After Men: Modernist Adventure And Post-Patriarchal Work

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Abstract
After Men tracks the prehistory of creative economy discourse via the modernist cultural form of the female adventure narrative. It focusses on three modernist authors – E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen – exploring how their work appropriates the language of Victorian imperial romance in order to grant new kinds of feminized economic agency to humanist capacities such as imagination, creativity and aesthetic perception. It argues that during the massive influx of women into the British economy between 1910 and 1940, these authors were pioneers in broaching the importance of aesthetic capacities to national economies and capitalist workplaces. Via attending to the contemporary afterlives of modernist adventure in post-industrial fiction and film – in Zadie Smith, Sally Potter and Rachel Cusk – After Men ultimately reflects on the ways such stories have shaped the workplace imaginations of today's “creative class”, as well as broader debates about work, gender, kinship and aesthetics in the present moment.

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AFTER MEN: MODERNIST ADVENTURE AND POST-PATRIARCHAL WORK

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ABSTRACT

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*After Men* tracks the prehistory of creative economy discourse via the modernist cultural form of the female adventure narrative. It focusses on three modernist authors – E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen – exploring how their work appropriates the language of Victorian imperial romance in order to grant new kinds of feminized economic agency to humanist capacities such as imagination, creativity and aesthetic perception. It argues that during the massive influx of women into the British economy between 1910 and 1940, these authors were pioneers in broaching the importance of aesthetic capacities to national economies and capitalist workplaces. Via attending to the contemporary afterlives of modernist adventure in post-industrial fiction and film – in Zadie Smith, Sally Potter and Rachel Cusk – *After Men* ultimately reflects on the ways such stories have shaped the workplace imaginations of today’s “creative class”, as well as broader debates about work, gender, kinship and aesthetics in the present moment.
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Introduction

Literary histories and cultural theories of adventure, whether they begin in the medieval period, the eighteenth century or the Victorian *fin de siècle*, have a tendency to fizzle out at the threshold of the modernist era. By most accounts, adventure fiction reached its apex at the end of the nineteenth century in the imperial romances of Rider Haggard, John Buchan, Rudyard Kipling and other popular writers of empire fiction. Modernism is often described as the moment when adventure becomes squalid, soured, psychologized and disenchanted.¹ Indeed, anyone moderately familiar with the broader culture of the period would be forgiven for thinking it antithetical to the spirit of adventure – a period which saw the decline of empire, two world wars, the bureaucratization and standardization of labor, the rise of a welfare state and insurance industries seeking to mitigate unnecessary personal risk. The modern period, so the story goes, is the beginning of an unheroic and unadventurous age – and one in which we still dwell.

One does not have to look far for the culprits of such a narrative. Joseph Conrad’s imperial quests gone awry, Graham Greene’s semi-fictional travelogues of sordid colonial backwaters, Evelyn Waugh’s satires on the romance of travel, James Joyce’s psychologized retellings of epic, Samuel Beckett’s parodies of nineteenth century swashbuckling: much of the most canonized art of the modernist era stakes its bid for cultural prestige on a satiric disavowal of adventure and its associated values – masculine pluck, heroic labor, excessive risk and so forth. The aforementioned authors were from varying cultural and class backgrounds, attesting to what has been understood as the 20th century’s widespread allergy to adventure. But they all had at least one thing in common: they were all men.

*After Men* argues that if we turn to female and/or queer members of the modernist cultural cadre, we encounter quite a different story about the twentieth century afterlives of

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adventure. In the inner core and outer peripheries of the Bloomsbury Group, adventure was to take on a new life of its own. After Men explores how seminal modernist texts by E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen dislocate the tropology of adventure from regimes of imperial expansion and reconnect it to woman- and queer-centered imaginaries of selfhood, work and economy at the same moment as Britain itself was undergoing widespread geopolitical and vocational changes. As Britain entered its twilight phase of imperial domination around the turn of the twentieth century, adventure became a key symbolic site upon which debates about work, economy and gender were played out in narrative form, of which the modernist context was only one (very peculiar) aspect.

For proponents of an expansive imperial state such as Rider Haggard and John Buchan, plot-driven tales of adventure were the cultural fuel that could power manly deeds of empire. Woolf and Forster might have abhorred the colonial, gender and sexual politics of such texts, but they also recognized in them rich narrative resources for enchanting new social, economic and sexual opportunities for women and queer subjects. Their literary projects, and Woolf’s in particular, might have staked their prestige on an opposition to what she memorably described as the “tyranny of plot”, but as numerous accounts of modernism have emphasized, even its most experimental works don’t so much cancel or disregard nineteenth-century plot structures so much as adapt, repurpose and rework them into new social and aesthetic formations. Adventure is no exception. Forster, Woolf and Bowen, then, all sought to critique adventure’s foundations in imperial and misogynist forms of violence

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2 The “Bloomsbury Group” represents a notoriously lose affiliation of artists, writers and intellectuals (including the Woolfs, Forster, J.M. Keynes, Clive and Vanessa Bell and Roger Fry) which is to some extent a back-formation created by English modernism’s historical framing and popular reception. Still, what makes “Bloomsbury” a cogent heuristic for this project is the way it constellates, if never quite delimits, a set of liberal and bohemian values about culture and the arts; gender and sexuality; and family, domesticity and work, which anticipate a later phase of bourgeois ideology and mainstream capitalism. For a concise and critical account of those values, see Williams, Raymond. “The Bloomsbury Fraction”, in Problems in Culture and Materialism (Verso, 1980) I will refer to more specific and more recent studies of Bloomsbury when they become directly relevant.

3 For a seminal feminist account of modernist plot experimentation, see Abel, Elizabeth. Fictions of Female Development (University Press of New England, 1983); for a colonial perspective: Esty, Jed. Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism and the Fiction of Development (Oxford University Press, USA, 2012); and for recent work on modernist time and queer theory: Haffey, Kate. Literary Modernism, Queer Temporality: Eddies in Time (Springer, 2019)
and agency while at the same time reaggregating the forms, conventions, tropes and rhetorics of adventure under the sign of a new vocational constituency, one imaginatively extrapolated from (though not finally identical with) their own bohemian social formations and forms of imaginative and creative work. In doing so, they not only imagined sexual economies outside of patriarchy and gender- and hetero-normativity; they also imagined workplace economies beyond the dominant modes of industrial production and imperial expansion.

While the first two thirds of After Men develops an account of Bloomsbury’s aesthetic romances between the publication of Howards End in 1910 and Orlando in 1928, the final section finds Elizabeth Bowen writing back to Bloomsbury HQ in the 1930s, herself deeply critical of Forster’s and Woolf’s appropriations of the genre. From her perspective at the edge of both Bloomsbury coterie and cultivated Englishness, as well as on the cusp of late modernism, the Forster-Woolf penchant for adventure looks like an apologetics for a new phase of capitalist consumerism and female service work that, as we shall see, it was precisely invented to circumvent. For Bowen, adventure had its heyday with Haggard and high imperialism, and could by the 30s represent only the soured prospect of commodified experience and precarious work. Even she, though, can’t quite resist squeezing the left-over piths of imperial romance in order to suck out some very strange, sour-sweet flavors of enchantment and escape from the here-and-now. The cultural-historical core of this argument tracks the literary-formal development of that enchantment-disenchantment arc as dialectically related to, though by no means identical with, women’s integration into the British labor force. With its attention firmly focused on the gender and sexual dimension of adventure, After Men offers an altered picture of generic transformation from the late Victorian to the modernist period.

At the center of this argument is the spiralized relationship between literary and social form, adventure and capitalism. Adventure tales from the eighteenth century onwards
represented the boundless impulses of capitalist expansion, innovation and accumulation.\textsuperscript{4}

That spirit and its attendant cultural fantasies were (with some notable exceptions) overwhelmingly masculinist.\textsuperscript{5} Indeed, it wouldn’t be much of an exaggeration to say that through the Victorian period in particular there was a cultural division of labor, on the one side of which is the male adventure tale representing the frontier impulses of global capital, and on the other, feminine domestic fiction representing the sphere of the nation and its social and biological reproduction. As Nancy Armstrong (1987) would be the first to remind us, this division does not mean that adventure tales (nor men) are somehow ‘closer’ or more integral to capital and its reproduction. We can agree with her that women were, in many respects, the paradigmatic bourgeois subjects of the nineteenth century, while at the same time recognizing that the twin cultural logics of adventure and domesticity together represented the gendered division of labor integral to British capitalism at its moment of peak expansion.\textsuperscript{6}

As George Eliot expressed it via Gwendolen Harleth in her 1876 novel, Daniel Deronda, “[w]e women can’t go in search of adventures – to find out the North-West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners transplant us.”\textsuperscript{7} [My emphasis] The value of Gwendolen’s insight (and her memorable form of resentment) comes not from its descriptive let alone essentialist truth about what women can or cannot do or be, so much as its diagnosis of a certain normative force. We must. Women who stepped outside of that normative injunction (one tied here to

\textsuperscript{4} See Nerlich, Michael. Ideology of Adventure (1987, University of Minenessota) vol. II Nerlich narrates how the ideology of adventure gets carried over into the bourgeois era from an earlier, pre-capitalist mode of production, pointing out how the adventurer’s penchant for risk and passion is in many ways at odds with bourgeois calculation and interest. Franco Moretti takes up this point in relation to Crusoe and “the two halves of the bourgeois soul” in The Bourgeois: Between Literature and History (Verso, 2013)

\textsuperscript{5} There are of course exceptions to this critical narrative which have been documented by revisionist feminist historians, but to my mind it’s important to remember that they are just that: exceptions that are important for understanding modes of cultural resistance but which don’t disprove the normative collocation of masculinity and adventure through the Victorian period, See DiBattista, Maria & Epstein Nord, Deborah. At Home in the World: Women Writers and Public Life, from Austen to the Present (Princeton University Press, 18 Jun 2019) especially ch.1 “Adventure”. Martin Hipsky has also brought our attention to a corpus of late Victorian imperial fictions by women which are in some respects frontier fantasies premised on new forms of female agency. Moreover, he reads such fictions as continuous with modernist art-novels by writers such as Mansfield and Woolf. See Hipsky, Martin. Modernism and the Women’s Popular Romance in Britain, 1885–1925 (Ohio University Press, 2011)

\textsuperscript{6} See Armstrong, Nancy. Desire and Domestic Fiction (Oxford University Press, 1989)

\textsuperscript{7} Eliot, George. Daniel Deronda (Wordsworth Editions, 1996)
the domestic sphere and to social reproduction) might have temporarily negotiated with systems of patriarchy and capital, but they would also have found themselves in flight from the structures of social recognition and valorization that increasingly underwrote life (however unequal) in bourgeois societies and domestic fictions. Such was often the fate of the adventurer’s abjected sister concept, the ‘adventuress’, and her downtrodden cousin, the ‘fallen woman’.8

And yet, because the relation between adventure and gender is historical and normative (rather than essentialist) it is for that very reason subject to the possibility of negotiation and reorganisation. “Oh, she’s out of it - completely. They - the women, I mean - are out of it - should be out of it.”? [my emphasis] That’s Marlow, sounding less certain than Gwendolen about the position of women in modern adventure narratives in 1899. And since it was his aunt who got him the gig on the steamboat in the first place, we’ll perhaps forgive him his doubt. In other words, as women’s agency in capitalism became increasingly diversified and extended beyond the home, and, indeed, as the home itself became striated by productive logics and industrial and professional discourses, the bifurcated gendered and generic architecture of feminine domesticity vs masculine adventure found itself becoming deconstructed under the logic of work’s reorganisation, democratization and intensification.

To track the shifting and contested meanings of both the concept of adventure and its narrative conventions as they striate the modernist period is, then, to enquire into what Rita Felski describes as the gender of modernity:

Accounts of the modern age, whether academic or popular, typically achieve some kind of formal coherence by dramatizing and personifying historical processes; individual or collective human subjects are endowed with symbolic importance as

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8 Indeed, there is a whole other ghost economy of “adventuress” figures in relation to the adultery plot/novel, exemplified by characters such as Defoe’s Moll Flanders, Austen’s Lady Susan and Flaubert’s Emma Bovary, who pursue sexual relationships outside of the marriage contract and in contradiction with its logics of property and gender. This genre remained relatively minor in the English book market of the nineteenth century, perhaps because bourgeois distinction was so tightly alloyed to sexual respectability. On the continent, by contrast, the adultery novel flourished and proliferated multiple sub-genres. See Overton, Bill. The Novel of Female Adultery: Love and Gender in Continental European Fiction, 1830–1900 (Springer, 2016)

exemplary bearers of temporal meaning. Whether these subjects are presumed to be male or female has important consequences for the kind of narrative that unfolds.10

Felski’s seminal formulation reminds us of two important qualities of narrative in relation to historical meaning. First, that while narrative might (with some avant-garde exceptions) represent the actions and interactions of discrete individuals in time and space, it also has the capacity to render those individuals paradigmatic or exemplary of larger constituencies and collectives. (Lukács called this the affordance of typification, and he recognised in it literature’s special claim to represent historical change as such.) Second, Felski’s remarks reminds us that narrative is not a finite resource like grain or shoes, in that it doesn’t get passed from one owner to the next remaining essentially unchanged. Rather, the agent or “personification” driving a narrative will affect the kind of narrative that unfolds.

I rehearse these basic points of narratology to emphasise two crucial points moving forward. First, that while the modernist adventures analysed herein might often seem to represent the lonely desires and exiled longings of individual and in some respects socially marginalized agents, they also project a relation to the broader horizon of collective praxis and the formation of collective agency and labor. The cogency of that collective praxis and that agency is one of the features of aesthetic romance that what I will be tracking over the next three chapters. If it fails to congeal into anything as tidy as class consciousness or even, at times, group identity, then I hope readers will understand that such ambivalence reflects the successes and failures of collective praxis and the macro-tendencies of national economies as much as the hermeneutic limits of my own readings. In other words, in making a cultural bid for the shape of the as-yet-unwritten future, Bloomsbury anticipated and petitioned for structural changes in the relationship between subjects and their societies of which only some emerged into dominant social and economic praxis. This project, however, is as interested in tracking the difference between the emergent and the dominant, or the non-dominant

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10 Felski, Rita. The Gender of Modernity (Harvard University Press, 1995) p.1
emergent, as it is in those features of modernist adventure which seem to uncannily portend the workplaces and the social formations of our own more contemporary era.

At the same time as tracking the uneven development of a collective praxis, we will, to echo Felski, also be tracking the kinds of narrative that unfold when adventure is appropriated by female and/or queer subjects. That is, how does the frontier ideology of capitalism look different when it’s no longer dreamt up by men lighting out for unmapped territories thirsty for material accumulation, but rather by women and queer subjects seeking new forms of economic and sexual self-extension? How could aspects of femininity and sexual non-normativity be reimagined as codes of a new entrepreneurial praxis, one at odds with capitalism as usual?

