitalizes upon and critiques the variety of narrative forms that preceded Bowen's.

As other scholars have claimed, Bowen often invokes and then resists trajectories of development; in doing so, she continues in the modernist tradition of re-working the canonical bildungsroman form. Jed Esty asserts that modernist writers transform this genre so that their texts emphasize not education or maturation, but the trope of "frozen youth." According to Esty: "Metamorphosis, dilation, consumption, evacuation, inversion: these stories spectacularly and conspicuously thwart the realist proportions of biographical time that had, from its inception, defined the bildungsroman" (2). For Esty, novels of frozen youth disrupt protagonists' progress toward socially integrated maturity,

which reflects a disruption in the teleological vision of history that casts the nation state as the endpoint of progress. Modernism, he claims, "exposes and disrupts the inherited conventions of the bildungsroman in order to criticize bourgeois values and to reinvent the biographical novel, but also to explore the contradictions inherent in mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire" (3). For Esty, the salient feature of these modernist novels of stunted youth is their ability to disrupt the teleological narrative of imperial development. This has consequences for the individual and for literary history, according to Esty:

> many canonical works of the late Victorian and modernist period feature colonial themes of backwardness, anachronism, and uneven development that provide the symbolic basis for an anti-teleological model of subject formation. This is the very model of social delay and narrative distension that will, in the hands of Conrad, Joyce, and Woolf, open up space for the novel of consciousness and thereby become the hallmark of modernist style. (14)

For Esty the antiteleological orientation of imperially inflected novels of stunted growth is prerequisite to the exploration of consciousness for which high modernism is known.

Bowen and her late modernist cohort, however, plumb yet more deeply the model of consciousness posited by their high modernist forebears. If, as Esty argues, Joyce, Woolf, and others were able to forge textual explorations of consciousness as a result of a new and anti-teleological model of subject formation, the late modernists query the very concept of subjectivity.[2] While their high modernist predecessors were indeed deeply

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[2] Samuel Beckett's work is particularly well known for rigorously dismantling taken-for-granted notions of selfhood and subjectivity. Characters in his plays and novels defy ascriptions of even the most basic tenets of subjectivity. For instance, in *The Unnameable* (1953), names—the most legible and familiar markers of

invested in the narrative disruption of teleology, Bowen's cohort emphasizes and explores the radically strange model of subjectivity that results from modernity's reorientation of time and national space. In *The Hotel* and *The Death of the Heart*, Bowen is clearly invested in these destabilizing conditions' consequences for individual subjects.

This disjunctive model of subject formation is Bowen's central preoccupation in *The Hotel* and *The Death of the Heart.* While Esty focuses on "the special capacity of modernist texts to give literary form to the collapse of progressive historicism as an organizing idea of European modernity and therefore of the European novel," many late modernist novels written in the late 1920s and beyond focus squarely on the consequences of this collapse for those living in the aftermath of empire, World War I, and, in a literary context, both the nineteenth century bildungsroman and high modernism (19). In his work on Samuel Beckett's revisions of the bildungsroman genre, Patrick Bixby configures these consequences to subjects as spatial, claiming that Beckett's narrator-protagonists "explore the state of deterritorialization, a condition which positions each of them in opposition to the evolutionary narrative of modernity at large" (28). This is the condition of Bowen's protagonists' lives, too; they are fundamentally dislocated from their home nations, which have been destabilized by the breakdown of empire and its teleological worldview. The anti-teleological model of subject formation that results from this condition determines the particular contours of their stories of "frozen youth."

The relationship of Bowen's work to canonical modernist forms, as well as the pre-modernist narrative genres that preceded them, is decidedly critical. In this respect, her early novels exhibit characteristics of what David Lloyd, building on the work of

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selfhood—are mutable, and the later part of the narrative is dominated by a creature identifiable neither as human nor inhuman. The late modernist interrogation of the concept of subjectivity also occurs in the work of Wyndham Lewis, Djuna Barnes, Flann O'Brien, and others.

Deleuze and Guattari, terms "minor literature."[3] Considering Bowen's work through this framework enables a productive understanding of the relationship of Bowen's work to the literary canon, and to modernism more generally. For Lloyd, major works of literature claim "to realize the autonomy of the individual subject to such a degree that the individual subject becomes universally valid and archetypal" (19). In so doing, they perpetuate the concept of the autonomous subject as the "essence of the human," which underwrites the coercive and assimilationist logic of the State, wherein whatever deviates from this human archetype is "seen as incompletely developed historically rather than as radically different" (19, 17). For Lloyd, hegemonic state power relies upon a demand that the individual strive toward autonomous subjectivity in a manner analogous to culture's evolution toward the endpoint of historical development. The literature most able to realize this demand is the bildungsroman (19).

"Major works" of literature, Lloyd asserts, are "in some manner directed toward the production of an autonomous ethical identity for the subject" (19). Because decipherable ethical imperatives and their corresponding formulation of coherent subjectivity are precisely what she dismantles by disabling the functions of bildung for the young women in her texts, Bowen's early novels resist this mandate. Lloyd furthermore argues that a major work itself must be autonomous, "both self-contained and original, where the latter term implies the re-creation at a higher level of the original identity of the race" (19). Bowen's work is also recalcitrant to this characterization; her

[3] By employing this term, I do not wish to merely "label" Bowen's work as minor. Rather, recognizing that her work performs a "minor function" makes it possible to understand the real-world effects of Bowen's formal and aesthetic practices. Because her work is resistant to coercive state assimilation and bourgeois prescriptions of subjectivity, it performs the role of "minor literature" that Lloyd describes. Furthermore, this category helps us to think through why Bowen's work was initially deemed a "failure" in relation to "major" works of canonical modernism, when in reality it exists in a complex, negatively critical relationship to the canon.

perpetually fraught relationship to the canon and the aforementioned attributions of "failure" to her aesthetic techniques indicate that her work is not commonly understood to reproduce an "original or essential identity at a higher and self-conscious level" (22). Indeed, until recently critics resisted granting Bowen canonical status for this very reason. Lloyd's formulation of minor literature enables us to understand the negatively critical role that Bowen's work plays; she has not failed to represent the "attainment of the autonomous subjectivity that is the ultimate aim of the major narrative" (22). Rather, she actively resists it. By doing so, she, like other writers of minor literature, says Lloyd, commences the "questioning of the founding principles of canonical aesthetic judgments" (23).

The principles of aesthetic judgment that value high modernist linguistic experimentation, revolutionary narrative forms, and emphasis on interiority over the interrogation of subjectivity that Bowen performs, then, initially relegated her work to a position outside the canon. Despite high modernism's purportedly revolutionary ethos, Lloyd claims, the claims of canonical modernists including Eliot, Pound, and Yeats to transcend division and difference clearly position them within a major paradigm (23). Bowen, in her refusal to conceive of her work as "playing in some sense a prefigurative and reconciling role," enacts the "negative critical aspect of modernism" that Lloyd ascribes to minor literature (23). This critical posture is crucial to Bowen's radical conception of a subjectivity that is recalcitrant to both the canonical mandate of transcendence of difference and the state's demand for autonomous subjectivity. Lloyd describes the function of minor literature as follows:

> Rather than shore up the notions of subjectivity that underpin canonical aesthetics, and rather than claiming still to prefigure a reconciled domain of human freedom in creativity as even surrealism does, a minor literature pushes further the recognition of the disintegration of the individual subject of the bourgeois state, questioning the principles of originality and autonomy that underwrite that conception of the subject…Minor literature adheres constantly to a negatively critical attitude. (24-5)

Lloyd's configuration of minor literature, then, reveals the negative critical relationship of Bowen's work to a canon that posits—indeed, demands—an autonomous subject amenable to "formation" according to a progressive, evolutionary logic. Furthermore, Bowen's invocation of other seemingly antiquated narrative forms in addition to the bildungsroman, including the epistolary novel form and the genre of women's autobiography, underlines the ways in which writing is historically complicit in the discursive creation and sanctioning of a prescriptive model of subjectivity.

Subjectivity in/and Form

In *The Hotel,* her first novel, Bowen invokes a specifically Victorian formulation of bildung. Combined with her "estranging" aesthetic techniques, the use of this form *after* the apotheosis of high modernism makes for a jarring reading experience. By 1927, the year of *The Hotel*'s publication, writers had innovated a slew of experimental narrative structures: in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf used free indirect discourse to track the psychological machinations of her characters; Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) featured a collage of literary genres to create the "whole" of one Dublin day; Stein created

vignettes—portions of which she wrote in dialect—to create intimate portraits of her characters in *Three Lives* (1909). None of these modernist narrative modes resembles the teleologically oriented coming-of-age novels so popular throughout the nineteenth century. Given that Bowen wrote in the wake of high modernism, her early novels' apparent resemblance to such Victorian forms appears anachronistic and perhaps "unmodern."

To read Bowen's sophisticated use of the bildungsroman form as a reversion to an outmoded genre, however, is to miss her critique of high modernism's failed attempts to cope with the profound dislocations of early twentieth century life. *The Hotel* begins like many earlier novels about young women: an amusing community of characters meddles in the fate of one young woman who is positioned on the precipice of adulthood. These are the same conditions that Jane Austen, the progenitor of the female bildungsroman genre, established at the outset of her works. Readers are therefore invited to experience *The Hotel* as the story of Sydney Warren's coming-of-age. The narrative conventions of the female bildungsroman have trained readers to expect that Sydney will commit a series of social faux pas and endure her friends' meddling during her journey toward adulthood and a socially advantageous marriage. In seeming capitulation to these expectations, in the first several pages of Bowen's novel, a fussy spinster named Miss Pym noses around the grounds of a Hotel located on the Italian Riviera. As she does so, she discovers letters from Sydney's future suitor, Rev. J.D.L. Milton, and engages in gossipy conversation with another traveler about Sydney herself. In the mode of a Victorian novel, then, the stage is set for the events that will determine Sydney's future.

The novel's form, too, exhibits traits of conventional Victorian writing. The chapters are numbered, suggesting a teleological progression in which Sydney begins as an unformed, unmarried girl who will presumably mature into a socially gracious married woman. The characters' dialogue is formally punctuated and speakers are clearly identified; Bowen does not utilize the experimental and subjectivist narrative techniques of her immediate literary predecessors. Furthermore, much of Bowen's narration in *The Hotel* is occupied with the relaying of plot: characters walk to and from tennis courts; they make arch comments about others over dinner; they answer letters at writing tables. The logistics of plotting are on display here in a way distinct from the emphasis on interiority that characterizes much of high modernist narrative. By adopting these Victorian tactics, Bowen invites a reading of *The Hotel* as a story of Sydney's coming-of-age in a pre-modernist mode.

As the novel progresses, however, Bowen rigorously renovates this narrative form. Her particular re-working of the bildungsroman stands in creative tension with a series of modernist revisions of the genre. According to Patrick Bixby, when the bildungsroman is "successful," it can reconcile the desire for personal autonomy characteristic of modernity with the demand for social integration (25). However, "a certain awareness of the possibility of failure or even a skepticism about the hero's ability to succeed in his integrative project was always an ironic presence in the bildungsroman tradition" (28). High modernist writers in particular explicitly invoked motifs of failure and exhibited skepticism in their treatments of the bildungsroman. For instance, in *The Voyage Out* (1915), Woolf short-circuits a young woman's integration into society by narrating her untimely death; in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916),

Stephen Dedalus does not become integrated into the culture or class into which he was born but rather leaves them behind. Bowen, then, with her predilection for writing narratives about young people who fail to mature, makes her own contribution to modernism's ongoing renovation of the bildungsroman form that Bixby has recently shown to be a crucially important, though often unnoticed, aspect of Beckett's work.

Bowen's Critique of Interiority

Unlike her high modernist predecessors, however, Bowen's re-working of the Victorian female bildungsroman indicates not the existence of a robust individual subjectivity, but rather the incommensurability of one's being and the performance of "self" that purports to reveal it to the world. In *The Voyage Out,* for instance, Woolf insists upon the existence of a rich interiority by indicating—via her heroine's sudden death—that a socially sanctioned marriage would short-circuit the ongoing development of Rachel Vinrace's "self." In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* Stephen Dedalus is armed *only* with his dynamic subjectivity when he leaves Ireland to forge in his soul the uncreated conscience of his race. In their revisions of the bildungsroman form, then, the authors of these canonical modernist texts configure modernity's alienation as a threat to individuals' existing and robust subjectivities.

By indicating that no such dynamic and decipherable self exists at the center of her young female characters, however, Bowen anticipates Beckett's more formally radical interventions into the bildungsroman's narrative of personal integration. According to Bixby, even as they invoke familiar features of the bildungsroman, Beckett's novels "consistently deny the image of a subjectivity progressing from a stable

origin towards an ever more substantial presence, replacing this trajectory with a narrative in which identity is relentlessly in flux" (28). In *The Hotel,* Sydney's identity both lacks substance and fluctuates. Although Bowen's style is, in many ways, more formally conventional than Beckett's, both authors interrogate and challenge the ethical imperatives of the bildungsroman. According to Bixby:

> Rather than reinforcing a notion of identity foundational to major literature, [Beckett's] writing performs the deterritorialization of the individual subject, interrogating the principles of authenticity and autonomy that guarantee its coherence and stability, and simultaneously defies the conventions of the novel form and bildungsroman tradition which dictate the necessity of coherent characters developing in the context of coherent sociological communities. (28)

For Beckett, as for Bowen, the reconfiguration of subjectivity mandates a defiance of literary convention; late modernist subjectivity of the kind that these writers explore requires late modernist narrative forms. In a late scene in *The Hotel*, Sydney is not socially integrated and poised for marriage; rather Bowen describes her as "inanimate and objective as a young girl in a story told by a man, incapable of a thought or a feeling that was not attributed to her, without a personality of her own outside of [her companions'] three projections upon her: Milton's fiancée, Tessa's young cousin, Mrs. Kerr's protégée, lately her friend" (262). In this scene, Sydney's subjectivity is revealed to be neither authentic nor autonomous but rather the product of others' projections upon her. As such, it proves that Bowen's deformation of the Victorian bildungsroman, like Beckett's, performs a radical critique of conventional notions of a stable and coherent subject.

In significant ways, Bowen builds on the modernist revision of the female bildungsroman that Woolf had already begun to develop in *The Voyage Out* in 1915.[4] Like *The Hotel*, *The Voyage Out* explicitly engages the Victorian narrative conventions that led Woolf's early readers to anticipate Rachel Vinrace's maturation and marriage. But as the novel progresses and Rachel grows as an artist and begins to develop a mature consciousness, Woolf indicates that the culmination of her "coming-of-age" process should be not marriage, but independence. Shortly after she accepts a marriage proposal—one that would solidify her place in the cosmopolitan upper class circle she inhabits—she contracts an illness and dies within days. By killing off her protagonist in this way, Woolf offers a bold riposte to the female bildungsroman convention that circumscribes both her narrative practices and Rachel's story.

Woolf therefore goes beyond deforming an inherited literary genre; indeed, she rejects conventional narrative practices altogether. In the well-known version of her essay "Modern Fiction" published in 1925, Woolf exhorts modern novelists to reject established narrative conventions: "[t]he sooner English fiction turns its back on" popular writing practices of the nineteenth century, Woolf claims, "the better for its soul" (104). For Woolf, writing that is appropriate to the modern experience taps into an inner,

[4] Jed Esty asserts that, when considering Bowen's work, one should not invoke the predictable Woolf comparison without good reason ("Antidevelopment" 258). In this instance, examination of Woolf's evolving relationship to inherited literary practices, as traced from *The Voyage Out* to her later essay "Modern Fiction," yields insight into the modernist narrative techniques and postures that Bowen responded to by way of her seemingly anachronistic formal maneuvers. Esty compares Woolf's renovation of the female bildungsroman form to Bowen's project in *The Last September* (1929). Esty claims "the language of [*The Last September*] encodes the broken and jagged time of a dying colonial modernity into the trope of adolescence, destabilizing the entwined allegory of individual and social progress endemic to the nineteenth-century bildungsroman" ("Antidevelopment" 259). Bowen's first novel, too, destabilizes the values endemic to the female bildungsroman. However, in *The Hotel,* this destabilization reveals the psychic affliction wrought by late modernist dislocation. Like Esty, I understand Bowen's and Woolf's deformations of the bildungsroman as modernist. I see Bowen's *evacuation* of this conventional form, however, as distinctively *late* modernist. Bowen's way of renovating these inherited literary practices reveals not the similarities in Woolf's and Bowen's work, but important distinctions between them.

irreducible dimension of consciousness that is not outwardly manifest. According to Woolf, this "essential thing" cannot be conveyed when an author is compelled "to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole" (106). Though succumbing to these compulsions results in novels "done to a turn," Woolf claims that it precludes meaningful expression of reality as she understands it (106). This reality, claims Woolf, is most richly portrayed via narrations of individuals' interior lives. Consciousness itself, she asserts, should be the "point of interest" for modern writing (108). By exhorting modern writers to explore "the dark places of psychology," Woolf announces fiction's inward turn: modern writers should, Woolf asserts, be concerned with exploring and expressing the inner life of the mind (108).

In *The Hotel,* Bowen repudiates the ethos of interiority that Woolf calls for in "Modern Fiction." Certainly, by explicitly setting readers up to expect a reenactment of the marriage plot with which they are familiar, Bowen swerves away from the modernist interiority that Woolf valorizes. In *The Hotel,* Bowen apparently returns to a narrative form that emphasizes interactions between community members, the complex intrigues of courtship, and one woman's integration into her social class. These are indeed the purported concerns of Bowen's text and her characters, and together they constitute the conventional plot of a female bildungsroman. But as the novel progresses, Bowen invokes these narrative conventions only to subvert them; by the novel's end, these conventions are evacuated of their intended meaning.

Woolf's and Bowen's novelistic practices are therefore distinct: whereas Woolf rejects the conventional female bildungsroman form (both by killing off Rachel Vinrace

and by later declaring the insufficiency of nineteenth century realism in "Modern Fiction"), Bowen invokes and then *evacuates* it. This distinction is attributable to the writers' fundamentally different perceptions of the individual consciousness. As she elaborates in "Modern Fiction," Woolf believes that great modern writers have access to an "essential thing" or "spirit" that they express as vividly as possible in writing (105). For Bowen, however, modernity's fundamental dissolution precludes the possibility of coherent subjectivity; she must therefore reject those high modernist genres that assume its existence. Her evacuation of a form associated with "materialists," then, facilitates her radical commentary on late modernist subjectivity. Rather than rejecting a conventional form, as Woolf calls for, she empties it of the meaning associated with it. In so doing, she pushes past high modernism's emphasis on interiority to reveal the dynamic emptiness at the core of the late modernist subject.

Late Modernist Cosmopolitanism & the Crisis of Subjectivity

In Bowen's early novels, encounters with locations abroad exacerbate the sensation of being unmoored from place that all modern subjects experience.[5] For Bowen's characters, this sensation provokes a crisis of subjectivity, the outcome of which reveals that the self has nothing at its center. This revelation is fundamentally different from that which characterizes depictions of journeys abroad in many high modernist texts. Nels Pearson argues that certain prominent early British modernists "depict the dissociation from national histories and geographies as an encounter with—or a rising

[5] In *The House in Paris* (1935), in particular, every character is unmoored from his or her home place. From Leopold, a young English-Jewish-French boy adopted by an American family and taken to live in Italy, to Karen, an upper-class Englishwoman whose home place—like Sydney's—is rendered uninhabitable by her experiences abroad, no character has a secure attachment to home.

feeling of being subsumed within—universal time or space" (320). High modernists such as Wyndham Lewis (in his early work), Ezra Pound, E.M. Forster, and Woolf, Pearson claims, posit a vision of cosmopolitanism wherein one's eminently portable and robust subjectivity enables a transcendence of national identifications. Importantly, as Pearson points out, this transcendence is predicated on the "notion of a normative, stable, or 'traditional' correspondence between history and geography" (321). Certain of these high modernists' aesthetic maneuvers, then, "work to negate something that can only be bestowed in the first place by the sovereign imperial state" (321). For many of these writers, a coherent national identification—and a subjectivity capable of transcending that identification—conditions a depiction of cosmopolitanism as a series of encounters with universal time or space.

To be sure, however, not all high modernists envisioned cosmopolitanism as an enactment of this type of transcendent subjectivity at all times.[6] Rebecca Walkowitz demonstrates that several high modernist writers meaningfully interrogated the complexities that transnational mobility posed in the early twentieth century. She argues that, instead of using "metaphors of exile to represent various experiences of displacement," writers including Conrad, Joyce, and Woolf "troubled the distinction between local and global that most conceptions of exile have presupposed" (6). Walkowitz's analysis diverges from traditional accounts of international modernism by "replacing static models of modernist exile with more flexible, more dynamic models of migration, entanglement, and mix-up" (6). According to Walkowitz, the high modernists she examines were always already engaged in an "analysis of self and location" wherein

[6] Pearson, too, acknowledges that "British modernist treatments of universality, or non-nationalistic modes of human interconnection, are of course not limited to such abstract and absolute proclamations" (320).

belonging to, affiliation with, and distance from, one's home nation were perceived as overlapping and shifting phenomena (16). Both Pearson's and Walkowitz's claims, therefore, evidence the challenge that cosmopolitan experience posed to high modernist writers. At times, it provoked a sensation of being subsumed within an undifferentiated world; at other moments, it compelled artistic engagement with shifting notions of national belonging.

Bowen's texts go beyond performing an "analysis of self and location" of the type Walkowitz describes (16). Bowen's position within the decrepit aftermath of an Anglo-Irish culture, which was struggling to establish itself in the wake of the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, makes her particularly attuned to the shortcomings of high modernism's cosmopolitan framework to manage postcolonial subjects' dislocation. According to Pearson, this insight leads Bowen to challenge high modernism's presumption of "lost and gained modes of affiliation, past and present spheres of belonging, and national and transnational ways of identifying oneself" (322). She does so by illuminating the consequences of "the *unresolved* status of one's prior national belonging" for postcolonial and minority transnational subjects (Pearson 318). For these individuals, Pearson claims, new "communal identities" are not contingent upon rejecting a previous, fully-formulated national or cultural identity (322). Rather, for Pearson, these individuals, like Bowen, experience cosmopolitanism as "deferred and mobile attachment" (324).

Bowen does not envision cosmopolitanism as precisely "deferred and mobile," however. Foreign encounters are, rather, the occasion for crises in subjectivity that reveal not a multiplicity of identifications, but rather these identifications' emptiness. This

dislocation is, according to Bowen, a condition of modernity: English and Irish, French and American, young and old characters experience their transnational mobility as the occasion for traumatic self-examination of this kind.[7] Detachment from one's home nation—whether one's identification with it is "resolved" or "unresolved," in Pearson's terms—is intimately connected in Bowen's early work to the emptied-out subjectivity that afflicts her characters.

Bowen's insistence upon the psychologically destabilizing effects of modern dislocation is a hallmark of her late modernism. This conception of late modernism both contrasts with and complements recent critical treatments of late modernist writing, including Esty's analyses, in *A Shrinking Island,* of the later works of several canonical British authors. Esty perceives that writers including Woolf, T.S. Eliot, and E.M. Forster developed aesthetic practices as means through which to contend with the contraction of the British empire. These writers, Esty claims, translate this contraction "into a resurgent concept of national culture," which results in a re-consolidation of England and English literature (2). This re-consolidation mandates a revision of the postures of fragmentation, subjectivism, and aesthetic idiosyncrasy that Esty claims characterize modernism in its earlier and more classic iteration.

By theorizing this "shrinking island" phenomenon, Esty underlines the profound spatial re-orientation that occurred in the early twentieth century. This re-orientation determines the contours of several strands of late modernism, including some high modernists' assertion of a "resurgent concept of national culture" (2). Bowen's response to this re-orientation, however, is determined by her position *within* the wreckage of

[7] In *The House in Paris*, for instance, dislocation traumatizes *both* Karen Michaelis, a young woman with roots in upper-class London, and Max Ebhart, a Jewish Frenchman without family or a home of his own.

empire. Bowen's Anglo-Irishness fosters a multivalent understanding of imperial contraction. Her "unresolved" identification with her home place, then, mandates that her late modernism is formulated quite distinctly from the work of canonical modernists who reassert a salient Englishness as the antidote for the trauma wrought by imperial contraction. In her early texts, Bowen configures imperial contraction not as an opportunity to assert the centrality of English culture (or any other national culture) but as an occasion for interrogating high modernism's vision of a cosmopolitanism predicated on a robust and mobile interiority.

Like canonical English modernists in their late phase, Bowen responds in her work to the tensions inherent in modernism: for her, the preponderance of interiority in high modernism was insufficient to the task of expressing the late modernist problem of dislocation. She therefore creates not new, revolutionary literary forms, but rather performs radical renovations of existing narrative structures. Both Bowen and canonical modernists in their late phases, therefore, confront the transformation of empire in the early twentieth century and the shortcomings of high modernist techniques to fully grapple with this transformation. Bowen, unlike Woolf, Forster, and Eliot, however, does not reassert a complete and insular culture at the center of her late modernism but rather reveals the absence at the center of both cosmopolitan subjects and of high modernism itself.

Bowen's work exists within a corpus of late modernist writing that Tyrus Miller claims serves as "an index of a new dispensation, a growing skepticism about modernist sensibility and craft as means of managing the turbulent forces of the day" (20). Bowen, like other late modernist writers, "developed a repertoire of means for unsettling the signs

of formal craft that testified to the modernist writer's discursive mastery" (19). By pointing up the shortcomings of high modernism's reliance upon interiority and subjectivism, Bowen, in the same way that Miller ascribes to other late modernists, "weakened the formal cohesion of the modernist novel and sought to deflate its symbolic resources" (19).

According to Miller, the mainstream of European high modernist fiction focused on the problem of mastering a chaotic modernity by means of a variety of formal techniques (17). Late modernism, however, "registers the ways in which intense social, political, and economic pressures of the period increasingly threatened the efficacy of high modernist form" (20). Bowen's early work registers the ways in which dislocation threatens the high modernist project of "discursive mastery" (Miller 16). Her style exhibits almost none of the high modernist "stylistic ostentation" to which Miller refers. As a result, as Osborn points out, critics "have historically struggled to place or locate her vast oeuvre in one tradition or another" (227).

Neither is Bowen engaged in the project of "mastering a chaotic modernity" on the level of content (Miller 17). In *The Hotel,* Sydney becomes yet more *un*settled as the novel progresses. Her biography thematizes the sense of dislocation that Bowen attributes to modern cosmopolitans. She is one among many of Bowen's focal characters who, asserts Pearson, "do not possess an orientation that precedes their disorientation" (325). Sydney is like many of Bowen's other young female protagonists, for whom "notions of transnational modernity involving an unprecedented estrangement…don't illuminate their predicaments. It is not that they once belonged somewhere else and suddenly feel adrift in the globe-as-universe; rather, they always 'belong somewhere

else'" (Pearson 325). This is literally true of Sydney: she is an orphan who has only "relations" and therefore no identifiable genealogical "roots." Moreover, neither Bowen nor Sydney herself specify where Sydney's home is located or with which "relations" she resides. Nor does Sydney evince any particular identification with England. This contrasts with many other characters in the novel who speak lovingly about, send letters to, and feel a resolved sense of allegiance for, England as home. As a young upper class traveler without well-established family origins or attachment to home, Sydney's status is itself a model of Bowen's vision of late modernist cosmopolitanism: it does not render one's identifications mobile or partial, but rather empty. Sydney belongs nowhere.

Sydney's status as a traumatized cosmopolitan signals Bowen's refusal to enact the conventions of the female bildungsroman that she invokes from the outset of the novel. Her "relations" aim to integrate Sydney into the proper place within her class and social circle. As it progresses, however, *The Hotel* is essentially a narrative of Sydney's failed attempts to establish the coherent subjectivity that her relations hope for. Sydney's experiences abroad, they believe, are an opportunity for her to cement her status within upper class English society: "an ideal winter had offered itself: sunshine, a pleasant social round. Sydney could be out of doors all day long; she might distinguish herself in tennis tournaments, she might get engaged" (28). Travel abroad, then, presents several opportunities to young women: to participate in society, to recreate, and to find oneself a husband. Sydney's relations hope these events might occur: they "had been delighted that she should go abroad with her cousin Tessa. It had appeared an inspired solution to the Sydney problem" (28). The problem: Sydney "passed too many" examinations in preparation for a career in medicine, "was on the verge of a breakdown," and bitterly

resisted the year's "enforced idleness" that constituted treatment for such a breakdown (28). Here Bowen establishes that, before the events of the novel transpire, Sydney is dis-oriented from both a home place and a meaningful position within her own social class. Bowen thereby simultaneously invokes and undercuts the bildungsroman plot. Like many young women in previous bildungsromane, Sydney is poised for marriage and integration into society; unlike many of them, she has no solid grounding in the social milieu of which she is expected to become a full-fledged member.

Sydney also exhibits a yet more fundamental kind of dislocation: she is an incoherent subject. She, much like Lois Farquar in *The Last September,* both pursues and resists others' characterizations of her self. She is conscious of the vacuity of her own subjectivity, relying upon others to confirm that she is an individual at all. Sydney approaches her relationship with Mrs. Kerr, her middle-aged companion, as a means by which she might ground and define herself: "It became no longer a question of—what did Mrs. Kerr think of her? but rather—did Mrs. Kerr *ever* think of her? The possibility of not being kept in mind seemed to Sydney . . . a kind of extinction" (23). Sydney conceives of her own identity as dependent upon someone else for its elaboration; she relies upon this external figure to lend her a coherence that she cannot achieve on her own. By depicting Sydney's consciousness in this way, Bowen indicates the inadequacy of high modernism's vision of a cosmopolitanism facilitated by a rich interiority. Just as Sydney's relations perceive that the external figure of a husband is necessary for Sydney to become fully integrated into her class and social circle, so does she herself perceive that she is fundamentally so unmoored as to be dependent upon others' projections for a semblance of identity.

Late Modernist Subjectivity in *The Hotel*

Bowen furthermore questions the sufficiency of high modernist renovations of the bildungsroman to plumb the personal and geographical disorientation that modern individuals experienced. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel's fate indexes the modernist shift away from conventional narrative forms; both she and Woolf resist the plot that is allowed them. In *The Hotel,* Bowen narrates Veronica Lawrence's courtship; she, like Sydney, is a young woman making the "social round" in Italy. By constructing these parallel coming-of-age narratives and yet making Sydney's story her focus, Bowen pursues the theme of alienation at which Veronica's experience only hints.

Veronica, unlike Sydney, is not a "problem" for her relations to solve. Rather, she embarks cheerfully upon the journey that is meant to end in her class-sanctioned marriage. But as her courtship with a young man at the Hotel progresses, Veronica begins to feel disillusioned by her social circle's Victorian expectations regarding marriage and motherhood. In a long conversation with Sydney, Veronica asks, "Does it seem to you…that this world is entirely divided into rather stupid men and very silly women? And that the stupid are all one will have to hope for and that the silly are all one can ever become?" (164). Here, she voices the feeling, expressed so forcefully by Woolf in *The Voyage Out,* that the Victorian marriage plot constrains modern young women. Veronica explicitly articulates the plot's arbitrariness: "Everybody's the same and I must have somebody" (166). Veronica's cosmopolitan experience, like Sydney's, is meant to facilitate her integration into her nation and class through marriage. Instead, Veronica's experiences overseas reveal that her choice of partners is arbitrary and that her courtship "comes, of course, from having nothing else to do here" (170). For Veronica, as for

Woolf, a framework of cosmopolitanism exposes the bildungsroman plot as a mere script that offers nothing in the way of self-realization for young women. If Veronica's skepticism indexes modernist dissatisfaction with—and a desire to short-circuit—the expected fate of young English women in the early twentieth century, Sydney's experience reveals that fate to be empty of meaning.

Late modernist dislocation is not limited to orphaned young women, however. Bowen rehearses a variety of cosmopolitan postures, some of which indicate fully "resolved" national identifications, only to reveal that trauma accompanies all varieties of cosmopolitanism. Several of Sydney's fellow travelers *do* seem to posses an orientation that precedes their disorientation (Pearson 325). But Bowen uncovers the challenge that travel abroad poses even to the most self-assuredly sophisticated and well-grounded travelers. Several of the novel's older characters conceive of their experience on the Italian Riviera as an encounter with difference against which to contrast and solidify their own Englishness; for them, this encounter shores up their own already established notions of home. This conception resembles the outcome of Victorian colonial travel as theorized by Simon Gikandi, who endorses Edward Said's assertion that colonized peoples and imperial spaces were crucial to the development of European identity and its master narratives (5). According to Gikandi, travel in and to spaces occupied by the colonial other was intended to "hallow a cosmological or theoretical space that Western society can inhabit" (89). He claims that this space was, however, "constructed according to the dictates of a value system that predates touring" (89).[8] For many of the

[8] In his analysis, Gikandi examines how Victorian imperial travelers define their own cultural values and practices in a negative relation to the colonial other. Though my project is not to examine Victorian experiences of travel, I argue that Bowen's characters in *The Hotel* arrive in Italy equipped with a notion of Englishness defined negatively against foreignness. Furthermore, I would argue that the deconstruction

Hotel's visitors, their encounter with Italy, rather than facilitating an exposure to foreignness that might expand their vision, acts as a foil for their already existing notions of Englishness. Their preexisting cultural values construct the Italian Riviera on a model of difference from their own cultural norms.