At this juncture, some qualifications seem necessary to frame the queer component of this project as distinct from its feminist payload. If the adventures of Forster, Woolf and Bowen express what we might tentatively call queerness then this is in one sense related to the minoritarian question of their own sexual orientations and identities, all of which leaned at different times and to different degrees towards same-sex attraction. However, their sexual identities do not explain, much less exhaust, the far-reaching challenges their works issued to heteronormativity, nor to normativity in general. According to this argument, adventure provided one very particular set of languages for staging negative critiques of heteronormativity and positive recuperations of same-sex desire and alternative kinship formations beyond the heterosexual family. Adventure carried this symbolic and narrative affordance because, ironically, its late Victorian formulations already symptomatized an allergic reaction to the over-determinations of the bourgeois family, replacing it with intense forms of masculine homosocial bonding.¹¹ The sexual complexes of imperial romance were thus a paradigmatic example of what Eve Sedgwick (1985) has described as the triangulation

¹¹ This is perhaps one of the few staples of the genre in the modern period, famously exemplified by that short paragraph from Robinson Crusoe in which Defoe’s hero returns home, marries, has three children, and is off again on more adventures.
between masculinity, homoeroticism and misogyny. As Rider Haggard’s narrator put it at the beginning of *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885): “I am going to tell the strangest story that I remember, which may seem a queer thing to say, especially considering that there is no woman in it… not a petticoat in the whole history.”¹²

Virginia Woolf called such stories “purely masculine orgies of Men … alone with their Work”, a characteristically acerbic diagnosis from modernism’s queen of satire.¹³ But this project argues that Woolf’s ironic dismissal of adventure’s male sexual complexes was combined with a canny ambition to repopulate the orgy. That is, if adventure narratives provided a way to eroticize men’s work (without the interference of women) then maybe it could be rewritten to eroticize work for and between women, and figure woman-centred bonds outside the legitimating narratives of heteronormativity and patriarchy? This wager would turn not only on what kinds of (adventure) narratives women personified, but also what sorts of work they imagined for themselves through its storytelling protocols. After all, the mass entry of women into the labor market didn’t necessarily pose a threat to gender nor sexual (nor workplace) normativity. Yet, for those subjects suspicious of gen/sex norms – indeed, for subjects to whom normalization was felt as a form of violent subjectivization or repression – there was indeed what we might call a queer dialectic of transformation under the broader sign of vocational and economic transition.¹⁴ Adventure was a language for

¹⁴ In his seminal article “Capitalism and Gay Identity” John D’Emilio powerfully argues that the rise of homosexuality as a visible and liveable social formation was intimately connected to the rise of capitalism’s “free” labor system, which uprooted masses of people from traditional family units and placed them in novel living situations with non-familial members of the same sex. From this materialist perspective, then, it makes sense that moments of mass labour integration for either sex would lead to a rise in queer visibility. It also makes sense (for our purposes) that ‘work’ as a discursive site would take on queer dimensions and meanings, as it often does in this project. What this also suggests to me is that there is an opportunity for greater rapprochement between queer theory and first wave feminisms, a rapprochement that would allow us to draw out the queer components of the often unfashionable feminisms of 1900 – 1945. Historians such as Hobsbawm will of course remind us of the fact that what I am calling a queer dialectic of transformation may well remain a virtual possibility: “For while major changes, such as the massive entry of married women into the labour market might be expected to produce concomitant or consequential changes, they need not do so – as witness the USSR where (after the initial utopian-revolutionary aspirations of the 1920s had been abandoned) married women generally found themselves carrying a double load of old household responsibilities and new wage-earning responsibilities without any change in relations between the sexes or in the public or private spheres.” (313) No doubt this “double burden” will feel familiar to cultural historians of British gender relations in the same period.
placing this queer transformation into narrative, a way to smuggle sexual and more broadly social non-normativity into storytelling structures that could fly under the radar of state censorship and sexual prejudice.\textsuperscript{15} If “queer is difficult to entextualize as culture”, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998) have reminded us, then that only makes it all the more vital to read for the unlikely languages of its world-making, of which adventure is but one.\textsuperscript{16}

As readers may now have inferred, then, After Men echoes at least two other texts from gender and sexuality studies, even as it draws other critical resources from outside that disciplinary field. The first, Eve Sedgewick’s Between Men (1985), not only made it possible to think male sexual queerness and female gender abjection as co-constitutive; it also called for “analyses… of the relations between female-homosocial and male-homosocial structures”.\textsuperscript{17} I hope that in attending to the impaction of Victorian and modernist, man- and woman-centred adventure narratives and imaginaries of work, this project will add to the body of literature that has already heeded that call.\textsuperscript{18} What’s crucial here is less that woman-centred adventures were historically posterior to or “after” man-centred ones, so much as that female-homosocial structures went after, were pursuant of their male-homosocial counterparts, poaching and alchemizing their narrative fantasies for new social, sexual and economic ends.

Second, After Men echoes Halley and Parker’s edited collection, After Sex?, which seeks to explore the meanings of queer beyond the field of sexual desire. After Sex? brings to the fore what Michael Warner has described as queer theory’s “aggressive impulse of

\textsuperscript{15} As a highly mediated language for encoding queer desires, adventure thus allowed modernists to avoid the fate of cultural documents such as the Well of Loneliness. If we ask ourselves why Hall’s novel was placed under such intense legal scrutiny while Woolf’s Orlando, published in the same year, was not, one answer might be that Woolf’s recuperations of romance allowed her to bend gen/sex norms in ways that would have otherwise been socially outlawed. I am not making any particular value-claim about those two strategies of queer representation, but rather pointing to the difference that literary mediation makes in the production, circulation and consumption of narratives about sexuality and kinship.


\textsuperscript{17} Sedgwick, Eve. Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (Columbia University Press, 1985) p.18

\textsuperscript{18} In particular, After Men speaks to the modernist afterlives of Sharon Marcus’s Between Women, as intense bonds between women come to disrupt rather than bolster patriarchal social and property relations.
generalization”, its capacity to “[reject] a minoritizing logic of toleration of simple political-interest representation in favour of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal.”¹⁹ [my emphasis] It is precisely via this majoritarian, generalizing logic that queer theory has recently come into productive dialogue with Marxism, and in particular with debates about reification and totality. As Kevin Floyd (2009) has argued at length, the inaugural and ongoing work of both queer theory and Marxism aspire towards a totalizing logic (which is not to say a state or State of totality) in which their constitutive categories, whether class or sexuality, are described in connection with multiple other categories and spheres of experience.²⁰ Only connect! might define this logic of generalisation. It’s also a logic that came to define the aesthetic projects of writers such as Forster and Woolf, who sought to make far reaching connections between sexuality, class, work, property, gender and other spheres of the social.

Rather than understanding queerness from the perspective of erotics, then, After Men explores it primarily as a question of social formations and the material organisation of human relationships, kinship structures and workplace economies. Of course, these spheres (of desire and sociality) are intimately coupled, and if the characters of this dissertation pursue non-normative (or “bohemian”) ways of living and organizing their lives, their workplaces and their families, then such bohemian living often feels driven by closeted desires that cannot take flight in the sanctioned institutions of sexual and legal union, nor in the genres of heterosexual romance and the marriage plot. But there is more than compensation at stake in this shift from erotic to more broadly social modes storytelling. The necessity of disguising or annexing same-sex desire under the shelter of more loosely antinormative social formations can be read not only as a displacement but as an opportunity

Heather Love, amongst others, has alerted us to the risks of this generalizing impulse as queer becomes untethered from a gay/lesbian identity politics: “Before we get too excited about the expansive energies of queer, though, we have to ask ourselves whether queer actually becomes more effective as it surveys more territory.” See, Love, Heather. “You Can’t Take that Away from me”, in After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory. ed Janet Halley & Andrew Parker et al (Duke University Press, 2011) pp. 180-192
²⁰ Floyd, Kevin. The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism (University of Minnesota Press, 2009)
to transform the wider culture of heterosexuality and to reveal its pervasive constitution of the social, legal and economic world. In short, modernism’s aesthetic romances come to conjoin the question of who and how one loves with questions about how one works, resides, consumes, or fails to consume, how one perceives: how, in short, one develops “such and such relations to people”, as Woolf’s Lily Briscoe puts it at a crucial juncture in this dissertation. What finally emerges from the cumulative analysis of these relations is a new kind of subject, one that I hope will feel both familiar and estranging from our own post-Fordist standpoint in the ongoing history of kinship and capitalism.

I will shortly have more to say about how modernist adventure speaks or refuses to speak to our own moment of post-industry and sexual liberalization. But for now, I wish to take a historical step backwards in order to investigate the late Victorian adventure narratives to which all three authors in this dissertation were reacting, albeit in different ways.

Adventures of body and mind: From Geographical to Psychological Frontiers

To situate adventure romance in the wider context of capitalism, work, gender and sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century, let’s turn to Rider Haggard’s novel, *King Solomon’s Mines*, first published in 1885. Haggard’s neo-epic romance was an instant bestseller and is often considered to mark the genesis of the “Lost World” genre. It tells the story of a team of British adventurers lead by Alan Quartermain in search of the missing brother of another member of the group. Family reunion, however, like the scientific exploration or journalistic curiosity of later Lost World formulations, turns out to be a somewhat thinly disguised alibi

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21 Consider, as an example, the relationship between Margaret Schlegel’s intensely erotic but tragically foreshortened relationship with Ruth Wilcox, and Margaret’s habitation of Howards End, gifted to her by Ruth. On the one hand, the property might be considered Margaret’s symbolic compensation for Ruth’s unavailability as a sexual object. On the other, we might read the property and its renewed post-patriarchal relations as the social generalization or totalization of a logic of queer critique, from which even the heterosexual marriage plot is no longer immured.
for political and economic imperialism. The men’s quest leads them into an unexplored and mythical African landscape named Kukuanaland, where democratic regime change and resource extraction somewhat overtake the mission of fraternal rescue.\(^{22}\)

*King Solomon’s Mines* was published the year after the Berlin Conference, at which major European leaders had met to negotiate the division of the world’s scant remaining “non-occupied” land. The Berlin conference is widely seen as crystalizing a wider shift in capitalist imperialism that Lenin famously described as the moment in which “the world is completely divided up, so that in the future only redivision is possible, i.e., territories can only pass from one “owner” to another, instead of passing as ownerless territory to an “owner”.\(^{23}\) [Imperialism, p.82] Moreover, this geopolitical shift signals a fundamental change in accumulation cycles, which in Britain’s case pass from what Giovanni Arrighi (1995) terms material expansion to financialization, the export of surplus-money and financial services via large monopolies and banks rather than the smaller-scale exploitation of labor and natural resources that attended the entrepreneurial expansion and exportation of national models of industrial capital.\(^{24}\)

*Fin de siècle* romances were a way to petition for the continuance of that earlier form of industrial-era imperialism. Indeed, the Lost World genre is precisely a fantasy of capitalist

\(^{22}\) Nathan Hensley has cogently demonstrated how such stories actively manage the contradictions of a hegemonic liberal empire by splicing discourse onto two levels, with epic violence at level of plot and liberal rationalism at level of character dialogue. His reading of such stories as allegories of political contradiction, however, leaves open the question of how such texts are to be understood as staging an economic value-problem. See Hensley, Nathan, *Forms of Empire: The Poetics of Victorian Sovereignty* (Oxford University Press, 2016)


individualism, business entrepreneurship and geographical expansion outside of large state and bureaucratic structures. Free and risk-seeking agents in flight from bourgeois solidity and domestic stability, its heroes were, we might say, neo-Crusoes whose ambitions seem somewhat out of place in a new phase of monopoly capitalism. The Lost world genre, in other words, is a paradigmatic example of culture’s narrative capacity to provide symbolic solutions to real contradictions by re-enchanting the values of fading (“Lost”) modes of production for the purposes of popular entertainment and psychic compensation. This is Frederic Jameson’s famous argument in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), in which he reads a split between adventure’s plots of extensive action and modernism’s styles of intensive introspection, both of which, for him, are responses to crises in the experience of work under advanced capitalist rationalization. In order to understand the more specific psychodynamics of this late imperial fantasy, however, let us take a closer look at what Woolf described as the purely masculine orgy of adventure.

At the climax of *King Solomon’s Mines*, Quartermain and his team find themselves trapped in a subterraneous cave after being tricked by their nemesis, Gogol, the novel’s figure for treacherous colonial femininity. The treasure cave would soon become a staple trope of the Lost World genre, and was further popularized by writers such as Stevenson and Doyle before coming to animate post-Victorian adventure franchises from *Indiana Jones* to *Tomb Raider*. (Virginia Woolf had more than half an eye on it when she dubbed her characters “beautiful caves”, from which could be mined endless literary resources). The treasure cave is a symbolic solution highly attuned to late industrial crises of land and labor, and a symptom of the diminishing returns from both these sources of high bourgeois accumulation. In a seminal feminist critique of imperial romance, Anne McClintock has described Haggard’s

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25 Nicholas Daly has written persuasively of *fin de siècle* romance as fantasy of anti-monopoly, animated by small, proto-professional teams of men. See Daly, Nicholas. Modernism, Romance and the fin de siècle (Cambridge University Press, 1999)


27 “I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters: I think that gives exactly what I want; humanity, humour, depth. The idea is that the caves shall connect, and each comes to daylight at the present moment.” Woolf, Virginia. A *Writer’s Diary*. ed Leonard Woolf (Harcourt, 2003) p.59
caves as examples of commodity fetishism, as “the disavowal of the origins of money in labour. Finding treasure,” she argues, “implies that gold and diamonds are there simply to be discovered, thereby denying the work of digging them out of the earth and thus the contested right to ownership.”

Building on McClintock’s insights, we can say yet more precisely that the treasure cave stages the fetish of “found” value as both a solution and a further problem. Precisely because it conjures value without labor, the treasure’s appropriation cannot be morally distinguished from theft, and thus, standing before the “glimmering gems”, Quartermain and his men feel “as though” – a vital qualification – they are “conspirators about to commit a crime, instead of being, as we thought, the most fortunate men on earth.”

In order to solve this second-order contradiction between criminality and fortune, ownership and theft, the diamonds will need to be worked for, even as the work itself is vigorously distinguished from the toil and alienation of industrial and bureaucratic labor. In this sense, by trapping the men inside the cave, Gogol really does them a service, since she donates to them the opportunity to work for what is (already) theirs, and thus to morally justify it.

But this work is also more than a post facto moral justification for accumulation. It has a positive content, a fantasy-value, a utopian quotient. Let us temporarily join Quartermain in the treasure cave:

“Great heavens!” said Good, starting up, “I never thought of that. It can’t come through the stone door, for it’s air-tight, if ever a door was. It must come from somewhere. If there were no current of air in the place we should have been stifled or poisoned when we first came in. Let us have a look.”

It was wonderful what a change this mere spark of hope wrought in us. In a moment we were all three groping about on our hands and knees, feeling for the

28 McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, 2013) p.257

29 Indeed, this moment of discovery is written precisely as the discursive equivocation inherent to a value problem, coded not only as found discovery but also as passive consumption and aristocratic inheritance. Such moments of discursive equivocation are endemic to the climaxes of imperial plots of this period, reflecting an economic situation in which value was in crisis and proliferating and competing theories were arising about how best to solve that crisis.

30 This is a similar split narrative structure that Franco Moretti reads between Crusoe’s work on his island and the riches than eventually accrue from his West Indian plantations. See Moretti, *The Bourgeois*. ch. 1
slightest indication of a draught. Presently my ardour received a check. I put my hand on something cold. It was dead Foulata’s face.

For an hour or more we went on feeling about, till at last Sir Henry and I gave it up in despair, having been considerably hurt by constantly knocking our heads against tusks, chests, and the sides of the chamber. But Good still persevered, saying, with an approach to cheerfulness, that it was better than doing nothing. (211)

This scene, like so many others like it, can be read as a symbolic transformation of the reality of industrial extraction zones into the utopian key of romance. As McClintock points out, the men’s activity is not labor in the capitalist sense of alienated production for the purposes of rendering surplus-value for another. But it is work – self-motivated, unmanaged, unmechanized and even non-instrumentalized activity that, despite its initial futility, is still preferable to the deadly decadence of eating and drinking which opens the passage, and the “doing nothing” with which closes it. As Woolf suggested, there is a crude kind of homoerotics to this work, as the men grope about on all fours bumping heads. If women are included in this erotics then it is only to be more thoroughly excluded as quite literally dead flesh – a logic of abjection that runs through all Haggard’s work. On the other hand, the female body returns in the form of what McClintock has dubbed the “mine-womb”, a figure for female engulfment from which the men are also attempting to escape. By this narrative logic, the female domestic ideologies of social and biological reproduction are made symbolically redundant at precisely the same time as masculine productivity and muscular heroism are promoted.  

As such, the treasure-cave chronotope is a dense site of both material and symbolic extraction, in which the anxieties of late industrial society undergo alchemic transformation. 

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31 This fantasy of work partakes of a wider nineteenth century cultural discourse in which, as Douglas Mao has reminded us, to be “manly” is to be productive, while to be womanly is to be reproductive. Mao also reminds us that the modernist moment is precisely that in which such a dichotomy comes into crisis, as women become recognised as economic subjects of work and productivity. See Mao, Douglas. *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 85-9

For a queer reading of male homosocial desire in imperial romance, focussing on its temporalities of fore-pleasure as opposed to genitally teleological end-pleasure, see Holden & Ruppel, *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003)

32 Of course, what is also cyclically elided by the men’s redemptive work is the racialized body of the colonial laborer as such, as the professional/managerial class come to actually do the labor of extraction. From this perspective, such documents are paradigmatic sites of liberal, white guilt and colonial erasure.
But there is a caveat to be added here, one that will allow us to pivot our account towards the emerging modernist imagination. For if the cave is, on the one hand, a site for redeeming the industrious masculine body from the routinization and standardization of industrial labor, then it is also a site of fantasy for a different regime of labor – the cognitive brain-work of professionalism and expertise. After all, this whole passage is motivated in the first instance less by action or muscles than by an “idea”, but an idea of a particular kind, since its content is closer to sensation than to cognition: the redemptive draught of perfectly fresh air that not only allows the men to breath, but puts them to work. Such an embodied idea is, I think, what R.L. Stevenson called “practical intelligence”, a form of thinking tightly alloyed to romance, and which he contrasted to “the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience” characteristic of the psychologized states of Jamesian realism.\(^\text{33}\) Although Nathan Hensley (2016) has recently been keen to distinguish romance’s “relentlessly physicalizing aesthetic” from “the embodied or arational processing that goes by the name of ‘affect’” (200) there is indeed a sense in which the narrative climaxes of the adventure quest exhibit forms of affective processing and even collective cognition (note the increasingly pluralized pronouns encoding a kind of shared brain-power).

We have, in short, arrived at a different and competing thesis about the relationship between romance and capitalism, one exemplified most persuasively, perhaps, by the work of David Trotter. In *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (2001), Trotter argues that adventure narratives and early modernist art-novels shared the ambition of reenchanting the work of technocratic elites via what he calls a form of ‘postliberal paranoia’. When cognitive ability is no longer recognized as a property of a special individuals but is increasingly understood in the

\(^{33}\) Stevenson, R L, “A Gossip on Romance”, Longman's magazine, 1882-1905; London Vol. 1, Iss. 1, (Nov 1882) p.70 Stevenson certainly wasn’t alone in pitting romance’s emphasis on “the problems of the body” against US realism and French naturalism. If the first nemesis represented overcivilized interiority, then the second stood for a sordid concern with the sexual body and the neurosis of hyper-conscious stylization. Andrew Lang spoke on behalf of the romancers when he claimed that good romance writing was written in the “white heat” of instinct, thus restaging at the level of composition the primitivism extolled at the level of plot. Lang, Andrew. “Realism and Romance.” Contemporary Review (London, England) 52 (1887) p. 692
standardized terms of qualifications, training and IQ metrics, highly skilled professional
subjects (and ‘gifted’ professional authors) develop paranoid reaction formations in which
they are the only ones who can see (or smell, or hear, or otherwise mysteriously sense) the
truth of romance’s mysteries, and thereby resolve the crises of its plots. For Trotter, adventure
narratives are a way to reenchant expertise in the era of hyper-professionalization and mass-
bureaucratization, a way to render cognitive ability and symbolic capital as a “veritable
magical power”. (7)

One can thus see how Quartermain’s escape from the treasure cave might be
redescribed as a form of paranoid detective work, the male body’s sensorium coming to enact
almost-magical forms of recognition and pattern-formation. (How was it, exactly, that sensing
the draught led to the tumbling escape from the cave with the diamonds? To ask the question
is itself to be on the wrong side of paranoid asymmetry and the suspension of disbelief.) The
possibility of such interpretive redescription might sound like an equivocation or hesitation to
pin down a determinate material context for literary historicization. Are romances industrial
fantasies, or professional ones? Are their protagonists brain heroes or body heroes? And is
their style a “relentlessly physicalizing aesthetic” or a voyage of paranoid interiority? I would
suggest that what needs to be historicized here is not one or other of these hermeneutic poles
but the contradiction itself, which points to the stylistic paradoxes of fiction in a mixed and
shifting economy of industrial and professional, manual and mental labor power.34

This narrative tension between exteriority and interiority displays even more torsion,
moreover, if we turn to its gendered dimensions. For the abjected women of imperial romance
often appear as dangerously powerful brain-workers. They figure the anxious possibility that
the traditional zone of feminine and domestic ‘interiority’ might take flight towards a new

34 This ambiguity is condensed in many of the identities of late Victorian romance heroes, who are professional
brain workers (academics, journalists) who when abroad become primitivist icons of strength and industriousness.
See, Doyle, _The Lost World_ for a paradigmatic example of this fantasy. The transition from industrial/extractive
romance to more professionally oriented adventure narratives can also be tracked via the shift from adventure to
espionage/detection, exemplified in novels by Kipling, Doyle and Childers.
economic frontier, thus becoming embodied, to echo Stevenson, as a form of dangerously practical intelligence.

Figures such as Gogol from *King Solomon’s Mines* and Ayesha from *She* (1886) pose a threat to patriarchal power either because they possess knowledge which the male heroes need to extract before they can proceed, or, more hyperbolically still, because they can literally make stuff happen (and thus drive plots) with their mind. Readers of Haggard’s *She* (one of Bowen’s favorite childhood reads, as we’ll discover) will recall that Ayesha’s power was characterized as an “empire of the imagination” – a phrase which might also describe Bloomsbury’s own aesthetic romances.35 Ayesha was able to use feminine capacities of thought, culture and language (rather than masculine muscles and swords) to control the actions of her subjects. While she is to some extent a figure for non-white and occult female power, the narrative threat she poses is not only in her otherness to but in her similarity with white and even British womanhood. Steeped in classical culture – indeed, quite literally embodying ancient civilization – and with a thirst for sovereign power over the British Isles, Ayesha seems to represent the female imagination’s threat to British domestic life, though one that appears as dangerously undomesticated.

Yet, subversive as it might be, Ayesha’s brain-power must be supplemented by another quality which saps or relativizes its resourcefulness. For she is also a purveyor and regulator of sexuality and sexual relationships. Her unspeakable “beauty” transfixes men’s desire, rendering them helpless in her presence and lending her a dangerous degree of social and sexual agency. Brains alone are not enough to defeat the patriarchy of male heroes, and so the “empire of the imagination” must be bolstered by an economy of the flesh, one in which Ayesha is finally condemned to flames. As with Haggard’s male heroes, then, who hover somewhere indeterminately between industrial and professional wish-fulfilments, his

35 Steven Arata has suggested that powerful cultural figures such as Ayesha represent male anxieties about female competition in the literary marketplace that romance authors were trying to masculinize in the wake of George Eliot’s death. See Arata, Stephen. *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian fin de Siècle: Identity and Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.96
female nemeses are also equivocal and anxiety-laden images of labor-power that straddle two overlapping economic imaginaries. In the first, their “imagination”, their cultural knowledge, their linguistic spells, are the sources of their power and their productivity; in the second, their sexuality and their body. As we move forward into modernism and outwards into extra-literary arguments and debates about women’s labor power at the turn of the century, we shall see just how much turns on this distinction. Indeed, it could be said that modernism’s woman-centered aesthetic romances work to peel away sexual and affective service work for men from the valuable core of imaginative and creative activity that would test the limits of patriarchy and heteronormativity as it becomes inscribed in capitalist economies.

Even in pre-modernist romances, then, female characters embodied what Martin Hipsky (2011) has called a “romance of interiority”, a feature which he sees connecting late Victorian woman-authored adventure tales and their modernist art-novel counterparts. But of course, neither female romances nor modernist art-novels by women had a monopoly on the interiorization of adventure. For a number of male modernists, too, the final frontier of the quest was to be located in what Woolf called “the dark places of psychology”. But it’s important to appreciate that interiority in adventure plots does not always look like enchanted brain work. In fact, many of our accounts of modernist era adventure would agree that the interiorization of the quest is a sign of decadence and decay, anti-epic inactivity and anti-productive unemployment. In a persuasive reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, Michael Sayeau (2006) has argued that the sluggish, looping temporality of Conrad’s plot and the interiorizing, self-reflexive consciousness of his protagonist reflects the subjective experience of unemployment. “Rather than labor”, Sayeau argues, what Marlow finds at the Central Station is a frantic sort of waiting, talk instead of action, and intrigue in

36 Unlike my account, Hipsky’s interiority is more like a flight into transcendence than a flight into renovated work. As he puts it, both romancers and modernists came together in their ambition to “loft us, however fleetingly or intermittently, into a refashioned symbolic order that would bridge us across the pain of the historical Real.” (Xxi)
place of commerce.”37 As he suggests at the end of his essay, such a logic might be extended
to other seminal modernist texts in which under- or unemployment seems to formally dovetail
with or take shape through an internalized quest structure. Sayeau’s reading prompts us to
reread the key texts of "high modernism" specifically in light of unemployment.
Think, for in- stance, of Joyce's probing of internal chatter in Ulysses, a novel which
stages an inconclusive collision between a semi-employed adman and an
overqualified school teacher, or Woolf's evocation of both the surging streams of
consciousness and the less-than-voluntary under-employment of her female
characters. (358)

Sayeau’s remarks are suggestive, and we need only think of adventure narratives by Graham
Greene or Evelyn Waugh to see how they might be extended to a whole corpus of modernism
in which vocational crises find form in the psychologization of the quest.38 What I think lacks
distinction in Sayeau’s otherwise helpful account, however, are the gendered dimensions of
this thesis, which pertain, in my view, to a specifically man-oriented, long-nineteenth century
enchantment-disenchantment arc pertaining to crises of male unemployment as well as to the

Indeed, accounts of late imperial romance such as those by Daly, Trotter, Sayeau, and
indeed Jameson, are all narrated against more or less explicitly male histories of employment
and professionalization, and take shape against contradictions that aren’t straightforwardly
generalizable to women. As Magali Larson has argued at length, professional ideology was
by the end the nineteenth century already at war with professional praxis. As an ideology

37 Sayeau, Michael. “Work, Unemployment, and the Exhaustion of Fiction in Heart of Darkness”, in NOVEL: A
Forum on Fiction, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Summer, 2006), pp. 347
38 Patrick Bratlinger is one of several critics to have noted the correlation between the spluttering of the imperial
engines and the rise of psychology and spiritualism as a final frontier of narrative. See Rule of Darkness, p.250-
253
See also Paul Fussel’s illuminating account of Greene’s Journey Without Maps as a quest into memory and the
See also White, Andrea. Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition (Cambridge University Press, 1993) “Like
many Victorians before him, Conrad admired man’s capacity to dream, to reach, but he had the modernist’s double
vision which demanded that he applaud the desire but condemn its disastrous consequences, both at once. And as
the maps filled up, the dreams gave way to facts, often unpalatable ones, and adventure turned inward.” (6)
Of course, idleness need not always be understood as anxiety in the face of work’s absence, but may well be
reconceived as a form of resistance to the increasingly compulsory imperatives of capitalist discipline and colonial
labor regimes. See Dobbins, Gregory. Lazy Idle Schemers: Irish Modernism and the Cultural Politics of Idleness
(Field Day Publications, 2000)
rooted in the values of liberal individualism, workplace autonomy and financial disinterestedness, professions (understood in the classical sense of church, law and medicine) were both expanding to include new spheres of social labor as well as being impinged upon by commercial imperatives and bureaucratic frameworks.\footnote{As Talcott Parsons put it in 1939: “The fact that professions have reached a uniquely high level of development in the same society which is also characterized by a business economy, suggests that the contrast between business and professions, which has been mainly stated in terms of the problem of self-interest, is not the whole story.” (207) Quoted in Trotter, \textit{Paranoid Modernism}. p. 128.} This social torsion between professional ideology and professional praxis led to all kinds of reaction formations, of which adventure was just one. Adventure fiction and its imperial arena provided what we might describe as a fantasy-patch for a whole class of professionally oriented men who felt themselves to be at the far end of vocational enchantment, facing what they felt was the prospect not only of British imperial decline but that of a fully rationalized, commercialized world of work.\footnote{See Knapp, James, F. \textit{Literary Modernism and the Transformation of Work} (Northwestern University Press, 1998) Pound’s will-to-style and Eliot’s significant form were, according to Knapp, other kinds of reaction against what they saw as the threat of fully rationalized production, including cultural production.}

This social and literary history has been rehearsed and debated at length, and my intention here is not to reproduce it but rather to complicate its assumptions by asking what happens when we introduce gender and sexual difference as variables in our analysis. For it will be immediately obvious – even if it seems irrelevant to many commentators – that we get a very different picture of both the timelines and the social dynamics of the professions and their associated fictions if we introduce women into the historical equation. Women not only entered the professions in large numbers \textit{after men}, they were also situated very differently (and in certain respects, \textit{more} favorably) in relation to professional ideals of individualism, autonomy and disinterestedness. As Francesca Sawaya (2011) has argued in a US context that is largely apposite to Britain, femininity and the domestic sphere were at the turn of twentieth century represented as both professionalism’s outside as well as one of its key models. Like professionals, or at least in confluence with their ideological self-image, the household was...
constructed as a space of social good and free individuality, beyond market calculations and outside regimes of standardization. Domestic ideologies, Sawaya argues, thus constitute a kind of supplementary logic at the heart of professional discourses, a constitutively absent center that women writers and professionals could make good on by insisting that domestic training was already proto-professional training, if not proto-professional work.

If we turn out attention back to Britain, we can see this discursive logic playing out in debates and fictions about women’s work at the turn of the century. In Britain, moreover, this discursive context inevitably had an imperial dimension. Arguments about women’s economic agency often took shape against broader questions about Britain’s destiny as a national vs imperial power. This discursive and material context was one of the reasons why, as late as the 1930s, Virginia Woolf was able to cogently argue that Britain’s role as a late imperial war machine had everything to do with women’s professional status and identity. The trenchant connections between war, capitalism and gender that she makes in *Three Guineas* (1938) are often read as forms of remarkably intersectional analysis. But when set against the backdrop of earlier suffrage debates about work for an expanding female middleclass constituency, Woolf’s connections appear as part of a wider historical problematic that can also shed some contextual light on the particular geo-vocational logic underpinning the argument of this dissertation: the repatriation of adventure narrative to a national and feminized frame of meaning.