Bowen's depictions of several characters—including the spinsters Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald, the snobbish socialites the Lee-Mittisons, and the self-righteous colonialist Mrs. Hillier—satirize and then deflate the Victorian reification of Englishness through travel. Early in the novel, Bowen describes the Hotel's dining room:

> Nearly everybody here was English: the air was allowed to come in pleasantly through the open windows under green-striped awnings and feel its way cool-fingered from flushing face to face. Nobody was hurried or constrained, time put out no compulsion and the afternoon might have stretched ahead, as it seemed to stretch, brightly blank. Over it, however, habit had spun her web of obligations; a web infinitely fine and fragile from which it was yet impossible to break without outrage . . . Leisure, so linked up with ennui, had been sedulously barred away. Each armchair, each palm and bureau had become a trysting place where couples met to hurry off or groups were reunited. (34)

Bowen's characteristically oblique style heightens this from a scene of mere description to a fraught engagement with Englishness. The colon at the outset indicates that everything that follows is an elaboration upon the statement made before it: *because* everybody within is English, the room exhibits particular characteristics and fosters a particular mood. Because these travelers anticipate that the air will "come in pleasantly

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that this notion undergoes throughout *The Hotel* points to the distinctly late modernist and postcolonial dimensions of national identity in Bowen's work. I use Gikandi's analysis, then, as a way to describe the starting point of the characters' evolving understandings of their own Englishness.

through the open windows," it is allowed to do so. The room seems to exist in order to fulfill these English travelers' notions of the Italian Riviera.

More importantly, the ethos of Englishness asserts its influence here when travelers feel compelled to bar away leisure and ennui, despite the lack of compulsion or constraint to do so. The travelers' Victorian configuration of Englishness and foreignness as mutually exclusive categories dictates that the spirit of leisure associated with the Riviera is fundamentally opposed to the "precedents" of seriousness and hurry associated with the English themselves. The English "habit" of busyness and "small engagements" cannot be ignored; to do so would be an "outrage." This description of the Hotel's central meeting place rehearses the Victorian posture of international travel as a means by which to recapitulate and reify one's home culture. Even here, however, Bowen indicates that this posture does not inoculate travelers against the threat that cosmopolitan experience poses to their Englishness; after all, Italian ennui must be "sedulously barred away." As the novel progresses, Bowen undermines the Victorian posture featured in this scene: even her most "Victorian" characters are traumatized by their eventual realization that they, too, are fundamentally dislocated.

In her narration of Sydney's final interaction with Mrs. Kerr, Bowen forcefully demonstrates that a vision of cosmopolitanism that relies upon an existing and dynamic interiority falls short of compensating late modernist subjects for their traumatized sense of dislocation. When Mrs. Kerr's son Ronald appears at the Hotel and dominates his mother's attention, Sydney is bereft. After Mrs. Kerr obliquely informs her, over pastries, that Sydney has overestimated the intimacy of their relationship, they rise to leave the café where they are seated:

> "Where now?" said Mrs. Kerr and laid a hand on Sydney's sleeve in her anxiety to be directed. Sydney could make no suggestion, she remembered they were on an edge of Europe and had an impulse in the still active top of her mind to suggest Prague, the Hook, or Rouen. The facility with which it would be possible for her to cover larger distances and her present complete inability to move from the kerbstone presented themselves simultaneously. (198)

Here, Sydney's rejection by Mrs. Kerr—a very personal trauma—provokes a revealing crisis for cosmopolitanism: neither of the two women knows where to go. Sydney has been completely unmoored from a relationship that she hoped would ground her, and has therefore been irrevocably set adrift. Sydney can perceive of their location as only "an edge of Europe:" a liminal space that is not any one place at all. Bowen configures this perception as a symptom of modern cosmopolitanism: Sydney has the impulse to suggest a number of other specific places they might go, and their mobility as modern cosmopolitans would allow it. Yet she feels equally compelled toward *both* a rooted posture on the kerbstone *and* movement toward some other place. In this moment of crisis and epiphany, she is neither mobile and liberated from identifications—whether resolved or unresolved—nor rooted. She can go nowhere and can take no action. Importantly, even Mrs. Kerr displays an "anxiety to be directed." Despite the fact that she has already "come of age" in the manner required by the female bildungsroman plot, she too indicates that her sophisticated cosmopolitan posture does nothing to prevent a sensation of being fundamentally lost.

This scene is Bowen's forceful declaration of the traumatic consequences of dislocation upon even the most tentative or indirect apprehension of subjectivity.

Sydney's break with Mrs. Kerr, an emotional and personal event, evacuates her "home environment" of meaning for her:

> She could not command the few words, the few movements which should take her away from Mrs. Kerr; or imagine where, having escaped, she would find a mood, room, place, even country to offer her sanctuary. Her home environment, apart from which the crisis of to-day, or these last weeks, had produced itself, was seen very clearly at this distance away from it but presented an impenetrable façade with no ingress. She could see her life very plainly but there seemed no way back into it, the whole thing might have been painted on canvas with a clever enough but not convincing appearance of reality. (198)

Sydney senses that no *mood* exists within herself that might provide relief from her present crisis. Her own emotional resources—the interiority that Woolf calls "the dark places of psychology"—fail to reassure her that she might ever be able to achieve a stable emotional state in which to root her self. Bowen then ties this crisis of subjectivity directly to place: "no room, place, even country" can provide "sanctuary." The meditative space of respite that Bowen evokes is deflated: in Sydney's conception, the locations and nations that might once have offered her solace have lost their healing quality. These voided locations, once layered with significance, have become empty; like the bildungsroman form, they are evacuated of the very task that justifies their existence.

More importantly, this moment in the text illuminates the connection between the outcome of Sydney's traumatic experiences overseas and Bowen's critique of high modernist narrative strategies. Sydney's total disorientation transforms her home into a place evacuated of meaning: as a result of the crisis of "today, of these last weeks," she

can see but not access her own "home environment." By a similar dynamic, Bowen's late modernist aesthetic reveals that high modernist renovations of Victorian narratives create merely a veneer that, though purportedly expressive of modernity's crisis of the subject, covers over an incomplete exploration of modern dislocation. Bowen's renovation of an established narrative form, like those of several high modernist predecessors, critiques nineteenth century notions of what constitutes an acceptable fate for young women. Her innovation is to utilize this same form to point up the shortcomings of high modernist versions of the female bildungsroman. In so doing, she forges a late modernist critique of Victorian and high modernist narrative modes alike. Just as Sydney's whole life might have been painted on canvas "with a clever enough but not convincing appearance of reality," Bowen's novel reveals both the vacuity at the center of Victorian narrative conventions and the insufficiency of high modernism's renovations of these conventions to express the reality of a late modernism characterized by an unfathomable abyss of alienation and dislocation.

Bowen's invocation of Victorian conventions is precisely what facilitates her critique of established modernist postures toward them. Whereas, in *The Voyage Out,* Woolf circumvents the anticipated ending of the bildungsroman plot by rejecting it, Bowen empties it out. Sydney is, after all, still alive. But she can discover no meaning in the empty spaces of her own mind, her home, or locations abroad. Bowen's technique departs from Woolf's exhortation in "Modern Fiction" that modern fiction should "turn its back on" the narrative strategies of the past. Rather, by invoking and deconstructing these forms, Bowen asserts a canny critique of the high modernist turn toward interiority.

For Bowen, dislocation is the salient attribute of life in the early twentieth century. Her first novel vigorously explores the forms of this dislocation and its consequences for individuals. By opting to use the female bildungsroman as the template for this exploration, Bowen performs a critique of the high modernist attitudes that prompted the dismissal of pre-modernist forms. This complicated repudiation confirms Bowen's place within a late modernist canon. As Miller claims, "Precisely in their untimeliness, their lack of symmetry and formal balance, [late modernist works] retain the power to transport their readers and critics 'out of bounds'—to an 'elsewhere' of writing from which the period can be surveyed" (13). A reader's sense that Bowen's work is "out of kilter" with its time and place in literary history confirms Bowen's insight: modernism failed to deliver on its promise to interrogate the alienation wrought by modernity. Bowen's late modernism, then, provokes a reconsideration of high modernism's claim to plumb and to express the crisis of subjectivity that afflicted individuals in the early twentieth century. For Bowen, this high modernist project stopped short of interrogating the anxious dislocation provoked by the contraction of empire and cosmopolitan mobility. When we view her radical reconsideration of the female bildungsroman in this way, we are encouraged to both reconsider our understanding of modernism itself and to perceive late modernists' forward-looking engagements with the ongoing social, political, and historical conditions of the late 1920s, 30s, and 40s.

Subjectivity & Narrative Form in *The Death of the Heart*

While Bowen's early novels *The Hotel, The House in Paris,* and *To the North* are suspicious of projections of the self as coherent and consistent over time, her 1938 novel *The Death of the Heart* explodes these projections once and for all. Bowen's characters in this text discover that subjectivity, as an interior framework around which individuals organize their selves, is a false imposition upon a vacancy at the core of the self. In this novel, characters are not "in possession of" deep and unique interiority. Instead, subjectivity itself is revealed to be merely a performance compelled by the powerfully coercive cultural narrative of development associated with bildung. In *The Death of the Heart,* individuals perform selfhood in order to compensate for an unnerving reality: subjectivity is, in this late modernist moment, a hollowed-out space haunted by the specter of the robust, dynamic, and deep interiority that characterized high modernism.

The Death of the Heart is the culmination of Bowen's narratives about young women. In it, the implications of Bowen's explorations of individual subjectivity during late modernism come fully into focus. These implications determine the novel's outcome for her young protagonist, but they also place Bowen's work squarely within a canon of late modernist writing that exhibits what Miller calls a "central paradox of late modernist literature in English: its apparent admixture of decadent and forward-looking elements and its consequent lack of a clearly defined place in the dominant frameworks of twentieth-century criticism" (7). By invoking pre-twentieth century narrative forms, Bowen thematizes the haunting of late modernist individuals by the "lunatic giant" of subjectivity,[9] and the haunting of her own narratives by the pre-twentieth century forms

[9] This reference to a "lunatic giant" that every individual keeps "battened down inside himself" occurs at the conclusion of *The Death of the Heart*, wherein a peripheral character asserts that Portia is the only

that function to forge subjectivity. This practice furthermore confounds the rigidly defined critical categories of realism, the bildungsroman, modernism, and even postmodernism.

The Death of the Heart, as Jed Esty asserts of *The Last September* (1929), "invokes yet programmatically cancels the generic protocols" associated with nineteenth century forms (257). Esty's approach places Bowen "at the center of a revisionary model of modernist fiction, understood in terms of the partial displacement of nineteenth-century historical concepts of progress by twentieth-century anthropological concepts of difference as the major frame of reference for narrative form" (272). The "spliced-together" form of *The Last September,* says Esty, revises old genres to reflect extant historical phenomena. Certainly, Bowen's invocation of a variety of pre-modernist forms facilitates her commentary on historical developments.[10] But more than a "revisionary model of modernist fiction," Bowen's early novels in fact constitute a critique of high modernism's revision of the bildungsroman and related genres. In other words, Bowen goes beyond merely revising established forms; instead, her reworking of anachronistic forms constitutes a corrective to those high modernist revisions that failed to fully illuminate the radical reconfiguration of subjectivity taking place in the 1930s and 40s.

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character who does not deny the presence of this giant within; in fact, he claims, she is ruled by the "lunatic giant" that haunts her consciousness (407). An analysis of this important scene is included at the end of this chapter.

[10] For instance, in *The Last September,* Bowen's literary treatment of the Irish War of Independence in the form of a novel of manners highlights the tension between ongoing tennis parties, dances, and teas, and the violent guerilla war that lurks below this antiquated surface. Her revision of the bildungsroman enables Bowen's commentary on the very real late modernist sensibility that Eddie expresses in *The Death of the Heart* when he asks "How can we grow up when there's nothing left to inherit, when what we must feed on is so stale and corrupt?" (362).

Pre-Modernist Forms & Bowen's Immanent Critique

When viewed in light of Bowen's formulation of subjectivity as a haunted emptiness, high modernism's faith in interiority is revealed to stop short of a full interrogation of twentieth century subjectivity. While canonical high modernist novelists often relied upon interiority as a way to stave off fragmentation, Bowen acknowledges the emptiness at the center of the subject. Bowen's immediate high modernist predecessors were, like Bowen, thoroughly engaged with the crisis of subjectivity wrought by modernity. In an effort to stave off the collapse of the self, many of these writers asserted a deep and dynamic interiority capable of organizing modernity's chaos into a palatable—or at least tolerable—form. For instance, Ford Maddox Ford's John Dowell in *The Good Soldier* (1915) tells a fractured story indeed, but his dynamic interiority is precisely what gives it shape and furthermore reveals the complexity of his own deep psychology. At the close of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Stephen Dedalus possesses a robust and knowable subjectivity with which he confronts his future and the institutions that govern his life. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) is the story of Clarissa Dalloway's preparation for a party, but the narrative that makes the novel a modernist masterpiece takes place within characters' consciousnesses. Similarly, in Woolf's later novel *The Waves* (1931), the narrative is fractured and nonlinear, yet each of the novel's six characters has thoughts and emotions indicative of a rich interiority. Dynamic and robust interior consciousness is a hallmark of high modernist narrative.

Bowen, however, emphasizes not one's already-existing "soul," but one's origins, as the most powerful determiner of one's subject formation. Bowen is consistently

attentive to the ways that characters' origins condition their experience in the world, their relationship to nation, and their most intimate emotions. *The Death of the Heart,* too, begins with an exploration of its central character's rootlessness; as the novel ends, however, Portia's sense of dislocation is clearly deeper and more psychically significant than that wrought by geographical alienation. In this sense, Portia's status in *The Death of the Heart* embodies the ethos of "radical contingency" that Miller claims is a hallmark of late modernist writing (13).

Like many of Bowen's young female focal characters, Portia Quayne's coming-of-age departs so markedly from the narrative of maturation that compels her toward "selfhood" that she experiences it as trauma. The development of her subjectivity is prescribed by the culturally coercive narrative of maturation for which bildung is the literary analogue and exemplar. Like many young heroines of nineteenth century novels, Portia struggles to mature into the young woman that her culture expects her to be. But perhaps more surprisingly, she fails to develop the kind of robust interiority exhibited in so many works of high modernism. Her relationship to subjectivity differs markedly, then, from both pre-twentieth century *and* modernist prescriptions.

In *The Death of the Heart,* Bowen explicitly thematizes the complicity of writing in the forging of subjectivity. In so doing, she reveals the coercive power of the written word, and, in turn, the power of existing written forms to create and nurture the traditional conception of bourgeois subjectivity. In the novel, writing has the menacing power of lending increased significance to events, things, and people; furthermore, in the novel, characters both perceive and fear that writing will bring events into being. Portia expresses her own view of the power of writing in her reflections about a pile of letters

waiting for Anna upon her return from a trip to Capri: "Portia tried to imagine getting out of a taxi to find one's own name written so many times. This should make one's name mean—oh, most decidedly—more" (310). Simply by being written, words accrue significance beyond pen strokes on a page, and furthermore lend increased significance to an individual. For Portia, the outward sign of one's identity—one's name in writing—becomes increasingly meaningful *to oneself* through the act of writing. This insight is shared by every character in the novel, each of whom understands the act of writing to be powerful and intimately bound up with the status of the subject. It is for this reason that Portia's diary inspires intense anxiety in all those who Portia writes about.

In *The Death of the Heart,* the constitution of a self through writing is a concrete focal point of Bowen's critique of high modernist interiority. Eddie, a shiftless young man with whom Portia has a relationship of sorts, hints at the menace that inheres in writing when he exhorts Portia: "I don't want you to *write* about you and me. In fact you must never write about me at all" (136). Portia asks why, and Eddie responds:

> I hate writing; I hate art—there's always something else there. I won't have you choosing words about me. If you ever start that, your diary will become a horrible trap, and I shan't feel safe with you any more. I like you to think, in a sort of way; I like to think of you going, like a watch. But between you and me there must never be any thoughts. And I detest after-thoughts. (136-7)

Here, Eddie asserts his position—which he shares with the novel's other characters and with the novel itself—that the act of writing about individuals is an intentional act of construction. In doing so, he registers a protest against autobiographical writing's traditional role in reifying knowable subjectivities. By equating Portia's writing with art,

Eddie articulates that when one writes about another, "something else" adheres to that other subject as a result. Because Portia chooses words about him, Eddie feels both trapped and unsafe with her; when she constructs her version of Eddie subjectively, her writing becomes threatening. Eddie prefers to think of Portia herself as a piece of machinery, objective in its task, rather than as a thinking writer capable of attaching particular traits to him. He critiques the process of reflection that makes it possible to write about an event after the fact; Portia's "after-thoughts," he fears, accrue significance (as does Anna's identity, by virtue of her name being written repeatedly on her letters) in their writing.

While her deconstruction of the female bildungsroman is consistent throughout most of her early work, Bowen also invokes the genre of women's autobiography in service of her interrogation of late modernist subjectivity in *The Death of the Heart*. Portia's diary is the novel's focal point; her diary entries make up large sections of several chapters throughout the text, granting insight into both Portia's assessments of others and her own efforts to produce the kind of "self" that she senses others expect. In doing so, Portia enacts the process of discursive self-creation that Felicity Nussbaum observes in eighteenth century women's autobiographical writing. Nussbaum's premise is that "the 'self' is an ideological construct recruited into place within specific historical formations rather than always present as an eternal truth" (xii). Women's autobiography, Nussbaum argues, confirms the bourgeois self but also make available textual subversions of its dominance (xxi). Diaries and journals "urge readers and writers to recognize themselves in existing social relations, and to believe in a sameness that makes them like all other human beings, as well as in a difference that guarantees their

individuation. They also offer a private space for experimentation, revision, and resistance to prevailing notions of identity" (Nussbaum xxi). Women writing about their own experiences introduced distinct ways of understanding the self: on the one hand, writers understood themselves and were understood as individual subjects situated among many other equally autonomous subjects; on the other hand, they understood themselves as unique.

Autobiographical writing, then, both reified and allowed for conceptual variation in the bourgeois self that emerged in the eighteenth century. According to Nussbaum, in seeking a paradigmatic model that would provide a "poetics" of eighteenth century autobiography, narratives *about* this autobiographical writing posited that "an infinitely varied but unified self exists" that is both like other human beings and unique, and can be imitated textually (9, 2). In these narratives:

> [t]here is often an assumption that a reality, hidden behind appearances, is independent of its inscription and its reading, and that representation in autobiography corresponds to it. In addition, these narratives presume that autobiographers are the source and center of the meaning of their texts, and that their aim is to write aesthetically satisfying works. If we accept these terms and generic limits, eighteenth century self-writing can only be an attempt to strive toward nineteenth century models and notions of self, and our attempts to read it will be constrained by that view. (9)

Cultural assumptions about autobiographical writing, then, posit a revelation of meaning by a truth-telling author.[11]

[11] This is a particularly inappropriate way to understand Portia's diary, which is constrained by others' directives about it, and by her own ideas about what is and is not appropriate material for the diary. At no

Furthermore, Nussbaum's assertion that the nineteenth century realist novel constrains contemporary readings of eighteenth century autobiographical writing facilitates an understanding of the relation of *The Death of the Heart* to pre-modernist narrative strategies. When viewed retrospectively, eighteenth century autobiographical writing gets interpreted as an anticipatory version of the unified and organized realism of the nineteenth century novel; in this way, eighteenth century autobiography's shared sense of bourgeois selfhood becomes the condition for bildung's coercive power. The autobiographical aspect of Bowen's novel operates in a similar way, though from a different historical vantage point. If we understand Bowen's use of autobiography as an attempt to strive toward high modernist "models and notions of self," our attempts to read it will be, as Nussbaum warns, "constrained by that view." Given the character of the modernist canon, we are therefore in danger of reading Bowen's *refusal* of high modernist interiority—and the recruitment of a bourgeois subject—as a failure. Furthermore, Portia's discovery that her constant reassertion of an "I" fails to forge a deep "self" on the model of nineteenth century realism renders her a "failed subject," though the nature of her subjectivity is, for Bowen, fully and distinctly late modernist. Bowen, like Nussbaum, is aware of the degree to which literary history and generic categories constrain textual interpretations. *The Death of the Heart* illuminates this constraint by engaging with a genre that both forges the bourgeois self and, when read critically, puts into relief the power of literary genres to determine our expectations regarding narrative form and subjectivity alike.

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point is Portia a totally forthcoming, "truth-telling" author; rather her writing is always conditioned by factors outside of herself. Contrary to traditional understandings of autobiographical writing, then, Portia's diary does not make manifest the interior thoughts and feelings of a coherent subject.

Bowen likewise invokes the epistolary novel form in order to mine its unexploited potential for explicating the haunted status of late modernist subjectivity. Within literary history, the epistolary form played an instrumental role in the discursive reification of the bourgeois subject: letters asserted a writer and a reader, both of whom were autonomous subjects. Bowen complicates this traditional configuration of the epistolary form, which Ian Watt characterizes as follows: "letters are the most direct material evidence for the inner life of their writers that exist," and "their reality is one which reveals the subjective and private orientations of the writer both towards the recipient and the people discussed, as well as the writer's own inner being" (191). Implicit in Watt's description of the epistle is the assumption that, by 1748, when Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Clarissa* was published, a bourgeois subject existed, and was capable of narrating not only his or her experience but also his or her "inner being." Letter writers in novels, claims Watt, reveal their own "subjective and private" orientations in writing to others; they also reveal these to the reader of the text in which their letters are included.

In *The Death of the Heart,* Bowen troubles the generic function of the epistle by including letters that reflect not characters' reified subjectivities, but rather the unacknowledged emptiness that hovers beneath the surface of efforts to address themselves to other subjects. Her use of the epistolary form reveals its ability to interrogate, rather than recapitulate, the status of subjectivity during late modernism. In *The Death of the Heart,* epistles between characters indicate not an "inner consciousness," but an ongoing struggle with subjectivity that undermines Watt's assertion that letters are a "short-cut…to the heart" (193, 195). By using letters to disrupt the premise of subjectivity that underpins the epistolary genre, Bowen reveals the genre's

powerfully coercive effect on both individuals and her own narrative. She disabuses her characters and her readers of the assumption that, during this late modernist moment, subjectivity is configured in a manner consistent with traditional notions of epistolary subjectivity.

Portia Quayne: Late Modernist Subject

Portia Quayne, the sixteen-year-old focal character in *The Death of the Heart*, experiences all types of alienation that Bowen explores in her early work; by exploring the combined effects of these phenomena, Bowen posits a radically reconfigured notion of subjectivity. Portia lacks clear origins and family relationships, she is geographically dislocated, cosmopolitanism traumatizes her. Portia's father died several years before the events of the novel, and her mother Irene recently died abroad. Consequently, Portia is sent to live in London with her half brother Thomas and his stylish wife Anna at Windsor Terrace. Thomas is the son of Mr. Quayne and his wife; Portia is the daughter of Mr. Quayne and his mistress. Before arriving at Thomas and Anna's home, Portia was raised in shabby conditions throughout Europe: "Mr Quayne and Irene and Portia always had the back rooms in hotels, or dark flats in villas with no view" (21). Portia has no origins and no home: because she herself is "accidental," her roots are shallow and unattached to any particular place.

Portia's dubious origin is the first of many strikes against her in the stylish world of complex social niceties that she has come to inhabit. Because Portia's existence does not originate in Anna's upper class social milieu, Anna questions her very existence: "What is she, after all? The child of an aberration, the child of a panic, the child of an old

chap's pitiful sexuality" (323). Being the "child of a panic" means that Portia lacks class- and socially sanctioned origins; for Anna, this renders indecipherable the contours of Portia's self. From the outset of the novel, then, other characters are suspicious of Portia's personhood.

By situating Portia in Thomas and Anna's home, Mr. Quayne attempts to overcome Portia's suspect origins. In his final letter, Mr. Quayne writes "because of being his daughter (and becoming his daughter in the way that she had), Portia had grown up exiled not only from her own country but from *normal, cheerful* family life" (13). He assumes that his son's home will be normal and cheerful simply because it is permanent, and believes that he is to blame for Portia's "exile" from that kind of life. His last request is that Portia be invited to live with Thomas and Anna for a year. Indeed, moving in with her half-brother and sister-in-law means that Portia will, for the first time, live in one home for a substantial length of time. However, contrary to her father's wishes, she becomes increasingly dislocated—in effect, *more homeless*—as the novel progresses.

Several characters incorrectly attribute Portia's "innocence" to her youth and naivete; in reality, Portia is, over the course of the novel, disabused of the unrealistic notion of coherent subjectivity. On the surface, perhaps, Portia is merely an immature young woman whose self is not yet very powerfully articulated. She is young and naïve about relationships and individuals' sometimes nefarious motivations. At various moments throughout the novel, Portia is literally "blotted out," disappearing from view even when she is present (28, 337).[12] Indeed, until the novel's final few scenes, when

[12] Bowen describes Portia as being "blotted out," and Matchett, the housekeeper, as "blotting up" light. By describing the presence of both women as having a dynamic relationship with their surroundings, Bowen circumscribes them within the late modernist framework of subjectivity that she asserts in this novel. Neither Portia nor Matchett possesses the kind of static and reified subjectivity that Daphne and Dickie

Portia finally, in Thomas's words, gains a "point of view"—until she fully embraces her late modernist relationship to subjectivity—she "did not count as a presence" at the house on Windsor Terrace (403, 301). For these reasons, it is no wonder that Portia is referred to throughout as being innocent and almost a "natural" (267).

But Portia is afflicted by a much more complex consciousness than the "innocence" that others project upon her. When Portia travels to the seaside to stay with Anna's former governess Mrs. Heccomb and her loud and confident children Daphne and Dickie, it becomes evident that her innocence is strictly an outward marker of her own haunted subjectivity, and not a characteristic of her youthful self that will develop into wise maturity over time. When Portia's sometime boyfriend Eddie comes to visit, a group of young people goes to the movies; while there, Portia sees Daphne and Eddie "with emphasis, holding hands" (254). In an awkward and emotional conversation afterward wherein Portia tries and fails to make sense of what she interprets as Eddie's disloyalty to her, Daphne screams at Portia: "My goodness, who do you think *you* are?" (254, 267). Daphne's emphasis on *you,* here, indicates the indecipherability of Portia's subjectivity. Phrasing this comeuppance as a question, furthermore, underscores the indeterminacy of Portia's *self*; Bowen insinuates that Portia is just as unlikely to know the answer as Daphne. By way of response, "Portia, hands behind her, murmured something uncertain." Daphne demands that she clarify. "I said, I didn't know" (267). Portia knows neither *who* she is, nor even who she *thinks* she is. Daphne responds: "You're

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possess, and toward which Thomas and Anna strive in efforts to stave off the chaos that lurks within. Furthermore, Bowen's use of a *visual* metaphor to describe both women's way of inhabiting the world calls attention to the interplay between surface and depth that Bowen understands as the defining feature of late modernist subjectivity. Portia's and Matchett's visibility is mutable and depends upon interaction with their surroundings; this dynamic is analogous to the type of subjectivity that Matchett exhibits and which Portia finally adopts. For these late modernist subjects, "selfhood" is itself mutable and forged only out of the dynamism between the surface performance of subjectivity and the emptiness within.

completely bats…you don't even understand a single thing. Standing about there, not looking like anything. You know, really, if you'll excuse my saying so, a person might almost take you for a natural. Have you got *no* ideas?" (267). To Daphne, whose perception of Portia is consistent with others', Portia looks like nothing, seems to have only limited mental capacity, and has no ideas. She, as do others, configures Portia's subjectivity as empty; she perceives that Portia is *no one.*

Yet Portia's subjectivity is not merely undeveloped or empty; she has bursts of insight about the falsity of others' projections of coherent selves. Portia senses Anna, Thomas, and their adult friends watching her, critiquing her every move, and concludes: "they would forgive me if I were something special. But I don't know what I was meant to be" (98). She recognizes that others expect that she will reveal her unique self through her actions and attitudes. But she is also savvy enough to know that she *cannot* conform to this conception of the self. She does not know what she was meant to be; she cannot, therefore, become it. Here, Portia exhibits an insightful double consciousness. She recognizes others' expectation that individuals should develop a consistent and unique self, while she is also fully aware that no coherent interiority exists within to correspond with such a self.

Portia furthermore realizes that identity is both inconsistent and performed. According to Portia, judging people by their characters is "always a quite good way of judging, as people's characters get so different at times, as it depends so much what happens to them" (294-5). One's very character—the persona one presents to the world, and by which one is both judged and identified—is, according to Portia, changeable. So, even as she is circumscribed by the outmoded understanding of selfhood that posits a

deep and coherent interiority, she recognizes that it does not resonate with her own experience. Dickie corrects Portia, saying "what happened to people depended on their characters." Still, she persists in her belief: "I know Dickie sounds right, but I don't feel he is" (295). It *seems* to Portia that Dickie's conventional notion of the self—one's character determines the events of one's life—is correct, but again she acknowledges her own instinct that his outmoded notion is inaccurate. In this moment, Portia reveals her insight into the distinction between a traditional prescription of subjectivity and the performance of self that purports to express it. In this sense, Portia is a stand-in for Bowen, whose conception of subjectivity does not posit a coherent "character" deep within but rather an ongoing dynamism between an indecipherable experience of being and the mandated performance of a coherent exterior "self."

The Failure of High Modernist Subjectivity

Portia's destructive romantic relationship with Eddie, a manipulative young friend of Anna's, exacerbates Portia's trauma. Eddie is twenty-three and has yet to come of age himself; he lives in rented apartments, has few family ties, and cannot hold a job or maintain friendships. Initially, Eddie tries to enact the "inward turn" of high modernism in order to cope with this crisis by invoking a conception of deep interiority. As the novel progresses, however, Eddie senses a tension between received ideas of what his subjectivity *should* be and the emptiness that he eventually discovers there; indeed, neither the bourgeois self posited by eighteenth century genres nor the deep and robust interiority of high modernism aptly characterize his being. Moreover, Eddie's changing

conception of being itself mirrors the transition from high modernist to late modernist narrative treatments of subjectivity.

In a significant instance of Bowen's redeployment of the epistolary form, Eddie first expresses his attraction to Portia in a letter. He begins his letter by addressing himself to her: "What you did the other night was so sweet, I feel I must write and tell you how it cheered me up" (65). Here, Eddie recapitulates the function of the epistle by expressing his "subjective and private orientations" (Watt 191). In a manner consistent with Eddie's evolution toward a late modernist sensibility, however, this expression soon gives way to a series of acknowledgements of his own inability to perform the type of bourgeois subjectivity that the epistolary genre prescribes. He writes: "You know how I love Anna, as I'm sure you do too, but when she starts to say to me "Really, Eddie", I feel like a wild animal, and behave accordingly. I am much too influenced by people's manner towards me…Directly people attack me, I think they are right, and hate myself, and then I hate them—the more I like them this is so" (65). In his relations with others—even his "intimate" friend Anna—Eddie feels like an untamed creature devoid of rationality, articulacy, and certainly the ability to address another in writing.

Here, Bowen invokes a form that traditionally asserts and shores up bourgeois subjectivity only to undermine it. While the inconsistency of one's emotions does not equate to a lack of subjectivity, Eddie's acknowledgement hints at the transformation he will undergo throughout the novel. Here, he indicates insight into his own troubled relationship to high modernist conceptions of deep interiority: he is not a human, but an animal; he possesses not a coherent inner self, but a set of ephemeral emotions. By couching Eddie's insights in a letter, Bowen dismantles the epistle's coercive power to

reify a type of coherent subjectivity that is lacking in her characters; her invocation of the form, coupled with a resistance to its conventions, puts this old-fashioned genre to use in Bowen's forward-looking interrogation of late modernist subjectivity.

Eddie's relationship to his own subjectivity casts suspicion on the notion that individuals are in possession of a deep interiority that determines the contours of the self. Others find his lack of conformity to a coherent subjectivity disconcerting: he complains to Portia, "How can I keep on feeling something I once felt when there are so many things one can feel? People who say they always feel as they did simply fake themselves up. I may be a crook but I'm not a fake—that's an entirely different thing" (260). Eddie's feelings—expressions of sentiment attributed to his unique personality—are inconsistent. He furthermore asserts that the same is true for everyone. Also importantly, Eddie emphasizes that he is not a fake; his feelings are *authentically* incoherent and variable. For Eddie, an authentic understanding of individual subjectivity posits an interiority that is not quite an "I," that experiences different feelings over time, and that is authentic only by virtue of an acknowledgement of these truths. Eddie exhibits anxiety in response to both the compulsory performance of subjectivity and the logic that posits a deep interiority as the inner analogue to this performance. Here, Eddie diagnoses the modernist crisis of subjectivity: the foundational belief in a robust, unique, and inherent selfhood has broken down, and this produces profound anxiety. Those who perform a consistent though inauthentic version of selfhood—those who assert a deep and coherent interiority—are, as Eddie asserts, fakes.

Eddie is therefore suspicious of high modernist notions of subjectivity even as they govern his understanding of himself. He is explicit about what he understands as the

falsity of identity: "I suppose that I'm I at all is just a romantic fallacy. It may be vulgar to feel that I'm anyone, but at least I'm sure that I'm not anyone else" (250). Eddie does not have a sense of a permanent essence of selfhood within; he does not view himself as a unique and robust "I," but rather merely as the negative image of others' selves. Furthermore, he indicates that the very concept of "I" is a romantic one; it is something to be hoped for, but is in fact a fallacy.

Eddie's "inward turn"—his effort to apply a high modernist notion of subjectivity to his own experience—eventually yields not a discovery of a coherent "soul" deep within, but emptiness. A prolonged scene during which Portia and Eddie discuss the nature of their relationship reveals the evolution of Eddie's relationship to subjectivity. He claims "I cannot feel what you feel: I'm shut up in myself" (279). He initially asserts that he cannot access the self within, though he is convinced it exists. As he continues to speak, however, he diagnoses his struggle differently: "What you want is the whole of me—isn't it, *isn't it?*—and the whole of me isn't there for anybody. In that full sense you want me I don't exist" (280). Eddie articulates, here, a different notion of subjectivity: he characterizes it not merely as inaccessible, but rather as nonexistent.