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41 It was highly ironic and somewhat fantastical that the domestic sphere was being held up as a depository of the values of classical or liberal professionalism at the same moment that it was becoming newly subjected to Taylorist management principles. As Judy Giles summarizes, “The rhetoric of scientific management and industrial rationalization advocated by Taylorism and Fordism at the start of the twentieth century was quickly adapted to discussing women’s work within the home. ‘National efficiency’ demanded that the so-called private sphere of motherhood and housework be reconstructed as vital to the survival of the nation; as vital as advances in war technology or industrial production. In the name of efficiency, ‘experts’ and professionals were called upon to extend the scientific and rational principles inherent in the forces of modernization to housework, childcare, sexual relations, and nutrition.” Giles, Judy. “Good Housekeeping: Professionalizing the Housewife, 1920 – 1950”, in Cowman, Krista & Jackson, Louise, A. Women and Work Culture: Britain c.1850-1950. (Ashgate Publishers, 2005) p.73
Women and Labor: Workplace debates at the turn of the century

Because this dissertation tracks the repatriation of adventure discourse to a national frame of reference, it’s important to place its cultural intervention within wider social and economic debates about the nature of Britain’s national and imperial destiny at the turn of the twentieth century, and the relationship of that destiny to narratives about work, gender and sexuality. Returning to the macroeconomic frame supplied by Arrighi, we can see how the crisis in material expansion was accompanied by arguments for new kinds of national value-production and economic growth. One of the best known of these accounts is *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), by the liberal antiimperialist, J.A. Hobson. Hobson argued that imperial expansion could only lead to diminishing returns because once foreign markets had been saturated and “basic” needs fulfilled, there would be nowhere else for export markets to colonize. The widely discussed problem of over-production at home was, for Hobson, a symptom of bloated imperial markets abroad. Hobson thus advocated for the intensification of both national production and consumption as a way to upend the necessity of industrial imperialism.

What’s interesting about this argument for our purposes is the difference that Hobson locates in home markets, which, unlike colonial ones, are non-saturable because the needs of the domestic consumer are non-finite. In other words, the difference between imperial and domestic markets for Hobson is, in the final analysis, an anthropological one. Hobson falls back on climatological theories of nativity to suggest that the non-white subject will never develop the productive nor the consumerist capacities of the cultivated Westerner. Only home markets (and by implication, white producers and consumers) can inspire the “higher kinds of industry” that will fuel capitalist growth and consumer demand in perpetuity.⁴²

Hobson’s ideas about imperial shrinkage, national prosperity and racial identity stand at a complex crossroads in economic thought, exemplifying the shift from labor theories of value to ideas premised on supply, demand and utility. Central to such a shift is the constitutive role played by gender relations in a nascently consumerist economy. Feminist scholarship of both the first and second waves has demonstrated how an infinitely consuming national populace (Hobson’s alternative to imperial expansion) was persistently, if unevenly, projected onto a feminized body politic. Women (and particularly white women) often figured in the economic and cultural thought of the late imperial period as the all-consuming economic subjects inhabiting semi-public spaces such as the high street and the department store. As Rita Felski has explained, “if the flaneur was a masculine symbol of freedom of movement within the public spaces of the city, the department store, described by Benjamin as the flaneur’s last haunt, gave women a space in which they could wonder and observe in a similar manner.”

As Felski also observes, such freedom was by no means unequivocal, since women’s wondering forms of observation were so often purported to lack the aesthetic disinterestedness of their Baudelairian male counterparts, thus interpolating them as pre-rational, polymorphously-desiring subjects.

One can see these stereotypes and anxieties playing out in so-called “new woman” novels at the turn of the century. As Rachael Bowlby (2009) demonstrates in *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola*, literary representations of the female shopper responsible for the beautification of sexual self and family home were central to the production of consumption as a “feminine leisure activity”, one which routed women in the sexual and domestic services of the home. Bowlby reminds us how “the making of willing consumers readily fitted into the available ideological paradigm of a seduction of women by

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44 There has been some important scholarship attempting to recuperate a figure of woman-centered flânerie, most notably Deborah Parson’s *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (OUP Oxford, 2 Mar 2000) What Parsons reads as “a fusion of empirical and imaginative perspectives” (7), an ambition to weld the imaginative to the real, is apposite to my own account of the female/queer imagination entering discourses of work and productivity.
men, in which women would be addressed as yielding objects to the powerful male subject forming, and informing them of, their desires.” (11) Given that consumption was so often seen to objectify and control rather than empower women, many new woman writers, and especially those with a feminist worldview, would turn away from consumption and towards labor as a dominant model of female agency.

As Regenia Gagnier (2000) has explored at length, first wave feminists of all stripes often rejected narratives of consumption in favor of those which emphasized women’s capacity for work and productivity beyond their traditional sphere in the home.46 This productivist narrative is perhaps one of the features which separates the rise of suffragism and early twentieth century feminism from the disparate feminist literatures of the fin de siècle. The concern with labor as the new locus of female empowerment found superlative form in Olive Schreiner’s manifesto, Women and Labour (1911), an oft-purported ‘bible’ of the feminist movement, which argued that bourgeois women had been reduced to “sex-parasites” entirely dependent on the work of others, and which called for women’s “share of honoured and socially useful human toil,”47. But the turn from consumption to production was by no means an unproblematic one, as one can perhaps hear in Schreiner’s call for an honoured share of human toil. Her clarion call for labor marks up a contradiction that was increasingly coming to haunt women’s claims to vocational emancipation. As Morag Shiach (2004) has observed, labor was being increasingly understood as “oppressive, intense and deadening” at the same time and often in the same mouths as those for whom it was becoming a language for expressing women’s selfhood, agency and desire.48 The question of work for women then, soon became a question not just about seizing the means of production, but the very meanings of production. It became about redefining the relationship between gender, sexuality and work, and in turn resituating those arguments within a national or ‘domestic’ frame.

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47 Shreiner, Olive. Women and Labour (Stokes Company, New York, 1911), p. 73
Arguments about women’s workplace enfranchisement were, like those about under and over-consumption, integral to debates about Britain’s destiny as a national vs imperial power. It was no coincidence that several of the leading anti-suffrage campaigners, such as Lords Cromer and Curzon, returned from senior roles in imperial governance in order to lead the fight against the vote and women’s broader vocational and political enfranchisement. Women’s expanding agency in public and economic life was seen by this imperial cadre as a direct threat to colonial government because it upturned the sexual equanimity of the nation. “The German man is manly, and the German woman is womanly,” pleaded Lord Cromer in 1910, “can we hope to compete with such a nation as this if we war against nature, and endeavor to invert the natural role of the sexes?”

Moreover, it wasn’t only men for whom women’s entry into workplaces constituted both a war against nature and a self-imposed blow for Britain’s imperial power. As Julia Bush has explained in an excellent article on the subject, women of the so-called Forward Movement made up a significant portion of the anti-suffrage campaign, advancing arguments not dissimilar to its senior male representatives.

In her famous anti-suffrage speech at the Albert Hall in 1912, the anti-suffrage campaigner, Violet Markham, argued that men and women were of fundamentally different natures, and for that reason had different relationships to the specialised functions of state and economy:

In the first place we are here to affirm that woman’s citizenship is as great and as real as that of any man, that her service is as vitally necessary to the State. But unlike our Suffragist friends, we do not fly in the face of hard facts and natural law. We believe that men and women are different – not similar – beings, with talents that are complementary, not identical, and that they therefore ought to have different shares in the management of the State, that they severally compose. We do not depreciate by one jot or tittle women’s work and mission. We are concerned to find proper channels of expression for that work. We seek a fruitful diversity of political function, not a stultifying uniformity.

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49 Quoted in Harrison, Brian. *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women’s Suffrage in Britain* (Routledge, 2013) p.34
In this ‘equal but different’ argument (one that may still sound familiar today) women’s labor-power was to be premised on and extended from their natural capacity for biological and social reproduction. As Bush puts it, “The social welfare work of education, sanitary reform, maternity care, and support for the poor and the elderly was regarded as a relatively ‘non-political’ extension of the familial duties to which every woman was naturally suited.” (433) In conservative arguments such as these, women’s labor is compatible with an expanding imperial state via the work of overseeing that state’s own biological and social reproduction at home. Their work is ‘domestic’ in the national sense because it is premised on their domestic skills in the household sense, the two spheres of action becoming conflated in the emerging figure of the household economy.51

This argument represents one set of conclusions drawn from women’s historical role in social reproduction, but it was by no means the only one. Gender essentialism did not necessarily flow into political imperialism nor sexual conservativism. Essentialism was also used as a strategic justification narrative for expanding, rather than circumscribing, women’s vocational and professional jurisdiction. Indeed, this was precisely the argument made by Schreiner’s *Women and Labour*: women’s social and biological reproductive powers were not so much the model upon which wider forms of gendered work should be built, as the ultimate qualification licensing women to enter any and all professions. Because women performed the most difficult and important work of all – making men – Schreiner argued, how could they not be capable of becoming doctors, lawyers or judges, which were, by the logic of this argument, comparatively more trivial social functions? Delivered with characteristic rhetorical flair and polemic force, Schreiner’s argument rescued the category of “woman” from being enclosed within prescribed social and biological functions and economic services. But it was still by no means an unproblematic account of women’s selfhood, especially

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51 See also Holton, Sandra Stanley. *Feminism and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900-1918* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)
because it did nothing to dispel the myth that whatever her potential might be, her essence was to be located in childbearing and family caring. Moreover, like most – though not all – feminists of the period, Schreiner was at pains to argue that unleashing women’s full laboring potential would not corrode but elevate and dignify the marriage contract, and make sexual union into a more sacred bond between free and consenting individuals. In general, then, essentialist arguments, no matter how strategic, did not allow for a queer interrogation of heterosexual womanhood.\textsuperscript{52} That interrogation would come from a different quarter, one more suspicious of both women’s role in biological reproduction and the heterosexual household.

It was here, in critiquing heterofemine models of labor power, that deliberative arguments about women’s work needed to be supercharged with some narrative power drawn from outside existing models of female labor and sexual union. It was at this juncture, I am arguing, that adventure became an unlikely discursive ally for queer women and men seeking to wrest female labor power away from models premised on biological and domestic reproduction.\textsuperscript{53} Imperial adventure was, as we have seen, already about denigrating and abjecting heterosexual, domestic ideology, albeit to replace it with a violent fantasy of masculine work and man-centered sexuality. Ironically, then, Forster’s queer misogyny and Woolf’s queer feminism dovetail with patriarchal and imperial worldviews like Haggard’s at least in so far as all three of them developed reaction formations (such as adventure) against what Woolf called The Angel in the House, the ideal (and goad) of nineteenth century

\textsuperscript{52} There were other feminist groups which did challenge heterosexual monogamy in favor of concepts like “free love”, including the intellectual circle associated with \textit{The Freewoman} newspaper, amongst whom were Dora Marsden and Rebecca West. Their critique was often premised more along the rationalist line of feminism running from Mary Wollstonecraft and J.S. Mill and insisted on human equality rather than gender difference as the foundation of feminist transformation. See Clarke, Bruce. \textit{Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism, Science} (University of Michigan Press, 1996)

\textsuperscript{53} For sure, it wasn’t only modernists who drew on the language of adventure to narrate women’s vocational and political aspirations. Suffragette fictions such as Constance Maud’s \textit{No Surrender} and militant autobiographies such as the Pankhurts’ portrayed political protest as an adventure romance, often comparing their efforts to nineteenth century “social explorers” such as William Booth and his Salvation Army. See Nelson, Carolyn Christensen. Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England (Broadview Press, 2004) For examples of munitionette fictions in the style of adventure, see Smith, Angela K. “All Quiet on the Woolwich Front? Literary and Cultural Constructions of Women Munitions Workers in the First World War” In both these cases, however, adventure is being appropriated to masculinize women’s agency, whereas modernists were seeking to appropriate adventure for newly feminized ends.

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domestic femininity. Adventure could be a modernist ally against heteronormative womanhood, even as it was a nemesis to other kinds of modernist, feminist and queer aspiration. Its tropes and rhetorics (sufficiently remodeled) provided Bloomsbury with a working language for narrating new forms of vocational power, power that was modelled on their own cultural labor as artists and intellectuals but which was seeking to expand its jurisdiction beyond the sphere of the aesthetic understood in the particularizing terms of art-practice and art-objects. Indeed, it might be said that adventure was a way for Bloomsbury to displace the paradigmatic figure of domestic reproduction (the Victorian housewife) with a modern subject whose remit was not just the household but social relations at large – *kinship*, understood in the broadest sense of familial and sexual association and its material modes of habitation.

This is where my thesis comes closest to dovetailing with the work of another modernist scholar to whom I am indebted, and therefore from whose work I wish to draw some contrast. In *Expert modernists, matricide, and modern culture*, Lois Cucullu has argued that Forster, Joyce and Woolf were primary theorists and proponents of new forms of female and queer social power that “gained in cultural standing by denigrating and replacing the moral and social authority of ‘woman’, as defined by Victorian society, with their own expert narratives more synchronous with a mobile and worldly metropolitan aggregate.”54 Cucullu argues that modernist narratives oversaw (and were at the vanguard of) a transition from “Protestant, productionist, rational, and procreative” ideas of selfhood to those that were “secular, consumerist, desiring, and sexual”. (9) By this account, modernist innovations such as the aestheticization of consciousness and the elevation of literary style are just ways to extend jurisdiction over new social fields, whether they be the psychological life of subjects or the reproduction of bourgeois taste. Modernist form, like domestic charm, is essentially an “ideological con” that screens a bid for social power and cultural expertise.

But if we introduce adventure into its interpretive framework then Cucullu’s account of modernism’s vocational ideology becomes complexified to say the least. As a language of enchanted work, adventure marks the site where productivist values and even workplace utopias retain their hold over regimes centered on consumption, even as production is indeed wrested away from Protestant and industrial ethics of work. As a language for re-enchanting expertise, the adventure component of Bloomsbury modernism carries not just the con of ideological mystification but also the potential for critiquing expert and professional subjectivity, and therefore transforming it into something qualitatively new. And finally, as a language for critiquing heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies and institutions such as the couple-form, marriage and property ownership, adventure also harbors the potential for installing new kinds of social and familial formations in their wake. Indeed, on reading Expert Modernists, one is left unsure whether modernists venturing into new social and sexual territory were engaging in anything besides abstract games of Bourdieusian power-relations. Their works thus become surprisingly straightforward documents of political lobbying on behalf of a transparent identity politics. I think it’s important to remember that if challenges to Victorian ideology resulted in new forms of governance and new kinds of capitalism – in the reproduction of the totality of the social habitus, in Bourdieu’s terms – then they weren’t futile challenges for all that, though they may well have been contradictory ones.

Adventure is perhaps the discursive site where that contradiction comes most clearly into view, where social and cultural ambition struggles to distinguish itself from classed and racialized forms of domination and economic exploitation. Winnifred Holtby, who wrote the first book-length monograph on Virginia Woolf, captured this site of contradiction iconically:

When [Woolf] wrote of women, she wrote of a generation as adventurous in its exploration of experience as the Elizabethan men had been in their exploration of the globe. The women whom Mrs. Woolf knew were exploring the professional world, the political world, the world of business, discovering that they themselves had legs as well as wombs, brains as well as nerves, reason as well as sensibility; their Americas lay within themselves, and altered the map as profoundly as any added by
Cabot or Columbus. Like Raleigh, they founded their new colonies; like Drake, they combined national service with privateering.\textsuperscript{55}

Holtby’s gloss on Woolfian adventure as an imaginary relation to real social relations (to the “women whom Mrs. Woolf knew”) captures brilliantly the way that it became a discursive site for aggressively expanding the content and the jurisdiction of women’s labor power. At the same time, it also gestures towards many of the cultural and material contradictions that I will be untangling over the next three chapters. Her reading of modern female (and no doubt middleclass) adventure emphasizes a geopolitical shift from imperial heroism and extensive accumulation to psychological and embodied frontiers of agency and value-production. But adventure’s mediatory capacity in this regard is by no means figured as the unproblematic accumulation of social and economic power (à la Cucullu). In seeking new kinds of vocational agency, Woolf’s adventurers become analogous with imperial megalomaniacs and colonial warmongers. Yet in exploring the frontiers of their own bodies and psyches, they also risked exercising forms of self-domination and self-colonization (“their Americas lay within themselves”). Woolf and her colleagues were well aware of these risks, and as such one might say of their ambivalent relationship to adventure’s tropes and rhetorics what Clive Bell once memorably said of all artistic forms in relation to the living artist (even though he was really talking about modernism as such): that they represent both “canal” and “goad”.\textsuperscript{56}

There remains, throughout this dissertation, a sense, as Helen and Margaret put it at the end of \textit{Howards End}, that adventure is not enough, that notwithstanding its remarkable narrative

\textsuperscript{55} Quoted in Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan. \textit{No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century Volume 1: The War of the Words} (Yale University Press, 1988) p.33 Holby’s words are strangely evoked not to exemplify a shift in the gendered battle lines of literary genre enacted by Woolf, but as a kind of qualitative ballast backing an uncharacteristically positivist turn to the statistics of social change: “What Holby had intuited”, they write, “has, of course, since been statistically documented.” Greater numbers of women in the workplace, in public life, in politics, and so forth. One can’t help feeling that Holby’s historical and aesthetic intuition might be more forcefully brought out by a turn to the gendered dynamics of cultural contestation that are elsewhere so lucidly described by Gilbert and Gubar – by a turn, that is, towards literary genre as history’s ground of symbolic mediation.

\textsuperscript{56} Bell, Clive, “The Artistic Problem”, in Rosenbaum, Stanford Patrick. \textit{A Bloomsbury Group Reader} (Blackwell Publishers, 1993) p. 104
power, it cannot finally make good on its promises of enchantment and transvaluation, in whatever appropriated and modified new form.

This caveat should perhaps remind us of something important about modernist literary praxis in general: namely, of the way that it tends towards relativizing or tropifying all genres, viewing them as objects for critique and forms of expression simultaneously. *Ulysses* (1922) might be the most extreme example of this trend, in which entire literary traditions (not least of all, epic adventure) are reproduced and tested against new social experience, rendering the modernist text not only an arbitrator of literary authenticity, but a space for the critique of representation. If adventure is finally “not enough”, to echo Margaret and Helen, then this is precisely what will allow us to recuperate it as more (or, perhaps, less) than pure ideology and puerile wish-fulfilment, to think it as both a passionate striving towards and a failure to glibly represent far-reaching social and cultural aspirations.

Adventure’s twin status in the work of Forster, Woolf and Bowen as both canal and goad is also what sets it apart from the vocational plots of new woman novels, in which female characters seek new opportunities through employment and work. In their naturalist and realist modes, these plots portray work as the regrettable erosion of authentic femininity. Whether they feature industrial/agricultural work, as in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891), or clerical work, as in Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893), the protagonists of such plots take on jobs which symbolically exile them from the destiny of a happy marriage. Such plots reflected wider social anxieties that marriage and formal employment were incompatible vocations for those women with, or aspiring towards, middleclass status – an anxiety that found not only literary but legislative form in the guise of the ‘marriage bar’ and the mass de-employments for women following both world wars. Bloombury’s appropriations of adventure were one of the more peculiar tactics used to break down this bad choice.

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57 As Martin Danahay puts it, “in Gissing’s rehearsal of the problem, the working woman “unsexes” herself by entering into a sphere that is not properly feminine, nor, anymore, rigorously masculine.” See Danahay, Martin A. and Shatlock, Joanne. *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity* (Taylor and Francis, 2005) p.158
between marriage and work without reproducing either residual courtship nor emerging vocational plots.\textsuperscript{58} Adventure provided a way to simultaneously libidinize and belabor aesthetic capacities and sexual and kinship relations, and thus avoid the increasingly disenchanted alternatives of the working spinster (exiled from marriage and sexuality) and the housebound wife (exiled from the labor market, if not from the drudgery of unpaid sexual and affective services).\textsuperscript{59} The tropes of adventure were a way to mold subjectivity into the form of what Stevenson called practical intelligence without submitting it to what Schreiner diagnosed as the toil of waged work. Adventure represented a “neither/nor” logic in relation to both marriage and work. If this was a fantasy premised on white, rentier-class privilege, it was also one of a self-critical and perhaps even self-obliterating kind. What does this fantasy look like in literary practice?

‘Brains as well as nerves’: From psychologized adventure to adventurized psychology

Consider the following complaint from Forster’s 1910 condition of England novel, \textit{Howards End}: “Money, supremely useful; intellect, rather useful; imagination, of no use at all.”\textsuperscript{60} That’s a choice grievance from Forster’s bohemian and artistically minded Schlegel family, but what’s its corollary? Certainly not the Wildeian imperative that imagination be its own entirely useless reward, but nor the reverse, that the imagination should be so ruthlessly

\textsuperscript{58} One should remember that Forster and Woolf’s early fictions prior to \textit{Howards End} and \textit{Jacobs Room}, respectively, were very much still caught up in this narrative alternative, and thus it was no easy task for them to wriggle out of the conventions of the nineteenth century marriage/work dichotomy.

\textsuperscript{59} As Elaine Showalter reminds us in \textit{Sexual Anarchy}, while young men could be the adventurer and bachelor, there were few narrative opportunities available to women between celibacy and marriage. Showalter, Elaine. \textit{Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the fin de siècle} (Penguin Group, 1990) pp. 23 - 25 As another commentator puts it: “Like their counterparts in real life, the New Woman heroines – educated, eager to work, and desiring equitable relationships with men – soon found there were no new narratives awaiting them which could accommodate their desire for autonomy; they either had to conform to the ways of society in order to achieve a modicum of happiness, or live as outcasts on society’s fringes.” Miller, Jane Eldridge. \textit{Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel} (Virago Press, 1994) p.19

\textsuperscript{60} Forster, E.M. \textit{Howards End} (Penguin, 2005) p.23
Somewhere in the middle, then? This account of modernist adventure tracks that middle-path, often a muddled path, as Forster would have said, and sometimes a treacherous one.

To get a better sense of it, let’s take a look at a peculiar moment from *Howards End*, in which Margaret, Forster’s bohemian-hero-cum-industrialist’s-wife, finds herself at Kings Cross railway station, that icon of British industrial glory (and imaginative transport) from Francis Trollop to J.K. Rowling:

To Margaret – I hope that it will not set the reader against her – the station of King’s Cross had always suggested Infinity. Its very situation – withdrawn a little behind the facile splendours of St. Pancras – implied a comment on the materialism of life. Those two great arches, colourless, indifferent, shouldering between them an unlovely clock, were fit portals for some eternal adventure, whose issue might be prosperous, but would certainly not be expressed in the ordinary language of prosperity. (10)

Margaret’s perception here is of a peculiar kind, both mundane and magical, prosaic and sublime. Or, more precisely, the emphatic ordinariness of Kings Cross strips the physically built industrial environment of its claims to “material” value, while Margaret’s apperception of “Infinity” opens up a phenomenological space (a “portal”) for “some eternal adventure”: a form of enchanted perception whose telos is *prosperity*, but prosperity of a particularly modernist linguistic variety given that it cannot “be expressed in the ordinary language of prosperity.” Talk about creating a problem for yourself! On the one hand, Forster seems to be arrogating to Margaret an adventurous perceptual agency as a form of embodied symbolic

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61 The distinction between aesthetic romance and the romance of Aestheticism will become clearer as we move through the chapters. Suffice to say here that Wilde’s utopia was a utopia beyond use-values, and modelled ideal aesthetic activity on the figure of the Romantic Artist. As he put it: “The present is what man ought not to be. The future is what artists are.” All non-imaginative work, according to him, was to be done by machines. As a broad generalization, we can say that modernists were both more suspicious of mechanized modernity and of the aesthetic’s claim to uselessness. Forster’s short story, “The Machine Stops” might be taken to exemplify the first suspicion, representing a bleak future of machine-organized human “sanitation” which transposes Wilde’s program into a dystopian key. The broader arc of my argument will flesh out the dangers inherent in relocating the Artist and creative sensibility more broadly from the periphery of the economy to its center: dangers which, for all his prescience, Wilde could not have foreseen. Douglas Mao’s comments on the difference between aestheticism and Bloomsbury modernism are also instructive here: “For Bloomsbury, the moral of Wilde in respect to production would have been to do not as he said but as he did.” By which Mao means, become super-productive! Mao, Douglas. *Solid Objects*. p.35
capital, one gained, we might suspect, by her liberal and aesthetic education as a middleclass woman. On the other, he’s not happy to entextualize that symbolic capital in any of the “ordinary” languages of economic or social equivalence. The value of Margaret’s exalted perception is writable only as a form of blocked adventure.

Margaret’s perception might appear even more clearly as a value-problem if we pause on another curious keyword of this passage: Infinity. Jamesonians will no doubt recall that this is the same word which, in “Modernism and Imperialism”, marked *Howards End* as symptomatic of a new modernist representational regime. When the majority of economic production takes place outside of national borders, that essay had argued, the meaning of national space is no longer to be found “within itself”, but must be referred to a radically unknowable outside, in an aesthetic gesture resembling a Kantian sublime. Jameson reads such a spatial sublime via Forster’s Great North Road, “more suggestive of infinity than any railway”, a reading whose geopolitical dimensions are bolstered by the novel’s imperial thematics of motorcars and petroleum. But a condition of Jameson’s reading is its bracketing of questions of modernization within the nation, “distinguishing its problems from those of an internal industrialization and commodification in the modernizing metropolis.”

I think that what we’re seeing in Margaret’s platform nine-and-three-quarters moment is precisely the stubborn if mediated intrusion of this internal (which is to say, both national and psychological) frame of intensified commodification, in which aesthetic perception is marked as the infinite site of value-production or “prosperity”. In its nominal representation as an “adventure”, Margaret’s perception would appear to be something other than one of those idle flights of modernist interiority that Lukács derided as compensatory, bourgeois

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63 Forsterians will no doubt recall that in opposition to cars and roadways, railways are repeatedly coded as an old English institution, emanating from a time of national production that is under threat of vanishing. Mrs. Munt, the Schlegel’s quaintly English Aunt, invests all her fortunes in home rails, an investment which “decline[s] with the steady dignity of which only Home Rails are capable”. (12) Railways thus more broadly figure both the frame of the nation as well as the faltering worth of that frame as a space of economic value production, a national space in need of a revamped regime of accumulation.
subjectivism. Indeed, in the very next sentence, Forster assures the reader that Margaret’s perception has an extra-subjective existence: “If you think this ridiculous,” the narrator insists with peculiar ardor, “remember that it is not Margaret who is telling you about it; and let me hasten to add that they were in plenty of time for the train”.

The narrator effectively underwrites the value of Margaret’s perception by acting as the final guarantor of its social rather than simply personal or private value. Moreover, that guarantee seems itself to be underwritten by the fact that such nebulous perception is not in any way in contradiction with the forward momentum of novelistic plot, or with what Forster called the tapeworm of story. Let me hasten to add that they were in plenty of time for their train: a startling bit of defensiveness that feels like it’s directed at a reader (perhaps even at one of Haggard’s) who would hail: get on with the plot! To which the correct answer is, I would think: Margaret’s enchanted perception constitutes the plot by transvaluing the narrative content and social constituency of “adventure”. Not the catchiest of responses, granted, but then my awkward paraphrasing of this weird passage might itself highlight the representational difficulty inherent in such narrative acrobatics – a difficulty I regard as distinctly modernist. Margaret’s blocked adventure simultaneously petitions for the capitalization of the Imagination as an economic capacity, at the same time as it immures it from the functionality of service and the logic of commodification in the form of a mimetic

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65 As a literary practitioner, Forster was acutely aware of this contradiction between interiority and plot. In Aspects of the Novel he wrote of how “Characters must not brood too long, they must not waste time running up and down ladders in their own insides, they must contribute, or higher interests will be jeopardized.” It’s quite remarkable, I think, how this aesthetic imperative doubles up as an efficiency directive coming from a literary-compositional manager. (Forster did indeed like to think of the director of plot as a kind of “high government official”). See Forster E.M. Aspects of the Novel (Pelican Books, 1962) p.93 I read such moments of inner-adventure as quite different from the sorts of “epiphany” that Fredric Jameson, following Northrop Frye, reads in the work of Joyce and Kafka, in which a similar (though more temporally frozen) modernist sublime functions as a placeholder for the empty spaces created by desacralization and rationalization. See The Political Unconscious, p.135
66 Which is to say that such difficulty represents both a struggle to critique what Margaret Hennessey usefully describes as culture’s “available modes of intelligibility” as well as a kind of distinction-making exercise whereby it oversees “the gatekeeping of specialized discourse governing a finite field of expertise separate from popular [or “ordinary”] discourse.” Strychacz, Thomas. Modernism, Mass Culture and Professionalism (Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 26
vocational plot. Adventure creates an enchanted space for belabored aesthetic subjectivity without workplace toil.