In the subsequent scene, Bowen literalizes Eddie's traumatic realization that his subjectivity does not conform to established prescriptions. Eddie, Portia, and a group of friends are having drinks; Eddie is drunk and overemotional. As the other members of the party grow increasingly uncomfortable with Eddie's behavior, he writes his name in lipstick on a straw wrapper. Eventually, Eddie "dropped his eyes, giggled and struck a match and burnt the long spill with his name on it in lipstick. 'There I go,' he said" (288). With this move of uncharacteristic finality, Eddie eradicates himself. His

relationship with Portia has prompted him to look within, and he has found nothing there. As a result of his own crisis of subjectivity, Eddie comes to learn that he is not a self, an "I," or in possession of a unique and dynamic interiority. He enacts this realization when he literally eradicates himself in this bizarre ritual.

For Eddie, the realization that he is not in possession of a deep "self" is cause for anguish. His sensibility is therefore consistent with those high modernist writers for whom inner consciousness underpins both their conceptions of subjectivity and the narratives that purport to reveal them. Eddie fears fragmentation, seeks emotional coherence, and resists ascriptions that he feels don't jibe with a deeply felt selfhood. Like canonical modernists, Eddie strives to orchestrate a narrative of himself that has the power to forge wholeness out of fragmentation. He is traumatized by the realization that he is empty within and that, therefore, selfhood is merely a performance. His status in *The Death of the Heart,* then, is that of the fragmented modernist who persists in efforts to forge an outmoded notion of self in an era inhospitable to it. He experiences the crisis of subjectivity that is modernity's affliction, but unlike Portia, he resists rather than resigns himself to a late modernist evisceration of subjectivity.

Late Modernist Subjectivity as Dynamism

Matchett, the Quayne family's longtime housekeeper, possesses a more complexly layered type of subjectivity. Her consciousness of the dynamic relationship between past and present is a resource through which she staves off the crisis of subjectivity that afflicts the novel's other characters. While her sensibility appears outwardly reminiscent of the nineteenth century, in reality she is the only character who

is fully aware of the dynamism that exists between the performance of self that the teleological progression of bildung requires and the chaotic incoherence that it covers over. Matchett's embrace of this late modernist formulation of being ensures that she is not traumatized by changing formulations of subjectivity; rather, she embraces the utility of a relationship to subjectivity that both allows her to maintain a performed "self" and to acknowledge and engage the chaos of memory that others feel compelled to batten down or deny. In this way, Matchett's relationship to the past corresponds to Bowen's: just as Matchett understands the past as integral to one's ability to successfully navigate the present, so does Bowen mine pre-modernist narrative forms for meaningful ways to address specifically modern phenomena.

Matchett engages most meaningfully with Portia about the younger girl's lack of origins, her feelings of being unmoored, and her budding sexuality. She is, unlike Thomas, willing to discuss Portia's birth, the breakup of Mr. Quayne's marriage to Thomas's mother, and Portia's shabby cosmopolitan childhood. Though definitely old-fashioned, Matchett is not merely stuck in the past; rather, she mobilizes aspects of the past that have value in the novel's present. Matchett's invocation of old-fashioned ideas, habits, and values is therefore a canny engagement with the radical shift in subjectivity that Bowen identifies and elaborates in *The Death of the Heart.* Bowen describes Matchett's attitude toward the past:

> Matchett's ideas must date from the family house, where the young ladies, with bows on flowing horsetails of hair, supped upstairs with their governess, making toast, telling stories, telling each other's fortunes with apple peel . . . But Matchett, upstairs and down with her solid impassive tread, did not recognize that

> some tracts no longer exist. She seemed, instead, to detect some lack of life in the house, some organic failure in its propriety. Lack in the Quaynes' life of family custom seemed not only to disorientate Matchett but to rouse her contempt—family custom, partly kind, partly cruel, that has long been rationalized away. In this airy vivacious house, all mirrors and polish, there was no place where shadows lodged, no point where feeling could thicken. (49-50)

This passage, at its outset, indicates that Matchett's ideas of what a family home *should be* are rooted in the past; apparently, she does not recognize that "some tracts no longer exist." Yet, in a characteristically Bowenesque reversal of this statement, the narrator asserts that Matchett does "detect some lack of life" in the house. In other words, Matchett is very much aware that the "tract" of the nineteenth century family home, with its innocent young miss and established customs, does not exist. In fact, she is disoriented and contemptuous of Thomas and Anna's modern version of family life, wherein the partly kind and partly cruel reality of family life has been "rationalized" out of existence. Matchett values the irrational, "thick," and inconstant emotional reality of the kind of family custom she associates with the past. Despite at first calling attention to the past's charm, then, this passage in fact reveals its shadowy complexity. Windsor Terrace's "airy vivaciousness" bears no resemblance to this rich and multivalent vision of the past.

Notably, it is not the present, in and of itself, that Matchett views with contempt; rather she objects to the relegation of the past *to* the past and asserts its value in the present. With her "impassive tread," Matchett seems to traverse the divide between past and present, and to profit by a familiarity with each period's sensibility. In her reading of

Bowen's memoir *Seven Winters,* Victoria Stewart offers a conception of the relation between memory and subjectivity that helpfully illuminates Matchett's subjectivity in *The Death of the Heart*. For Stewart, Bowen's memoir reveals the author's evolving consciousness from that of a "phenomenal" relation to the world to a "realist relation, in which the autonomous existence of other things and other people is acknowledged" (335). *Seven Winters,* therefore, "both describes and enacts a theory of subject formation." Essential to this formation, for Stewart, is that "the act of remembering is itself a constitutive part of the formative process" (335). One's selfhood is not formulated, then, by integrating an accumulation of events and lessons into the self, but rather in part by the act of remembering. Matchett expresses this phenomenon in a characteristic declaration: "those without memories don't know what is what" (99). For Matchett, only those individuals who can and do engage in the act of remembering obtain the kind of dynamic consciousness that allows one to successfully navigate this late modernist historical moment. This view, furthermore, is borne out by the novel's ending.

Bowen reiterates the importance of this dynamism by casting Matchett as the only character in the novel who discusses the events that preceded Portia's arrival at Windsor Terrace. Early in the novel, in response to Portia's prompting, Matchett narrates the day when Mrs. Quayne and Thomas learned of Portia's birth. Sitting at the edge of Portia's bed, "only her apron showing," she sat "as though her body were a vaseful of memory that must not be spilt" (95). Here, Matchett embodies both rigid surface—her always-visible apron—and the deep well of memory; she presents a version of herself to the world that acts as a cover for an ongoing and chaotic engagement with memory. Bowen further magnifies Matchett's dynamic presence: as she leans over Portia, "she felt as near,

now as anyone can be without touching one. At the same time, as though to recreate distance, her voice pitched itself further away" (96). Matchett is, at all times, both rigidly present and enamored of the past, just as she is intimately close but maintains a calculated distance.

Matchett passes on this dynamic relationship to subjectivity as a lesson to young Portia. When Portia, late in the conversation, asserts "I just asked about the day I was born," Matchett replies: "Well, the one thing leads to the other. It all has to come back" (99). According to the housekeeper, one cannot discuss origins without bringing the past into the present. Furthermore, both she and Portia are aware that they are the only two inhabitants of their world who wish to discuss the past; according to Portia, "Except for you and me, nobody cares." Indeed, no one but Portia asks Matchett about the Quaynes' scandalous family history, though it is a history she shares with Thomas and Anna, both of whom batten down memory.[13] Matchett's response—"No, there's no past in this house"—indicates that neither Thomas nor Anna possesses the kind of dynamic consciousness of self and past that Matchett wishes to inculcate in Portia, whose dubious origin and lack of roots alert her to the complex ways in which the past and memory itself have robust life in the present (99).

Bowen announces her own affiliation with Matchett's dynamic late modernist sensibility by giving the housekeeper a crucial role in the novel's final events. Leading up to the ending, the novel is emphatic about Matchett's starched white apron, which remains visible and unchanging no matter the circumstances. Rather than being blotted

[13] Thomas, as the son of Mr. & Mrs. Quayne, clearly has an emotional investment in the breakup of their marriage and his father's subsequent absence. Yet Thomas flatly refuses any opportunity or request to discuss the past. Anna literally shuts the bureau drawer on her own past by storing a sheaf of letters from a former lover inside.

out by the darkness (as is Portia, in more than one scene), Matchett's blue dress "blotted the light up," and her "apron's harsh glaze" remains always visible (304). This emphasis on exterior phenomena would seem to attribute to Matchett a rigid sensibility, but attentiveness to Bowen's explorations of individual consciousness throughout *The Death of the Heart* reveals instead that Matchett possesses a nuanced relationship to subjectivity. The dynamic relationship between the past and the present that determines Matchett's way of being in the world is recapitulated in the dynamism between surfaces—such as her starched white apron—and one's inner life. Whereas Anna is busy hiding a stack of letters from her first fiancée, Thomas rejects any opportunity to discuss the past, and Eddie feels that self-obliteration is the only possible response to the challenges of the modern present, Matchett encourages Portia to keep her memory alive beneath the performance of selfhood that presents to the world.

In so doing, Matchett voices the sensibility that shapes Bowen's novel: though *The Death of the Heart,* on its surface, resembles nineteenth century or Edwardian narrative models, in fact a dynamic and living engagement with past narrative forms is ongoing beneath this seemingly staid surface. Such is the alchemy the Bowen performs through her renovations of established novel genres. Matchett's contempt for the lack of engagement with memory at Windsor Terrace, expressed succinctly with her claim "there's no past in this house," corresponds precisely to Bowen's understanding of the relationship of literary history to one's own writing: just as a house must have a past, so must a novel.

Coming of Age Beyond Bildung

By the end of *The Death of the Heart,* Portia's distinctly late modernist relationship to subjectivity becomes painfully apparent. After a traumatic split with Eddie, Portia leaves Windsor Terrace to find refuge with Major Brutt, an old-fashioned family friend, at his shabby hotel. She asserts that she will not return to Windsor Terrace until Thomas and Anna decide what to do about her defection, and even then her return will depend "on what they do then" (390). St. Quentin, Anna's novelist friend, diagnoses in Portia the specifically late modernist relationship to subjectivity that Bowen narrates and Matchett embodies throughout the novel. In an oft-cited and important passage, St. Quentin asserts:

> I swear that each of us keeps, battened down inside himself, a sort of lunatic giant—impossible socially, but full-scale—and that it's the knockings and batterings we sometimes hear in each other that keeps our intercourse from utter banality. Portia hears these the whole time; in fact she hears nothing else. Can we wonder she looks so goofy most of the time? (407)

Here, St. Quentin explicates the vision of consciousness that Portia struggles to articulate throughout the novel. She courts this lunatic giant when asking Matchett about her own origins; the lunatic giant is the source of both her frustration with and grudging acceptance of Eddie's resistance to being written about in her diary; it is the lunatic giant that she hopes to escape by running away from Windsor Terrace, and which she hopes to be allowed to embrace if her brother and sister-in-law do the right thing, whatever Portia believes that to be.

This lunatic giant is the knowledge that one's authentic being consists not of a stable and decipherable interiority but rather a chaotic engagement with the past that bears little resemblance to the mature self prescribed by the narratives of bildung that *The Death of the Heart* (and several of Bowen's other early novels) invokes and reworks. Whereas other characters are willing to acknowledge this lunatic giant only insofar as it might save their conversations from "utter banality," Portia is particularly attuned to its "knockings and batterings;" indeed, she is able to deny neither its presence nor its nature. Importantly, Bowen configures this giant as existing *inside* of "each of us;" it is the inner consciousness that one papers over with the performance of self. The interplay between the "knocking and battering" that occurs within and the exterior enactment of subjectivity is precisely what Portia has been experiencing throughout the novel. By leaving Windsor Terrace, she declares that she cannot and will no longer try to deny history and memory in the way that Anna and Thomas expect her to do. Rather, she will become fully immersed in the knockings and batterings that she constantly hears and which others deny. In so doing, Portia embraces the insight that Bowen and Matchett share about the nature of late modernist existence: to live in society always mandates a performance, and this performance is the surface beneath which roils a dynamic and forever changing consciousness.

Conclusion

Dynamism is the most salient hallmark of Bowen's late modernist narrative technique. Her early novels are marked by disjunction; they are both formally jarring and defy literary categorization. This disjunction is a strangely dynamic one, however. If

one reads Bowen's work carefully, one might sense, for example, the morphing of a tightly focused autobiography into a meditation on the power of exactly such narrative forms to project a false notion of selfhood. Moreover, attunement to Bowen's complex style allows one to perceive her writing swerve toward literary convention only to startle afresh with a passage that resembles nothing but Bowen's unique style. Her work's relationship to the literary prescriptions incumbent upon twentieth century writers is not one of unilateral rejection but a dynamic invocation, revision, and deformation. By constructing her novels as ongoing interactions with familiar literary forms, she reveals both these forms' limitations in expressing the true essence of late modernist consciousness and their utility in her forceful querying of this essence.

This dynamic relationship to the canon—and the formally strange and challenging novels that result from it—marks Bowen's work as characteristically late modernist. As Miller argues, the "unseasonable forms" spun out by late modernists "represent breaking points, points of nonsynchronism, in the broad narrative of twentieth-century cultural history" (12). Critical attunement to this nonsynchronism provides a corrective to initial perceptions that Bowen wrote novels of manners and sensibility; to read her novels with attention to the ongoing dynamism at work within them is to perceive not only their formally conventional—if delightful—surfaces, but their deep engagement with the experience of being. Dynamism furthermore inheres in the relationship of Bowen's work to classic modernism: even as, at times, she participates in modernism's rejection of literary conventions, she is critical of the limitations that result from this rejection. Her insistence that the deformation of pre-modernist forms can plumb late modernist consciousness more deeply than high modernist narrative innovations produces a

negatively critical relationship to modernism: though the aesthetics of modernism haunt her novels, these novels' unique forms facilitate Bowen's ongoing responses to and reflections upon those aesthetics.

The configuration of consciousness that Bowen depicts in *The Hotel* and *The Death of the Heart* furthermore inheres in the dynamic relationship between one's experience of being and the performance of subjectivity that society requires. This radical late modernist conception of consciousness therefore obliterates both the reified notion of autonomous subjectivity posited by nineteenth century literary genres and the deep selfhood prized by modernist aesthetics. Bowen's protagonists reveal that, in their lived experience, "selfhood" is a concept without a corollary: Sydney's rootless cosmopolitanism brings her face to face with the emptiness at her core, while Portia's dislocation makes her particularly attuned to the incommensurability of her consciousness and the "self" she is expected to display. Rather than come of age, therefore, these young women arrive at an awareness of the contingent nature of existence in the era between world wars. Their respective narratives thereby constitute a late modernist critique of static and prescriptive models of subjectivity that previously constrained both writers and individuals. Precisely as a result of their ongoing interaction with conventionalized literary forms, Bowen's radically complex narrative performances facilitate a complex understanding of the lived experience of those born into an era haunted both by the past and by modernity itself.

CHAPTER III

WAUGH'S GOTHIC SATIRE AND THE "DEAUTHENTICATION" OF LIFE

Introduction

Evelyn Waugh's 1934 novel *A Handful of Dust* is a Gothic satire in which the author deploys his sharp-edged comic sensibility to depict and excoriate his characters' shallow contemporary lifestyles. Waugh invokes aspects of the Gothic—a seemingly untimely aesthetic—in order to mount a distinctly late modernist reflection on both the empty investments that characterize mid-twentieth-century modernity and the capacity of narrative forms to be productively deformed and repurposed for contemporary critique. The novel appears at first to be a relatively straightforward—and very funny—send-up of shallow modern figures, but its invocation of the Gothic produces a complex and, in the end, horrified realization about the vacuity that lies at the heart of conventionalized narrative forms, including the nineteenth century imperial adventure narrative, high modernist depictions of imperial travel, and the Gothic itself. Even more profoundly, the novel concludes that, in the era between world wars, life itself consists in the habitual playing out of social roles that are no longer relevant. Waugh's depiction of the emptiness of narrative convention thereby functions as the aesthetic expression of life's banal emptiness at this historical moment.

Waugh's method in this novel facilitates a complex depiction of the progressive penetration of everyday life by mimetic practices; Tyrus Miller claims that this ongoing transformation of individuals' authentic experience into a mere playing-out of social roles amounts to a "deauthentication of life" in the 1930s (42). Waugh's thoroughgoing satire depicts this transformation by flattening out the traditional effects of the Gothic, thereby

rejecting the melodramatic and fearsome aspects of the form. In so doing, Waugh's use of the Gothic offers a deep engagement with his contemporary reality, wherein life itself is increasingly experienced as devoid of affect; it is in the process of transforming from authentic engagement with one's environment and other individuals into rote performance. The invocation of the Gothic reveals that this literary form, which has been invested in questions of fakery and authenticity since its inception, is uncannily attuned to the progressive transformation of life into spectacle that marks the 1930s.

According to Tyrus Miller, late modernist writers were divested of the "cultural 'cosmos'—the modernist 'myth,' in its most encompassing sense—in which the singular works of high modernism seemed components of an aesthetically transfigured world" (14). Instead these late modernists produced "the splinter-products of a shattered 'classic' modernism," "disfigured likenesses of modernist masterpieces," and novels bearing "disfigured countenances" (Miller 14,13). Indeed, Waugh's novel is formally disjointed, free of symbolism, and seemingly depthless in its affect; it little resembles the masterworks of modernist fiction wherein pyrotechnic and highly subjectivist literary techniques produce richly textured narratives. Importantly, *A Handful of Dust* betrays an awareness of the tenets of high modernism that it defies and offers—paradoxically, through a seemingly outmoded form—an innovative narrative approach that can engage yet more fully with the contingencies of life in the late modernist era.

Waugh's late modernist approach to narrative conventions rejects modernism's typical orientation toward the Gothic. Rather than capitalizing upon its frightening aspects, Waugh uses the Gothic as a *formal* category to provide the ground for his interrogation of the inauthenticity of contemporary life. Whereas high modernism—as

exemplified by T. S. Eliot's seminal poem *The Waste Land* capitalized upon the fearsome elements of the Gothic to express the sense of foreboding that haunted individuals in the shell-shocked years immediately following World War I, Waugh flattens the affect of these elements. In so doing, he recalibrates the Gothic in order to make it useful for his task of depicting the increasing "derealization of reality" that afflicts his characters (Miller 44). As emblematized by his protagonist's obsessive but empty devotion to his family's "Gothic" legacy, for Waugh, the Gothic is a *sensibility* that prioritizes surfaces and undervalues authenticity; as such, it provides the framework for his interrogation of a lack of depth that he believes characterizes modernity.

The Gothic inflection of Waugh's treatment of form in *A Handful of Dust* carries through his re-articulation of a number of disparate formal elements that combine in a purposefully awkward fashion. As part of a wide-ranging re-animation of the British novel's buried past, Waugh's novel recalibrates both the conventional nineteenth century imperial adventure narrative and familiar modernist depictions of travel abroad. When Waugh's central character, Tony Last, ventures away from England, he models his journey on those undertaken by the boy-heroes featured in nineteenth century novels of imperial adventure, wherein young men conquer the wilderness. Waugh's novel reveals that Tony's belief in his own competence to reenact this type of adventure is grossly overblown; Tony's mere status as a member of England's ruling class is not enough to prevent him from being conquered by the jungle. Waugh's depiction thereby inverts the typical function of imperial adventure fiction, whose narratives of heroes conquering the wilderness in the name of expanding the English empire bolstered the imperial project. Tony, however, falls quite short of becoming a conquering hero, and indeed finds himself

immured in a very Gothic "living death" where he must endlessly read aloud tomes of nineteenth-century British literature for the pleasure of his jungle host-cum-captor. In this way, the narrative of British cultural superiority and stability that undergirds imperial fiction is shown not only to be empty but connected to an ineluctable past enclosing the imperialist hero in an endless purgatorial loop. The novel's finale thereby underscores Waugh's broader exploration of depthlessness and inauthenticity while revealing the true horror lurking beneath the insouciant satire running through the earlier parts of the novel.

Tony's journey is furthermore uncannily similar to that which Virginia Woolf depicts in her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915). Unlike in Woolf's novel, however, Tony's adventure does not prompt an epiphany that brings Tony to greater knowledge of himself. Rather, *A Handful of Dust* reveals that there is no deep self for Tony to know; this revelation is one manifestation of the motif of surface and depth by which Waugh depicts the rote enactment of social roles that characterizes individuals' lives in the mid-twentieth-century. Like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), furthermore, Waugh depicts Tony's journey as a venture back in time, to a "primeval" era. But for Tony, unlike for Conrad's central character, this temporal orientation becomes muddled; in the era of late modernism, the "dark places of the earth" and 1930s civilization do not stay relegated to the temporal categories to which Tony tries to assign them. As such, Waugh's deformation of Conrad's temporal scheme reveals the degree to which the narrative of modernist travel abroad is no longer commensurate to individuals' lived experience. Waugh's revision of these canonical modernist narrative structures is an aspect of his recalibration of conventional arcs to make them yet more expressive of the transformation of life into empty spectacle that characterizes life in the 1930s.

Though *A Handful of Dust* is not thematically Gothic—indeed it little resembles the frightening melodrama that characterizes the genre—it uses the Gothic as a formal structure around which to organize its final horrifying revelation that life in the late modernist era is devoid of authenticity. This inauthenticity constitutes a terrible "living death" from which one can expect no reprieve or even complete acknowledgement of its reality from others. The reformulation of the Gothic form, moreover, facilitates Waugh's assertion that continued belief in conventionalized narratives wreaks destruction upon modern individuals. This revelation is made most forcefully at the end of the novel, when Tony finds himself held captive in the jungle, reading and re-reading the novels of Dickens aloud to his captor. Tony becomes entombed in a materialist and conventionalized literature; this dynamic embodies the destruction that, for Waugh, is wrought by blind adherence to narrative forms that no longer resonate with historical reality. The narrative that his home culture creates about Tony, furthermore, renders him "undead;" his friends in England invent and endorse a story in which Tony's adventure ends in his death, though he in fact lives on. This strange motif of "living death" is a concrete manifestation of Waugh's complex deformation of the Gothic in service of an elaboration of the unique conditions faced by those living in the era of late modernism.

Though the novel's plot does not set out to frighten the reader, therefore, its final revelation offers a frightening commentary indeed on the inauthenticity that characterizes life in the 1930s. Waugh's narrative method therefore draws attention to the timely cultural critique that can be performed through the redeployment and deformation of conventional and seemingly untimely forms. *A Handful of Dust* invokes and manipulates conventionalized narrative forms; in so doing, the novel disrupts and haunts both a

modernism and a modernity characterized by empty investments. This complex formal recalibration restores the disruptive power of the Gothic and thereby facilitates a sophisticated understanding of the ongoing "depersonalization and deauthentication of life in modern society" (Miller 42).

Varieties of Gothic in *The Waste Land* vs. *A Handful of Dust*

The title and epigraph of *A Handful of Dust* are taken from T. S. Eliot's innovative and groundbreaking 1922 poem *The Waste Land.* Waugh's title page quotes Eliot's modernist masterpiece: "I will show you something different from either / Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you; / I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (I.27-30). These lines are characteristically both richly expressive and enigmatic; the fear evoked is palpable even as the image itself is difficult to envision. The passage is, in this respect, exemplary of Eliot's particular use of the Gothic in the poem, wherein identifiably Gothic elements give aesthetic expression to modernists' powerful generalized dread of the future. The shadowy elusiveness that characterizes this passage evokes the creeping sensation of unease produced by Gothic fiction since its inception. The epigraph Waugh selects is therefore an explicitly modernist invocation of Gothic imagery.

Waugh's Gothic satire in *A Handful of Dust* functions as a late modernist recalibration of this modernist use of the Gothic. His invocation of the Gothic highlights not its fearsome elements, as does Eliot's, but flattens the Gothic's affect as a method by which to reveal the banal character of life in the 1930s, which is a means by which Waugh composes entirely new horrors of emptiness and living death. Waugh's epigraph

is therefore not a preface or a précis for his novel so much as a means by which the author establishes a line of inheritance from the modernist canon to his own novel. The epigraph emphasizes the presence of the Gothic in both texts. Importantly, however, whereas the Gothic elements of *The Waste Land* are expressive of real dread, Waugh evacuates the form of its explicit manifestations of threat and uncanny terror. Waugh's flattened version of the Gothic rather recalibrates the form to depict the banal and mimetic character of his characters' lives.

Criticism on modernism and the Gothic is particularly attentive to the thematic relationships between Gothic writing and modernist projects.[14] Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace's edited volume *Gothic Modernisms* takes as its premise that modernism and the Gothic shared a mutual obsession "with the rapidly changing relationship between culture and the quotidian" (1). By transforming Michelangelo into mass experience, for example, Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" establishes a connection between everyday experience and "a more profound world of longing, fear, and nostalgia—a world, in other words, of Gothic dimensions" (Smith, Wallace 1). Both modernist and Gothic writing, claim Smith and Wallace, aim to "raise questions about reality" and are furthermore joined by "their fascination with the potential erosion of moral value, and with the forms that amorality can take" (Smith, Wallace 3). Certainly, in *A Handful of Dust,* Waugh explores the consequences wrought upon characters for whom institutions including the aristocracy, the church, and socially cohesive communities have lost the power to provide stability and moral guidance. The horror of the novel emerges, in part, from the

[14] Other texts that explore the connections between modernism and the Gothic include: Jim Hansen's *Terror and Irish Modernism: The Gothic Tradition from Burke to Beckett* (2009), John Paul Riquelme's edited volume *Gothic and Modernism: Essaying Dark Literary Modernity* (2008), and Lucie Armitt's *History of the Gothic: Twentieth Century Gothic* (2011).

evacuation of these institutions' meaning and its characters' resulting moral bankruptcy. While Waugh indeed deploys a Gothic aesthetic in service of an exploration of "the forms amorality can take," critics' rich claims about modernism and the Gothic concentrate mostly on thematic similarities. Waugh's recalibration of the Gothic, however, is particularly attuned to the *formal* characteristics of the Gothic that, when flattened into satire, precisely express the deauthentication and depersonalization of life that is specific to late modernism (Miller 42).

Waugh's epigraph and title have drawn the attention of critics who seek to theorize the relationship between Eliot's and Waugh's aesthetics, and between their respective uses of the Gothic. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik have noted that *A Handful of Dust* selectively parodies the Gothic, and in so doing draws upon the form's powerful resources in order to create "a darkly comic critique of Modernity" (225). Certainly, Waugh calls upon the Gothic as an unconventional means by which to investigate and express contemporary phenomena; his redeployment of the form is thoroughly modern. In this sense, as Horner and Zlosnik argue, Waugh's Gothic parody on the one hand mocks the forms and tenor of an older literature, which "paradoxically reaffirms it as a mode of articulating contemporary fear and anxiety" (226). Both Waugh and Eliot capitalize upon this aspect of the Gothic: it facilitates aesthetic engagement with ongoing historical realities. Horner and Zlosnik pair Waugh's use of the Gothic with Eliot's: *A Handful of Dust* "both lightly nods to the moment of high Modernism whilst pillaging the Gothic tradition for the appropriate tropes and motifs with which to represent the alienation inherent in the modern condition" (231). Certainly, Waugh, like Eliot, references the Gothic; his relationship to high modernism is not precisely a "nod,"

however. While Eliot's poem uses Gothic tropes to represent this modern alienation, Waugh's "pillaging" is put to a distinct purpose: representing the empty banality that characterizes the late modernist era. In this sense, Waugh's recalibration of the Gothic goes further than merely foregrounding the Gothic strain within Eliot's writing (Horner, Zlosnik 231). Rather, Waugh's Gothic satire extends the utility of the form to express the transformation of life into banal spectacle.

In *The Waste Land,* Eliot invokes Gothic imagery both to establish the "living dead" or "death-in-life" motif that conditions the entire poem, and to create a foreboding sense of a dark future. The Gothic elements in Eliot's poem are a means by which to elaborate and explore the central question of whether the conditions of modernity are sufficient to nurture life. Eliot is most attuned to Gothic's "skin-crawling" elements: bats with baby faces crawl upward upon a wall, a corpse is planted in the garden, eerie portraits peer down from the wall as footsteps sound on the stair. These images are of a piece with the presentations of supernatural, sensational and terrifying incidents that appeared in the traditional Gothic, and which "produced emotional effects" on readers, "rather than developing a rational or properly cultivated response" (Botting 4). *The Waste Land,* which is widely recognized as one of the ur-texts of modernism, capitalizes upon the Gothic's tendency to create emotional disturbance in the reader to achieve some of the poem's most discomfiting effects. Eliot's modernist re-working of this antiquated form thereby engages the melodramatic register of the Gothic that, at the time of the form's conception in the eighteenth century, "signified a trend towards an aesthetics based on feeling and emotion" (Botting 3). Indeed, at some points in *The Waste Land,* thematically Gothic imagery is precisely what produces the sensations of foreboding and

discomfort that make Eliot's poem so powerfully expressive of modernist alienation and dread of the future.

Both Eliot and Waugh, therefore, mobilize Gothic tropes in service of thoroughly contemporary critique. Eliot's Gothic elements give aesthetic form to the palpable presence of death within life that afflicts those living in a post-WWI urban landscape. In *A Handful of Dust,* however, Waugh's Gothic satire interrogates the challenges wrought by the breakdown of social relations and cultural institutions specific to the moneyed classes in 1930s England. Waugh's Gothic satire explicates the "deauthentication of life" and the transformation of authentic human experience into spectacle that results from the dissolution of aristocratic values and the breakdown of meaningful social relations (Miller 42). Waugh's pointed and satirical invocation of the Gothic is a means by which he dramatizes this deauthentication; as such, it differs fundamentally from Eliot's Gothic portrayal of the newly haunted character of life in the twentieth century.

The combination of satire with the Gothic sensibility that characterizes the greater part of *A Handful of Dust* disallows the kind of emotional response that melodramatic Gothic fiction from earlier centuries provoked, and which Eliot's poem echoes in its Gothic passages.[15] Whereas the Gothic moments in Eliot's poem are truly creepy, Waugh's deployment of the Gothic reveals the deadening of emotion that afflicts individuals in an era of widespread commodification and social alienation. Waugh

[15] Importantly, when the novel switches registers upon Tony's arrival in South America, its affect ceases to be flattened. At that point, the horrifying consequences of Tony's empty life leading up to his journey into the wilderness are brought fully into relief by Waugh's reanimation of the imperial adventure narrative. The invocation of this seemingly antiquated form reveals that because Tony's life has become merely a rote enactment of his aristocratic role, disaster is the only fate possible when he is removed from his home culture. Tragedy inheres in the novel's final scenes *because* the novel's preceding content renders Tony so completely vacuous. The jarring formal discontinuity that occurs at the end of the novel is therefore fundamental to both Waugh's rendering of late modernist experience and this novel's "nonsynchronous" form (Miller 43).

flattens the affective function of the Gothic upon which the disturbing character of *The Waste Land* so depends and draws instead upon the form's ability to express and process complex historical ambivalences. Precisely by *not* being "scary," Waugh's Gothic satire reveals the horrifying truth that, in the 1930s, individuals are so alienated from themselves and from one another that even the most tragic events have lost their power to frighten.[16]

A central motif in *The Waste Land* is the intermixture of death and life; where life asserts itself, death impinges. The lilacs that breed out of the dead land in the poem's first stanza depict this dynamic precisely, and one of Eliot's speakers articulates it thus: "I was neither / Living nor dead" (I.39-40). This imagery is evoked throughout the poem, when life-giving or life-sustaining elements combine with death or bodily destruction. This combination recalls the "undead" personages that populate Gothic tales. These characters include the immortal vampires who, though not quite living, cannot die; Frankenstein's monster whose life is made possible only by others' deaths; the portrait of Dorian Gray that pulses with life as Dorian himself fades into death. Throughout its many iterations, a central and most frightening element of the Gothic is the blurring of the distinction between the living and the dead. This fear haunts Eliot's poem. In the years following World War I, life itself was haunted by the tangible reminders of death Eliot evokes in *The Waste Land*: zombie-like combatants trudging across London bridge; a conversation about abortion over drinks in a bar; the creeping of rats among bones along the Thames. The presence of death in the midst of new growth, as in another speaker's

[16] The novel is rife with examples of fundamentally disturbing events whose presentation is not tragic but flat. A peripheral and absurdly melodramatic character, Jenny Abdul-Akbar, suffers domestic violence at the hands of her ex-husband; in the novel's first scene, the maids jump from a top window, fearing fire; even John Andrew's parents display an underwhelming emotional response to his death. In each of these instances, Waugh's satire evokes not our sympathy but our laughter at these characters' expense.

question “That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?,” exemplifies this “death-in-life” motif (I.71-2). This liminality—a sense of existing somewhere between life and death—accompanies a traumatized emergence from the nineteenth century into a new era that offers little possibility for the amelioration of this trauma. Individuals in this predicament are not dead, but neither are they riotous with life: in this sense, they resemble the flowers who breed out of dead land. The poem’s Gothic elements, therefore, are fundamental to its portrayal of modern subjects as “undead.”