Indeed, Margaret’s infinitized perception becomes even more suggestive as a specifically modernist value-problem if we view it in the light of Jacque Rancière’s suggestive if fleeting critique of *The Political Unconscious*. In “The Thread of the Novel”, Rancière turns to Conrad as a way to rebuff Jameson’s argument about the split between adventure plot and modernist style:

Rather than the contradiction between high literature and the “culture industry” of adventure stories invoked by Fredric Jameson, the gaps in [Conrad’s] plot reveal the contradiction between two ways of understanding “adventure”: as an abandonment to the truth of the “existence between sky and water” or as the fulfilment of a will.67

I am struck by Rancière’s suggestion that Conrad’s mixed style – his weird propensity to pause the forward motion of buccaneering plot to gaze upon a gorgeous sunset – constitutes not the burgeoning Jamesonian opposition between adventure and impressionism, but “two ways of understanding ‘adventure’”.68 That to me seems like an important insight because, like Margaret gazing at Kings Cross, it captures the way that the modernist text so often grants a kind of gratuitous enchantment and narrative value to moments of sensory apperception that appear extra-subjective and extra-compensatory – impersonal, one might say. Rancière elsewhere in his talk suggests, in the closest thing to a thesis statement, that the very “success” of ‘modern fiction’ “rests on its capacity to construct a form of succession that fits the demands of a plot while making the ‘life of the soul’ — the life of the impersonal or the infinite that denies the artificiality of all plots — appear.” (204)

As Jameson might have reminded him, however, Rancière’s formal attention to “the life of the soul” or “the infinite”, does not exempt his argument from that Marxist ur-

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68 Jameson, of course, had understood Conrad’s impressionism as the first stage of “a final and extremely specialized phase of that immense process of superstructural transformation whereby the inhabitants of older social formations are culturally and psychologically trained for life in the market system.” *The Political Unconscious*, p. 236
imperative: always historicize! For if modernism marks that moment where instances of perceptive enchantment take on the hot glow of adventure to which they would in previous representational regimes have been opposed, then this doesn’t so much mark modernism’s capacity to escape what Ranciere, following Woolf, calls the “tyranny of plot”. Rather, it suggests that the “Infinite” – or the “inner life”, or “the unseen”, as Margaret Schlegel also liked to describe it – is becoming subjected to its own forms of externalization, emplotment, perhaps even its own forms of tyranny. “It is private life that holds out the mirror to infinity” the narrator of Howards End attempts to reassure us at one point, “personal intercourse, and that alone, that ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision.” (69) Another very ambiguous assurance, I think, given that the other half of infinity’s symbolic payload indexes the bad infinitude of that global labor camp, the British empire. If modernism is the cultural moment when “private life” can mirror itself infinitely, to the point that it reveals “a personality” (note the indefinite article) behind any singular individual’s “vision”, then this should alert us to inchoate and highly mediated changes in the relationship between psychological-humanist capacities and capitalist forms of reification, capture and commodification.70

Some of those changes were historically extant, such as the service revolution that around the turn of the century began recruiting women into sectors such as retail, care and secretarial work.71 These jobs entailed forms of affective and emotional labor in which

69 André Gorz writes acerbically of how the post-Fordist worker “must understand that the possibility of selling their labour-power depends on the unpaid, voluntary, unseen work they put in continually to reproduce it anew.” This labor of self-production is much older than modernism – it’s the primary subject of nineteenth century domestic fiction, for one – but modernism represents the moment when it begins to come into greater contact with markets and formal economies.

70 This passage, then, would seem to contradict Lukacs’ gloss on modernity, that “the abandonment of the world by God manifests itself in the incommensurability of soul and work, of interiority and adventure”. When work becomes a question of excavating and utilizing the inner-life or the “soul”, adventure reappears as a discourse of enchanted and precarious interiority. Also germane here is Mark McGurl’s imperative that Veblen’s notion of an idle leisure class needs to be balanced with its dialectical opposite, a working elite continuing the work ethic via “inconspicuous (because mental) production”. McGurl, Mark. The Novel Art (Princeton University Press, 2001) p.18

71 I would also point, here, to those critics who have alerted us to the fact that work is always an opaque signifier in the novel, not least because its productive logics are so often anathema to the forms of enchantment, entertainment and sentiment that helped popularize the novel as a genre. See Lesjak, Carolyn. Working Fictions: A Genealogy of the Victorian Novel (Duke University Press, 2007)

feminine “personality” would be performed as set of behavioral codes that had no necessary relationship to an essential gender, person or identity. But other changes in the adventurization of character interiority tracked by this dissertation were, according to my argument, more inchoate and anticipatory, especially those that centered on imaginative and artistic capacities rather than affective and emotional ones. Although we might historicize the emergence of the Imagination as an economic capacity via the complexification and expansion of the culture markets in which Forster, Woolf and Bowen all participated in different ways, their fictions don’t so easily invite such a move. This is because the aesthetic romances tracked herein conspicuously do not result in the production, circulation and consumption of cultural commodities nor art-goods. Rather, After Men suggests that what is distinct about modernism’s feminized aesthetic romances is the way they aggressively expand the jurisdictional field of the aesthetic, engaging it in economic and symbolic spaces where we would not expect to see it employed (such as at the heart of national transportation infrastructure!). To put it at its most algebraic, then, Bloomsbury adventure is a self-critical fantasy of aesthetic perception as economic value production.

But not a fantasy wholly at odds with economic practice, it turns out. In the closing section of this introduction, I want to suggest why grasping Margaret’s infinitized modernist perception as an economic value-problem – and thus as the inchoate locus of capitalist

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73 If seminal theorists of romance such as Northrup Fry are credited, then it would make sense that adventure marks the site of the emergent or the futural: While one half of romance draws on archaic forms of storytelling, “[t]he other half consists of bringing something into the present which is potential or possible, and that sense belongs to the future. This recreation of the possible or future or ideal constitutes the wish-fulfillment element in romance”. Frye, Northrop. The Secular Scripture (Harvard University Press, 1976) p.179 Felski points out that this quality makes romance a “meaningful representational mode to those who do not enjoy the privileges of subjecthood in reality, and who thus refuse to reproduce mimetically an existing social order.” Gender of Modernity. p.121

74 Still, what Hadjiafxendi and Zakreski track as “the expansion of the literary market-place and related ‘art industries’ (a specific term coined for a variety of manufactories such as textiles, pottery, engraving and metalwork, which combined artistic principles with the creation of consumer goods)” is certainly germane to the aesthetic romances broached by Forster, Woolf and Bowen, even as such jobs were ‘below their station’. See Hadjiafxendi, Kyriaki; Zakreski, Patricia. Crafting the woman professional in the long nineteenth century: artistry and industry in Britain (Ashgate, 2013) p.1
expansion – might only be perceivable by us now. From our own standpoint within a late mode of capitalism the idea of capitalizing on the Imagination should seem eerily familiar. I want to suggest, in other words, that Margaret and her modernist co-adventurers might have been the first members of the so-called Creative Class.75

Modernism and the Neoliberal Imagination

Raymond Williams once described Bloomsbury as “one of the advanced formations of their class”, and no doubt he wasn’t the first to sense the group’s anticipation of cultural shifts in middleclass values about sexual and kinship liberalization, cultured individualism and the arts.76 But he was, as usual, a particularly astute reader of the historical tension between the emergent and the dominant, sensing how Bloomsbury’s “advanced” ideas about gender, sexuality and culture would be incorporated into bourgeois dogma and mainstream capitalism. But Williams also urged us (and this is, I think, often forgotten amidst the derision) to see “the difference between the fruit and its rotting, or between the hopefully planted seed and its fashionably distorted tree.” After Men heeds that call by reading

75 Most cultural accounts of the rise of post-industrial work ethics (including creative regimes of labor) have been centered on post-45 US literature, in excellent studies such as Stephen Schryer’s Fantasies of the New Class: Ideologies of Professionalism in Post–World War II American Fiction (Columbia University Press, 2011), Andrew Hoberek’s, The Twilight of the Middle Class: Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work (Princeton University Press, 2005) and Heather Hicks’s The Culture of Soft Work: Labor, Gender, and Race in Postmodern American Narrative (Pelgrave Macmillan, 2009) Given the shift in global hegemony and finance capital from the UK to the US post-45 it’s hardly surprising that accounts of new, postindustrial class ethics have gravitated to that geopolitical context. It’s my hope that in attending to earlier workplace imaginaries on the other side of the Atlantic we can uncover some new similarities and differences between early twentieth century UK and mid-twentieth century US imaginaries. David Trotter’s account of professional paranoia in the early modernist period, for instance, resonates with Schryer’s description of new class fantasies as “simultaneously impotent and exaggerated models of intellectual agency” in the Cold War era. (7) In both cases, literary culture is mediating or patching over a crisis in vocational recognition and professional status at the cliff-edge of the respective nations’ liberal hegemony. For a fuller account of this UK/US imagination via the cultural form of the realism war, see Jed Esty, “Realism Wars”, in Novel, Volume 49, Issue 2, p. 316. (2016)

76 Williams, Raymond. ‘The Bloomsbury Fraction’, in Problems in Culture and Materialism (Verso, 1980) p.166
Bloomsbury’s aesthetic romances in a contrapuntal relationship with sociological and literary representations of “creative capitalism” post 1960.

The argument here is that Bloomsbury’s conception of a creative economy anticipates debates about and practices in productivity and culture at the far end of the West’s industrial era. It has indeed been repeatedly observed by materially minded critics (of whom Bowen might have been the first) that Bloomsbury were pioneers in popularizing (if at first, for a coterie) many of the tendencies of market society and consumer capitalism that would become dominant later in the century. In an important article on Bloomsbury, Jennifer Wicke (1994) has argued that Woolf and Keynes were key agents in inventing our modern conceptions of markets as dynamic and interactive structures in dialectical relationship with mobile human desires. In a persuasive reading of Mrs. Dalloway, Wicke shows how Woolf’s aesthetically dazzling forms of metropolitan perception are often mediated in and through displays of commodities: stream of consciousness as the literary equivalence of high-end window shopping. Similarly, John X. Cooper (2004) has argued that Bloomsburries were key agents in commodifying and fetishizing aesthetic and domestic style as a middleclass consumer good, and that Bloomsbury as a whole is now nothing other than “a style package [that] can be purchased off shelf and rack along with all the accessories.”

These accounts of Bloomsbury as an embryonic consumer culture, while extremely insightful, perhaps also reflect the cultural concerns and anxieties of our most recent fin de siècle, with its post-Thatcherite, globalist appetite for luxury goods and fast-paced experiences. But now, two decades later, I think we’re in a position to see how rampant consumerism was neither the only nor the defining economic context foreshadowed by Bloomsbury’s experiments in art, domesticity, sexuality and work.

By my account, Bloomsbury’s aesthetic romances anticipate the rise of what has come to be called the “creative class” and “creative capitalism”. Those phrases describe shifts

in the locus and the style of economic value production after humanist-aesthetic capacities such as creativity and imagination have been thoroughly incorporated into regimes of production, and not only in the sectors of arts and culture proper. Indeed, creative capitalists such as Richard Florida (2002) advocate for the “harnessing” of creativity across all economic sectors and class strata, insisting that productivity is fundamentally stymied if not injected with creative impulses. Florida’s arguments turn on the claim that, unlike regimes based on (finite) material expansion, “[h]uman creativity is a virtually limitless resource” and can therefore power economic growth in perpetuity. Andrew Ross, one of the most astute historians and critics of creative class ideology to date, describes this policy ambition and its real-world application as “the industrialization of bohemia”, a phrase which might alert us to some of the parallels between creative capitalism in our own moment and the lifestyles and literatures pioneered by semi-commercial modernist subcultures such as Bloomsbury.

Curiously – one might say perversely – neoliberals like Florida diagnose a similar problem to liberal creatives like the Schlegels, even as they advocate for different solutions. If the Schlegels complained of the imagination’s exclusion from use-values, then Florida will likewise lament that “we lack the broader social and economic system to fully harness [creativity] and put it to use.” (xiii)

The difference between these two regimes, which is also the difference between liberalism and neoliberalism in general, is that the latter has no truck with subjecting the imagination to the increasingly universal laws of equivalence and exchange. Everything, for Florida and his colleagues, has its price, and aesthetic ideas are no exception to the rule of capital: they are its post-industrial fuel. By contrast, the Schlegels, and along with them the entire cast of creative adventurers in this dissertation, are extremely suspicious of what

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79 Ross, Andrew. No-Collar: The Humane Workplace and it’s Hidden Costs (Temple University Press, 2003) p.10
More broadly, commentators on immaterial labor have repeatedly noted how contemporary forms of mental labor are nascent within earlier bohemian and artistic social formations: “All the characteristics of the postindustrial economy (both in industry and society as a whole) are highly present within the classic forms of “immaterial” production”, including “cultural production”. Lazzarato, Maurizio. “Immaterial Labour”, in Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics, ed. Paulo Virno & Michael Hardt (University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p.136
happens to imaginative and cultural capacities as they are encouraged to serve economic imperatives of utility and exchange. Indeed, it wouldn’t be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that what is at stake for them is the Kantian category of aesthetic experience itself, and in particular the critical distance from the social and the rational afforded by it. It is one of the many and disturbing ironies of this argument that in seeking to aggressively expand the scope and jurisdiction of the aesthetic, Forster, Woolf and Bowen risked obliterating it entirely. Yet such obliteration remains impartial, just as the adventure narratives themselves teeter ambivalently short of opportunistic treasure-grabbing. It’s that ambivalence—often registered as a generic tension between adventure and pastoral, city and country, Kings Cross and Howards End—that makes these stories a valuable heuristic for our present. Via them, we might think of ways to gain a newly critical aesthetic standpoint, one that falls back neither on high modernist claims to autonomy nor on post-modern resignations to market heteronomy, but seeks rather to forge a mediation between the two that is reducible to neither liberal pragmatism nor bourgeois compromise—a weakly utopic space for the aesthetic as a form of social praxis, a form of world-making.80

Proponents of creative capitalism such as Florida often claim that its superiority in relation to previous economic regimes is partly to be located in the energy it draws from non-normative sexual subjects and communities. To this end, in measuring a locale’s “creativity index”, Florida will consider other metrics such as its “bohemian index” and its “gay index”. It this version of management utopia, there are no externalities to capital: it does not occur to such thinkers that quantifying, measuring and calculating the sexual lives and cultures of non-normative subjects as proto-workers and consumers in order to maximize economic output represents an erasure of difference via the reduction of everything to the logic of exchange and equivalence. If “queer” means “a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal”, as

80 We can thus say of the kind of labor-power imagined by modernist adventure what Lawrence Rainey has said of the modernist art-work in general, that it “is a strategy whereby the work of art invites and solicits commodification, but does so in such a way that it becomes a commodity of a special sort, one that is temporarily exempted from the exigencies of immediate consumption prevalent within the larger cultural commodity”. Rainey, Lawrence. Institutions of Modernism (Yale University Press, 1998) p.3
Warner puts it, then this kind of incorporation of gay life into capital represents a fundamental threat to queerness as such. Peter Drucker calls this reduction of sexual difference to a regime of economic homogeneity the emergence of “neoliberal gay normality”, which would limit queerness to a sexual orientation and a set of measurable lifestyle patterns. The modernist texts analyzed herein might place the imagination in the service of queering kin, but that’s not the same as touting gay folks as ideal subjects for a new phase of neoliberal capitalism, and from that difference I think we might draw some differential forms of value.

Sarah Brouillette (2014) has recently spoken eloquently to literature’s own stake in the creative economy, demonstrating how contemporary literary texts and producers themselves stand to gain from the instrumentalization and monetization of culture while at the same time providing one of our few remaining sites for “critique[ing] the excesses and inequities of neoliberal capital”. As Brouillette has also suggested, “[m]ore research is needed to account for the particularity, historicity, emergence, and spread of the vocabulary that makes contemporary labor an aesthetic act of self-exploration, self-expression, and self-realization.” (54) Given that “creativity”, “imagination” and “innovation” are now well-worn buzzwords of neoliberal ideology, and given that Art is a market and industry much like any other, we do not in our present have an easy standpoint from which to make any sort of artistic critique of capital. The modernist adventures tracked herein might provide a different kind of vantage point from which we can not only rethink the relationship between aesthetics and capital, but also broaden the genealogy of creative capitalism to include identities that aren’t subsumed under the category of the Artist. Indeed, only one of the figures in this dissertation – Lily Briscoe – could be considered an artist in the sense of it being her primary

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81 Drucker, Peter. Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism (BRILL, 2015)
82 Exactly why gay folks are prized neoliberal subjects for Florida is a more complex question, but references to gay people usually get folded under the banner of liberal multiculturalism. Employers’ acceptance of and willingness to employ homosexual people has thus become a marker of their broader attitudes to diversity, and of their claim to be ‘a family’ and not just a business. At the same time, gay identity represents a consumer market like any other, one that can be saturated by desires for niche commodities and services.
83 Brouillette, Sarah. Literature and the Creative Economy (Stanford University Press, 2014) p.13
84 For an excellent genealogy of the keywords of the new capitalism, see Leary, John Patrick. Keywords: The New Language of Capitalism (Haymarket Books, 2018)
livelihood, and even there, critics have disagreed about the seriousness with which Woolf wished to portray art-making as an occupation.