Waugh’s characters, too, are neither dead not truly alive; their status is not precisely liminal, however, so much as it is hollowed-out. Brenda, Tony, and their peers in *A Handful of Dust* go through the motions of living. They engage in the empty pursuits of redecorating, gossip, and travel to and from London for social events. These shallow pursuits are the stuff of their lives. In an era during which the aristocracy, which gave their ancestors’ lives substance, is in the process of fully breaking down, the events that previously lent their lives meaning have been evacuated of significance. Tony’s role as landlord has been reduced to merely paying sporadic visits to his tenants; his religion is now a routine bereft of spiritual content; most crucially, with John Andrew’s death, his ancestral line is ended. Tony is thereby reduced to merely playing out the script passed down to him as the inheritor of his family’s estate, Hetton Abbey, though it is no longer meaningful. Even as his house literally falls down around him, he persists in enacting this script, fulfilling its tenets in an unreflective and rote way. Tony’s life therefore becomes a mimetic practice; he plays the role of aristocratic landlord, though his actions no longer hold meaning or exert influence.

In this sense, Waugh's depiction of his characters is consistent with a late modernist representation of life as being "increasingly penetrated by mimetic practices," including role-playing and ritualized behavior (Miller 42-3). The tendency that Waugh's characters display toward empty and rote actions is thereby consistent with the "generalized mimeticism" that Miller observes in late modernist aesthetics. This generalized mimeticism is "an involuntary process for individuals, a compulsory lowering of the threshold of difference between subjects and objects, their unconscious assimilation to an objective environment" (43). The disturbing lack of depth that Waugh's characters display is therefore not the fearsome "death-in-life" exemplified in *The Waste Land,* but rather indicates a *lack of life* in the self. Waugh's characters are not the haunted, zombie-like denizens of modernist London; they are, rather, hollowed-out figures who—often enthusiastically—persist in playing roles that are no longer meaningful. Their lives have become performances; in this sense, they are no longer subjects whose complex subjectivities are being formed in response to emotional and social circumstances. They are, rather, objects in a spectacle. This is the horrifying truth that Waugh's satirical depiction of his characters' ritualized behavior reveals. Waugh's text indicates that, in their shallowness, late modernist individuals—unlike their modernist forebears—have little capacity to be haunted.

Waugh's Late Modernist Gothic Satire

Importantly, this late modernist dispensation in fiction demands a reconfiguration of the self and its boundaries. According to Miller, the breakdown of the division

between reality and spectacle put into doubt many of the basic tenets of modernism's aesthetic ideology (45):

> The heroic subjectivity of the innovating artist; the organic convergence of form and content in a symbolic unity set down by the artist on paper, on canvas, in stone; the exhibition of stylistic mastery as a criterion of value; the belief in an underlying myth of aesthetic order to history; and the possibility of redeeming tradition through its transfiguration into art. (45)

Waugh intuits this new dispensation; his depiction of his characters as players in the performance of their own lives confirms the breakdown of the division between reality and spectacle. The formal expression of this breakdown is a fractured novel form that is rooted firmly in the contemporary present even as it enlists old-fashioned forms in service of its reflection upon the "loss of a stable, authentic social ground" (Miller 43). Gone is the coherence lent to modernist writing by symbolic unity and mastery. Rather than a coherent whole, the novel is a series of episodes whose ending is stylistically distinct from what precedes it. *A Handful of Dust* is thereby a late modernist novel in the vein that Miller theorizes: in the empty space of high modernism's dissolution, Waugh, like other late modernists, "reassembled fragments into disfigured likenesses of modernist masterpieces: the unlovely allegories of a world's end" (14).

The form of Waugh's novel is mystifying and confounding: when Tony leaves England to pursue adventure in the South American wilderness, an abrupt shift in tone and style occurs. The beginning two-thirds of *A Handful of Dust* is consistent with Waugh's earlier work: it is a firmly tongue-in-cheek satire of every character that

provokes knowing laughter throughout.[17] But the final ominous section marks a distinct shift away from outright laughter and a more pointed engagement with established narrative arcs associated with imperial adventure and travel, including the nineteenth century imperial adventure form and narrative depictions of journeys away from civilization by Virginia Woolf and Joseph Conrad. The ending is, furthermore, genuinely disturbing in a way that previous chapters' satirical mode disallows. The resulting text therefore seems incongruous, and lacks organic or symbolic unity.

The confounding formal strangeness of Waugh's novel can be attributed to a characteristically late modernist orientation in fiction that Miller theorizes. Miller points to the novels of Wyndham Lewis, Djuna Barnes, Samuel Beckett, and Henry Miller as exemplars of a late modernism that both unfolds alongside ongoing developments in high modernism and is a precursor to postmodernism. This late modernism takes shape in "unseasonable forms" that lack the symbolic unity and discursive mastery that characterized high modernism (Miller 12). Late modernist novels are not governed by the overly schematic structures for which high modernist fiction is known (as exemplified by Joyce's 24-hour narrative of a precisely recreated Dublin) or conditioned by a deep psychological engagement with complex subjects (as is true of Woolf's and Joyce's subjectivist narration). Rather, "untimely phenomena like late modernist fiction represent breaking points, points of nonsynchronism, in the broad narrative of twentieth-century cultural history" (Miller 12). Their late modernism inheres precisely in the impasse they present to an understanding of literary history wherein the symbolic mastery, unity, and stylistic ostentation of modernism constitute the apex of literary expression.

[17] These novels include *Decline and Fall* (1928), *Vile Bodies* (1930), and *Black Mischief* (1932).

A Handful of Dust exemplifies this nonsynchronism. The novel is jarring because of its structure but also for its seeming historical incongruity; the Gothic elements that inform the novel's form are, by 1934, almost two centuries old. But it is precisely this nonsynchronism that facilitates this seemingly innocuously satirical novel's power to reveal the frightening consequences of the transformation of life into spectacle. *A Handful of Dust* engages the tenets of the Gothic form in a subtle and pointed reflection on a late modernist reality. As such, the novel enacts a Gothic *function.* Though it does not aim to frighten or provoke emotion in the same manner as its Gothic forebears, the novel in many ways performs the same cultural work as the Gothic fiction of the preceding two centuries: it processes the horror that results from the clash between tradition and modernity; it orients itself around questions of authenticity and fakery, producing authentic emotion in response to conventionalized and purely textual phenomena; it provides a "safe" site for the playing out of anxieties that have often truly terrifying ramifications for individual subjects. By performing these functions in a novel that is squarely focused on contemporary individuals confronting specifically contemporary challenges, Waugh creates an "elsewhere of writing" from which the late modernist historical moment can be surveyed (Miller 13).

Waugh's indirect satire is operative in his reworking of the Gothic. Indirect satire depicts extreme behavior without offering any explicit commentary. Certainly, Waugh's characters exhibit extreme self-interest, a blatant disregard for (or, in Tony's case, a naïve devotion to) tradition, a distinct lack of family feeling, and absurdly strong devotion to superficial things. But the novel does not instruct readers to evaluate characters on these

bases. Indeed, Waugh's depiction of his characters' callousness and naiveté provides most of the novel's humor.

This orientation to the novel's events is crucial to the late modernist recalibration of the Gothic that Waugh enacts throughout the novel. By housing what appears to be a send-up of both the foolish pursuit of contemporaneity and a naïve devotion to dying institutions within indirect satire, Waugh both capitalizes upon the humor this send-up generates and subtly deploys the Gothic in a way that encourages reflection upon modernism's more straightforward engagement of the form. This novel's satirical register makes the literary Gothic more difficult to detect in *A Handful of Dust* than in many modernist texts, but is instrumental in facilitating the articulation of Waugh's critical stance toward conventional invocations of the Gothic.

The Gothic Revival: Monuments to Inauthenticity

One of the novel's most explicitly Gothic elements is Tony's Gothic Revival home, Hetton Abbey. Tony is enamored of the authentic history that he believes Hetton embodies, though in reality the house is a monument to the vagaries of historical trends. The features of Tony's home—its bedsteads, crumbling plaster, and shelves of childhood books—are of a piece with the home itself, which is a Gothic Revival shrine to an idealized narrative of English history (15). Hetton Abbey is a physical manifestation of the values associated with the nineteenth century Gothic Revival in England. During this period, Victorians looked to the art, architecture, and literature of England's Middle Ages as a way to organize English history into a line of inheritance from England's pre-industrial golden age to the present.

This narrative construction of history was a central function of the Gothic Revival in architecture. Chris Brooks claims that, as acknowledged symbols of power and long-established features of the British countryside, "castellar gothic" buildings, of which Hetton Abbey is an example, "were particularly suited to the ideological task of naturalizing land ownership and its attendant political authority" (164). Nineteenth century Gothic structures' material presence furthermore functioned as an antidote to the bafflements of modernity: "Gothic's 'reality' was a talisman to ward off a world many felt to be increasingly unreal. The thronged cities appeared ever more anonymous and alienating, the face-to-face dealings of community vanished in an impersonal capitalist order" (Brooks 305). As Brooks points out, the Victorian era was characterized by the breakdown of seemingly solid institutions and beliefs: burgeoning capitalism depended on intangible credit and speculation; Biblical beliefs gave way to geologists' fossil evidence and evolution; revolution threatened monarchies all over Europe (305). The Gothic Revival emerged out of the anxiety provoked by these modern phenomena; the solidity of these new structures built on models from the Middle Ages grounded their inhabitants and seemingly counteracted the disintegration that characterized the mid-nineteenth century.

The Gothic Revival enlisted the literary and aesthetic legacy of the Middle Ages even as it obfuscated the roles of industrialization and circulation of capital in the construction of its structures. According to Brooks, "In Romantic gothic's ideological landscape, the mysterious, wealth-producing forest and the magically built castle join the monastery with its hidden treasure as archetypes in a modern fairy story. The landscape is held in being by the sorcery of capital, and the enchantment […] is woven by the

Picturesque" (164). Modern factories produced the decorative tiles, bricks, and other materials out of which Gothic Revival structures were built. This dynamic, in which contemporary nineteenth century industrial processes enabled the construction of "Gothic" buildings, illustrates one way in which an emphasis upon surfaces is fundamental to the Gothic; edifices such as Hetton Abbey were made to *appear* antiquated, though this appearance could only be produced through contemporary means. Waugh's novel focuses squarely upon the fundamental role played by modernity itself in creating "Gothic England." Though Hetton Abbey purports to be an emblem of England's ancient and aristocratic past, for Waugh it embodies a specifically late modernist conundrum wherein history itself seems to function as a veneer that overlays a vacuous present.

Tony, however, is clearly in thrall to Hetton's Gothic enchantments but willfully blind to the modern processes and conditions that produce them. Hetton's battlements, clock tower, "ecclesiastical gloom," stained-glass windows, brass bedsteads, tapestries, and other Gothic features "were a source of constant delight and exultation to Tony; things of tender memory and proud possession" (15). For Tony, as for his nineteenth century forebears, this Gothic structure itself participates in the "modern fairy story" that naturalizes the Lasts' land ownership and influence. Hetton Abbey literally replaces the genuine history of the estate with a fetishized version of the past that projects the Last's position back into the Middle Ages.

Because Hetton Abbey is a Gothic Revival structure, it is neither authentic nor, on the scale of English history, even "old."[18] The "county Guide Book" states:

[18] Waugh's description of one of the London social clubs of which Tony is a member exemplifies this dynamic: "The air of antiquity pervading Bratt's, derived from its elegant Georgian façade, and finely

> Between the villages of Hetton and Compton Last lies the extension park of Hetton Abbey. This, formerly one of the notable houses of the county, was entirely rebuilt in 1864 in the Gothic style and is now devoid of interest. The grounds are open to the public daily until sunset and the house may be viewed on application by writing. It contains some good portraits and furniture. The terrace commands a fine view. (14)

Tony's ancestors razed the original Gothic structure and built a Gothic Revival estate in its place. Hetton is, therefore, a monument to the mid-nineteenth century's notion of contemporaneity: in 1864, to rebuild in a Gothic style was to be in keeping with the fashion of the times. By recasting Hetton Abbey in a historically significant *style,* Tony's ancestors rendered it historically insignificant.

Hetton Abbey's status as a tourist attraction—albeit one that seems to have fallen out of favor—furthermore underscores its inauthenticity. The notion that the house "may be viewed" emphasizes the importance of appearance and impressions to Hetton's purported historicity. Tourists' gratification upon viewing historical sites occurs in response not to the presence of *actual* historical objects and elements, but the *feel* of historicity. As is true of all tourist attractions, Hetton Abbey is only worth seeing insofar as it provides an elaborate demonstration of that which it purports to embody. The more encaustic tiles and castellar features it displays, therefore, the more "historical" it feels to the viewer. Tony is conscious of the crucial role that appearances play in conjuring the authenticity with which he wants to endow Hetton: he escorts all of his guests throughout

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paneled rooms, was entirely spurious, for it was a club of recent origin, founded in the burst of bonhomie immediately after the war" (11). This is perhaps the novel's most explicit acknowledgement that, for the characters in this novel, history itself *is* merely an "air of antiquity." The façade and the paneling in this scene literalizes these characters' "papering over" of their banal existences.

the home, pointing out its Gothic Revival features, despite their boredom and lack of interest. Ironically, the home is "devoid of interest" precisely as a result of its having been reconstructed in the Gothic Revival style. Though Tony persists in a belief that the appearance of historical authenticity constitutes the thing itself, his guests' boredom and Hetton's lack of status as a tourist attraction underscores both the home's inauthenticity and the absurdity of Tony's single-minded mission to bestow historical significance upon a structure that is thoroughly a product of its own time.

In the Victorian era, the production of "history" followed a dynamic similar to the construction of the Gothic Revival version of Hetton Abbey. Like Tony, Victorian England aimed to preserve, but in fact created, its own version of historical England. Victorians did so by embracing a projection of medievalism. Lorretta M. Holloway and Jennifer Palmgren claim that throughout the nineteenth century, "popular culture embraced medievalism so much that the historic Middle Ages became, in many ways, of secondary importance to the majority of Victorians" (1). As is true of Tony's notion of Victorian "history," for the Victorians, everything about the medieval era became a matter of interpretation, "not an 'authentic past' but an authentic fantasy" (Holloway, Palmgren 1). The dynamic of the cultural production of the Victorian era, as is true of Hetton Abbey, is to raze historical fact and reconstruct in the *style* of the medieval past.

Tony participates in the imaginative reconstruction of English history by embracing the "Arthurian" strand of the Victorian medievalism. The house's bedrooms explicitly invoke this Arthurian "past":

> the bedrooms with their brass bedsteads, each with a frieze of Gothic text, each named from Malory, Yseult, Elaine, Mordred and Merlin, Gawaine and Bedivere,

> Lancelot, Perceval, Tristram, Galahad, his own dressing room, Morgan leFay, and Brenda's Guinevere, where the bed stood on a dais, the walls were hung with tapestry, the fireplace was like a tomb of the thirteenth century… (15)

The bedrooms are named not for extant historical figures, but "from Malory;" their source is a poetic and narrative rendering of an imagined strain of English history. This is, nevertheless, the history Tony means to evoke with the tapestries and tomb-like fireplaces. These decorative features are, of course, Gothic Revival reproductions of thirteenth century features; they are physical objects that produce an *appearance* of historical authenticity. But they, like the Arthurian figures for which the bedrooms are named, are in fact emblems of the eras in which they were produced, and of those eras' self-styled narratives of cultural affirmation.

For Brenda, these bedrooms are manifestations of the house's dated decrepitude, but for Tony they are "things of tender memory and proud possession" (15). They are among the things with which he had grown up that "were a source of constant delight and exultation" (15). They feature largely in his memory because he associates them with the happy childhood that he spent at Hetton Abbey; the Arthurian rooms are a repository for Tony's nostalgia. Importantly, these rooms are also things of "proud possession." Tony owns the rooms, the tapestries they contain, and the window that looks out onto the "spires of six churches" (15). More significantly, however, this moment in the text implies Tony's ownership of the Arthurian characters to which the bedrooms refer. "Yseult," "Mordred," and "Galahad" are things of "proud possession;" this indicates the extent to which the narrative of an imagined English past not only conditions his memory but is also commodifiable. Tony turns the heroes and villains of Arthurian legend into

rooms he can possess and then decorate in a Gothic Revival style. They are thereby subsumed into the narrative of the past to which Tony subscribes. This narrative depends upon the commodifiability of medieval culture and aesthetics even as it obfuscates this commodification. The very things that exist in Tony's memory as warm reminders of England's noble past, then, become commodities alongside the chromium plating and sheepskin rugs that Brenda covets. Just as the Gothic Revival commodified the Gothic itself, Tony's "possession" of his Arthurian bedrooms commodifies the Arthurian strand of medieval culture.

The blurring of memory and possession in Tony's imagination exemplifies the predominance of "spectacle and simulacra" that Miller identifies as fundamental to the late modernist sensibility (62). Tony's worldview in *A Handful of Dust* blurs the boundary between memory, wherein past phenomena continue into the present *as memory,* and possession, wherein phenomena associated with the past (even an imagined one) become material objects that can be owned. This is consistent with the "deauthenticated world" in which Tony lives; his home is a spectacle devoted to an imagined history, and this version of history is itself a simulacrum without an original. Everything that for Tony embodies "memory and proud possession" is inauthentic; as such, his devotion to the appearance of historicity becomes a ritualized behavior separate from any authentic social or intellectual connection (Miller 43). This is a manifestation of the "lowering of the threshold of difference between subjects and objects, their unconscious assimilation to an objective environment" that characterizes late modernism (43). Tony is immersed in a world of objects with which he endows historical and emotional significance that is nevertheless based upon an illusion. Tony's self-conception

has become inseparable from the commodities and inauthentic trappings of the invented history to which he devotes himself; the conflation of his selfhood and his "things of proud possession" thereby enacts the "disruption of stable differences" that Miller detects in late modernist fiction (62).

The spirit of tradition that Hetton purports to embody is furthermore caught up in an ethos of trendiness and consumption. Tony is sure that the house's Gothic and Arthurian elements will come back into vogue, despite their distinctly unstylish appearance in the 1930s. He knows the bedrooms are not in the fashion: whereas "twenty years ago people had liked half timber and old pewter; now it was urns and colonnades" (15). But Tony is convinced that "the time would come, perhaps in John Andrew's day, when opinion would reinstate Hetton in its proper place" (15). The restoration of Hetton's "proper place" is associated not with Tony's reputation as a landowner or the profitability of his estate, but with the home's aesthetic style. In this way, the novel reveals his notions of tradition to be another face of Brenda's approach to the world. Moreover, Tony's belief that the Gothic Revival style will come back into vogue is further evidence that this aesthetic representation of history as spectacle will continue to spin out into the future. One trend after another will be subsumed into the ongoing commodification of a history that was always an illusion.

The novel thereby insists that Tony's "historical" sensibility is every bit as vacuous as the hyper-modern ethos that initially appears as its opposite, and which Brenda and her social circle embody. Tony's and Brenda's first scene emphasizes their differences and therefore seems to establish a distinction between them. Tony first appears laying in bed, happily planning the improvements he will make to augment

Hetton's appearance of historical authenticity, while Brenda reads the London papers in her modern bed next door: "Brenda lay on the dais. She had insisted on a modern bed" (16). While "all over England people were waking up, queasy and despondent," "Tony lay for ten minutes very happily planning the renovation of his ceiling" (16). Fantasizing about how to make his home appear more historically significant distinguishes Tony from his contemporary peers, who are presumably occupied with more contemporary matters. The more typical—and despondent—English citizen evidently has no such preoccupation with the past. As the novel progresses, however, Waugh insists that Tony's obsession with historicity is merely an alternate manifestation of the obsession with trendiness enacted by Brenda and her ilk.

The necessity of availing himself of modern manufacturing and construction practices in his quest to make Hetton Abbey appear historical highlights the extent to which Tony's quest depends upon consumption. In order to maintain Hetton, Tony, like his Gothic Revival forebears, must participate in modern consumer culture by purchasing factory-produced goods. Waugh thereby reveals that Tony's pursuit of the past is dependent upon the present; in fact, modern phenomena are precisely what *enable* his delusional pursuit of the past. Tony is, therefore, more like his English compatriots (and Brenda's shallow friends) than at first it seems; he, too, is obsessed with surfaces and consumes contemporary products in a manic pursuit of perfecting these surfaces. Brenda's chromium plating is just a contemporary version of Tony's encaustic tiles; both literalize the preoccupation with appearances that Waugh perceives as a late modernist affliction.

Therefore, though Brenda and Tony initially appear to embody two fundamentally opposed orientations toward contemporary life, the contrast between them is actually a means for Waugh to satirize the falseness of this dichotomy. Brenda, who immerses herself in chic, urban modernity in London, and Tony, who identifies with Gothic Revival England, express two superficial faces of modernity. Both are obsessed with keeping up appearances by engaging in the practices common to their "set;" both are vigorous consumers; both highly value décor consistent with their respective aesthetics. The spouses understand themselves to be fundamentally different: Brenda thinks Tony "madly feudal" and "*detests"* the house, while Tony "gets rushed off his feet in London" (39, 36, 41). But both are obsessed with surfaces: appearing "the part," having the right wall coverings, playing the role they've chosen for themselves.

In this sense, the spouses' vacuous sensibility and manner of living enact the "contemporary 'derealization' of reality, its progressive replacement with simulacra and spectacles" that Miller detects in late modernist writing (Miller 44). Tony models his selfhood upon the estate owner of the nineteenth century, and his habits, emotions and actions are all conditioned by his effort to fulfill this role. Conversely, Brenda wishes to become a preeminent London socialite; all of her energies are put toward playing this part. Tony's and Brenda's existences are conditioned by the scripts they have chosen. As a result, the become performers in the play that is their lives. In the late modernist era, Miller argues, the present becomes flattened into a scenario, and life itself becomes a spectacle (44).[19] Waugh's Gothic satire depicts this flattened present. Therefore

[19] In making this assertion, Miller paraphrases Wyndham Lewis's *Men Without Art* (1934).

Waugh's "form," like the work of Lewis, Barnes, and Beckett, reflects and reflects critically *upon* the loss of a stable, authentic social ground (Miller 43).

Waugh's Redeployment of Gothic Form

Waugh's most explicit references to the Gothic form occur in his rather inelegantly named chapters "English Gothic," "English Gothic-II," and "English Gothic-III." Waugh's repetition seems to insist on the "gothicness" of these chapters, even though they are not thematically gothic: no monsters, bats, or shadows appear in these chapters, and their "creepiest" element is arguably the characters' callousness. Waugh's flattening of the affective component of the Gothic furthermore prevents these chapters from being melodramatic or frightening.[20] Their being delineated as Gothic, however, extends the subtle critique of modernist invocations of the Gothic implied by the novel's title and epigraph. "English Gothic" narrates the breakdown of Tony and Brenda's marriage; it is the novel's longest chapter and focuses most squarely on the shallowness of Brenda and her ilk. The subject of "English Gothic-II" is Tony's pretended infidelity at a seaside resort; this will facilitate a quick and easy divorce, though Brenda's affair with John Beaver is the real reason for their split. "English Gothic-III" is the novel's very brief final chapter wherein Tony's cousins, who inherit Hetton after Tony's apparent

[20] One oft-cited scene in "English Gothic-II" is an exception to this claim. Tony sees the necessity of faking his infidelity as "phantasmagoric, and even gruesome" (137). It provokes a moment of realization wherein he senses that "the whole reasonable and decent constitution of things, the sum of all he had experienced or learned to expect, were an inconspicuous, inconsiderable object mislaid somewhere on the dressing table" (137). This recognition of the diminution of his life's significance magnifies the "all-encompassing chaos that shrieked about his ears" (137-8). Though this is certainly a moment of insight in which Tony frames his horror in explicitly Gothic terms—phantasm, gruesomeness, shrieking—it is incongruous with the rest of the chapter. This moment of melodrama thereby serves to underscore the shallowness with which Tony responds to his subsequent humiliations, and the extent to which even a moment of Gothic horror cannot bring him face to face with the role his own empty investments have played in bringing about his fate.

demise in South America, go about the daily business of running a silver-fox farm from Hetton's stables; this is the means by which they hope to continue funding the estate. Each of these chapters narrates an intrinsically contemporary event. Callous infidelity, divorce, and the displacement of the aristocracy by profit-making business are manifestations of precisely the kind of breakdown of authentic relationships and traditional institutions to which high modernism was an aesthetic response.

Waugh's *naming* of these developments as "Gothic" underscores the degree to which the Gothic has, within modernism, become a way of naming or categorizing the fearsome quality of contemporary social phenomena. As this project's analysis of the Gothic elements in *The Waste Land* previously explored, traditionally Gothic themes and elements are instrumental in Eliot's expression of modern fear and alienation in particular. By defining as Gothic the distinctly modern developments that take place in what are consistently cynically funny chapters, Waugh reveals the overly pat use to which modernism put the Gothic. Whereas modernist aesthetics capitalized upon the affect traditionally produced by Gothic narrative's emphases on horror and mystery, Waugh's late modernist Gothic satire flattens this affect, thereby morphing the form to express more precisely the "deauthentication of life" that characterizes his era (Miller 42).

Furthermore, content that might, in another novel, undergo "Gothic" treatment occurs in chapters that are *not* titled "Gothic." This emphasizes Waugh's subtle critique of modernism's straightforward invocation of the Gothic. The Last's son's death occurs in a chapter entitled "Hard Cheese on Tony;" this flippant tone ironizes this chapter's disturbing central event, to which characters exhibit an underwhelming emotional

response. Waugh's seemingly inverted naming scheme for his chapters thereby announces the extent to which his use of the Gothic is not a straightforward invocation of its fearsome elements. Rather, the Gothic becomes not a category or way of naming a narrative tendency, but a complex engagement of a conventionalized form to engage with the social and historical conditions particular to Waugh's era. Rather than capitalizing upon the frightening elements of the Gothic, Waugh undoes the conventions of the form to innovate a discomfiting portrayal of the "'derealization' of reality" between the world wars (Miller 44).

Waugh's Recalibration of Modernist Narrative

Importantly, the style of Waugh's novel—satire—mandates the absence of interiority. Because Waugh's satire is made possible by a devotion to surfaces—of objects, of relationships, of individuals' psyches—it is therefore antithetical to modernism's investment in the expression of characters' inner lives. In *A Handful of Dust* in particular, the satire facilitates both the novel's humor and its critique of modernity's obsession with surfaces. Jonathan Greenberg refers to Waugh's technique as an "external method," which "does not so much deny the interiority of the self, but rather suggests that it is oddly unknowable, buried beneath layers of social custom and ritualized expression" (356).[21] For Greenberg, intimate knowledge of characters—for

[21] James McNaughton makes a similar argument about Beckett's approach during the same era. He claims that Beckett's fiction discloses a central theme: "everything from modernist postures and political positions to images and phrases appear to him increasingly repetitive, imitative, and, in the sense that the usual appears novel, provincial" (56). The layers of custom and ritualized expression that paper over Waugh's characters' emptiness is an alternate manifestation of the project that McNaughton claims is at the heart of Beckett's fiction in the 1930s: an investigation of "how ideology is sustained, and how simplified interpretations repeated with old words shape experience long after those words have ceased to match social reality" (67). McNaughton's analysis of Beckett's work focuses on its politically engaged

both readers and other figures in the text—is prevented by the cultural and social habits that have become, for them, rote performances. Waugh's "external method" thereby formally enacts the "flattening of the present into a scenario" (Miller 44). Just as social customs and ritualized expressions bury the authentic self, so does Waugh's satire make intimate knowledge of a character's psyche "unknowable" for his readers.

This marks a profound departure from the emphasis high modernist fiction placed upon exploring the deep recesses of characters' consciousness. Modernist narrative techniques—stream of consciousness narration, a preponderance of free indirect discourse, first-person point of view (even if an unreliable narrator's)—promised to reveal characters' inner lives and contradictions. Waugh's nonsynchronous Gothic satire, written in third-person point of view and laden with dialogue, refuses these narrative tenets of modernism. His novel is instead composed in a spirit of reportage; "outward signs" are the only means by which to judge characters (Greenberg 355).

This stylistic choice is fundamental to Waugh's elaboration of the ritualized and aestheticized nature of social life in the 1930s. The characters' self-knowledge goes no deeper than is (or can be) reflected in Waugh's "external method" (Greenberg 356). The novel's formal character can therefore be understood as a recalibration of narrative techniques to the specific cultural phenomena and historical realities at play in the novel. Whereas the pyrotechnic innovations of modernism sought to express what lay in the deepest recesses of modern subjects' minds, such techniques ill befit an era afflicted by the transformation of authentic human experience into spectacle. Waugh's satirical "external method" thereby reveals the limits of modernist narrative modes: it is not the

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dimensions; though Waugh's novel does not indicate this type of engagement, it, like the work of Beckett and other late modernists, evaluates "the failures of modernism to accomplish its critique" (56).

exploration of interiority but of *surfaces* that can yield timely insight into Waugh's era and culture.

Tony's journey to the South American wilderness late in the novel brings him face to face with precisely the type of physical and existential challenges that would, in a high modernist novel, be likely to precede deep self-examination and discovery. But because this is Tony Last, and because he is the central character in a late modernist Gothic satire, no such self-awareness is provoked by his harrowing experiences. After Tony's divorce proceedings are underway, he elects to leave England and join an eccentric young Dr. Messinger on an expedition to discover a mythical city in South America, located in what "may be Brazil or Dutch Guiana" (157). Tony feels that going away is the conduct expected of a husband under the circumstances, and for the time being, the associations of Hetton are poisoned for him (156-7). It pains him to think of running into Brenda's lover or other old friends at the social clubs he frequents; so it is "with this feeling of evasion dominant in his mind" that he initially plans to embark on a cruise or other "civilized" journey. But when Tony meets Dr. Messinger, he becomes absorbed in the doctor's narrative about a legendary city which the doctor claims exists in the folklore of local people, but which non-native people have yet to discover. Tony is so taken by this description of the City that he signs up on the spot to join the expedition.

Tony imagines the City as an embodiment of the Gothic Revival. This idealized city becomes an illusion that sustains him throughout the arduous sea journey away from England and the even more threatening trek through the South American wilderness. In this respect, the City fulfills the same role as Hetton: it is an illusion that appears antithetical to—and a safe haven from—the cruel and shallow nature of modern life.

Tony "had a clear picture of it in his mind. It was Gothic in character, all vanes and pinnacles, gargoyles, battlements, groining and tracery, pavilions and terraces" (160). In Tony's imagination, the City is a glorious embodiment of Gothic Revival aesthetics; clearly, he has not divested himself of his delusional faith in the power of an illusory past to salve his modern wounds. Waugh's depiction of Tony as persistently besotted with this imagined Gothic version of the City underscores Tony's devotion to illusion and fakery. Tony continues to seek authentication by associating himself with the values of his ancestors, which are emblematized in the façade of Gothic Revival aesthetics. The pinnacles and gargoyles that Tony imagines will adorn the City are a manifestation of the total containment of his consciousness by the narrative that governs both his understanding of history and, more fundamentally, his life.

Waugh's novel furthermore recalibrates the modernist treatment of travel abroad, wherein journeys to distant places prompt a traumatic and authentic engagement with characters' deepest selves. A central and early example of this modernist trope is Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915). This novel exemplifies early modernist fiction's characteristic depiction of journeys abroad: they are occasions for traumatic revelations about deep truths. In such texts, characters confront the ugly realities of Britain's influence in the colonies and beyond, have disturbing encounters with native people and environments, and endure forced self-examinations that typically bring them into more intimate contact with their deepest selves. *The Voyage Out,* Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908) and *A Passage to India* (1924) all conform loosely to these modernist themes. A central element of these novels is the degree to which journeys abroad bring characters more closely into

acquaintanceship not with the people they meet (though this occurs), but with their own interior consciousness. Waugh's depiction forecloses this possibility, however: his characters are so thoroughly circumscribed by their rote adherence to empty narratives that no authentic selves exist deep within to be plumbed.

Woolf's early modernist female bildungsroman and Waugh's late modernist Gothic satire are formally and stylistically distinct. The journeys away from England that their central characters undertake are, however, uncannily similar. Tony and Rachel Vinrace, Woolf's young female protagonist, both travel to South America. Their ocean journeys take place on ships populated by an idiosyncratic cast of characters. Most significantly, both Rachel and Tony contract fever in the South American wilderness. Fever not only brings these characters face to face with their own mortality, but also prompts a backward-looking assessment of their lives. Though these novels depict "voyages out" that bear similar outlines, they were written at very different historical moments. In this sense, they exemplify the formal, stylistic, and thematic distinctions that characterize travel narratives at the outset of modernism and during an era of late modernism, respectively. In *A Handful of Dust,* Waugh engages the tenets of the modernist story of travel abroad, but his novel communicates a very different orientation toward modernity: his central character's experience is characterized not by epiphany, but by a persistent lack of self-awareness.

In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel's entire story is one of growing self-possession and self-knowledge.[22] Rachel's journey to South America is an important step in her

[22] Importantly, Rachel dies before she can act upon her newly gained self-knowledge. Jed Esty's *Unseasonable Youth* (2013) theorizes the phenomena of "frozen youth" and "uneven development" featured in several modernist novels (including *The Voyage Out*), wherein the bildungsroman plot is short-circuited or spun out endlessly. In Rachel's case, fever kills her before she can become the woman she

integration into her social class now that she is of marriageable age; prior to this trip, she is sheltered, absorbed in her own musical pursuits, and socially ungraceful. The cast of characters that surrounds her on the journey observes the start of her evolution into a charming hostess and mature woman. It is the natural outgrowth of this process that she should become engaged to Terence, another young person poised for induction into his social class by way of a successful marriage. But in this text, as is true of Woolf's fiction in general, *events* are not the most significant aspect of the narrative. Rather, the modernist preoccupation with the psyche predominates. Indeed, Woolf's first novel offers early hints of the deep exploration of individuals' interiority that characterizes—and distinguishes—Woolf's later novels, including *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To The Lighthouse* (1927). Late in the *The Voyage Out*, Rachel reflects at length upon the degree to which she is simultaneously becoming fit for civilization and increasingly aware of civilization's oppressiveness. The novel is, therefore, not strictly the story of Rachel's admittance into upper-class English society, but her coming of age into conscious selfhood.

Just after Rachel becomes engaged to Terence, and immediately before the fever that will kill her becomes apparent, she expresses her growing awareness of the rigidity of the social codes that govern her life in an extended reflection, presented in Woolf's trademark free indirect discourse. It indicates Rachel's complex recognition that her most intimate self cannot be fully manifested within her social milieu, but that the mores that rule her existence also provide security:

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envisions in her moments of epiphany. Furthermore, the socially prescriptive culture in which she lives forecloses the possibility that she can live in a manner fully commensurate to her character and her desires.

> She felt herself amazingly secure as she sat in her arm-chair, and able to review … the entire past, tenderly and humorously, as if she had been turning in a fog for a long time, and could now see exactly where she had turned. For the methods by which she had reached her present position, seemed to her very strange, and the strangest thing about them was that she had not known where they were leading her. That was the strange thing, that one did not know where one was going, or what one wanted, and followed blindly, suffering so much in secret, always unprepared and amazed and knowing nothing; but one thing led to another and by degrees something had formed itself out of nothing, and so one reached at last this calm, this quiet, this certainty, and it was this process that people called living. (306)

Now that she is engaged, Rachel is secure; she now has a designated and esteemed role as a future wife and mother. She is mystified as to how she came to inhabit this role, however: she has been, up to this point, "following blindly" the example of those who came before her—her aunts, the Dalloways—and whose example her social class obligates her to emulate. But in this moment, Rachel comes to recognize that she, like other women of her class, has emerged into what "people called living." She possesses, suddenly, a deep self-awareness: she recognizes her own lack of agency and the power that cultural norms have over her behavior and her future even as she capitulates to—and even welcomes the security ensured by—these phenomena. She is suddenly in possession of a profound understanding of the relationship between herself and her culture.

In this respect, Rachel is fundamentally unlike Tony Last; the culmination of her story is a profound self-examination that facilitates a more authentic understanding of her culture of which she was previously incapable. In contrast, Tony, though brought face to face with both his own mortality and the contingency of his role within his own culture, does not engage in this sort of self-reflection. Over his lifetime, he too has been "turning in a fog for a long time:" he unreflectively enacts the part of upper class English boy, then young man, then estate owner. Unlike Rachel, his continued and delusional belief in the solidity of a culture that is, in reality, both artificial and in decline prevents him from any recognition of its role in determining the character of his life or his fate. Whereas Rachel's revelation is an insightful glimpse into the role her culture and class have played in determining who she has become, Tony's lack of insight into the inauthenticity of his own culture prevents the kind of modernist revelation that Rachel experiences.

Tony's lack of interiority and self-revelation is symptomatic of the late modernist orientation of Waugh's novel. *A Handful of Dust*'s narrative depicts the transformation of life itself into spectacle. Tony's existence has itself become a play in which is he the central player; this is the "generalized mimetism" to which Miller refers (43). The persistence of Tony's delusion is attributable not to his naiveté or exceptionality but to the nature of life during the late modernist era. The modernist preoccupation with interiority gives way to a deauthentication of life so complete that neither travel abroad, nor mortal illness, nor divorce, nor the death of his son, can force Tony into an investigation of his deepest self. Indeed, Waugh's novel reveals that Tony has no authentic self. He is, rather, so circumscribed by the culture in which he lives that his

novel ends not with a modernist epiphany but his relegation to an eternal purgatory in which he is no closer to self-knowledge than he was while ensconced at Hetton Abbey.

Waugh's Subversion of the Imperial Adventure Narrative

Upon Tony's departure to South America, *A Handful of Dust* invokes yet another seemingly outmoded literary genre: the imperial adventure novel. Waugh's rendering of Tony's doomed adventure to the edge of civilization maintains the lineaments of imperial adventure even as it divests the form of its original function. Throughout the nineteenth century, the imperial adventure novel popularized stories of young men dispatched to the edge of empire to confront and conquer native environments and people, thereby exercising the power of British civility over barbarism. The literary form thereby affirmed and bolstered the British imperial project at a time when other world powers (including the United States) were emergent and Queen Victoria's holdings across the globe were being divided amongst European nations.

In *A Handful of Dust,* Waugh empties these conventions of their affirming function by depicting the inevitable failure of Tony's effort to become a conquering hero. In an era of imperial contraction during which a notion of imperialism as a noble British civilizing mission has long since lost traction, the imperial adventure story's role in bolstering empire is no longer resonant; nevertheless its features remain codified and consistent. Like the Arthurian romances for which Hetton's bedrooms are named, the imperial adventure form—in its conventional manifestation—has ceased to be a timely response to ongoing historical predicaments, though as a literary form it is coherent as ever. It is precisely these narratives' untimeliness that makes them an ideal ground for

Waugh's late modernist reworking of the imperial adventure form, which underscores that a narrative of imperial expansion is yet one more story that has ceased to give meaning to individuals' existence both at home and abroad.

Adventure fiction for young readers became a veritable industry from the 1830s on (Brantlinger 31). In these narratives, heroes either emigrated or traveled to the far reaches of the British empire; they were typically young men dispatched to do Britain's work in India, the Caribbean, and Africa. In most imperial adventure fiction, Patrick Brantlinger claims, "boy-heroes are forever proving their manliness through their pluck and derring-do" (33). These novels frequently imitated either Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or Scott's Waverley novels, or sometimes both; the form was always highly conventionalized (Brantlinger 30). According to Brantlinger, "adventure fiction is typically focused on the future: crossing frontiers and exploring new territories, the white heroes are pathfinders for the Empire and civilization. Almost always, civilization is equated both with the supposed superiority of the white race and with colonization by white settlers" (30). In these novels, pathfinding heroes discovered territories that were yet to be annexed by the Empire. As such, they gave literary expression to the principles behind Britain's ongoing imperial projects in the colonies: the heroes' adventures were undertaken in service of adding future wealth and territory to the home nation.

Waugh's novel, however, undoes the orientation toward the future exhibited in imperial adventure fiction. While Tony certainly "crosses frontiers" and "explores new territories," he is not a pathfinder on behalf of Britain as he does so. The most obvious sense in which this is true is that Tony does not return or report back to England; what discoveries he makes remain his alone, and his adventure will bestow no future benefit

upon his home nation. More central to Waugh's method of morphing genres' conventions in service of his late modernism, however, is Tony's lack of "pluck and derring-do" (33). Though he fancies that he embodies the competence and authority of England's ruling class, Tony has no skills or abilities that might make him a competent colonial adventurer; he is the very antithesis of the boy heroes featured in nineteenth century imperial adventure fiction. Tony is entirely dependent upon Dr. Messinger, who translates from the natives' several languages, informs Tony what is safe and unsafe to eat and drink, navigates on their behalf, and negotiates with the native people for transportation and assistance. Left to his own resources, Tony's "adventure" would have ended the moment he stepped off the ship upon which they arrived in South America. Though his journey itself resembles those undertaken by the "boy-heroes" of nineteenth century imperial adventure fiction, then, his own limitations make him entirely unfit for adventure at the edge of civilization.

Moreover, Waugh's insistent reversal of the tenets of the form reveals that the imperial adventure narrative is yet another empty script that continues to condition individuals' behavior and expectations despite its total lack of resonance in the late modernist era. The narrative of imperial adventure is one story among many that Waugh reveals to be merely a set of conventions. Despite their apparent untimeliness, however, Waugh's deformation of these forms reveals their utility in confronting and processing uniquely late modernist phenomena. Tony's initial attitude about the journey, which is confident and ignorant in equal parts, reflects the extent to which the imperial adventure narrative conditions his understanding of what can transpire when an English man of status ventures into the wilderness. Tony's confidence is baseless, but is rooted in his

knowledge of the plots that constitute imperial adventure fiction. His unreflective enactment of a script whose plot is determined by this highly conventionalized genre proves yet again that the meaning of his life lies not deep within the recesses of his self, but rather consists in the playing-out of already established narratives.

Waugh inverts imperial adventure fiction's typical orientation to the future by depicting Tony's conception of his adventures as reenactments of *past* discoveries and epic journeys. Throughout the nineteenth century, adventure fiction worked to affirm and bolster *ongoing* imperial projects via depictions of competent British males taming wild environments and populations. At the time of *A Handful of Dust*'s publication in 1934, however, the empire was no longer in a state of expansion, but contraction; British fiction could therefore no longer project a larger and more illustrious empire into the future. Tony's orientation to the past reflects this reality. His journey is undertaken with a "feeling of evasion dominant in his mind;" his primary motivation for leaving England is not primarily to discover new territory, but to avoid his painful past (157). Furthermore, the imagery and historical contexts that condition Tony's imagination about the nature of his adventure are rooted not in the future, but in the past. He discusses the quest for the legendary city to a fellow passenger in the following way:

> Peruvian emigrants in the middle ages and their long caravan working through the mountains and forests, llamas packed with works of intricate craftsmanship; of the continual rumor percolating to the coast and luring adventurers up into the forests; of the route they would take up the rivers, the cutting through the bush along Indian trails and across untravelled country; of the stream they might strike high

up and how, Dr. Messinger said, they would make woodskin canoes and take to the water again. (163-4)

Tony imagines that he shares a kinship with ancient adventurers who have travelled the same territory in centuries past. The reader, who knows that Tony is neither industrious nor trained to navigate such a perilous journey, can easily recognize that this is a story that Tony is telling himself. This narrative is, furthermore, a story that Dr. Messinger has told. As is indicated by the acknowledgement "Dr. Messinger said," Tony's description of their adventure is merely a rote recital of the story he has heard from Dr. Messinger. This is a concrete demonstration of the extent to which Tony's very *ability to imagine* is conditioned by the stories that he has heard. In this way, Waugh insists that the conventions of narrative delimit the imagination. As such, they are constitutive of the "scripting" of reality that characterizes late modernism.

Tony finishes his monologue about his upcoming adventure with a final flourish: "finally they would arrive under the walls of the city like the Vikings at Byzantium" (164). This last assertion brings together several aspects of Waugh's critique and redeployment of narrative convention: Tony's imagination, here, is limited to facts he remembers from history class, and his conception of himself as a "Viking" is furthermore consistent with his identification with the middle ages.[23] Whereas the "boy-heroes" of nineteenth century imperial adventure novels *add to* the empire by discovering and conquering new territories; Tony imagines himself as enacting a triumphant discovery that has *already occurred.* The total circumscription of his consciousness by

[23] Later, when Tony and Dr. Messinger have penetrated further into the wilderness than any map documents, Dr. Messinger declares "From now onwards the map is valueless to us." At Dr. Messinger's words, "memories of Tony's private school came back to him," "of inky little desks and a coloured picture of a Viking raid, of Mr. Trotter who had taught him history and wore very vivid ties" (177).

conventionalized narratives forecloses the possibility that Tony can imagine a future. This is consistent with the late modernist dispensation of writers who responded to a modernist movement "grinding to a halt and an aesthetic on the threshold of dissolution" by sinking "faithlessly into a present devoid of future" (Miller 14). *A Handful of Dust* is, therefore, a manifestation of the "closure of the horizon of the future" that is characteristic of late modernist fiction (Miller 13).

Heart of Darkness, Temporal Disorientation, and the Gothic

Tony's journey deep into the South American jungle is reminiscent of Charlie Marlow's imperial adventure into the African wilderness in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Conrad's novella explores the moral ambivalence of European imperial projects; indeed this proto-modernist text's continued significance is due in large part to its richly layered and skeptical engagement with the rationale for imperialism, the ethical conundrums it produces, and its effects upon both its agents and its victims. *Heart of Darkness* narrates a journey away from England that depicts the complex consequences that occur when individuals privileged by England's power and stability penetrate into unknown and wild territories. In this sense, it provides a productive comparator for the strange ending of Waugh's novel, wherein Tony leaves England and journeys progressively further into a "heart of darkness." Furthermore, as was true for Marlow in Conrad's text, Tony's journey provokes his geographical and psychological disorientation. A comparison of Conrad's and Waugh's distinct approaches to these types of disorientation provides a framework through which Waugh's portrayal of late

modernist disorientation can be understood as a recalibration of the literary tendencies that preceded it.

Critical debate exists about the extent to which Waugh's novel—particularly its ending—bears the direct influence of *Heart of Darkness*.[24] Waugh's biographer Martin Stannard argues that "there is no evidence of Waugh's having read *Heart of Darkness"* and points to Waugh's claim that he is "not a devotee" of Conrad's work (185). Extraordinary as Waugh's ignorance may seem, Stannard observes, Waugh's reading habits were "eclectic" and focused most closely on his contemporaries' work (185). As other critics have argued however, comparing these texts is instructive regardless of the depth of Waugh's knowledge of Conrad's novella.

Both texts depict an Englishman's journey to the far reaches of civilization; as such, they represent distinct moments in England's imperial project. While *Heart of Darkness* depicts the ethical ambivalence wrought by imperial penetration in the 1890s, *A Handful of Dust*'s similar plot represents the vacuity of such adventures during a moment of imperial contraction. Moreover, each text's distinct relationship to the imperial adventure narrative highlights ongoing shifts within literary history. Conrad's novella maintains the constitutive features of the nineteenth century form while warping aspects of its ideological content. As a result of his participation in the imperial project,

[24] This lively debate about the indebtedness of *A Handful of Dust* to *Heart of Darkness* is documented in the journal *Connotations,* in which Stannard responds to Edward Lobb's contention in his article "Waugh Among the Modernists: Allusion and Theme in *A Handful of Dust"* that Waugh's novel should be read "in terms of its cultural allusions and references to other writers, particularly Conrad and Eliot" (131). Stannard responds with a vigorous protestation that Lobb's analysis suggests that Waugh is "in part carefully re-writing *Heart of Darkness* and that his 'allusions' are essential to the intertextual play of *A Handful of Dust"* (185). The editor of the *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter and Studies,* John Howard Wilson, is also "doubtful about Waugh's debt to Conrad, which is unsupported" in Waugh's biographies, nonfiction, and other sources (211). My project grants that Waugh may indeed have been ignorant of, or even resistant to, Conrad's novella. Nevertheless, comparing the two authors' work offers insight into the manner in which narrative and narrative conventions shift over time. In particular, viewing Waugh's work in terms of Conrad's allows a productive tracing of the relationships between empire, surface, commodification, and interiority as modernism emerges and ebbs between the 1890s and the 1930s.

Conrad's Marlow sees into the "heart of darkness" at its center; his resulting oral narrative constitutes a reflective unraveling of the triumphalist imperial adventure narrative itself. In *A Handful of Dust,* however, the imperial adventure narrative becomes a site at which Waugh demonstrates the emptiness of conventionalized narratives more generally. Analysis of the significant similarities and distinctions that these novels exhibit therefore offers a rich understanding of the ongoing evolution of narrative responses to historical reality and, furthermore, of the progressive emptying-out of narrative forms throughout the early part of the twentieth century.

Conrad's and Waugh's respective depictions of their protagonists' temporal orientations provides concrete insight into narrative responses to the imperial projects in the 1890s and 1930s. Marlow (like Tony) depicts his journey into the heart of darkness as a journey back in time. As he famously declares when embarking upon the river in search of Mr. Kurtz, "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (33). Marlow describes the environment as "primeval" and "prehistoric;" the further from civilization he ventures, the more ancient the world appears (26, 35). It is not strictly geographical distance or dislocation that conditions Marlow's understanding of his environment, then. Crucially, his customary relationship to temporality is fundamentally altered by his journey.

Conrad's rendering of temporality resonates most precisely with Tony's when Marlow invokes the journeys of ancient explorers and conquerors as precursors to his own. When Marlow's narration begins, he asserts "I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago" (5). He furthermore refers to Knights, Gauls, fleets at Ravenna, and men in togas. In so doing, he narratively

constructs a line of inheritance between his own ship full of sailors and the ancient imperial agents who initially conquered and "civilized" London. This is the same kind of narrative construction Tony performs when he asserts that he and Dr. Messinger "would arrive under the walls of the city like the Vikings at Byzantium" (164).

Waugh's and Conrad's narratives are distinct in several crucial ways, however. Marlow returns to England with a new and more conflicted understanding of the imperial project in which he has participated. Tony, however, is unable to return to his home country and therefore does not act as an agent of anything. More fundamentally, however, Waugh's narrative reveals that imperialism itself has become a script by which Tony governs his undertaking yet he is powerless to imbue his actions with any cultural or ideological significance. Whereas Marlow, despite his moral quandary about the imperial project, returns to England and lies to Kurtz's "Intended" in order to paper over the ethical complexities that haunt imperialism, Tony's experience reveals that there is no justification for his journey, whether in Tony's own mind or in actual fact. Though Tony leaves England to enact the same script that Marlow did when he ventured into the heart of darkness, his experience reveals that this script is *merely* a set of conventions and is devoid of any ability to lend meaning to Tony's journey and, therefore (given his reasons for embarking), his life.

Waugh reveals the "scripted" nature of this narrative through his depiction of Tony's changing relationship to time as he ventures further from the center of civilization. At the outset of his journey, Tony imagines his own trek as Marlow did, as a journey back in time. But as his journey progresses, Tony's temporal confusion becomes a central aspect of his disorientation. In the beginning of their journey through the forest,

Tony lays in his hammock thinking about home: "'Half-past eight,' thought Tony. 'In London they are just beginning to collect for dinner'" (170). But soon "it occurred to Tony that it was not half-past eight in England. There was five hours' difference in time. They had altered their watches daily on the voyage out" (171). As the men venture further into the heart of the wilderness, Tony's rigid sense of time becomes confused: he cannot remember whether London is five hours ahead or five hours behind. He then engages in an absurd process of rationale: "It ought to be easy to work out. The sun rose in the east. England was east of America so he and Dr. Messinger got the sun later. It came to them at second hand and slightly soiled after Polly Cockpurse and Mrs. Beaver and Princess Abdul Akbar had finished with it…" (171). This rationale signals the emerging breakdown of Tony's ability to relegate things to their "proper" temporalities. By initially imagining that it is "half-past eight" for *both* he and Brenda, Tony reveals his continued identification with the temporality of England. He continues to perceive of himself as belonging to the world of Hetton, and so he persists in imagining that his life can continue to be governed by its temporality.

But Tony's glimpse into the reality that "half-past eight" signifies differently for him and for Brenda signals his emerging consciousness that he now belongs to a different temporality than is operational at Hetton. Tony's temporal confusion disrupts his ability to assure himself of his proper place—both temporally and existentially. This breakdown not only threatens Tony's sanity, but it also reveals the extent to which his own systematization of time is merely a convention that cannot be sustained when faced with the challenges of travel in the wilderness. Furthermore, Tony's assertion that the sun comes to them "slightly soiled" after Brenda's shallow and future-oriented friends

"finished with it" indicates Tony's continued and misplaced belief in the superiority of his orientation to the past, which actually belies his fetish for commodification and consumption.

Tony's increasing temporal disorientation revises the rigid sensibility represented in *Heart of Darkness.* As his journey becomes increasingly fraught, Tony no longer understands himself as governed by an "English" temporality that is a starting point for the projection into the past that both he and Marlow perform at the outsets of their respective journeys. Marlow's frame narrative begins long after his journey to fetch Kurtz out of the jungle is complete; he has journeyed to the heart of darkness and lived to tell the tale. Marlow's narrative nevertheless configures his adventure as a journey backward in time. This contrasts with the confusion of Tony's rigid temporal sensibility. This disruption of the temporal logic of imperialism is central to Waugh's recalibration of modernist aesthetics to the late modernist era. Though Tony persists in his effort to render his voyage as a reenactment of earlier and more glorious journeys, he fails because the timeline that governs the narrative imperial adventure is disrupted by the realities of an era in which the myth of empire has lost traction.[25] By underscoring the arbitrary nature of this timeline—and the fact that it can be disrupted—Waugh reveals that the narrative of imperial penetration into the wilderness is *merely* a narrative. It is the scaffolding upon which Tony's own adventure narrative initially hangs, but late modernism's profound disorientation dictates that this narrative is indeed merely scaffolding.

[25] These realities include: the vacuity and "generalized mimetism" that characterizes Tony, Brenda, and their peers; the ideological bankruptcy of the imperial project; the ruling class's ineptitude in executing its responsibilities, including estate oversight and colonial administration (Miller 43).

When Tony contracts fever, the phenomena that he previously categorized as belonging to the past incur upon his present. When he is in the grip of fever, Tony is "fitfully oblivious of the passage of time;" his illness makes him literally unable to recognize the transition from day into night, or to distinguish morning from evening (199). More significantly in terms of Tony's psychological disorientation, he begins to hallucinate that Brenda is present with him in the jungle. In the midst of a fever-induced delusion, he stares intently at an odd shape some distance away in his canoe; eventually he "realized that it was a human being" (194). His conversation with Brenda combines memories from their marriage at Hetton, events associated with John Andrew's death, his travails thus far in South America, and other more absurd references.

In a profoundly embodied way, then, the very phenomena he'd been hoping to avoid in his "feeling of evasion" becomes present to him even in his location so distant from Hetton Abbey (157). In South America, Brenda "wore a ragged cotton gown" of the same pattern as the native women and reminds Tony that he must attend his County Council meeting (201). When Tony asks, "But it isn't Wednesday?," Brenda replies, "no, but time is different in Brazil; surely you remember?" (201).[26] Here, Brenda voices Tony's sensation that time does not function universally. If "time is different in Brazil," this introduces complexity into Tony's willful imaginative construction of himself as an ancient explorer. Furthermore, if Brenda, whom he is actively trying to relegate to the past, can appear as an embodied presence in his present, then Tony's configuration of time up to this point is undermined. The temporal relegation of things to their precise places—his slotting them into the right locations in the timeline that governs his

[26] Tony repeats the line "time is different" twice; he is clearly preoccupied with his radical temporal disorientation (202, 207).

existence—is disrupted by the illness he contracted on his journey. Through this depiction, Waugh makes literal the destruction of the narrative that casts Englishmen as triumphant explorers of an earlier era.

Tony's fever literalizes a forceful reemergence of the Gothic form. When Tony is in the grip of fever, Brenda appears to him as an embodied presence, though she is not, in fact, present. He also participates in conversations with old friends and acquaintances. When it finally becomes clear to Tony that fever has rendered him completely helpless—his tremors cause him to spill the tank of kerosene that is his only source of light—he "lay awake in the darkness crying" (200). Just before dawn, "the fever returned and a constant company of phantoms perplexed his senses" (200). Very real aspects of his life in England—his wife, his friends, his relationship with his son and his tenants—have been Gothicized into phantoms by his fever. For Tony, his confrontation with the wilderness facilitates a temporal and geographical disorientation that exposes his real life as phantasmic. In this sense, Waugh's depiction of Tony's harrowing experience in the jungle reveals the extent to which all the narratives by which Tony formerly governed his life have been rendered into merely a "company of phantoms." His life itself has been transformed into a spectacle—and a terrifying one.

Importantly, this truth is only apparent to Tony when he is in the grips of fever. When the fever is temporarily dormant, Brenda disappears and Tony returns to his polite English self: he acknowledges to Dr. Messinger "I'm afraid I'm being a great nuisance" (195). The fever is cyclical: though Tony believes that he is "well" each time the fever abates, Dr. Messinger explains the truth. "It's no use your thinking you are cured because you are out of fever for one day. That's the way it goes. One day fever and one

day normal" (195). Tony can anticipate that one day he will be haunted by phantoms, and the next his sanity (and seemingly his health) will return. Tony himself cannot discern when he is sick or well; such is the nature of his Gothic affliction.

A similar cycle of dormancy and reemergence is characteristic of the Gothic genre since its inception. Indeed, as Kelly Hurley claims, "Gothic in particular has been theorized as an instrumental genre, reemerging cyclically, at periods of cultural stress, to negotiate the anxieties that accompany social and epistemological transformations and crises" (Hurley 5). Like the fever that prompts Tony's horrified recognition of the vacuity of his own reality, the Gothic form itself emerges periodically throughout literary history as a site for the negotiation of cultural anxiety. Clearly, one of *A Handful of Dust*'s central preoccupations is the processing of anxiety provoked by the transformation of life into empty spectacle that afflicts those living in the late modernist era. Hurley's observation that the Gothic is particularly attuned to social and epistemological crises provides further rationale for Waugh's use of this form in his 1934 text; these are precisely the crises that Tony endures throughout the novel. The novel's Gothic finale underscores the utility of this form in negotiating specifically late modernist anxieties and furthermore allows Waugh to reveal the ominous nature of these cultural shifts even within this very funny satirical text.

"Living Death" and Entombment in Text

At the end of his narrative, Tony becomes "undead." This Gothic condition is a crucial aspect of Waugh's late modernist dispensation: it both reflects a "closure of the horizon of the future" despite the persistence of both Tony's life and Waugh's literary

career, and it betrays Waugh's skepticism of modernist aesthetics to fully express the contingent nature of life in the 1930s (Miller 13). Dr. Messinger dies, unspectacularly, in a small waterfall when seeking help for Tony. After this event, Tony stumbles through the forest, still in the grip of fever and covered in insect and bat bites. He is saved when a native woman discovers him, shoeless and raving, and brings him to Mr. Todd. Mr. Todd is a half-Barbadian, half-indigenous settler in the isolated Brazilian interior; he has settled a small savannah, upon which he raises a few cattle and fruit trees. As he tells Tony later, "Most of the men and women living in this savannah are my children. That is why they obey—for that reason and because I have the gun" (208). Mr. Todd rules over his estate with a concealed menace that Tony recognizes only after his convalescence is complete. Mr. Todd brings Tony back from the brink of death and insanity by healing his fever with medicines derived from native plants.

Mr. Todd appears to be Tony's savior until it becomes clear what he gains by Tony's presence: a literate person whom he can force to read aloud the complete works of Charles Dickens. Mr. Todd inherited a collection of Dickens's texts from his father and he is "more than fond, far more" of these texts; "You see, they are the only books I have ever heard" (209). Mr. Todd is clearly enamored of the material stability reflected in Dickens's fiction: he listens, enrapt, and asks questions about the characters and their relationships. Dickens's didactic nineteenth century materialism constitutes Mr. Todd's sole impression of English culture and the extent of his knowledge of literature. The material reality evoked during these readings is that of nineteenth century London; furthermore, in Dickens's depictions, institutions including the aristocracy, imperialism,

and the church have yet to undergo the radical breakdown that occurred in the early twentieth century.

In *A Handful of Dust*, this insistent irruption of Dickens's outmoded literary form has a Gothic effect: Waugh's depiction renders the national literary culture of nineteenth century England *undead*. By 1934, the Victorian novel has long since lost currency, but Tony (as compelled by Mr. Todd) brings it back to life. In fact, the authors within whose legacy Waugh writes are precisely those who "killed" the materialist novel: Woolf's and Conrad's anti-Victorian subjectivism and impressionism were fundamental in formulating a modernist ethos in fiction. Waugh's narration of Tony's ominous end insists, however, that some strange power remains within the literary forms that preceded modernism. Paradoxically, the recurrence of these outmoded literary styles in Waugh's novel reveal—in all its complexity—the specifically late modernist situation in which Tony is trapped.

In ways that resonate with the explorations we see in other late modernist writers such as Bowen and Beckett, Tony is circumscribed by narrative; his every thought and action is dictated by the stories he continues to tell himself, despite their incompatibility with life in the 1930s. By literalizing Tony's rehearsal of the nineteenth century sensibility with which he so closely identifies, Waugh declares the completion of the "generalized mimetism" of Tony's existence (Miller 43). The narratives by which he has governed his life, in the end, are no more resonant or applicable to his late modernist existence than those found in Dickens's fiction.

Mr. Todd insists that Tony bring Victorian materialism back to life. Tony's wish to *inhabit* the nineteenth century—to live in the era of the Gothic Revival—is therefore

granted, but only at the cost of remaining trapped by his captor, forced at gunpoint to read Dickens's collected works until his inevitable death. By giving new life to this old literature, Tony becomes entombed within it. Tony's final scenes spent reading to Mr. Todd therefore reveal *not* that Tony is fundamentally a "nineteenth century" man, but rather that his consciousness and actions are determined (and delimited) not by an ethical code, religious belief, or the stability of his class position, but by narrative. He is, therefore, fundamentally a creature of the late modernist era.

Tony becomes "undead" in both a physical and a temporal sense as a result of his fate in the Brazilian wilderness. After Tony has lived on Mr. Todd's savannah for a year or more, a search party of Englishmen arrives. Mr. Todd ensures that Tony is drugged so that he sleeps for several days, and he conceals Tony's presence. When Tony awakes, Mr. Todd tells him that the search party "took some photographs of the little cross I put up to commemorate your coming. They were pleased with that" (216-17). The cross—though Mr. Todd suggests that it memorializes Tony's arrival—thereby becomes "evidence" of Tony's death. The search party reasonably assumes that the cross is a marker for Tony's grave; as such, they conclude that Tony's body is buried beneath it. In this way, a narrative is constructed in which Tony's physical death has already taken place; the members of the search party are "pleased" with this story because it offers a series of events to fill the timeline of Tony's life. The cross therefore emblematizes Tony's "undead" status: though he remains living, the cross renders him "dead."

Moreover, Tony's temporal disorientation is made complete when Mr. Todd gives his watch to the members of the search party. "As you could not greet them yourself," he says, "I gave them a little souvenir, your watch. They wanted something to take back to

England where a reward is being offered for news of you" (216). Given Tony's lack of intimate knowledge of nature, he is powerless to decipher time on his own. Furthermore, without his watch he is unable to orient himself to the passage of time back home; he can no longer do the math in order to imagine what Brenda is doing at any given moment. He is also lost, in a temporal sense, to the world with which he identifies; he inhabits a netherworld in which time exists, but it is not the time that governs the "world of the living." Tony is alive and well in the historical past, entombed as he is within the walls of Victorian literature. But he is no longer a citizen of modernity.

Importantly, it is narrative that entraps Tony within "living death;" Mr. Todd offers up precisely the kind of plot details that his own narrative training dictates will constitute a believable story. The cross and the watch are concrete and symbolic objects that suggest, in no uncertain terms, that Tony has died. Furthermore, the narrative Mr. Todd composes becomes the narrative that the search party will deliver to those who know Tony. This narrative therefore "kills" him. Narrative thus becomes "truer" than the actual life it purports to represent. Tony is not dead, but Tony's *story* declares that he is. Tony is therefore rendered "undead" by the "generalized mimetism" inherent to late modernism, wherein narrative conditions and delimits the events and character of individuals' lives.

Conclusion

Waugh's final chapter, "English Gothic-III" is four pages long; its jarring change in setting content contributes to the lack of symbolic unity and late modernist "disfigurement" that characterizes *A Handful of Dust* (Miller 14). This strange chapter is

therefore crucial to the novel's form and furthermore emphasizes the "perilous breakdown of distinction—between subject and object, between spectator and spectacle, between producer and consumer" that Miller argues characterizes late modernism (43). The chapter opens on a scene at Hetton Abbey. Tony's industrious cousins have inherited the estate and turned it into a silver-fox farm. Most of the Abbey's rooms have been shut, an economical range has been installed in the kitchen, and the cousins employ a "skeleton staff" of servants. The estate no longer resembles the monument to the Gothic Revival that it did when Tony lived there; it is, instead, a modernized and functional enterprise. A dedication of a memorial to Tony takes place in the chapter; Waugh describes the service in four short paragraphs.

In several distinct ways, the memorial embodies the late modernist Gothic sensibility that Waugh develops throughout the novel. First, the memorial itself is Mrs. Beaver's idea; initially she suggested the more ambitious—and costly—idea that they might "have the chapel redecorated as a chantry" (221). Waugh's satire is in full force here: Mrs. Beaver was responsible for outfitting Brenda with a well-decorated apartment in London and for covering the walls at Hetton with chromium plating. Her continued investment in purely aesthetic objects even after—indeed, in response to—Tony's tragic "death" reveals the empty investments of the culture she represents. This final scene's satirical register certainly contrasts with Tony's Gothic entombment at the end of the previous chapter; in the context of Waugh's late modernist Gothic satire, this puts a fine point on Waugh's social critique. The matter-of-fact manner in which Mrs. Beaver seeks to profit by Tony's death underscores this novel's overall Gothic effect: to reveal the horrifyingly shallow and inauthentic character of contemporary life.

The memorial also encapsulates Waugh's critique of narrative as a force that determines fates and circumscribes lives. The stone reads: "TONY LAST OF HETTON / EXPLORER / Born at Hetton, 1902 / Died in Brazil, 1934" (220). The stone declares that Tony is dead, and that he died in Brazil. As the reader is aware, Tony lives on in the Brazilian wilderness, reading Dickens's novels aloud in Mr. Todd's hut. Nevertheless the memorial acts as a finale to Tony's life; because the memorial exists, and because it declares him dead, he *is* dead. The memorial is the "THE END" that marks the end of the narrative that Mr. Todd insinuated to Tony's search party, and which the search party delivered to England, and to which everyone who knew Tony now subscribes. The *story* of Tony's death has, in this case, become truer than reality. Though Tony lives on, he has been made dead by the narratives created about him.

The memorial's description of Tony as an "explorer" furthermore creates a narrative that both far outstrips reality and conforms to the basic features of the imperial adventure narrative that governed Tony's initial excursion. Tony's familiarity with these narratives gave him baseless confidence in his "pluck and derring-do;" these stories' conventions furthermore give Tony's family and friends a ready-made script for how to understand Tony's journey and its end. A man of the ruling class who ventures out into a heart of darkness is an "explorer;" this narrative renders unimaginable the actual failure of Tony's adventure. The well-known and highly conventionalized narratives that depict such journeys dictate that there is only one way to understand Tony's adventure. Again, the story of Tony becomes truer than his reality. The memorial thereby embodies Waugh's complex critique of narrative itself: in an era of late modernism, narratives cannot provide the ideological security they offered in the era of Dickens. Waugh's

novel furthermore reveals that conventionalized narratives are destructive in their capacity to delimit individuals' actions and imaginations.