Thinking the genealogy of creative capitalism outside the reification of the concept of the Artist allows us to consider how other forms of subjectivity – the critic, the female amateur, and indeed shades and fragments of experience which fall below the threshold of an “identity” – might have fed into ideas about the way we work now, and the ways we now think of ourselves, and get thought of as, workers. Indeed, I hope that this thesis has implications for the ways that literary scholars think of their own labor as potentially contributing to a creative economy of knowledge and ideas. Along with others, I have been struck by Joseph North’s recent and not altogether unproblematic polemic arguing for a return to “aesthetic appreciation” within literary studies. North’s argument is that since the long rise of the historicist paradigm post-New Criticism, literary studies has largely lost touch with the aesthetic as anything other than a symptom of non-cultural first causes. His argument is not to jettison historicization altogether but to alloy it to aesthetic appreciation conceived as a space of positivity and possibility for the imagination of new social worlds – a tendency that he sees characterizing those divisions of critical labor most immediately serving political struggle in the present, such as queer theory. My point here is not to agree with North in the theoretical abstract, but rather to suggest how further historicization can be on his side.

Historicizing the aesthetic – as he in fact does extensively via the history of literary criticism – can allow us to see other times and places in which it was indeed understood as a form of world-making. Bloomsbury is one of those times and places, where producing, perceiving and appreciating art and culture were inseparable from the cultivation of individual and collective capacities more broadly. (Just as it was central, it turns out, to post-Fordist adaptions of Bloomsbury novels from Sally Potter’s Orlando (1992) to Zadie Smith’s On Beauty (2005)).

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But even North, who has a wily eye for historical contradiction, seems not fully aware – or perhaps insufficiently worried – of the risks inherent in advocating for a re-instrumentalization of the aesthetic and its capacities. In the UK context, the social applicability of academic research (its “Impact”, as it has come to be called in a distinctly masculinist-military metaphor) has increasingly come to define, and confine, the value of thinking in the academy to that which is crassly utilitarian if not always explicitly profitable. The problems with “Impact”, in other words, are the Schlegelian problems of making the imagination and culture as “supremely useful” as money, transforming their associated skills into forms of “practical intelligence”. I will turn to these problems more fully in my conclusion, alongside the wider context of immaterial and creative theories of labor.

In particular, I will think about how the movement of artistic and aesthetic labor from the peripheries to the centers of advanced capitalist economies has led to new forms of precarity, ones often difficult to detect because they present themselves as novel forms of enchantment, even of “adventure”. As Andrew Ross notes in his ethnography of US dot com tech companies, such firms finally displaced the Protestant work ethic with a vocational ideology in which “the zeal of employees [is] more like a quest for personal and existential stimulation, closer in spirit to extreme sport or adventure travel than to the sobriety of the self-dependent man who saw himself as a pious and productive member of society.” Such ideologies of work as a creative adventure in our own moment have powerfully legitimated and glamorized new kinds of intensified labor regimes, in which “burn-out” after marathon shifts is considered integral to workplace satisfaction, part of the “risk”. In such examples, “adventure” has becomes a way of misdescribing economic relations of exploitation. Are Forster, Woolf and Bowen to blame for inventing the cynical ideologies that have become contemporary features of capitalist false consciousness? Not exactly, I argue, but closer attention to the difference between the fruit and its rotting, to echo Williams, might explain

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86 Ross, No-Collar. p.12
what went wrong in the ripening, and reveal what new and different kinds of self-cultivation are possible.

Chapter breakdowns

In my first chapter I read Forster’s 1910 condition-of-England novel as broaching a new rapprochement between aesthetic “appreciation” and the appreciation of social and economic value. Beginning with Forster’s late-career essays, I show how appreciation named what he understood to be the kernel of charismatic culture work, a humanist-aesthetic core that was being eroded under increasingly standardized conditions of intellectual training. In the narrative form of the novel, however, appreciation is able to be entered into a different kind of symbolic and vocational economy, one in which it is encoded as a new form of literary adventure. In this reading of Howards End, Margaret Schlegel’s forms of appreciative perception signal not the contemplative states of an idle leisure class, but a prototypical form of work redolent of today’s creative class worker. Her conjunction of aesthetic abilities and workplace aspirations dramatizes the imagination’s capacity to produce new kinds of social, sexual and economic value.

Taking Howards End as the focal point of Forster’s engagement of adventure might strike readers as somewhat surprising, considering that he was to go on and write A Passage to India (1924), a novel in many ways more apposite to an account of modernist-era romance. By turning briefly to that later novel, however, I reveal in negative why the repatriation of adventure to a national frame was a condition of possibility for its continuing enchantment in the era of late empire. Passage can only figure adventure as either ruthlessly disenchanted (as in the bathetic figure of the Marabar caves) or as endlessly deferred (as in the ambivalently proleptic ending, “not here, not now”). If we want to understand the afterlives of Howards
End understood as an aesthetic romance, then, we need to move both outwards, to Forster’s Bloomsbury colleagues, and forwards, to post-Fordist adaptations of his work that recuperate its vocational cultural fantasy. To that end, the chapter contains a coda on Zadie Smith’s On Beauty, which upgrades Forster’s fantasy of imaginative production for the era of the North American research university and its regimes of mental labor. Reading Smith’s novel in counterpoint with Howards End not only demonstrates how Bloomsbury novels shaped our post-Fordist imagination of mental and creative work; the comparison also illuminates important differences between the narrativization of imaginative labor then and now – differences that will allow us to see both moments in a fresh light.

In chapter two, I turn to Virginia Woolf, beginning once again with her essays, in order to develop the problematic of adventure in her work. More so than Forster, perhaps, Woolf was steeped in the male romance tradition, and wrote reviews of popular adventure writers from Defoe to Conrad. As Woolfians will be acutely aware, the tropes and rhetorics of adventure saturate her fictional and non-fictional work, often in whimsical, satirical and even over-determined ways. This presents a challenge for interpretation, which is confronted with a disarming array of starting points, pathways and even dead ends leading to and from the tropes and rhetorics of adventure. In an effort to orient myself through this interpretive maze, I have chosen to focus primarily on three works – Mrs. Dalloway (1924), To the Lighthouse (1927) and Orlando (1928) – which I argue can be connected via a genealogy of the queered, female imagination. These fictions represent what we might call the becoming-major of minoritarian characters and desires, beginning with Elizabeth Dalloway (Clarissa’s enigmatic daughter), moving through Lilly Briscoe, Woolf’s part-time artist-in-residence, and culminating with Orlando, who comes to embody not only the character-space of a protagonist but also the symbolic space of modernity’s paradigmatic subject.

What connects these characters is an enchanted sense of self-performativity and aesthetic perception, a combination in all three cases set to the rhythms of adventure’s sudden, anti-developmental narrative tense. But the becoming-major of aesthetic perception
also presents major problems for Woolf. As her creative workers gain a stronghold in the symbolic economy of adventure, they also become increasingly subjected to the stranglehold of incipient forms of exploitation and disinvestiture. Although Orlando might be in some ways Woolf’s most romantic and whimsical creation, it is in others the site upon which psychological workplace precarity comes most forcefully into view. Orlando, we might say, is anticipatory of the kind of subject produced by the gig economy, one who is expected to move at great speed and with sudden flexibility between jobs or projects in the absence of anything like a stable, developmental schema of career advancement, nor indeed a secure relation to identity and property. Turning to Sally Potter’s 1992 adaptation of the novel in my coda, I show how the film presents a different, and more positive, kind of ending to the novel, one based on embedding aesthetic praxis into a queered family structure.

The fear that adventure’s enchanting will-to-speed might dovetail with capitalism’s immanent logics of accelerated turnover and workplace “speed-up” is an anxiety that plays out at a more sociological level in my third chapter on Elizabeth Bowen. Bowen is not usually described as part of the Bloomsbury coterie, for reasons to do with her younger age and Irish background. Yet her work shows a sustained engagement with the aesthetic and social values of Bloomsbury that has led many reviewers to see her as continuing the group’s legacy into the late modernist and midcentury novel. Nowhere, perhaps, can this continuity be seen more clearly than in her 1932 novel, To the North, in whose title one should hear more than an echo of To the Lighthouse. Both center upon creative protagonists of sorts, but whereas Woolf makes sure to remove Lily Briscoe to the outer echelons of British territory so she can experience aesthetic adventure at least nominally free from metropolitan capital, Bowen sets up shop for Emmeline Summers on the street adjacent to the Woolf’s Bloomsbury residence. Emmeline co-owns a travel agency, where she works to sell adventure holidays to men in need of escape from metropolitan ennui. Her service work involves the instrumentalization of performative affects and aesthetic capacities, which the novel represents via the textualization and data-analysis of aesthetic experience entailed by Emmeline’s work. “Clients come in
when they’re back and give us their impressions”, she tells a potential customer, “we get them tabulated.” The tabulation of aesthetic perception as a component of a business model not only spells the end of Bloomsbury’s aesthetic romance, but also anticipates the fully-fledged commercialization of adventure as an administered fantasy of escape within a burgeoning service/tourism sector. And yet I will also suggest that Emmeline’s workplace systems of data collection and textual analysis become the surprising source for a new kind of utopian payload, one that anticipates digital romances of the post-Fordist era, from *The Matrix* (1999) and *Lucy* (2014) through to the recent BBC mini-series (and Woolfian adaptation) *Years and Years* (2019), as well as postmodern autofictions such as *Transit* (2016) by Rachael Cusk.

Appreciation – suddenly – writing. These are the keywords and the organizing lenses of the chapters which follow. They represent three non-exhaustive ways of describing the content, the temporality, and the technology of work, respectively, in emergent regimes of creative capitalism and immaterial labor. They also suggest three novel possibilities for organizing the action, the plot and the medium, respectively, of adventure romance as it is renovated across some of the most canonized works of the modernist era, and each keyword could be productively applied as a hermeneutic to any of the other chapters of which it is not the central focus (and, I would wager, to a number of other novels of both the modernist and post-modern eras). In my conclusion, these keywords frame some provisional reflections and speculations on the state of work and fiction post-’68, on popular and academic theories of creativity and immaterial labor, as well as possibilities for rethinking the future of what we do and mean with our bodies when we do or don’t do that thing called work.

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Margaret’s plea to her somewhat work-phobic younger brother might sound a little odd, since she doesn’t – work, that is. Instead, as she enigmatically puts it in the preceding line, she “pretends” to work, engaging in a host of cultural activities with an energy redolent of work, perhaps, but with few of its economic or productive imperatives. What this strange formulation pretending to work might mean in the context of Forster’s 1910 novel – indeed, in the context of 1910 more broadly – is one way to frame the question posed by this essay. On the one hand, it could be read as a familiar token of the liberal guilt that has come to define readings of Schlegelian privilege as leisure-class aestheticism. Margaret “pretends” to work, in this familiarly rehearsed account, to assuage her own bad feelings about people who actually do – whether the novel’s downwardly mobile insurance clerk, Leonard Bast; his déclassé wife Jacky, formerly employed in the sex-trade; the imperial business magnate and Margaret’s prospective husband, Henry Wilcox; or indeed the colonial workforce notoriously laboring below the novel’s diegetic horizon. Nonetheless, bad as Margaret (and Forster) may feel about their personal and cultural embroilment in these forms of work and exploitation (indeed, bad as we may feel about them), there is another way to read this “pretend” work – as less compensatory, more aspirational.

As discussed in my introduction, work (of the non-pretend kind) was central to the politics of first wave feminism that framed Howards End on both sides. It figures prominently

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88 For Fredric Jameson, this constitutively absent workforce is what qualifies the novel as incipiently modernist. He argues that because the majority of economic production takes place outside of national space, its absence is felt as a spatial infinity or Kantian sublime in the novel’s modes of description. See Jameson, Fredric. “Modernism and Imperialism”, in The Modernist Papers (London: Verso, 2016) pp.152 – 170
in feminist literature and polemics from the New Woman novels of the fin de siècle with their stoically working heroines, to Olive Schreiner’s manifesto, *Women and Labour* (1911), published the year after *Howards End* (1910), which argued that bourgeois women had been reduced to “sex-parasites” entirely dependent on the work of others, and which called for women’s “share of honoured and socially useful human toil,” through to Virginia Woolf’s manifestos of the 1920s and 30s, in which work bears the double burden not only of rescuing women from servility to men, but also of renovating feminine subjectivity and society in the process. In all these cases and more, work of a non-domestic, remunerated variety becomes a complex, often over-determined, sign for women’s identity, independence and freedom from traditional social structures and modes of patriarchal oppression. So if Forster wanted Margaret to bear the utopian possibilities of work (“work if you’d save your soul and your body”) then why didn’t he just give her a job?

The answer to this question can be sought, I think, in the particular historical contradiction between work’s aspirational values and its everyday, lived reality. As Morag Shiach (2004) reminded us, women’s relationship to work in the first few decades of the twentieth century was one of profound ambivalence. On the one hand, work carried the promises of social freedom, financial independence and self-fulfillment. On the other, it meant new degradations, forms of mechanization and alienation that were felt as sacrifice and loss. Thus, for many feminists of the period the challenge was to both infuse work with aspirational content while simultaneously critiquing the workplace conditions and values of the labor market for their sex.

The argument of this article, however, turns the screw of this logic one notch further, since my intention is not so much to recuperate a “feminist Forster”, as it is first of all to

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90 See Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas* (William Collins, 2014)
91 Virginia Woolf expressed this contradiction with typical perspicacity in *Three Guineas*: “If we encourage the daughters to enter the professions without making any conditions as to the way in which the professions are to be practiced shall we not be doing our best to stereotype the old tune which human nature, like a gramophone whose needle has stuck, is now grinding out with such disastrous unanimity?” Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford University Press, 2015) p.140
demonstrate how Margaret’s position as a financially independent and “cultivated” woman came to vicariously, or, in psychoanalytical terms, projectively, solve occupational deadlocks and workplace contradictions that Forster felt acutely in his own professional career as a male cultural-worker. *Howards End* has been widely read as containing a trenchant critique of the inequities and injustices of twentieth century capitalism and imperialism, but in this reading it emerges as something else, too: an aesthetic romance in which Margaret’s forms of “pretending” vie to displace industrial capitalism on its own symbolic terrain, as a form of enchanted adventure, one harboring a new spirit of post-industrial, creative work.  

“*There was something uncanny in her triumph*: From Pastoral to Neo-Adventure

Margaret might not “work” in the ways that we as literary historians have been trained to read work by early twentieth century historians of culture, or of economics, for that matter. She does not have a job, nor does she embark on a career.  

Living on the independent means of inherited wealth, Margaret is a fictional manifestation of Bloomsbury’s own rentier class privileges. Yet, like Bloomsbury, what’s distinctive about the way Margaret occupies her class position is that, despite her freedom from work’s necessity, she desires fulfilment.