The most powerful way in which the memorial embodies the distinctly late modernist ethos of this text is as an object that facilitates Tony's "living death." Tony is not, in fact, dead, but the memorial declares that he is; in this sense, he is both living and dead. Crucial to Waugh's critique of the consumption and obsession with objects that characterizes this era is the memorial's status as an *object.* It was Mrs. Beaver's idea to construct the memorial; she commissions its construction and orchestrates its unveiling. The novel's final moments focus not the life or death of the person being memorialized, but on the object itself. Tony himself is thereby commodified into an object. This commodification both satirizes his own devotion to commodities during his lifetime and ensures that his "undead" status will remain permanent. In terms of the novel's social critique, the large stone stands as a monument to the "undead" status of those living in the late modernist era: their "living death" is innocuous, empty, enacted as a matter of habit, and void of ideological or ethical significance.

As Miller argues, late modernists "carry the signs of death on their faces, the disfigured countenances they show to their postmodern successors. Paradoxically, however, these very signs of disfiguration charge their work with its contemporaneity" (13). *A Handful of Dust* does not endorse modernism's straightforward engagement of Gothic's fearsome melodrama; neither does it engage modernism's investment in interiority or its conventionalized narrative arcs. Rather, it flattens the affect of the Gothic form, warps modernist and other narrative conventions, and satirizes individuals' insistent devotion to empty narratives. In so doing, Waugh produces a strange and

estranging novel that precisely captures the shared sense among late modernists that "their contemporary reality—both subjective and objective—was somehow becoming 'less real'" (Miller 45). In this sense, Waugh's novel, which appears initially to be an innocuous social satire, both offers an unexpectedly penetrating critique of his own era and marks the emergence of a postmodern sensibility wherein reality itself is constituted by simulacra.

CHAPTER IV

BECKETT'S DISSOLUTION OF NARRATIVE SUBJECTIVITY THROUGH THE DISASSEMBLY OF FORM

Introduction

The project of Samuel Beckett's trilogy is to narrate a formulation of selfhood that is neither contained nor constrained by narrative. To this end, the novels of the trilogy—published in French in 1951-1953 and released in English in 1958 with the titles *Molloy, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable*—systematically expose and explicate the matrices of literary and narrative convention by which authors typically compel subjectivity into being. By mobilizing and then undoing the defining features of several conventionalized narrative forms, including the bildungsroman, autobiography, and detective fiction, Beckett reveals their complicity in producing a limiting and limited formulation of subjectivity. His trilogy furthermore highlights modernist aesthetics' role in reinscribing this prescriptive formulation of the subject despite its formally revolutionary ethos. Beckett's narrative method in the trilogy thereby reveals that both pre-twentieth century forms and the modernist investment in interiority assume and perpetuate a configuration of subjectivity that is both prescriptive and coercive. Beckett enlists and transforms basic elements of narrative and well-worn narrative forms in order to produce a late modernist "unwriting" of the human consciousness as it had heretofore been conceived in narrative fiction.

The novel form itself provides the ground for Beckett's critique of conventionalized narrative practices' coerciveness. Because the development of the individual into a socially sanctioned subject is the premise of several canonical novel

forms, these forms are both the objects and the vehicles of Beckett's critique. As Beckett's immanent critique unfolds, his method demonstrates that narrative does not reveal the true essence of the self, but rather produces a textual performance of autonomous subjectivity that conforms to the "universally valid and archetypal" subjectivity represented in canonical literature (Lloyd 19). Despite its apparent nonconformity to canonical narrative practices, careful attention to the trilogy's construction reveals that the texts' strangeness is, in part, due to Beckett's manner of wrenching recognizable forms into the service of his radical project. Beckett's invocation of these highly prescriptive narrative frameworks forces an examination of these frameworks' role in circumscribing the socially sanctioned perception of what it means to be human.

The first novel in the trilogy inaugurates this immanent critique. *Molloy* begins as a first person autobiographical narrative; as the narrative progresses, this premise is deconstructed even as it haunts the text. The autobiographical form's coercive articulation of subjectivity is an imperative against which each of Beckett's subsequent protagonists struggles; indeed, this is what might be called the texts' central "conflict." Beckett also enlists the bildungsroman subgenre—a form that itself echoes autobiography in several key respects—in his pursuit of a means by which to dismantle the process of identity formation that circumscribes his characters.

Beckett's enlistment of the detective fiction form in his ongoing dissolution of the narrative subject highlights the degree to which highly prescriptive narrative conventions—and the popular literary forms that employ them—contribute to the ascription of a reductive identity to characters. The detective fiction form enacts the

ongoing construction of a detective's "report;" the protagonist is obligated to produce a narrative that both reconstructs and resolves the "crime." In order to produce this narrative, the detective surveils the target of the investigation, deciphers his attributes, and then renders him legible through text. In so doing, the detective writes the subjectivity of the "criminal" into being. In this way, detective fiction nurtures a process of increasing legibility that culminates in narrative resolution; it is premised upon the ongoing and increasing decipherability of the "criminal's" subjectivity.

Beckett's invocation of this form also reveals the narrator's legible subjectivity to be produced by the conventions of the form. Even as the detective polices the identity of the "criminal," by composing his report, he writes his own identity into being. He ensures that his report performs the identity ascription and resolution that are the purposes of a detective's report, and in so doing he *becomes* the detective that he purports to be. He is thereby offered as a model to the reader as an enforcer of identity for himself and others. The detective monitors disruptive actors in society, thereby making them knowable. This composition of others' subjectivities requires a narrator whose own subjectivity is coherent and recognizable to the reader and which is the premise for his evaluative narration about the "criminal" he seeks. The detective fiction form thereby mandates a prescriptive and archetypal configuration of subjectivity for both the characters being narrated and narrators themselves. Beckett's method of exposing the rigid conventions that perpetuate this mandate reveals their inherent conventionality. More importantly, his method shows that this popular form—which, unlike autobiography and bildung, does not have as its purpose the depiction of identity formation—produces narrative identity through its own uniquely coercive methods.

Beckett's writing in the trilogy also indicts the limits of modernist efforts to dismantle narrative conventions. Certainly, innovative modernists sought to move beyond the narrative tendencies of the nineteenth century; as Paul Sheehan observes, "the experimental, formally diverse modernist novel… offers a powerful commentary on the various struggles to break free of narrative—or at least to find a different order for its particular conventions" (5-6). The novel form in particular lent itself to modernist efforts to produce new modes of writing by transforming well-worn genres. According to Sheehan, the novel's protean ability to "reappropriate the literary technique of the past and 'make it new' promotes it to the forefront of the modernist endeavour" (14). The novel is a site of modernist experimentation wherein authors self-consciously enlist, reject, revise, and reanimate established narrative structures.

Even many of modernist fiction's most revolutionary narrative techniques, however, seek to express characters' and narrators' deepest selves; the stream-of-consciousness narration, free indirect discourse, narrative impressionism, and "moments of being" that constitute many of classic modernist fiction's most radical innovations reflect a subjectivism that both posits and seeks to depict subjects' inner lives.[27] Certainly, these techniques reject the nineteenth century materialist practices, embodied in the work of George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and others, that sought to represent life empirically through exhaustive exploration of social communities, character attributes, and physical environments. Modernist fiction writers came to view this mode of narration as naïve and sought to instead depict individual human consciousness in all its complexity. Beckett's critique of modernism's innovative techniques reveals, however,

[27] The canonical modernist fiction writers whose work exemplifies these tendencies are James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner.

that they nevertheless perpetuate the reification of the subject that Beckett's narrative seeks to undermine. Beckett's enlistment of the nineteenth century conventions that modernists refused is, paradoxically, the means by which he mounts a radical critique of the conventional modernist investment in interiority that displaced them.

The very first phrases in Molloy's narrative focus attention upon the mysteries surrounding the "I" who narrates: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there" (7). Molloy's self-introduction thereby both undermines the notion of an autonomous and truth-telling narrator that governs autobiographical narrative, but also hints at the extent to which this notion continues to act as a powerful mandate upon the "I" who narrates. This introduction underscores not only the quandary that Molloy the character faces—how *did* he come to inhabit his mother's room?—but when read as a question about his origins *as narrator,* the sentence furthermore focuses attention on the mysterious dynamic by which articulate selves are "created" by and in narrative. Here, by the novel's third sentence, Beckett inaugurates his interrogation of the method by which narrative coerces subjectivity into being. When read as this type of interrogation, the sentence encourages a particular line of questioning: how *did* the text's narrator come to narrate the text? How *did* this become a story to be read? *To what end* do novels call subjects, figures, characters, narrators into being? Beckett's trilogy, as it posits and dissolves subjects via a disintegration of the narrative structures by which they are typically created, serves as a complex and lengthy exploration of these questions.

Narrative's Coercion of Subjectivity

Molloy's elliptical and often self-canceling mode of narration prevents him from becoming a subject whom readers can "know" as a result of his own self-disclosure; he is instead a figure whose status—both textual and ontological—is recalcitrant to conventional modes of understanding. As David Weisberg argues, "Beckett embeds the figure of Molloy in a narrative structure that complicates the idea of self-expression implicit in first-person narration (88). Indeed, Molloy does not narrate the events of his life from a position of omniscience. Rather, his narration insistently casts doubt upon his own authority and continually revises the details of his story as they accumulate. If Molloy is the text's "speaker," his function *as* speaker is to persistently call his audience's attention to the conventionality of the narrative frame that would cast him as such. This function violates the conventional premise that governs first-person narratives: namely, that a narrative is brought into being by a subject. As the text's ongoing critical interrogation of this premise builds momentum throughout the trilogy, it produces awareness that subjectivity—the narrating "self"—is produced by the conventions that govern narrative.

Molloy begins with a strident first-person declaration: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now" (7). The text thereby begins with the assertion of information about an "I": we know the speaker's location, and we sense that a change must have occurred to prompt this declaration (the narrator is compelled to assert that it is he, not another, who lives there at the time of the text's present). This is, in the context of Beckett's novel as a whole, a relative abundance of information. And yet: in the next sentence, the narrator asserts "I don't know how I got there," introducing the doubt about

his origins which is both the impetus for and the limiting factor in the narrator's quest to find his mother (7). As the novel progresses, the reader understands that the narrator's uncertainty applies not only to his physical state and location but also to more fundamental questions of selfhood. Molloy identifies and undermines, denies and reasserts his familial and ontological origins. Molloy's persistent interrogation of the nature of his own existence (and his reasons for being) is concomitant with Beckett's interrogation of the coercive positing of subjectivity that is inherent to narrative.

At the very outset of the novel, the insistent assertion of "I" is intermingled with the equally persistent sensation of *not knowing* that prevents Molloy from being or developing into a subject. Molloy continues, stridently asserting "I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more. All I need now is a son. Perhaps I have one somewhere. But I think not" (7). Immediately following upon a self-assured statement ("I have taken her place"), then, Molloy places his own discrete subjectivity under suspicion by hinting that his identity is merged with his mother's. Molloy further undermines his autobiography by casting doubt upon his own assertions of fatherhood. This very early moment in the text inaugurates the theme of a return to origins that is one of the central means by which Beckett undermines the narrative of development mandated by autobiography and the bildungsroman. Molloy's assertion that perhaps he has a son, but he thinks not enacts this theme by suggesting that, were Molloy's identity to merge with his mother's as he implies ("I have taken her place"), he would then *be his own son*. This strange narrative moment, which occurs on the novel's first page, suggests that Molloy may be his mother, and so therefore may be his own son, but in no way confirms these suggestions.

This passage also inaugurates Beckett's complex method of undermining the category of subjectivity by creating character dyads that, likewise, suggest but never confirm the two characters' sameness. Here, Beckett simultaneously evokes conventional notions of individual subjectivity (Molloy is a man who is telling a story) and undermines them by hinting at the blurring of one subjectivity into another's (Molloy may be his mother). To cast Molloy as his own mother in this way conceives a dynamic in which Molloy may "give birth to himself" through the ongoing process of narrating a coherent story that, in turn, narrates his subjectivity into being. This is precisely the process that the trilogy interrogates. The themes explored in this inaugural scene—the return to origins and the merging of identities—begins this interrogation; from the novel's very outset, Beckett dismantles narrative conventions from within.

In a relatively basic way, then, Part I of *Molloy* begins by undermining the first sentence's strident assertion of individuality. Molloy finds himself to be indistinguishable, at times, both from other humans and from inanimate objects. This depiction undermines conventional ways of representing subjectivity and replaces them with notions of interchangeability, arbitrariness, and indecipherability. That Molloy is not in possession of even basic personal details violates the reader's expectation that a first-person narrator will enact the disclosure of the truths that constitute his or her selfhood. This novel's first person narrator is no more in control of the "facts" that constitute his identity than the reader; his narrative unfolds not as the expression of an extant "self," but as a series of quandaries about who he is and how he came to be.

Molloy's dissembling and insistence upon self-canceling details about his own life are a means by which he resists the mandates of narrative coherence and subject

formation that adhere to autobiographical storytelling. The novel's opening inaugurates Molloy's narration as an autobiography; this is an emphatically first person narrative that seeks to explain how its author came to be located in his particular time and place. But Molloy persistently resists the formal strictures of autobiography even as he continues to narrate. As such, his narrative refuses to endorse the powerful cultural assumption—operational even upon Molloy himself—that a "self" exists within Molloy, waiting to be translated into language and rendered "legible" in such a way as to coerce the reader into acknowledging this conception of being as normative and desirable.

But his narrative also capitulates to this assumption throughout, despite Molloy's recalcitrance; this reveals the extent to which the construction of narrative coerces a performance of selfhood that becomes, in turn, interpreted as proof of individuals' pre-existing subjectivity. Sidonie Smith builds upon Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to explain the dynamics of autobiographical storytelling: "people assemble, if only temporarily, a 'life' to which they assign narrative coherence and meaning and through which they position themselves in historically specific identities" (108). In so doing, Smith argues, "the autobiographical speaker becomes a performative subject" (108). The individual subjectivity that appears to preexist one's life story is therefore a phenomenon born of the act of telling this story.

Importantly, narrative itself is the medium through which this performance of subjectivity is enacted. Smith claims that because "the self is not a documentary repository of all experiential history running uninterruptedly from infancy to the contemporary moment . . . The very sense of self as identity derives paradoxically from the loss to consciousness of fragments of experiential history" (108). Because an

exhaustive account of one's life cannot be remembered, it must be narrated.[28] The notion of selfhood posited as the *premise* of narrative is thus, instead, the *product* of its construction.

The initial premise of Molloy's narrative makes literal the enactment of subjectivity that occurs when one undertakes to tell one's life story. Molloy writes his autobiography because "there's this man who comes every week. Perhaps I got there thanks to him.[29] He says not. He gives me money and takes away the pages" (7). This is a literal transaction, the result of which is that Molloy writes himself into being; the reason he exists before the reader is because he is being paid to write his life story. By inaugurating both *Molloy* and Molloy's process of writing with this concrete transaction, Beckett insists upon the inherent performativity that characterizes the construction of Molloy's autobiography.

Molloy's narrative furthermore exhibits and exaggerates the "loss to consciousness" of fragments of experiential history" that characterizes the performance of subjectivity via autobiographical narrative (Smith 108). Molloy acknowledges the

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[28] Smith is extending Benedict Anderson's assertion in *Imagined Communities* (1991) that our estrangement from our own personal histories requires a conception of identity that must be narrated because it cannot be remembered.

[29] The conflation of "here" and "there" in this opening passage is another way that Beckett spotlights autobiographical conventions' delimiting effect upon Molloy's narration. Though the first line of the novel is "I am in my mother's room," Molloy follows it by saying "I don't know how I got there" (7). Though the story begins in the present and therefore enacts the autobiographical premise that Molloy is *in the act* of writing his autobiography, to speak of his mother's room as "there" implies that he is no longer located within it. In this way, Beckett draws attention to another aspect of the conventional construction of narrative: he must bring the protagonist from the past into the present in such a way that "the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness" (Bruner 28). Molloy's narrative *has already been* written (he *was* "there"), though the present tense creates an impression that a narrative *is being* written (he *is* "here"). He is not, at present, the figure whose ongoing identity formation is narrated throughout this text; rather, convention compels him to create this illusion. This is an explicit enactment of the prescriptive subjectivity required by narrative. However, by claiming that his mother's room is "there" and not "here" (thereby cagily acknowledging that his narrative has already taken place), Molloy disrupts this enactment, revealing that the autobiographical convention that one must narrate the events of one's life as they unfold conditions and limits Molloy's narrative.

gaps in his knowledge of his past: "The truth is I don't know much. For example my mother's death. Was she already dead when I came? Or did she only die later? I mean enough to bury. I don't know" (7). This salient element of his own life story is lost to Molloy's consciousness. Yet he continues to narrate the autobiography that his transaction with "this man" obligates him to construct. Molloy's persistent narration despite gaps in his self-knowledge enacts the dynamic by which one *narrates* one's life story because that story cannot be remembered in all its fullness. Despite his own explicit admission that he is not in possession of the "facts" of his life, Molloy speculates about, invents, retracts, and corrects these facts in order to produce a narrative that conforms to the tenets of autobiography.

In this way, Molloy's ongoing performative enactment of his own subjectivity underscores the coercive dynamics of narrative that mandate this performance, and which are obfuscated in more traditional examples of autobiography. The initial premise of Beckett's text, wherein a first-person narrator both resists and enacts the narration of selfhood, demonstrates that "there is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating" (Smith 108). Rather, as Smith argues, the phenomenon of subjectivity that is enacted in instances of self-expression is an *effect* of conventionalized elements of autobiographical storytelling.

This narrative performance of the self is furthermore enforced by powerful cultural imperatives. Discourses of identity and truth-telling govern the autobiographical enterprise; readers demand that "life stories" are true, and that they disclose the identity of the speaker (Smith 108). The positing of a self through narration is therefore not merely an elective process in which the narrator "fills in the blanks" that exist in memory.

Rather, it is enacted in response to powerful prescriptions: that one is both unique and recognizable as a member of society; that though one's circumstances change, one remains the selfsame individual throughout one's narrative; that one's identity emerges in response to events that "really happened."

As Smith argues, these same prescriptions underpin the post-Enlightenment conception of the individual whose membership in the social sphere depended upon his or her self-perception as being both free and autonomous. The "selfhood" mandated by the conventionalized tenets of autobiography is therefore precisely the "selfhood" that governs the process by which bourgeois individuals are "civilized" into productive citizenship. Autobiographical discourses thereby act as hegemonic strategies for the cultural reproduction of normative selves (Smith 109).[30] The logic of autobiographical storytelling is therefore the same logic by which individuals become subjects of the state: both discourses assume an interiorized self to be regulated, while in fact individuals enact selfhood through a self-regulating performance of the prescriptive subjectivity that is amenable to citizenship (Smith 109). In this way, autobiographical narrative itself becomes one means by which to reify and regulate the bourgeois subject. When one undertakes to construct an autobiography, therefore, one performs an act of self-regulation wherein self-expression is conditioned and delimited by not only narrative, but also by broader cultural and political imperatives.

Beckett dramatizes the role of cultural and legal imperatives in coercing the performance of subjectivity when a policeman who disapproves of Molloy's "resting" posture astride his bicycle confronts him. The policeman demands that Molloy display

[30] In making this claim, Smith builds upon Michel de Certeau's analyses in *The Practices of Everyday Life* (1984).

his "papers;" presumably, these papers would ascribe an identity—a name, an origin, a home address—to Molloy. The presentation of these papers would be a performative act, making him into a subject of the state on the spot. Without these papers, Molloy is merely a nameless wanderer whose presence disturbs the authorities whose role it is to keep "public order, public decency" (20). In this moment, the policeman is literally demanding that Molloy enact his own subjectivity so that it can then be policed.

Rather than enacting the performance the policeman demands, however, Molloy asserts "Ah my papers. Now the only papers I carry with me are bits of newspaper to wipe myself, you understand, when I have a stool" (20). He continues: "In a panic I took this paper from my pocket and thrust it under his nose" (21). Rather than capitulate to the self-regulation of his identity demanded by this interaction, Molloy commits an act that the policeman interprets as defiance; hence he is taken to the police station. The absurdity of this transaction—the policeman's demand that Molloy declare an identity and Molloy's absolute failure to comply—emphasizes that subjectivity is an effect of, in this case, the performances mandated by the legal discourse of identity. The policeman's demand expresses the cultural imperative that Molloy must *be someone;* Molloy's refusal to capitulate amounts to a refusal to claim or acknowledge an extant interior selfhood.

In addition, by proffering this specific *kind* of paper rather than the bureaucratic records that the policeman requests, Molloy links the production of such records with scatology. This association appears throughout Beckett's work, and both delegitimizes and renders absurd the kind of official records that the policeman requests. Importantly, too, to directly associate these "papers"—a written record of an individual's archetypal and universal identity—with bodily waste is to suggest that the system that requires such

papers is itself wasteful. The policeman understands the "papers" to be a state-sanctioned means by which to keep order through the policing of individuals; for Molloy, they are a receptacle for his physical waste. In this sense, it is not the state that "begets" Molloy through the production of records that document his identity, but Molloy himself. This comic moment undercuts the ascription of identity *to* Molloy and rather insists upon the possibility that Molloy may produce his *own* identity. Beckett thereby insists that the system by which Molloy is forced to account for himself through official "papers" is bureaucratic and wasteful, while Molloy's "waste" is productive of a selfhood that is not delimited by the records kept by the state. In addition, Beckett's scatological representation of Molloy's resistance to this objectification emphasizes that the process of becoming "someone" inevitably produces objects of the most abject sort.

Certainly, by proffering these particular papers to the policeman, Molloy manifestly repudiates the policeman's—and thereby the state's—authority over the definition of his identity. Though he will be dragged into jail for doing so, he refuses to capitulate to the fundamental delimiting of his selfhood that presenting the "correct" papers would perform. Furthermore, Molloy's action also calls into question the discourses of value and waste, and of self and object, as they are perpetuated by the state. The state's authority over individuals resides in its ability to document and police these individuals; this regulation is endemic to the value system by which the state maintains its functioning. Beckett's depiction of Molloy's actions and their consequences focus attention upon the wastefulness of a system that would jail a physically feeble and homeless old man for lacking some particular document. Furthermore, as a result of his action, Molloy refuses to become an object of the state's surveillance. The "papers" that

the policeman requests reify individuals' subjectivities by formalizing their state-sanctioned identity; in so doing, they transform individual selves into objects of state authority.

David Lloyd claims that autobiography's coerciveness is rooted in its status as a literary genre within a canon of "major literature."[31] The most salient characteristic of major literature is its role in the "production of an autonomous ethical identity for the subject" (19). Lloyd describes the dynamic by which this occurs in autobiography as follows:

> In most general terms, autobiography, including fictional autobiography, tends to represent the ethical self-realization of the writer from a perspective of self-consciousness through which the repetition of a life endows it with the appearance of a providential or predestined pattern. But while autobiographical texts are devoted to composing the unity and integrity of a personal identity through repetition, they are necessarily devoted at the same time to producing the individual as *autonomous,* that is, as self-authenticating and self-authorizing (162).

[31] In *Nationalism and Minor Literature* (1987), David Lloyd examines the historical role of aesthetic culture in establishing the authority of the bourgeois nation-state. Lloyd claims major literature posits a conception of the human individual that acts as a coercive exemplar upon readers: major literature claims "representative status," positing the individual subjects as "universally valid and archetypal" (19). "Minor literature," by contrast, is defined by its oppositional relationship to both the literary canon and the canonical form of the state: minor literature "not only 'writes back' against the universal standards of the literary canon, but also contests the canonical form of the representative individual and questions the teleological narrative of modern social cohesion" (19-20). Patrick Bixby, in *Samuel Beckett and the Postcolonial Novel* (2009) explores the ways that Beckett's trilogy enacts the function of "minor literature." I certainly concur with Bixby's analyses. My argument, however, focuses more centrally on the trilogy's critical orientation toward major literature. To analyze the ways that Molloy's narrative in particular resists the ascription and modeling of autonomous identity reveals the method by which Beckett undermines the usual role of autobiography in mounting a universally valid and archetypal conception of subjectivity. *Molloy* strenuously resists capitulating to the mandates of major literature, thereby positing a conception of selfhood that is not prescribed by canonical literary forms, including autobiography and bildung.

The positing of an individual whose subjectivity appears inevitable and preordained despite its ongoing composition is inherent to the structure of the autobiographical genre.

Lloyd's analysis also highlights the degree to which the aesthetic experience of reading autobiography creates ethical identification between a text's narrator and its reader. This ethical identification powerfully suggests commensurability between the narrator's life and the reader's life, which constitutes a model and enactment of the coercive nature of subject formation. Lloyd describes how this dynamic of ethical identification functions in works of major literature: "since ethics involves the capacity to judge as from the perspective of archetypal man, and since the aesthetic experience is the mode in which that perspective is most purely achieved, the writer as writer appears as representative man, and the work as a representation of representative human experience" (20). The "humanity" or subjectivity of the autobiographical narrator becomes a model to which the reader aspires, and the canonical text thereby functions as a model of what it means to be human. In this way, the conception of subjectivity represented in text exercises a coercive influence upon individuals, who police their own subjectivity to conform to autobiography's aesthetic standards.

Beckett's ongoing refusal to posit the autonomous subject established in canonical novelistic forms as the "essence of the human" marks his critical orientation to the canon of major literature. By initially constructing *Molloy* as a first person narrative in which the narrator sets out to explain himself and his reasons for being, Beckett inaugurates the aspect of major literature wherein canonical texts set out to produce an autonomous ethical identity for the subject (Lloyd 19). As his text progresses, however, Beckett's more complex project becomes apparent: he seeks to undermine the production of

autonomous ethical identity by dismantling both his narrator's identity and the autobiographical form itself. This dismantlement begins with the undermining of Molly's subjectivity and becomes yet more pronounced as the trilogy progresses: in the trilogy's third novel, *The Unnamable,* the protagonist is unrecognizable as a literary "subject" of the kind represented in works of major literature, and the text is a skewed version of autobiography that resists the form's prescriptions at every turn.[32] As such, the trilogy resists the dynamic by which works of major literature produce readers' ethical identification with the autobiographical narrator. This dimension of Beckett's texts underwrites the radical possibility for new fictional depictions of the self that is inaugurated in the trilogy. Beckett's invocation and deformation of a conventionalized genre suggest the possibility that a notion of selfhood not delimited by the prescriptions of major literature is representable in narrative. The contours of this selfhood can be deciphered not in terms of what is directly presented or in terms of the teleological "destination" of narrative, but in the novel's repeated confessions of falsity and failure.

Patrick Bixby has insightfully explained how Beckett uses another conventionalized form, the bildungsroman, as additional ground for his investigation of the process by which subjectivity is compelled by narrative. Bixby analyzes the degree to which Beckett's fiction is inflected by Irish and national concerns even at its most seemingly abstract moments. He thereby highlights the postcolonial dimension of Beckett's writing, claiming that it enacts a "cultural performance that continually

[32] In *The Unnamable,* Beckett confounds the ascription of identity to the central character by not giving him a name that remains consistent throughout the text. The protagonist may be Mahood, or Basil, or Worm, or each of these at different moments. The text never explicitly declares, furthermore, that the protagonist is human; he is an embodied figure who lives in a vessel and who does not possess the power of speech. Though his process of narration suggests his humanity in a manner consistent with Beckett's "suggestion" of subjectivity throughout the trilogy, Beckett never grants it fully. These are yet more radical manifestations of the dismantlement of the autobiographical form that Beckett inaugurates in *Molloy*.

interrogates the principles of canonical culture by writing back to the traditions of cultural nationalism and the canon of European literature" (20). Bixby's analysis builds on Lloyd's definition of "minor literature," which, in turn, is indebted to Deleuze and Guattari's elaboration of the minor function of Kafka's work. By asserting the trilogy's status as "minor literature," Bixby asserts that its function is to not only 'write back" against the universal standards of the canon itself, but also to contest the canonical form of the representative individual and to question the teleological narrative of modern social cohesion (Bixby 20).[33] Beckett's method does not only resist the formal strictures that delimit novelistic expression; it contests the prescriptive formulations of selfhood and of society that these strictures perpetuate and enforce.

The bildungsroman subgenre is an ideal ground for Beckett's project because it shares with Beckett's writing "preoccupations with identity formation, national belonging, cultural dispossession, and narrative failure" (Bixby 20-1). These concerns are reflected in the threat of failure (to become a socially sanctioned individual) that has lurked within the bildungsroman form since its inception. By dismantling the novel of formation, Beckett delivers on this threat, undermining the "Enlightenment metanarratives of progress and development" that bildung articulates (Bixby 33). Beckett's deformation of this canonical subgenre highlights his characters' failures to "become someone" in the manner prescribed by the bildungsroman form; in this sense, the failure is a formal one. As such, Beckett's redeployment of this form contributes to the complex intermixture of literary legacies and deformations through which he

[33] Bixby's analysis pays particular attention to the ramifications of Beckett's undoing of the subject for concepts of nationalism, national belonging, and postcolonial identity. My chapter aims to highlight the variety of formal redeployments by which Beckett undermines the narrative subject in order to highlight his critique of previous forms of the novel and to address canonical modernism's complicity in coercing the formulation of identity in the way Bixby explains.

constructs a new means by which to represent the experience of being a self. But as Bixby articulates, Beckett's critique has ramifications far beyond the realm of literature: his novels confront the "developmental narrative of modernity, interrogating the concepts of identity and identification, while challenging the necessity of assimilation and accommodation" (33).

Beckett's Late Modernist Siege on Modernism's Investment in the Subject

Skepticism toward modernism's insistence upon the textual representation of consciousness is a central tenet of Beckett's late modernism. In *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars* (1999), Tyrus Miller counts Beckett—and his early fiction in particular—as an important contributor to a late modernist corpus that includes the work of Wyndham Lewis and Djuna Barnes. His work exemplifies the "apparent admixture of decadent and forward-looking elements" that prevents late modernism from inhabiting a "clearly defined place in the dominant frameworks of twentieth-century criticism" (Miller 7). By 1938, Miller asserts, Beckett's criticism continued to defend and legitimate "high modernist writing in the tradition of Conrad, Joyce, Proust, Eliot and others" (175). But precisely at the moment that he articulates a coherent modernist *critical* position, advocating the modernism he discerns in the fiction and poetry of other writers, "he is also working to sabotage its functioning in his own fiction" (Miller 176). Indebted though he was to the modernist sensibility that sought to deploy language and literary form in new ways, Beckett's interrogation of the novel's complicity in prescribing and circumscribing the boundaries of selfhood required

a "sabotage" of the conventions by which high modernists sought to represent and plumb the depths of the self.

An attunement to individual psychology marked the early part of the twentieth century and prompted the development of new narrative strategies that sought to represent individuals' interior selves. Freud's theory of the unconscious prompted a popular perception of the interior consciousness as a hidden but more deeply authentic version of the self than that which individuals display to the world. A growing awareness of the psychologically traumatic effects of World War I further encouraged this perception. "Shell shock," the profound mental illness that afflicted many combatants, very often carried no outward signs. Men who suffered from this condition could appear entirely normal on the surface. This legitimated the premise of Freud's theory of the unconscious and encouraged a perception that individuals' interior lives roiled beneath a veneer of socially acceptable attributes and behavior. For those living in the early years of the twentieth century, the self came to be understood in these terms of surface and depth; as such, interiority became a category that demanded exploration and investigation, both in life and in literature.

Modernist novelists sought to perform this work by depicting characters' consciousness. This investigation of characters' deep selves acted as a corrective to nineteenth century narrative realism and materialism; the work of George Eliot, Charles Dickens and others is exemplary of this sensibility. One of the era's most canonical texts, Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), for instance, emphasizes complex relationships within communities; while Eliot's characters are richly depicted, her novels emphasize the consequences wrought upon characters resulting from their conformity—or lack

thereof—to the societies in which they live. Eliot constructs this rich materialist depiction of the town of Middlemarch through third person omniscient narration and dialogue. The narrative "voice" in this text is both invisible and granted equal insight into the thoughts and emotions of each character, and dialogue offers relatively objective access to characters' personalities. These formal techniques are the manifestation of Victorian literature's emphasis upon depicting daily reality and social life in rich detail.

Early twentieth century writers often maintained this narrative emphasis on social relationships; their materialist orientation furthermore resulted in novels preoccupied with the details of physical objects and environments. This is the "materialism" for which Virginia Woolf excoriates her Edwardian counterparts—including H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy—in her oft-cited essay "Modern Fiction" (1921). She asserts that because such novels are "done to a turn" in terms of their airtight narrative construction and exhaustive depiction of physical detail, "life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide" (287). For Woolf, "the essential thing"—the "moderns' point of interest"—is "very likely in the dark places of psychology" (290). According to Woolf, the modern dispensation in fiction, which she pinpoints in Joyce's *Ulysses,* seeks to depict individuals' *inner* lives. Woolf's essay underscores the degree to which this existence of a deep self that resides in the far recesses of characters' consciousness becomes a premise taken for granted in high modernist fiction.

The result of the modernists' rejection of their predecessors' materialism and realism resulted in a new and revolutionary narrative orientation; modernist fiction

writers fundamentally altered the ethos of the novel. Their innovative literary methods not only produced rich depictions of individual characters' interior lives, but also reflected the fundamental perceptual shift that the advent of psychology prompted within modern culture. Canonical examples of these new methods reflect this ethos: Woolf's "moments of being" depict characters' flashes of insight into their own unconscious; Joyce's epiphanies are likewise moments in which characters become instantly aware of desires and beliefs previously hidden from consciousness; the stream of consciousness narration exhibited by these authors and others sought, through an accumulation of highly personal revelations, to depict characters' interior lives in all their complexity. Other characteristics of modernist writing included the fragmentation of narrative order, the shifting of narrative perspectives among characters, and narrative movement between materiality and interiority. These techniques exemplify the modernist fictional orientation that sought to illuminate the "dark places of psychology" residing deep within the self that, in previous eras, remained in darkness. As Miller points out, the high modernist novel's purported ability to exhaustively represent the self became its crowning accomplishment, both in practice and according to contemporary critical consensus.

Beckett endorsed and legitimated high modernism's revolutionary formal developments in his criticism but, as Miller observes, sought to sabotage what had become, by the time of the trilogy's composition, a canon of modernist narrative techniques. Modernism's subjectivist orientation posits a subject both unique and knowable; it is precisely the innovative methods by which modernist fiction depicts the "dark places of psychology" that produce the notion of an extant "self" whose consciousness is revealed by narrative. The writer's task is therefore framed as a

revelation of the content of characters' unconscious. Beckett's narrative method systematically undercuts this framework and insists instead that the techniques and underlying impulses of modernist narrative themselves produce the appearance of subjectivity. Beckett's redeployment of pre-twentieth century narrative forms reveals the degree to which even modernism's most radically innovative postures reenact a model of identity formation common to the novels of previous centuries. Modernist fiction's formal innovations merely retrain writers and readers to compose and understand new conventions that carry strong traces of the conventions by which subjectivity is constructed in the genres that Beckett travesties, including autobiography, bildungsroman, and the detective novel.

Canonical modernism's subjectivist narrative practices thereby enact the function of major literature that Lloyd theorizes wherein the major work is "directed toward the production of an autonomous ethical identity for the subject" (19). Though the innovations of high modernism are formally revolutionary, for Beckett they do not address the fundamental methods of coercion by which narrative both requires and models the formation of identity. The narrative techniques by which this coercion is enacted are, therefore, objects of Beckett's critique. As Miller asserts, "if consciousness was [the modernist] aesthetic's castle of purity, then the formal conventions of modernist fiction, with its finely developed techniques for representing consciousness, was the point at which to lay siege on that citadel"(185). As Woolf's "Modern Fiction" insinuates, the textual exploration of the unconscious was often understood as a "pure" form of narration: it was free of materialism's focus on surfaces and devoid of realism's obligation to narrate every character and scene in exhaustive detail. Beckett, however,

insists that this method of narration is in no way "pure;" rather, it perpetuates the prescription of autonomous subjectivity so powerfully mandated in and by nineteenth century fiction.

Miller's description of the modernist aesthetic investment in representing consciousness as a "citadel" furthermore highlights the manner in which this aesthetic both surveils and disciplines subsequent narrative practices. Like a citadel which looms over the city that it both protects and monitors, the modernist investment in interiority casts a long shadow over the work of any novelist who undertakes to tell a story about human characters.[34] Certainly, Beckett's method indicates the degree to which his own project is monitored by the prescriptions of modernist narrative practice; Molloy's every admission of his lack of development is an acknowledgement of the strength of these prescriptions upon his own subjectivity. Molloy is aware—and Beckett insists—that his non-identity is a rebuke to modernism's investment in interiority. The "finely developed techniques for representing consciousness" to which Miller refers are, therefore, the point from which Beckett's own rebuke of modernist formal techniques originates.

Beckett therefore refuses to render subjectivity via techniques that by the time of the trilogy's writing in the late 1940s and early 50s had in many ways come to take on the force of institutional authority. More profoundly, the trilogy protests the obligation texts are under to "produce" a subject. Indeed, *Molloy* is the first stage in a methodical breaking-down of the methods by which novels typically meet this obligation; by the end

[34] This schematic rendering of Beckett's relationship to the modernist canon is consistent with Beckett's own rendering of Molloy's narrative perspective in the A & C episode in *Molloy*. In this scene (which I explore in greater detail later in this chapter), Molloy voices an awareness of the narrative moves he *should* make based upon the conventions that circumscribe his narration. In so doing, he performs a kind of narrative surveillance upon the content of his autobiography. This policing of narrative content is consistent with the regulating function that Beckett perceives the modernist canon has upon his (and others') narrative practices. As Miller asserts, in the late modernist era, modernist aesthetics function as a sort of looming authority, policing the creative expression of writers working in the 1930s and 40s.

of *The Unnamable*, Beckett's wholesale rejection of modernism's "finely developed techniques for representing consciousness" renders his narrator as existing outside the framework of subjectivity by which modern readers have been trained to understand protagonists. This depiction not only makes possible new ways of narrating individuals' experience of living, but it resists the coercive effects of both modernist narrative practices and the model of subjectivity inherent to autobiography and bildungsroman in particular.

Beckett's formal intervention into what he perceives as modernism's inadequately critical relationship to literary conventions' coercion of identity is consistent with his assessment of modernism in his letters and early stories. James McNaughton argues that in Beckett's writing from the late 1930s and early 40s "everything from modernist postures and political positions to images and phrases appear to [Beckett] increasingly repetitive, imitative, and, in the sense that the usual appears novel, provincial" (56). Beckett's early narrative forms are the means by which he evaluates "the failures of modernism to accomplish its promise of critique" (McNaughton 56). Though McNaughton focuses on Beckett's engagement with the consequences of modernism's crisis of representation on Irish politics, the question of "how interpretive models can linger long after their usefulness has expired" is central not only to Beckett's political engagement, but also to his interrogation of modernism's complicity in the narrative disciplining of subjectivity (58).

Beckett's method of undermining the narrative techniques through which this complicity is manifested highlights the underdeveloped promise of modernist innovation. The trilogy's precise dismantling of the methods by which narrative both produces and

polices subjectivity reveals that modernism itself stopped short of fundamentally altering the depiction of selfhood rendered in text and, furthermore, reproduced the conventional prescription for the formation of identity that was characteristic of the pre-twentieth century forms that modernists so strenuously rejected. In his early novels, Beckett frees himself "to examine the contradictions within modernism in his creative work" (McNaughton 65). The result is a trilogy of novels whose mission to undermine the coercion of subjectivity produces an "unwriting" of the novel form, hence revealing the fundamental complicity of the form with prescriptions of identity formation that, in Beckett's view, delimit both fiction's imaginative possibilities and the potential for individuals to conceive of a self beyond these prescriptions.

Beckett's critical orientation toward modernism's investment in interiority is most pronounced in his treatment of narration. The trilogy approaches narration as a process and a phenomenon that is both produced and mandated by the novel form. The danger of canonical modernist modes of narration, for Beckett, is the obfuscation of their complicity with earlier narrative conventions and, therefore, with the coercion of subjectivity. Modernist techniques did away with nineteenth century notions of narrative objectivity altogether, seeming to grant direct access to a character's consciousness. The reader observes not a novel's "objective" events themselves, but a privileged narrator's or character's perspective of them.

Throughout Part I of *Molloy,* Molloy provides a running commentary on the necessity that his method of narration conforms to a variety of conventions. Beckett dramatizes this dynamic when Molloy interacts with a figure—A or C—that he has been observing. Molloy pursues him and soon, he narrates, "I am up against him" (12). In the

context of Molloy's ongoing story, this means that he has caught up to the man on the road. As a meta-narrative statement of Molloy's role within the *narrative,* however, this indicates that Molloy the narrator has "come up against" another character in the text and is now obligated to narrate this interaction. Molloy becomes preoccupied with the process by which he gleans information about this figure: "I want to see the dog, see the man, at close quarters, know what smokes, inspect the shoes, find out other things" (12). Molloy desires to learn all the facts by which this figure could be constituted as a character in the text so that he can narrate them. By disclosing this desire, Molloy highlights its conventionality: narrators know information and share it with readers, and readers expect that the narrator or narrating function will share this information. Here, Molloy indicates his awareness that he bears the responsibility of knowing and narrating the content of his story.

But more profoundly, Molloy's disclosure of this desire pinpoints the narrative function by which texts create subjects: that whom/which narrates must be in possession of a consciousness that both knows and can disclose the information that makes this a novel. The reader, in turn, must recognize and share this sense of identity as part of the process of rendering the text intelligible. Molloy himself enacts this performance of narrative subjectivity when he "comes up against" another figure and endeavors to characterize him. But Beckett's rendering of this scene refuses to represent this performance as natural or inevitable. Molloy further comments upon the conventional premise that posits him as a conscious subject with particular insight into every aspect of the unfolding narrative that is *Molloy:* "There I am then, informed as to certain things, knowing certain things about him, things I didn't know, things I had craved to know,

things I had never thought of. What rigmarole. I am even capable of having learnt what his profession is, I who am so interested in professions" (13). Thus, Molloy is at once narrator and reader. Here, Beckett underscores the irony inherent in the narrating function: as a conventional and coercive aspect of narrative, it requires a conscious subject who can narrate, but the source of the "facts" that constitute this subject's knowledge is obfuscated. In other words, Molloy's knowledge of the man's dog, his smoking, and his profession is not actually the result of his conscious understanding, but of the prescriptive narrative framework wherein subjectivity is taken to be the condition for a novel's narrating function. As narrator of this tale, Molloy is under an obligation to "know things" about this man, and to indicate these "things" to the reader. Beckett's method, however, insists upon exposing this operation *as* obligation and, furthermore, as largely misinformed. He thereby reveals consciousness to be an element of narrative fiction alongside plot and dialogue (for example). The process by which Molloy is both made into a knowledgeable narrator and then obligated to disclose his knowledge is the "rigmarole" by which narrative's coerciveness is typically obfuscated and which Beckett's trilogy undermines.

The trilogy furthermore reveals that the novel form itself—and the conventions by which it has developed over time—produces the premise of a speaking consciousness. For Beckett, the modernist revelation that narration is not always attributable to an identifiable figure does not go far enough because it does not acknowledge that narrative itself creates the appearance of subjectivity. The "subject" that is produced by narration—whether by a first person autobiographical narrator, or a third person omniscient narrator, or by any variety of modernist narrating functions—is a product of

narrative convention; Beckett's insistent revelation of this phenomenon is a trademark of his late modernism. Narration functions in the trilogy not to represent individual consciousness, but to reveal that subjectivity is an effect, rather than the source or end, of narration.

Narration & Subjectivity in *Molloy*

Beckett performs this revelation by exposing the mechanics of narrative by which a subject effect is coerced into being. Beckett's explication of conventional formulas of narration contrasts directly with the obfuscation of narration that traditionally characterizes the novel form. Roland Barthes claims, "our society takes the greatest pains to conjure away the coding of the narrative situation: there is no counting the number of narrational devices which seek to naturalize the subsequent narrative by feigning to make it the outcome of some natural circumstance and thus, as it were, 'disinaugurating' it" (116). The refusal of Molloy's narration to posit the narrator's extant subjectivity as the "natural circumstance" from which narration proceeds resists this disinauguration. Modernist novelists' explorations of consciousness, for instance, are both grounded in a conception of subjectivity as a source for narration and rely upon the obfuscation of the means by which this subjectivity is created by narrative. The success of a modernist exploration of interiority depends upon the "disinauguration" of the narrative; it must appear as the natural outpouring of an extant character's inner consciousness. By contrast, the trilogy obsessively "inaugurates" the act of composition, thereby refusing to make narrative appear to be the outcome of "natural circumstance." By doing so, Beckett's text forces the reader to recognize that it is not Molloy himself but the

conventions of the narrative forms to which he is obligated that produce and shape his narrative.

Beckett's schematic configuration of Molloy's narrative perspective is an important way in which he spotlights, rather than conjures away, the narrative situation. During an oft-cited passage at the outset of *Molloy,* the narrator observes two figures, A and C, as they encounter one another on an unidentified road. He muses on the circumstance that makes it possible for him to "see"—and therefore to narrate—the events of the novel: "I must have been on the top, or on the slopes, of some considerable eminence, for otherwise how could I have seen, so far away, so near at hand, so far beneath, so many things, fixed and moving" (14). As is so often the case, the narrator discovers—rather than declares—his status: he occupies, evidently, a position that facilitates a panoptic perspective. His status on "some considerable eminence" implies a privileged view of the novel's events. But though Molloy can "see" A and C, his befuddlement and the self-canceling descriptions he offers reveal his lack of *knowledge* about what he sees. Molloy's query—"what was I doing there, and why come?"—ridicules the commonplace assumption that a narrator is a text's locus of authority (14). Molloy may be able to observe A and C, but his lack of subjective insight about their meeting resists the notion that a text's events matter insofar as they are processed through a narrating function that purports to possess consciousness.

This early episode furthermore announces the trilogy's ongoing project of configuring a narrative function beyond—or outside of—the "speaking subject" that is conventionally rendered as the source and the anticipated destination of narrative. Molloy's answer to his own query—"These are things that we shall try and discover"—

refuses to enact the narrative convention that configures narrators as speaking selves who "possess" their own stories (15). By depicting Molloy at the top of an eminence, ignorant of how and why he arrived there, Beckett literalizes the dynamic that "narrational devices" typically "disinaugurate" (Barthes 116). Molloy's reflection about his privileged view of this encounter enacts a retrospective correction that reveals the artificiality of the conventional premise that would grant the narrator insight into all aspects of the narrative. The A and C episode undermines Molloy's reliability, but more profoundly, it reveals the notion of any narrating function's status as all-seeing to be a narrative construct.

Molloy is incredulous about his own omniscience. Even as he employs his narrative "vision" to watch as A and C meet on the road, he betrays his own suspicion about the limits of this perspective: how *can* he see things located nearby, things positioned beneath him, immobile things *and* things in motion (14)? His incredulity points to the unlikely—even impossible—character of his panoptic perspective. By casting doubt upon his own position as narrator, Molloy dismantles the manner in which a narrator's status as a privileged bearer of facts is typically constructed and reveals that he has been coerced into being—and placed upon this "eminence"—by the requirements of narrative itself. His emphasis on this point furthermore illustrates the degree to which Beckett's writing is haunted by narrative convention: Molloy must appear to possess a narrative perspective in order to narrate. Beckett's portrayal of Molloy's vision of A and C indicates that even this text, whose project is to dismantle commonplace configurations of narrative perspective, is circumscribed by these very configurations.

Molloy: Bildungsroman Foreclosed

Importantly, Beckett's project is enabled by a deep engagement with the forms that he dismantles. Beckett invokes traditional modes of narrative *as means by which* to perform these complex interrogations. Beckett begins by constructing a recognizable narrative and works to dismantle its constitutive features; As David Weisberg claims, "*Molloy* retains the clear contours of traditional, modern, and popular narrative forms. . . in order to exploit readers' expectations about the kind of information, pleasure, and meaning a good plot provides" (102). The overall effect of *Molloy*'s construction is to "short-circuit the stable coordinates by which we orient our reading of a narrative" (Weisberg 102). By exploiting the basic elements of popular and recognizable narrative forms, Beckett reveals both these elements' fundamental role in coercing subjectivity *and* their inevitable necessity as the ground upon which his radical critique rests.

Bixby focuses particularly on the presence of anthropological discourse and the bildungsroman in Beckett's fiction. Beckett invokes and travesties these genres in his quest to expose their complicity in producing a limiting and limited understanding of subjectivity.[35] As Bixby asserts, "Beckett's prose defies *and* mourns a sense both of belonging and of *Bildung* in a rhetoric generated by these very tensions, which propel the incessant performativity, the failing and the going on, that distinguishes his most admired fictions" (203). In the bildungsroman, an incipient subject is implied; the premise of the genre is to narrate the development of an individual self, through education, vocation, and

[35] Bixby explores the ideological and formal dimensions of Beckett's redeployment of the bildungsroman form at length in *Samuel Beckett and the Postcolonial Novel* (2009). Bixby claims that Beckett's specifically postcolonial redeployment of the form confronts "the developmental narrative of modernity, interrogating the concepts of identity and identification, while challenging the necessity of assimilation and accommodation" (33). Certainly, my argument is consistent with Bixby's analyses. In this chapter, however, I aim to highlight the formal dimension of Bixby's argument by concentrating on the conventional aspects of the bildungsroman form that make it one of several ideal forms to undergo Beckett's "unwriting."

misadventure, into a socially sanctioned subject. From its very outset, then, the end of a bildungsroman is present from its beginning; these novels' purpose is to disclose the subject whose fully developed subjectivity was implied from the start. By depicting the dissolution of his characters, and by constructing (most identifiably in *Malone Dies)* a version of bildung that adheres in its contours to the form but resists and parodies its conventions, Beckett rejects the teleological and developmental orientation of the bildungsroman.

Beckett's narratives do not enact the conventions of bildung; therefore, his protagonists do not become culturally sanctioned "selves." Beckett's invocation and deformation of conventional forms whose ideological function is to prescribe and sanction both characters' and readers' *humanity* facilitates his critical examination of bildung's pedagogical function. Indeed, as Part I progresses, Molloy refines his narrative stance yet further so that it explicitly engages and defies the teleological orientation that governs the bildungsroman: "the most you can hope is to be a little less, in the end, the creature you were in the beginning, and the middle" (32). Molloy's theory of development follows the logic of subtraction. Rather than becoming a more "whole" individual as a result of his journey, as bildungsroman traditionally prescribes, he hopes to become "less" of what he is: the produced subject of a bildungsroman. The subsequent text is a record of his efforts to escape the strictures of both literary form and subjectivity that constrain him.[36]

[36] This assertion that the novel is a record of Molloy's efforts to escape narrative obligation may initially seem to be at odds with my earlier arguments about the novel's opening, which I claim suggests that Molloy might "give birth to himself" as the result of narrating himself into being. To configure Molloy as being "born" literalizes the point of origin for the ongoing performance of identity that Beckett seeks to undermine. But this configuration is merely *suggested.* As such, it exists *alongside* this later configuration of Molloy's relationship to subjectivity wherein he seeks to become "less" of what he was in the beginning: an autonomous subject reified through text. *Molloy* thereby configures its resistance to narrative's coercion

Paradoxically, Molloy's failure to conform to the strictures of bildung generates the possibility for alternative depictions of the self in prose. If Molloy can become "less" the product of narrative convention, then he may come to occupy a location outside the limits these conventions enforce. In this way, Molloy's failure reveals a radical possibility suggested by Beckett's method: human consciousness may be represented in prose without being delimited by the coercive narrative of identity formation mandated by conventional literary forms.

Dismantling of Form, Dissolution of the Subject

In the trilogy, each novel purports to be a character's first person narrative. Beckett thereby engages the conventions of autobiography in addition to those of the bildungsroman and those high modernist techniques designed to depict authentic encounters with interiority. At the outset of each novel, its narrator—Molloy, Malone, Mahood (later or perhaps also Basil or Worm)—is also its central character. These first person "selves" set out to narrate their life stories. As the novel progresses, autobiography becomes both the vehicle for and the object of Beckett's critique of the role its conventions play in positing an exemplar of human identity. Beckett's wrenching of this form into the version readers experience in *Molloy* forces a recognition of its ideological function and insists that narrative can be mobilized not only to bolster, but also to question, the conventional view of the autobiographical work as "a representation of representative human experience" (Lloyd 20).

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of subjectivity *both* as a negation of the story of origins that would inaugurate a novel of development *and* as a story of Molloy's *"un*becoming."

Theorists of autobiography have pinpointed the genre's particular tendency to shed light on the complex problematics that emerge from the premise that the author is identical to the subject (Marcus 5). Laura Marcus observes that the manner in which autobiographical writing muddles "the postulated opposites between self and world, literature and history, fact and fiction, subject and object" threatens the stability of an intellectual context wherein these are seen as irreconcilably distinct (7). Indeed, the "proliferation of classificatory and categorizing systems in autobiographical criticism testifies to the extent to which autobiography is seen as a problem which requires control and containment" (Marcus 7). Its status as a threat to both literary classifications and to rigid conceptions of selfhood and fiction, in particular, make autobiography an ideal ground for Beckett's interrogation of these concepts.

As Marcus observes, autobiography has historically been understood to exemplify the unity and harmony that are some of Western literature's most highly prized aesthetic values:

> in philosophical terms, autobiography is seen to secure … the much desired unity of the subject and object of knowledge. In aesthetic terms, the elevation of autobiography to the status of a literary genre has involved its endowment with the properties of the unified work of art. In the broader terms of an Arnoldian account of 'culture,' the ideal autobiography may be seen as expressing humanity's 'approach to totality, and to a full, harmonious perfection.' (5) [37]

Because autobiography is a central genre in the canon of Western literature, the path of self-realization and development undergone by an autobiographical narrator has come to

[37] For Marcus, Augustine and Rousseau are "ideal" autobiographers whose texts are the model and standard for subsequent iterations of autobiography.

play the role of exemplar for readers. The "harmonious perfection" achieved by canonical autobiographers is a manifestation of major literature's claim to realize the autonomy of the individual subject to such a degree that the individual subject becomes universally valid and archetypal (Lloyd 19).

By invoking and undercutting the autobiographical form, however, Beckett critiques the complementary unity of the subject and unity of form that it typically seeks to achieve. Beckett undermines any perception of unity between Molloy the narrator (who, in a manner consistent with autobiographical narrators, narrates his story after it has already occurred) and Molloy the character (who is being narrated as the story progresses). Molloy's meta-narrative commentary throughout—which expresses both his ignorance about Molloy the character and the circumstances that confront him, and his obligation to invent pertinent information—prevents "the much desired unity of the subject and object of knowledge" (Marcus 5). Because Beckett systematically undoes the conventions of autobiography, the reader can never imaginatively collapse the Molloy who narrates into the Molloy who is narrated. Beckett's specific deployment of autobiography, therefore, is not an expression of humanity's approach to totality, and to a full, harmonious perfection, but rather a critical disassembly *of* the notion of human perfection that the form conventionally prescribes.

As is true of the bildungsroman, autobiography posits a model of subjectivity premised upon *development.* As Lloyd claims, in composing the unity and integrity of a personal identity through repetition, autobiographical texts are devoted "to producing the individual as *autonomous,* that is, as self-authenticating and self-authorizing" (162, italics in original). This autonomy, in turn, comes to be understood as the goal and end of

individual development. The ideal autobiography's conformity to the elements of the canonical form produces a model of the fully integrated human subject. Conversely, Beckett's rendering of autobiography inverts the narrative of development in order to subvert the universal and archetypal individuality that it prescribes. Several of the trilogy's major themes perform this work: in *Molloy,* the foreclosure of progress ensured by the novel's circular structure resists the autobiographical mandate of development; Molloy's ongoing resistance to knowledge of autobiographical details undermines the notions of autonomy and self-authorization that underpin the logic of autobiography; Beckett's depiction of both Molloy's and Gaber's physical decrepitude indexes their regression backward from the trappings of identity that they possess at their stories' outsets. In a characteristically Beckettian way, then, *Molloy*'s proliferation of text paradoxically *undoes* this canonical literary form and the ideological mandate of identity formation that is fundamental to it.

Throughout *Molloy,* Molloy indicates that the conventions of autobiography exert particular formal requirements upon his narrative; his explicit attention to their prescriptiveness constitutes his resistance to the formulation of identity that they posit. The narratorial challenges that confront Molloy are those that confront the autobiographer. Jerome Bruner describes these:

> A narrator, in the here and now, takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, one who happens to share his name. He must by convention bring that protagonist from the past into the present in such a way that the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness. Now, in order to bring a

> protagonist from the there and then to the point where the original protagonist becomes the present narrator, one needs a theory of growth or at least of transformation. (28)

Molloy's obsessive meditations on the nature of his narrative both enact and spotlight this dynamic. Whereas traditional autobiography seeks to close the gap that exists between the protagonist "in the here and now" and the narrator that exists "in the there and then," Molloy explicates this convention even as he enacts it. As he describes his difficulty when riding his bicycle—a difficulty that, owing to his physical immobility "in the here and now," confronted him in the past—he does so in the present tense. "When I try and think riding I lose my balance and fall. I speak in the present tense, it is so easy to speak in the present tense, when speaking of the past. It is the mythological present, don't mind it" (26). Molloy's assertion of "the mythological present" calls attention to the way in which an autobiographical text simultaneously demands that its narrator's story is constituted by events from the past and that this story is *told* from a position in the present. By telling parts of his story in "the mythological present," Molloy emphasizes the "collapsing" of the distance between one's present self and one's past self in autobiographical writing.

By describing this present as *mythological,* Beckett highlights the similar functions performed by myth and the phenomenon of unity between narrators and characters that autobiographical writing produces. Molloy's mythological present invokes a suspended temporality in which the past becomes present. This eternal present is the temporality of myth. A myth that retains cultural significance is never "over:" even when it is "about" the past, myth seeks to explain the present. Molloy's employment of

this temporality in the context of self-writing underscores its manipulativeness. Autobiography, which is posited on the ongoing development of the individual, insists upon a mythological construction wherein the events of the narrative appear to be ongoing in the present, though their narrator exists in the future and narrates past events. The mythological present thereby produces the *appearance* of narrative autonomy, though the autobiographical form itself wrests this autonomy from narrators. By calling attention to the manipulative dimension of the mythological present, Beckett exposes the schemes that autobiography engages to cover over the ongoing coercion of identity that its conventions produce. Molloy calls attention both to the mythological present imposed by the form and to his own narrative's violation of this temporal scheme by asserting "don't mind it." Beckett thereby ironically highlights the typical ways that narrative obfuscates its schemes by disinaugurating the mythological present (Barthes 116).

Molloy's narration is furthermore preoccupied with what Bruner calls the "theory of growth" or "transformation" required by autobiography. From its very outset, Molloy resists the notion that his narrative is one of transformation or development. Indeed, Molloy casts his goal of reaching his mother—Part I's "plot," insofar as it exists—as not so much an accomplishment as a return to his beginnings: "if ever I'm reduced to looking for a meaning to my life, you never can tell, it's in that old mess I'll stick my nose to begin with, the mess of that poor old uniparous whore" (19). The meaning of Molloy's life, he asserts, can be found not in whatever progress he undertakes or transformation he undergoes, but in his mother's reproductive organs. In other words, meaning lies precisely in the *antiprogressive* configuration of a return to the womb; to find oneself in precisely the same location as where one was born is precisely *not* to progress. The

"goal" of Molloy's narrative is, then, to forestall progress of any kind by regressing into the womb. But Beckett depicts this regression as a journey from one location to another; Molloy both develops and resist development as he enacts the "plot" to which his narrative is obligated. By constructing Molloy's goal as the forestalling of development, but his narrative as the story of progress toward finding his mother (which, by the end, he has done, as he is in his mother's room, but their reunion is not depicted), Beckett underscores the power that autobiographical conventions exert upon first person narratives; even this text whose purpose is to depict a return to beginnings must work against the trajectories of growth, transformation, and development that autobiography demands.

An additional defining feature of autobiography is its emphasis on the exceptionality of the subject's narrative. As Bruner asserts, a narrative must answer the question "Why?:" "'Why is this worth telling, what is interesting about it?' Not everything that happened is worth telling about, and it is not always clear why what one tells merits telling" (Bruner 29). The exemplars of the genre—narratives by Augustine, Rousseau, Wordsworth—are not only unified texts about "completed" persons, but are textual proof of their writers' exceptionality as writers, artists, intellectuals, and ethical beings. The conventions of autobiography therefore mandate that not only must a narrative be about a sequence of events over time, structured in terms of cultural canonicity, but "it must also contain something that endows it with *exceptionality"* (Bruner 29, italics in original). An autobiography should narrate the development of the individual in the context of his culture—it must sanction his membership in society—even as it proves his uniqueness.

In Part I of *Molloy* in particular, Beckett plays upon this expectation and highlights the distinctly mundane qualities of Molloy's narration.[38] Like any author of autobiography, Molloy "began at the beginning," "whereas now it's nearly the end" (8). He therefore invokes the convention that Bruner describes, by which protagonist and narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness (28). Even as he does so, however, Molloy doubts that his narrative demonstrates the type of exceptionality that autobiography requires: "Here's my beginning. It must mean something, or they wouldn't keep it" (8). This author himself is unclear about why, as Bruner puts it, his own narrative "merits telling" (29). Molloy inaugurates his autobiography not of his own volition, but because a figure outside himself prompts him to do so. Molloy identifies this figure as both "this man" and "they;" the fact that neither Molloy nor the reader knows who "takes away the pages" of his autobiographical narrative is Beckett's canny indication of the generalized coercion that operates upon autobiographical narrators. Unlike the narrators of canonical iterations of autobiography, Molloy writes not out of a belief in the exceptionality or instructive value of his story, but both because "they" pay him and, by his weekly reappearance, "this man" both monitors and coerces Molloy's narrative. Molloy's wishful declaration that "it must mean something" gives voice to the powerful mandate of exceptionality that governs the form in which Molloy writes.

Molloy's inauguration of his autobiography also positions Molloy as a "reader" of his own autobiography who is expected to discern that every moment in his life has meaning. His narrative emphasizes the way in which the autobiographical form produces

[38] Malone, in *Malone Dies,* obsessively points out the banality of his narrative. His profuse narration is punctuated throughout with the statement "what tedium" and others like it (187).

this awareness and coerces him into performing the role of autobiographical narrator, wherein his narrative's every event is endowed with exceptionality, or, as Molloy puts it, "must mean something" (Bruner 29, Beckett 8). As is characteristic of Molloy's narration, however, his capitulation to this mandated performance is punctuated by irritated insights into the power it exercises over his "telling" of his story.

At one point in the midst of his journey, Molloy meditates on the accumulation of details that constitutes narrative, and the seemingly arbitrary assignation of significance to some of these and of insignificance to others. He asserts: "you cannot mention everything in its proper place, you must choose, between the things not worth mentioning and those even less so. For if you set out to mention everything you would never be done, and that's what counts, to be done, to have done" (41). Here, Molloy is mindful of the degree to which his narrative will cease to conform to the conventions of autobiography if he "mentions everything." Molloy acknowledges, "Oh I know, even when you mention only a few of the things there are, you do not get done either, I know, I know. But it's a change of muck. And if all muck is the same much that doesn't matter, it's good to have a change of muck" (41). The mundane nature of the events that constitute Molloy's life do not, he recognizes, contribute to an understanding of him as an exceptional individual on a path of progression toward autonomy. In this moment, Molloy betrays his insight into and desire to meet the formal requirements of autobiography, and indicates that his life, as it is, does not conform to the standard of exceptionality inherent to the form. Though he strategizes how to endow his narrative with this exceptionality by choosing which details to narrate, in the end he acknowledges that these details are, in fact, all "muck." In this respect, the "muck" that constitutes

Molloy's autobiography, and therefore his autobiography as a whole, strenuously resists the imperatives of the form, which demands that his tale be interesting, thereby revealing its narrator's exceptionality.

Molloy's reading of his own autobiography explicates how autobiography acts as a mandate for subjectivity. Despite his stated goal of returning to his beginnings, Molloy is under a powerful imperative to develop into an autonomous individual. This reflects Western culture's usual orientation to autobiography: a central principle of autobiographical writing is the transmutation of the model or exemplary life "into that of the model or exemplary text: one whose exemplariness, paradoxically, lies in its representation of the uniqueness and singularity of the individual life" (Marcus 2). Molloy's narrative indicates his awareness that, because he is writing an autobiography, his life should be exemplary of the development that the form demands; as such, he continuously capitulates to the formal and thematic conventions that would make his narrative into a model autobiography.

However, the degree to which his narrative cannot be constrained—despite his best efforts—to achieve conformity to these conventions underscores the irony inherent in the notion that autobiography represents the "uniqueness and singularity of an individual life." Whereas autobiography purports to represent this singularity, in reality it prescribes a specific arc of development, thereby circumscribing both the form and the self-representation of the writer. As Molloy's autobiographical narrative—and the straying of his consciousness beyond its formal bounds—reveals, the autobiographical form's ideology of identity formation constrains that which can be revealed about a narrator. As such, it can never be a full depiction of the narrator's "life," but is always

rather a representation of a prescriptive form of development delimited by the conventions of the form. Molloy's persistent commentary upon these conventions, however, allows the reader a glimpse "beyond" autobiography and into the truly unique selfhood of an individual whose life does not conform to the formulation of narrative progress that autobiography demands.

Narrator as Narrative Effect: **Part I**

Molloy's effort to capitulate to narrative's demands despite his evident bewilderment underscores the coerciveness of these demands. As Marcus observes, autobiographical narrative acts to secure the "unity of the subject and object of knowledge" (5). Autobiography demands that the narrating subject—in this case, Molloy—come to know himself. Throughout Part I, Molloy makes an effort to perform this unity by asserting the details of his biography; in every instance, however, he undoes these assertions with revisionary or self-canceling statements. His narration simultaneously strives to capitulate to and resists the autobiographical convention of unity.

But Molloy is not merely a man with dubious origins confused about his own biography; Beckett's writing forces the yet more radical recognition that Molloy is a product of textual composition. Beckett puts the lie to the premise that Molloy is a "figure" or "character" by showing the reader's conception of him *as such* to be an effect of the novel tradition in which Beckett's work is situated. Molloy's sporadic acknowledgement that his narrative is *being constructed*—and that, as a result, it must capitulate to certain formal conventions—does not merely dismantle Molloy's status as

an individual, but more profoundly undermines the premise of subjectivity that is fundamental to the novel form. Furthermore, as Lloyd and Bixby argue, as a result of the novel's cultural and aesthetic status, the model of subjectivity that is its destination acts as an exemplar for readers. The novel form therefore plays a fundamental role in constructing and constraining subjectivity for real people. Beckett's trilogy invokes and dismantles this form in order to underline its role in enforcing and normalizing this regime of subjectivity. In so doing, Beckett calls attention to an aspect of narrative—its coercivity—that is typically overlooked.

Beckett's text furthermore highlights the novel form's coercive effect upon readers, whose training *as readers* both provides a coercive model for their own subjectivity and makes them complicit in creating the subject effect that convention demands. Narrative theory offers insight into this dynamic. In a conventional narrative, as Barthes describes, "each time the narrator stops 'representing' and reports details which he knows perfectly well but which are unknown to the reader, there occurs . . . a sign of reading, for there would be no sense in the narrator giving himself a piece of information" (110). Molloy, however, does not "know perfectly well" the details of his own story. In fact he knows so little about himself and the events he narrates that he cannot tell the difference between himself and a landmark, or remember his name, or know whether he ever owned a bicycle.

Molloy's explicit avowal that he is composing his narrative, the details of which are obscure to him, goes beyond being a "sign of reading" to become a sign of composition: in these moments, the reader is forced to recognize that she is in the act of reading a narrative that is being composed and one that composes in turn the mutually

constraining roles of writer and reader. Molloy acknowledges "I no longer know what I am doing, nor why, those are things I understand less and less, I don't deny it, for why deny it, and to whom, to you, to whom nothing is denied?" (45). Here, Molloy speaks directly to the reader's role as a disciplining agent: the reader expects that the novel's narrator will possess knowledge of his own story, thereby producing the subject effect the reader has been trained to anticipate. Molloy claims that he does the things he does—narrates the things he narrates—in order not to deny the "you" to whom his narrative is directed. This depiction associates this "you" with the "they" who come to take away the pages at the outset of the text; these parties enforce the narrative imperatives that are operational upon Molloy and his story. Here, Beckett clearly asserts that the reader, as well as the conventions of narration, acts as a policing force upon Molloy's narrative. Molloy is never free to narrate what he will, but must narrate what is required by the reader, whose expectations and demands are conditioned by the canonical forms that circumscribe his narration.

Molloy's question also emphasizes the power of literary convention to delimit readers' imaginative capacity. As Peter Brooks claims, "structures, functions, sequences, plot, the possibility of following a narrative and making sense of it" belong to one's training as a reader of narrative (19). Upon encountering this text, the reader immediately recognizes that Molloy's narration violates the principles of subject formation enforced by the novel form. Molloy's method of grasping for pieces of information to "give himself" is his effort to correct this violation. To complicate Molloy's "signs of reading" in this way indicates the extent to which Molloy's narration is both produced by narrative convention and policed by the reader's training. But Beckett's explicit avowal of the

text's ongoing narration violates the expectations produced by the "reader's literary competence" to create profound disorientation (Brooks 19). It thereby induces the reader to participate in Beckett's ongoing—and disorienting—project of undercutting the conventional ways in which narrative typically acts to "produce" subjectivity.

Molloy's narration furthermore calls attention to his own contradictory status: he must appear to possess a consciousness that is the source of his narration, but his existence is in fact a subject effect of the narrative in which he is situated. Beckett underscores this contradiction when he depicts Molloy's explication, in a moment of frustration inspired by his inability to recall the name of his hometown, of the complex way in which "invention" and "saying" become conflated during acts of narration: "And truly it little matters what I say, this, this or that or any other thing. Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten" (31-2). Certainly, this meditation points up the conventionality of language at the level of the word: the expression of thought is limited by the words available by which to express it. This moment furthermore illuminates the conundrum in which Molloy is trapped: he is both posited as the "inventor" of his narrative and yet acts merely as the vehicle for the playing-out of conventions that pre-exist him. Molloy's assertion that "saying is inventing" expresses the view of narration perpetuated in and by canonical autobiography and bildungsroman: the formulation of identity mandated by these forms posits an autonomous—that is, self-authenticating and self-authorizing—narrator who is the originator of his own story (Lloyd 162). The premise that a conscious subject is the "inventor" or source of narrative is furthermore

fundamental to the experimental modernist techniques that are invested in depicting characters' interiority.

Molloy's initial sense that "saying is inventing" would cast him as the speaking subject and source of his narrative. He immediately reverses this assertion, however, saying that it is not only "wrong," but "very rightly wrong." The strange construction of this assertion slyly indicates Molloy's insight into the complex dynamics of narrative construction: he recognizes that, though convention produces an appearance that his narration is a process of invention, in fact it is merely a channeling of pre-existing narrative requirements. Molloy's insight into the artificiality of this premise of narrative invention, as expressed in his ongoing meta-narrative commentary, confirms that it is fundamentally incorrect—"very rightly wrong"—to believe that saying is inventing. A narrator invents nothing; he thinks he is inventing and by doing so seemingly "escapes" the conventions of narrative by which he is created. But in fact, a narrator must "stammer out" the elements of narrative that combine to create the subject effect that give him a "voice." Importantly, the "lesson" that he stammers out was "one day got by heart and long forgotten;" the fundamental functions of narrative are so culturally dominant as to be invisible.

The dynamic Molloy describes here also precisely inheres in the relationship of the novel form to narrative convention. Even in this novel that sets out to dethrone human consciousness from its position as the locus of meaning in narrative, Beckett is yet—in substantial part—beholden to the conventions that govern the form to which *Molloy,* despite its resistance, conforms. Though *Molloy* proposes a radical reconfiguration of human consciousness as depicted in literature, it nevertheless

"stammers out its lesson:" it is obligated to enlist autobiography, the bildungsroman, the detective novel, and narrative itself, in order to mount this reconfiguration.

Even so, the text's insistence upon its own composition undercuts its "stammering out" of conventional generic forms. Molloy's awareness of both his interchangeability with others and his own uniqueness highlights his status as the product of Beckett's composition. When a stranger approaches him, Molloy says he "must have seen the rock in the shadow of which I crouched like Belaqua, or Sordello, I forget" (10). This interchangeability amongst a number of protagonists underscores the error inherent in conceiving of these figures as "different people." These figures are not discrete subjects but rather the varied results of the "stammering out" of the subject effect required by the novel form. Molloy's conflation of himself with these other Beckett protagonists reveals that no real difference inheres between them; they are all effects of the respective narratives in which they appear.

Importantly, Belacqua and Sordello are characters featured in Beckett's earlier fiction collection *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934). Sordello, furthermore, appears in previous canonical literary works: a figure by this name features in the *Purgatorio* section of Dante's fourteenth century *Divine Comedy,* and is also the title character in Robert Browning's Victorian era narrative poem *Sordello*. The Sordello who appears in Dante's poem is furthermore based on a thirteenth century troubadour whom Dante valorizes, along with several other poets and musicians, as a creator of transcendent secular art that is ennobling but nevertheless lacks the "anchorage in the sacred Word" required to achieve spiritual rebirth (Schnapp 98-9). According to Jeffrey Schnapp, this lack of anchorage in the word has the result that Sordello and other secular artists "can

lose their way with tragic consequences" (99). This interpretation of Sordello as an instigator of a mode of creative expression apart from a divinely inspired "Word" resonates with Molloy's own self-conscious efforts to distinguish his own narrative from the canonical narratives that pre-exist and condition it. By constructing Molloy's narrative as directly contesting the dominance of the "sacred" genres that constrain it, Beckett advocates for a critical engagement with the "Word." *Molloy* does not merely enact the precepts of conventionalized canonical genres, but self-consciously reflects upon the way that these genres dominate both novels' construction and their reception. Molloy's complex invocation and undermining of canonical forms illustrates the novel's willful disconnection from a culturally sanctioned order so powerful that it acts as a divine foundation for narrative.

Sordello's status as a purgatorial figure whose art Dante considers ennobling but not spiritually complete is also resonant with Beckett's depiction of Molloy. Sordello is a fully developed character who is, according to Dante's theology in *Purgatorio,* nevertheless unable to achieve spiritual rebirth. In this way he is a precursor to Molloy, who, as narrator of his tale, is both a literary figure and yet—because his narrative resists declarations of discrete subjectivity, narrative movement toward resolution, and the individual subject formation prescribed by the bildungsroman and autobiography—he remains "incomplete." He therefore resides in a sort of novelistic purgatory. Beckett's insistence that the narrator is himself an effect of the narrative that produces him both undermines the "divine" status of autobiography, bildungsroman, and other canonical forms by which subjectivity is coerced into being, and draws attention to the narrator's

entrapment within a literary purgatory. Molloy does not wholly capitulate to the formal elements that constrain him, but neither can he escape the novel itself.

Detective Fiction: Coherence Undermined

The detective fiction form is also fundamental to Beckett's interrogation of the process by which narrative coerces subjectivity. In Part II of *Molloy,* he capitalizes upon detective fiction's deterministic orientation to perform this interrogation; because the form requires that a crime be solved, it is predicated on coherence and resolution. Beckett's use of this popular form as an additional vehicle for his critique reveals that not only those pedigreed forms expressly focused upon narrating individual formation—autobiography and bildung—prescribe subjectivity; popular genres, too, contribute to this textual policing of the individual. Moran's narrative in Part II conforms to several of detective fiction's highly prescriptive conventions: Moran is an "agent;" he is commissioned by a superior agent to pursue a target (Molloy); he writes a report that describes his investigation. In other ways, of course, Beckett's writing resists the conventions of the genre: the reason for Molloy's apprehension—his "crime"— is unknown to both Moran and the reader; Moran does not accumulate clues in order to "solve" the crime; Moran's narrative focuses much more on his own mental and physical undoing than on Molloy's whereabouts. In a manner consistent with his technique of invoking, morphing, and remobilizing literary genres, Beckett dismantles the conventions of detective fiction to reveal the delimiting effect of the narrative drive toward coherence and resolution that this form requires.

Tzvetan Todorov's "The Typology of Detective Fiction" delineates the conventions of classic detective fiction that Beckett invokes by composing Part II as an investigation. The two-part structure of *Molloy,* in particular, plays on the "duality" that, claims Todorov, is "at the base" of the classic detective fiction that reached its peak between the two world wars (Todorov 44). Todorov calls this classic iteration "the whodunit;" this type of novel "contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. In their purest form, these stories have no point in common" (Todorov 44). The first of these two stories is the story of the crime, which "tells 'what really happened,' whereas the second—the story of the investigation—explains 'how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it'" (Todorov 45). This meta-narrative relationship is central to the form; the story of the investigation must shed light on the story of the crime and eventually reveal "whodunit." In this sense, the first story ends before the second begins (Todorov 44).

Works of detective fiction are therefore bifurcated into two linked but distinct stories; though concerned with the same event, the "first story" narrates the event itself, while the second story narratively reconstructs it. Todorov defines these stories' differences by invoking the Russian Formalist concepts of "story" and "plot:" "the story is what has happened in life, the plot is the way the author presents it to us. The first notion corresponds to the reality evoked, to events similar to those which take place in our lives; the second, to the book itself, to the narrative, to the literary devices the author employs" (45). This structure makes the form particularly liable for the kind of meta-narrative exploration that is Beckett's project in the trilogy. As indicated by his reworkings of narrative conventions throughout *Molloy,* Beckett insists that narrative's

coercive effect resides in its conventionality, which is to say its construction according to a set of textual prescriptions. The narrative construction of the "second story" that is ongoing throughout works of detective fiction makes the form an ideal ground for the extension of Beckett's critique in Part I of narrative conventions' coerciveness.

While Part II of *Molloy* is explicitly the story of Moran's investigation, it does not contain the story of "what really happened" (Todorov 44). The novel's structure thereby both awakens a reader's expectation that the story of the investigation will explain the crime and annihilates that expectation. Though Part II does not reveal "whodunit"—indeed, the reader never learns what "it" was—it is nevertheless explicitly composed as Moran's narration of his pursuit of Molloy. That he is ignorant of the explanations that might exist for his commission does not detract from the fact that he *was* commissioned and that the story before the reader is his narrative reconstruction of his investigation. Furthermore, Moran avows his role as investigator of a case: "Peeping and prying were part of my profession," he acknowledges (94). Before embarking, he lays down to consider carefully "the Molloy affair," adopting the language of detective fiction (98).

The necessity that Moran construct a report in which he narrates his findings—indeed, in which he "solves the crime"—expresses the power of text to both delimit an author's expression and to police the subjectivity of the figures within a text. Gaber is the agent who commissions Moran to seek Molloy; he tells Moran, despite Moran's professed lack of interest in the case, that the "chief," Youdi, "wants it to be you" (94). Moran is thusly appointed as the pursuer of Molloy; as such, he is enlisted into a subservient relationship that obligates him to find the object of his quest, write the

narrative report that reconstructs this quest, and turn this report over to his superior. In this regard, Moran finds himself in almost exactly the same position as Molloy: he is coerced into writing by an outside force and possesses only the scantest sense of what elements might legitimate the narrative's purpose or lend it coherence. Moran's own agency is subject to the requirements of his profession, which he acknowledges: "we agents often amused ourselves with grumbling among ourselves and giving ourselves the airs of free men" (95). The agents' lack of freedom is rooted not only in their obligation to pursue the targets of their investigations, but also in the conventionality of the reports that reveal "whodunit." The shape and character of the narratives they produce are conditioned; the "second story" of a detective novel *must* build toward coherence and resolution; this is its raison d'être.

Moran is therefore subject to the necessity of constructing a report that conforms to the formulation that Youdi requires—namely, a "solution" to the crime. Youdi's status as Moran's "chief" literalizes the extent to which the conventions of the detective fiction form exercise a coercive power: Moran must produce a report for his superior in order to remain employed, and this report can come to only one conclusion. The remainder of Part II, of course, is Beckett's emphatic refusal to grant this conclusion: the circularity of Moran's quest, his physical dissolution, and the eventual cancelation of his commission prevent him from enacting the kind of resolution that detective fiction requires. The coherence required by the "second story" is thereby foreclosed in Part II, and this foreclosure is a fundamental aspect of Beckett's method of undermining the coercive power of textual convention.

Moran's report—as do detectives' reports in general—also facilitates a meta-narrative commentary on the method by which the detective fiction form coerces into being—and then polices—the subjectivity of the "criminal." As a result of Moran's commission to write a report, Molloy becomes the product of Moran's narrative construction and the subject of his surveillance. Moran finds that when he takes a moment to consider his mission, he calls up a picture of Molloy and seems to possess knowledge of his attributes. Moran narrates the odd dynamic whereby he seems to have substantial insight about this figure he has never encountered: "Perhaps I had invented him, I mean found him ready made in my head. There is no doubt one sometimes meets with strangers who are not entire strangers, through their having played a part in certain cerebral reels" (112). Here, in a way consistent with Molloy's correction of "inventing" to "saying" in Part I, Moran initially conceives that he is "inventing"—creating wholesale the figure of Molloy out of his imagination—only to immediately alter this to assert that Molloy is "ready made in my head." In this way, Moran's image of Molloy acts in a manner analogous to those literary conventions to which both autobiographers and Beckett himself are obligated to conform. Because these conventions both preexist the text's composition and perform a coercive function, they act as "cerebral reels" that condition its form and content.

The text's two-part structure furthermore ensures that Part I's characterization of Molloy has been planted as a "cerebral reel" according to which readers will evaluate the accuracy of Moran's assessment of him. By structuring the text in this way, Beckett makes explicit the coercive effect of narrative conventions: a reader's consciousness of the Molloy narrated in Part I becomes a script that conditions her evaluation of Moran's

notion of Molloy. The conventions that produced Molloy in Part I—the elements of autobiography and bildungsroman that Beckett invokes and deforms—have hence made him into a *subject.* Despite Beckett's relentless dismantling of the conventions associated with genres of individual formation, then, Molloy's subjectivity is coherent enough for Moran to perceive of it as a "cerebral reel," and for the reader to recognize when Moran is "misapprehending" aspects of Molloy's character. This dimension of Part II magnifies Part I's revelation of the dynamics by which autobiography and bildung coerce subjectivity into being. Beckett's subsequent undermining of the conventions of detective fiction in Part II—particularly its "dual" structure—offers yet more insight into the deeper truth that subjectivity is an effect of narrative convention and not merely the narrative expression of extant individuals' consciousness.

The two-part structure of *Molloy* also instills in the reader a desire for unity and coherence; this is yet another way that the novel systematically awakens and annihilates readers' habits of reading.[39] According to Porter Abbott, *Molloy* is characterized by "a symmetricality complicated by a more unyielding disorder" (92):

[39] *Molloy*'s two-part arrangement acts upon the reader's and critic's desire to seek narrative coherence. Some common interpretations that satisfy this desire is that Part II, despite its location after Part I in the text, is a preamble to it, or that Moran is an as-yet not fully physically decrepit Molloy. These interpretations seek an *explanation* for both the mystery that Moran seeks to solve and for the book's composition in two parts. Yet while the text's structure suggests a relation between characters and events in Parts I and II, neither Beckett nor Moran *explains* the events or circumstances that lead to Moran's being commissioned to seek Molloy. Porter Abbott captures the reader's and critic's desire for coherence in a series of questions: "Does Moran become Molloy as his decay in physique and appearance would suggest? Is it the Molloy he stalks within him, one of five Molloys he enumerates at the outset? If so, what is Molloy? And what does Molloy become in his turn on his quest—his mother?" (95). These questions pinpoint the way in which the novel's structure both awakens the reader's desire for unity and frustrates it. The novel's refusal to confirm or deny the coherence and symmetry suggested by its two-part structure is characteristic of Beckett's method, which is simultaneously grounded in narrative forms that mandate coherence (in this case, the detective novel wherein there exists the story of the crime and the report of the investigation) and seeks to dismantle these forms from within.

> The problem for the reader is that *Molloy* is divided into two parts that appear at once to be intimately related and to have no relation. The parts are distinct, yet they abound in parallels and cross-references. Essentially, this is a concentrated example of what Beckett does throughout his entire canon when he has names and objects reappear from work to work. But in *Molloy* the repeated elements seize the reader's attention with greater urgency because now the separate narratives are squeezed between the same covers. What echoes there are take on great weight because they are the only clues we have—in our obsession with unity—to go on in finding the connection. The strain is increased by the very abundance of parallels. (99)

For Abbott, it is not the mere fact of this structure but its character—the two parts abound in parallels and similarities and are also profoundly different and distinct—that creates a particular effect. As a result of readers' "obsession with unity"—and of the convention that mandates narrative unity within a single text—we seek explanatory relationships between Parts I and II (Abbott 99).

Beckett's invocation of detective fiction imposes an additional layer of expectation onto the text: according to the conventions of this genre, readers should anticipate a resolution in which the second story (that of the investigation) fully reconstructs the first story (that of the crime). But because the two sections are both symmetrical and characterized by an "unyielding disorder," and because detective fiction's duality is both mobilized and foreclosed, the text's relationship to the events it contains is both explanatory and mystifying. The novel's structure facilitates Beckett's revelation that despite the absence of a crime, which is the basis for plot in detective

fiction—the conventions of the form nevertheless exert such power that the reader strives to instill unity and coherence into this text. In this way, Beckett demonstrates how formulaic literary forms limit at once readers' modes of understanding and the ability of authors to compose novels that exceed or exist outside of these modes.

Beckett's Doubles and the Collapsing of Narrative Subjectivity: Part II

Part II of *Molloy* performs much of the same work as Part I: Moran, its narrator, struggles to configure narrative even as he works against the prescriptions of narrative by which he conceives of himself. The resulting text engages both the indecipherability of identities that characterizes Part I, and simultaneously capitulates to and resists the mechanics of narrative that both generate and obfuscate the category of selfhood as it has traditionally been forged in fiction. It further complicates the way Part I performs this work by adding another layer of narration: whereas Part I is Molloy's first person narration of his predicament, in Part II Moran narrates both the events that are the material for the report and the composition of the report. As such, Part II explores more deeply the power dynamics that inhere in the production of narrative: its status as a commissioned report dramatizes narrative conventions' coercive effects upon narrators, characters, and readers alike.

Part II continues to dismantle the textual means by which the premise of subjectivity is typically created. Abbot claims that "the central mystery of Beckett's detective story is the mystery of self," from which a "panorama of contingent mysteries" radiates (93). Beckett's invocations of all the forms he dismantles—autobiography, bildungsroman, the detective novel—facilitate both his explication of the ways

convention coerces subjectivity and his insistence that representations of selfhood can and should exceed or exist outside of these conventions. Molloy's and Moran's resistance to and questioning of the identities they are ascribed underscores this insistence. Both narrators reflect upon and experience the mysteries that circulate around the experience of being a self: who am I? What differentiates me from others? What are the criteria by which I define my *self?* These queries both motivate their journeys and foreclose their completion; they seek to define themselves but in the process of seeking self-definition, their bodies and their "selves" disintegrate.

As Molloy pursues his mother and Moran pursues Molloy, the text suggests that they are simultaneously approaching clarity about *who they are* and discovering the artificiality of this construction of selfhood. The effect of the text's two-part structure combined with its deployment of detective fiction is, then, pronounced resistance to the reification of the subject that characterizes the genres—autobiography, bildung, detective fiction—that Beckett invokes and reconfigures in *Molloy.* The text's "symmetricality complicated by a more unyielding disorder" undoes the discrete boundaries that the novel form historically renders around the individual subject (Abbott 92). One way Beckett achieves this effect is through a persistent invocation of dyads: characters and entities are paired together, suggesting symmetricality and the possibility that each member of the dyad might promote clearer understanding of the other. But Beckett collapses these dyads' two halves into one another, blurring the boundaries between entities and characters. This is an additional manifestation of the unity complicated by an unyielding disorder that constitutes Beckett's complexly wrought refusal to become complicit with canonical literary forms' coercion of subjectivity.

The dyadic relationships of reader to writer and narrator to narrated are crucially important to Beckett's meta-commentary on the complicity of traditional narrative structures in both prescribing habits of reading and perpetuating the brand of identity formation mandated in canonical literature. By casting Molloy as both the reader and writer of his own text—he polices his own autobiography according to the requirements of the form—Beckett indicates the power these requirements exercise over *both* readers and writers. The former evaluates a work of fiction in terms of its conformity to the conventions of its genre, while the latter's creative project is circumscribed by these same conventions.

Moran's status as a detective further magnifies the collapsing of the distinction between reader and writer. He must compose his narrative so that its contours conform to the requirements of the "second story" of detective fiction; in this way, like Molloy, he becomes the "reader" of his text. But the conventions of this "second story" are precisely what bring him into being as the *writer* as well.

The narrator to narrated dyad operates in a similar way: Molloy and Moran both narrate their respective journeys, but each is consistently aware that his narrative is deeply conditioned by convention. In this way, though their role as narrators creates a premise of autonomous narrative authority, they are in fact both narrated into existence by the conventions of the forms they invoke. Both narrators' assertions about a lack of freedom speaks to this formal circumscription; though they would wish (and at times, indeed, they seem) to be independent subjects capable of generating stories, in fact they are merely vehicles for the execution of formal conventions.[40]

[40] Moran bemoans his lack of freedom when he asserts "we agents often amused ourselves with grumbling among ourselves and giving ourselves the airs of free men" (95). As I argue, Moran is not free because

These more abstractly configured dyads are thematically consistent with the method by which Beckett arranges his characters into dyads throughout *Molloy*. Beckett pairs textual figures by establishing their family relationships, depicting remarkable similarities between them, and assigning them names that are the same or almost the same. These connections seem to simultaneously establish the characters' connections to one another and their distinctiveness. These dyads include: Molloy and his mother; Molloy and Mollose; Moran and Moran's son; Molloy and Moran. Each protagonist seeks to assert the differences between himself and the other member of each dyad, but as his narrative progresses, the distinctions between them begin to collapse. Molloy suggests that he may be his mother; Moran defensively (and, as it turns out, ironically) suggests that sharing a name with his son "cannot lead to confusion"; Molloy and Moran, in their physical decrepitude, share an increasing number of attributes (92). These constructions invoke the premise that textual figures are distinct and coherent subjects only to foreclose this possibility by blurring the distinctions among these figures. Though the binary structure of these dyads suggests that they will provide clarity about the individuals and relationships they represent, the collapsing of differences within them makes these aspects of identity less, not more, decipherable.

Though characters' identities will become increasingly indecipherable throughout, at the outset of Part II, Moran presents details with the surety of fact. Given the ending of Part I, wherein the narrator acknowledges that he cannot remember the details of the

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both his narration and his agency are circumscribed by his obligation to compose his report according to a set of conventions. Molloy configures his lack of freedom as physical; at the end of his narrative, he asserts that he "could not, stay in the forest I mean, I was not free to" (86). This scene literalizes the compulsion toward narrative resolution mandated by conventional novel forms. Molloy is not free to foreclose an ending to his narrative; rather, he is obligated to pursue an ending. In the context of Molloy's configuration, this would mean escaping the forest.

preceding narrative and poses questions about his own experience, Moran's strident opening declaration—"It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows"—distinguishes him as a self-authorizing and self-authenticating narrator, confident of the "facts" that constitute his tale (92, Lloyd 162). Moreover, the first paragraph of Part II clearly delineates the kinds of details that, by the end of Part I, are unknowable or indeterminate. The narrator asserts that he goes to his desk, that he cannot sleep, and that his "lamp sheds a soft and steady light;" he furthermore establishes that he has a son (92). The straightforward manner in which the narrator relays these details distinguishes him from Molloy, whose ignorance of the details of his own narrative is, by the end of Part I, total. Moran's fatherhood furthermore contrasts with Molloy's uncertainty about his own status as a father and Molloy's depiction of himself as a son craving an origin. Unlike Moran, who authors a new identity by producing a son, in undertaking his journey, Molloy seeks to understand his own obscure selfhood.

Moran's growing recognition of the ways that textual convention determines the content and character of his narrative, however, undermines his initial self-conception as a self-authenticating and self-authorizing narrating subject. He initially conceives of the figure he is obligated to pursue as "Mollose," but "since Gaber has said Molloy, not once but several times, and each time with equal incisiveness, I was compelled to admit that I too should have said Molloy and that in saying Mollose I was at fault" (112-13). This is Moran's recognition that an identity has been ascribed to the figure he will pursue, and that identity is expressed in the ascription of a proper name. The power dynamic that inheres between Gaber and Moran furthermore dictates that Moran must conform to Gaber's way of perceiving Molloy. On this important point, then, Moran alters his own

narrative perspective in order to capitulate to Gaber's way of ascribing identity to the figure Moran is commissioned to pursue. His self-authorizing and self-authenticating perspective hereby begins to erode.

Here, Beckett again invokes the verb "say" in order to express the dynamic that occurs when a narrator enacts convention, thereby revealing that the narrator is not in fact the source of narration but rather a vehicle for the conventions that circumscribe it. In "saying" Mollose, Moran is "at fault;" to invent another name would be to violate the premise of subjectivity that Gaber's naming of Molloy has already established. At this early stage in his tale, Moran capitulates to a central tenet of narration wherein a narrating consciousness tells a story that reports on the seemingly "unfolding" events that are enacted by a set of discrete individuals. As Beckett reveals, however, and Molloy articulates in Part I, this "saying" is not, as it appears, a narrator's act of invention, but rather the "stammering out" of one's lesson (31-2). Beckett depicts Moran as having fully internalized the lesson of identity formation taught by the narrative conventions of autobiography, bildungsroman, and detective fiction: namely, that identities—both narrators' and characters'—are both fundamental to narrative and unimpeachable. Beckett's project throughout the trilogy lays siege to this "lesson," demonstrating that subjectivity is an effect of narrative convention and not its source or end.

Conclusion: Ends

As *Molloy* progresses toward its ending, Beckett dismantles the requirement that a narrative proceed toward an end that retroactively lends meaning to its events. Peter Brooks asserts that, in novels, "meanings are developed over temporal succession in a

suspense of final predication" (19). Conventionally, the meaning of a text becomes apparent in light of its ending; the reader's knowledge that a narrative will end motivates the sense-making that she performs between a novel's beginning and its end. We read; this takes time; what we read accrues meaning in light of a revelatory ending. As was true in Part I, the ending of Part II interrogates this requirement that a narrative move toward resolution. The reader does not retroactively gain clarity about the events of the novel in light of its ending. Rather, like Molloy, Moran becomes increasingly physically decrepit and therefore struggles to proceed toward home after Youdi calls off his assignment. The purpose and premise of his narrative—the composition of his report—is eliminated; rather than complete his mission, he merely returns home (slowly and with difficulty). This ending does not grant final predication to the events that precede it.

This lack of resolution enacts a strenuous resistance to the conventions of detective fiction in particular. The detective story itself is entirely predicated on resolution; the crime must be solved. But in Part II, when Youdi's authority is withdrawn, Moran is no longer obligated to compose his report, and so the drive toward narrative resolution evaporates. The coercive effect of the conventions prescribed by the detective report is embodied in Youdi's authority. Without this coercion, Moran's narrative ceases to facilitate the "sense-making" that readers typically perform when reading a novel.

Ironically, however, Moran does, in one sense, "find" Molloy: by establishing uncanny parallels between them, Beckett collapses the two characters into one another. Moran appears increasingly like Molloy; the binary relationship that seemed to exist between them at Part II's outset is increasingly blurred. This suggests that identity

inheres between the characters without making this identity explicit. Beckett's construction of the dyadic relationship of Molloy to Moran therefore functions to suggest that Moran has "found" Molloy, but that this is not the result of his own narrative authority—or even his narration more generally. In this way, Beckett suggests closure to this narrative *without* composing an ending that adheres to the conventional function of endings, wherein resolution retroactively ascribes meaning to the novel's events. His suggestion of the merging of Moran into Molloy, moreover, generates a kind of closure without ascribing a fully developed and socially sanctioned identity to either figure.

Beckett's depiction of Moran's increasing physical decrepitude further confounds the conventional narrative drive toward closure. In addition to suggesting (though the novel in no way confirms) that he and Molloy may be one and the same, Moran's paralysis discourages his movement toward home—and therefore toward the novel's ending. Though his legs are stiff and physical movement is painful, he remains determined in his movement, the culmination of which is ultimately his return home. The story therefore ends where it began; in this sense, there has been no real movement. Moran went on a journey, to be sure; but this journey did not produce a more intellectually or socially integrated individual. Rather, Moran is *less* a man than he was before the journey: he is partially paralyzed and literally sloughing off body parts. This depiction makes literal his narrative's resistance to the individual development that is fundamental to both autobiography and bildung. As his narrative nears its end, Moran's physical body *and* his subjectivity exhibit dissolution rather than increasing coherence. Beckett constructs Moran's journey as an arduous but circular ordeal that results in his

undoing; in so doing, he mobilizes and deforms narrative's prescriptions for both movement and the completion of an individual life.

Nevertheless, *Molloy* cannot continue into infinity. Brooks comments on the necessity of making an end, even for those novels that resist the tenets of the form:

> Our most sophisticated literature understands endings to be artificial, arbitrary, minor rather than major chords, casual and textual rather than cosmic and definitive. Yet they take place: if there is no spectacular denouement, no distribution of awards and punishments, no tie-up, through marriages and deaths, of all the characters' lives, there is a textual finish—we have no more pages to read. (Brooks 314)

As he nears home, Moran acknowledges this necessity when he declares "Now I may make an end" (174). In the ending that he "makes," he returns to his bedroom and writes precisely the same words with which he began: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows" (176). By coming full circle in this way, this novel resists narrative's requirement of an ending that lends coherence to the text that precedes it. Rather, this "ending" is both the cessation of words on the page and also a return to the beginning. The book must end, but by casting this ending not as a culmination or resolution, but rather as *anti*progressive, Beckett forecloses the "cosmic and definitive" function by which conventional endings confer retrospective meaning onto the novel's events (Brooks 314). This foreclosure is precisely what encourages readers to speculate that Part II is perhaps the precursor to Part I, or that Part II narrates a different time period in the same figure's life as Part I. Because the "end" that the narrator "makes" does not adhere strictly to the narrative code wherein the meaning of the text itself becomes apparent in

light of its ending (because this is not, strictly speaking, an ending), many of the text's most central premises collapse.

Moran undercuts the autobiographical premise of the preceding narrative yet more profoundly with the subsequent and final lines, which he writes: "It was not midnight. It was not raining" (176). These lines obliterate the truth-telling premise that is the basis for the autobiographical enterprise. By casting doubt upon the most basic conditions of the narrator's present circumstance, Beckett radically and explicitly disinaugurates the conventional premise that autobiography is a true account narrated by an individual possessed of a pre-existing subjectivity. If it is not raining, then the assertion with which the novel begins is rendered false; the possibility therefore exists that none of these events ever "occurred." Beckett's addition of these two lines at the end of his text thereby indicates the absurdity of the notion that autobiographical writing is merely the setting down on paper of one individual's experience which in turn renders legible his universal and archetypal identity. Moreover, by making these final lines expressly the product of Moran's composition, Beckett forcefully asserts that writing is fundamentally complicit in narrative's obfuscation of the means by which it positions subjectivity as its source.

Many of the most estranging and challenging elements of Beckett's trilogy are finely rendered inversions and deformations of the methods by which narrative conventions have made subjectivity into both the premise and purpose of the novel form. The trilogy does not itself belong to any generic category precisely because its purpose is to dismantle the conventions of those genres. *Molloy* therefore initially appears to be a stubbornly abstract and experimental text that little resembles the canonical forms its undermines. But close attention to the specific ways that these forms haunt the trilogy,

and to the complex techniques by which Beckett's writing interacts with and dismantles these forms, reveals the trilogy's revolutionary function: to unseat subjectivity as the premise for fiction. *Molloy* marks the beginning of Beckett's pursuit to configure a kind of writing suited to this function; the trilogy extends and continues this pursuit. Beckett's rigorous immanent critique of narrative subjectivity constitutes the author's insistence that the experience of being a self in the world warrants a mode of expression beyond the limiting and limited one prescribed by conventional narrative forms.

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