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92 It’s crucial, in this regard, that Margaret doesn’t become an artist, writer, artisan or craftsperson – and, concomitantly, that *Howards End* is not a female *kunstleroman* – all of which would be to restrict her activity to extant divisions of gendered labor. Instead, my account of Margaret’s creativity can be thought of as building upon and critiquing what Hadjiafxendi and Zakreski have helpfully described as a feminine discourse of “industrious amateurism”, which had the advantage of situating women as at once inherently creative while removed from the degradations of the (male) marketplace. (9) Unlike the modes of industrious amateurism which precede her, however, Margaret’s activity critiques both of these terms, as well as extends creativity’s vocational jurisdiction, thereby arriving at a new model of professional work. For an account of women’s relation to arts industries and creative labour in the period directly leading up to *Howards End*, see Hadjiafxendi, Kyriaki; Zakreski, Patricia. *Crafting the woman professional in the long nineteenth century: artistry and industry in Britain* (Ashgate, 2013)  

93 In this sense, my reading of Margaret qualitatively distinguishes her from the majority of so-called “new woman” heroines, who attempt to reconcile personal and vocational aspirations via workplace plots. At the same time, however, I don’t wish to perpetuate a reading of new woman novels as slavishly mimetic or realist. As Ann Ardis has powerfully reminded us, new woman fiction “*imagine[d] worlds quite different from the bourgeois patriarchy in which unmarried women are deemed odd and superfluous “side character[s] in modern life.”*” (2-3) My reading of Forster’s novel certainly fits within this tradition, but at the same time I will argue that there is something specifically modernist, even specifically *Bloomsbury*, about the fantasy of work encoded by Margaret. Ardis, Ann. *New Women, New Novels* (Rutgers University Press, 1990)
through work, nonetheless. Moreover, she seeks to disrupt and transform work’s norms and values and inject it with creativity and imagination. In narrative terms, we can say that Margaret harbors a surplus of aesthetic skills and cultural competencies that spill beyond the containers of both leisured aesthetics and domestic femininity, and take on a strange (and modernist) kind of productivity. In the novel’s closing pastoral scene this vocational surplus is most powerfully detectible as a formal one. While her sister Helen chats breezily to the children of the yeomanry, Margaret’s mind is conspicuously elsewhere, distracted by an item of work:

Margaret put down her work and regarded them absently. "What was that?" she asked.
"Tom wants to know whether baby is old enough to play with hay?"
"I haven't the least notion," answered Margaret, and took up her work again.

What kind of work is Margaret putting down and picking up in such absent-mindedness? Malcolm Page (1993) is one of very few critics who has commented on it, suggesting that it is “sewing” (55), and thus a synecdoche for Margaret’s gendered (if unconventional) reconciliation with the feminine domestic scene. But this work is in fact embedded in Margaret’s alienation from the expertise of childrearing (“whether baby is old enough”), as well as marked by her non-identity with the earthly wisdom (and domestic work) embodied by Mrs Wilcox the first, Forster’s nostalgic figure for traditional, matriarchal authority and agrarian rootedness, via the latter’s association with wisps of hay throughout the novel. Despite its incongruity, Forster keeps returning to this distracting item of work. Helen continues talking, but “Margaret never stopped working”. (287) When Charles’s younger son, Paul, comes to beckon Margaret into the house to discuss the family inheritance she “took her work and followed him.” (290)

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94 As numerous readers have noted, one of Bloomsbury’s defining characteristics was their challenging of the boundaries separating art, work and home. See Rosner, Victoria. The Cambridge Companion to The Bloomsbury Group (Cambridge University Press, 2014) ch. 4, 5 & 10
Margaret’s “work” rubs against the grain of that final scene like an irritant in the novel’s closural horizon, pointing obliquely to an alternative narrative of subjectivity, one which is registered via an inchoate, equally incongruous language of heroism used to describe her inheritance of the family property: “There was something uncanny in her triumph”, writes Forster as Henry announces the transfer of title deeds, “She, who had never expected to conquer anyone, had charged straight through these Wilcoxes and broken up their lives.” (291) Such a remark is truly “uncanny,” and not only in the typically Forsterian manner that it striates the home and the heterosexual romance plot with erotic and economic forces that feel distinctly unheimlich.66 The narration of Margaret’s victorious “charge” through Wilcox lines also signals a weird familiarity of another kind in its diction, rendering Forster’s reluctant domestic protagonist as if she were the hero of a fin de siècle adventure novel, arrogating to her a mode of heroic action out of joint with the pastoral idyll of the closing scene. Rather than read such rhetorical inflation as the blackened irony of a pyrrhic victory – Margaret’s ethical failure to “connect”, as Wilfred Stone lamented long ago – I am suggesting we read it as an interpretive prompt to rethink the narrative symbolics (and workplace politics) of Howards End.97

After all, this isn’t the only place where Margaret’s activity is described via the displaced generic tropes of imperial romance. As we shall see, her character is saturated by the language of heroic individualism redolent of the imperial adventurer novels of Rider

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66 In this sense, we can think of this final scene as registering Forster’s buried wish to break out of the marriage plot. He designated that plot device an unsatisfactory closural mechanism for modern fiction (and modern women) in his lectures at the Working Men’s club just three years earlier. Forster, E.M. “Pessimism in Literature”, in Albergo Empedocle and other writings (Liveright, New York, 1971) pp. 135 - 136

97 See Stone, Wilfred. The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E.M. Forster (Stanford University Press, 1966) Stone’s is perhaps the strongest indictment of this failure: “The malignancy inherent in spiritual-aesthetic withdrawal is a subject Forster knows well, and has warned about in his essays. But in fictionalizing the problem, he has presented a moral failure as a triumph – and, in the name of much that is beautiful and fine, has become the partisan of much that is sick and corrupt. The forces of value do not “connect,” but pursue each other in a lonely and circular futility. And the circle is especially vicious because Forster seems to see only its “proportion” and not its “emptiness.”” (266) Curiously, Stone also sensed a utopian dialectic in the novel’s closure, in which “we watch Margaret merge with Ruth Wilcox and then try to connect with Henry, only to emerge from these alliances a new creature – detached, autonomous, preserving “proportion” like an egg for the future to hatch.” (274) Further into that future than Stone was, I am asking fellow readers to consider what kinds of lively historical offspring might have been inside the egg.
Haggard or John Buchan. As several studies seeking to complicate the romance/modernism divide have demonstrated, the treasure-hunters of the fin de siècle also “pretended” to work, occupying a nebulous relation to formal economies of labor. Such heroes encoded fantasies of unalienated work and sexual charisma that transcended the bureaucratic constraints of metropolitan rationality and anxiety ridden masculinity. For both Nicholas Daly (1999) and (2001) David Trotter, fin de siècle romance overlaps with a subset of modernist experimentalism, whether in their shared use of the global periphery to vanish the conditions of commodity fetishism, or to restore enchantment to the technocratic work of cognitive elites via what Trotter calls the romance of a “postliberal paranoia”. Yet in both cases, the literary fantasy in question is avowedly masculinist. Margaret’s “triumph” might be heroic but the action it encodes is more akin to the production of non-normative social relations and kinship structures – breaking up lives, in the words of the narrator, a phrase which, in that slightly oblique, Forsterian way, is meant to signal the strange familial compromise waged by the novel’s ending.98

What would it mean, then, to take the novel’s generic displacements of romance seriously, and to read Howards End as a treasure story not, qua Wilcoxes, centered on the extraction of imperial rubber, but on a heist of English land and the occupation and modernization of a country house? What would it reveal to place Margaret at the center of this narrative as its buccaneering adventurer? What kinds of work does Margaret’s uncanny heroism encode, and what sorts of value is it capable of producing other than those legible in the bourgeois languages of property?

98 Imperial adventure novels such as Haggard’s King Solomon’s Mines were also fantasies of alternative (in a perverse sense, queer) kinship structures – misogynist and homosocial ones that excluded women. “I am going to tell the strangest story that I remember”, Alan Quartermain informs us, “which “may seem a queer thing to say, especially considering that there is no woman in it… not a petticoat in the whole history.” Haggard, Rider. King Solomon’s Mines (Macdonald: London, 1965) p.2 In this sense, Forster’s turn to kinship as the primary prize inherent in adventure is only another immanent turn of the generic screw of the era’s frontier romance. One thinks of Woolf’s attack on Kipling’s fiction in A Room of One’s Own, which seemed to designate a misogynist queerness as its primary characteristic: “a purely masculine orgy of Men who are alone with their Work”. Woolf, A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas. p.77
As we have already seen via Margaret’s uncanny or non-domesticated “work”, we are not referring here to the unpaid service labor of a housewife – a gendered mode of work that disappears from the novel with Ruth Wilcox’s death. Rather than trying to make Margaret fit within Forster’s strained pastoral idyll, in this essay I argue that her heroism encodes a fantasy of charismatic, creative labor, one that seeks to place feminized aesthetic sensitivity in the service of re-grounding property relations beyond the social mandate of patriarchy and the economic spirit of industrial capitalism. In this way, Margaret’s visionary work also allows us to reconceptualize the recently elaborated “queer” component of Howards End, not from the standpoint of desire (Margaret and Ruth’s brief rapprochement) but via the reconfiguration of kinship relations as they are structured by the gendered division of labor. The novel invests its queered vocational fantasy with enchantment via a modified deployment of the character tropes and rhetorics of heroic adventure, while simultaneously stripping vocational enchantment and charisma from the characters of imperial romance – i.e. the Wilcoxes and their West African Rubber Company.

As Nathan Hensley (2016) has recently shown, adventure fiction mediated the contradictions of a hegemonic liberal state by dressing up neo-epic, masculine action (theft, murder, conquest, etc.) in the fine clothes of liberal ideas, whether family reunion, political regime change or scientific exploration. Howards End reverses this mediation, investing liberal ideas and aesthetic capacities with all the robustness and extra-legal sovereignty inherent in adventure’s modes of renegade action. If fin de siècle romance attempted to render Britain’s twilight bid for global hegemony the narrative semblance of liberalism, then

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99 Although at other moments Margaret does perform a minimum quantity of household administration and affective labor, and stands in a kind of pseudo-parental relationship to her younger siblings, I think it is important to note how stringently Forster distinguishes Margaret’s activity from the work and values of traditional, domestic femininity embodied by Ruth. She is certainly not, as Woolf would have said, an Angel in the House.

100 In this sense, my reading echoes the novel’s own commentary on romance in the modern period: “Life is indeed dangerous, but not in the way morality would have us believe. It is indeed unmanageable, but the essence of it is not a battle. It is unmanageable because it is a romance, and its essence is romantic beauty.” (91) A year after Howards End was published, Forster spoke of the endurance of romance in modernity in terms of the capacity for a certain psychic and libidinal alertness: “Modern civilization does not lead us away from Romance, but it does try to lead us past it, and we have to keep awake. We must insist on going to look round the corner now and then, even if other people think us a little queer, for as likely as not something beautiful lies round the corner.” Forster, E.M. “The Beauty of Life”, in Albergo Empedocle and other writings (Liveright, New York, 1971) p.175
Forster’s aesthetic romance attempts to lend liberalism an air of heroic action. This rhetoric of action and questing, moreover, is also a fantasy of work. Much like his Bloomsbury colleague, Virginia Woolf, to whom I will turn briefly later, Forster renders the feminine aesthetic psyche *productive of value*. Such a generic reversal is so startling – both in literary and sociological terms – that it has gone under the radar of previous critics of both *Howards End* and modernism at large, who tend to read aesthetic and cognitive activities as a retreat from regimes of capitalist work, rather than as the emerging productivity of the aesthetic psyche.  

In Forster’s case, what we might call the decadence of the psyche has been doubly locked in by Lionel Trilling’s seminal reading of *Howards End*. Writing at the apex of mid-century American Fordism, at which capitalist growth and industrial production had been ideologically welded to one another, Trilling figures the intellectual – embodied by the Schlegels – as parasitical “upon the business civilization he is likely to fear and despise”. In this reading of the novel, Wilcoxes are the creditors funding Schlegel culture, or as Margaret herself admits at one point: “More and more do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it.” (149) But the corollary of this admission of liberal dependency was not predetermined, either narratively or historically. While *Howards End* might seem to have offered us one answer based on a kind of industrial patronage of the arts via its famously forced marriage plot, it also presents another – critically unexplored – that is centered on renewed economic competition via its representation of intellectual activity as economically productive and narratively heroic.

To analytically separate this account of cultural productivity and aesthetic romance from Trilling’s charge of intellectual parasitism, it is necessary to complexify his reading with a more nuanced account of the novel’s gender and sexual relations. The male gender of

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101 Thus, despite his excellent work on modernism and fantasies of cognitive work, David Trotter elsewhere argues that the general tendency of Woolf’s and Richardson’s characters is to exist “apart from work and community” in a rarefied “individual consciousness” of their own, thus “obscuring their Edwardian predecessors.” Trotter, David. *The English novel in History* (London: Routledge, 1993) p.48

Trilling’s intellectual is perhaps nominal rather than particular. But if we were to particularize it then it would soon become clear that male and female intellectual ability are not represented as equivalent by the novel, neither across nor within class categories – nor even within the same family. Margaret’s virtuoso intellect and capacity for aesthetic synthesis is not only superlative among her peers but pseudo-magical in its capacity to produce effects that are decidedly extra-aesthetic.

In its far-reaching (if under-appreciated) bid to render aesthetic creativity available to capital, Margaret’s heroism is not only oppositional to late-industrial modes of value-production; it also anticipates shifts in the locus of economic practice characteristic of our own historical moment of creative capitalism. The wager of this article is that Forster’s peculiar reworking of creative activity as a frontier romance or “adventure”, constitutes a crucially unexplored moment in the century-long spread of the vocabulary and the ideology of creative capitalism. But Forster’s moment was obviously not our own, and while this reading might carry a value for rethinking creative labor in the present, it does so only because the Schlegel ambition to render the imagination useful is not identical with the instrumentalizing imperatives of contemporary capitalism. Indeed, my hope is that by opening up for critique an earlier moment of disruption to industrial modes of production – at the near rather than far end of Fordism’s triumph, at the first rather than second wave of feminist praxis – we might recuperate some of the more radical challenges issued to work-culture by the workings of the imagination without, as Nancy Fraser has put it, “serving the legitimation needs of a new form of capitalism.”

Forster’s critique of industrialism and imperialism was in many ways defeated by the placing of the economy on a war-footing post-1914, a development which saw the production of material goods (by a largely female workforce) become newly urgent, and which left little prospect for a national economy premised on the kind of feminized aesthetic activity

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103 Fraser, Nancy. *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (Verso, 2013) p.223
exemplified by Bloomsbury. But as Raymond Williams reminded us, neither Bloomsbury’s failure to universalize their boldest social ambitions, nor the uneven development of those ambitions across time, should prevent us from viewing them as “one of the advanced formations of their class”, nor from better elucidating the “the difference between the fruit and its rotting, or between the hopefully planted seed and its fashionably distorted tree.”

[my emphasis] He already sensed in 1980 that many of Bloomsbury’s “advanced” ideas about gender, sexuality and culture would be incorporated into bourgeois dogma and mainstream capitalism, including what he called “the cult of conspicuous-appreciative-consumption”. (166) Appreciative or “appreciation” will become a keyword of this analysis, too, but in its Bloomsbury origins we shall see that it was by no means straightforwardly collocated with conspicuous consumption. Indeed, for Forster, it represented the charismatic core of cultural work.

“Appreciate the Heroism”: Problems in Cultural Work

Toward those ends, let us return to Margaret’s vocational pep talk to her younger brother with which we began. The conversation can be read as testing ground for vocational abilities inflected by gender and sexual identities. Urged by his sister to take up work, Tibby can only respond with groans. Advised to summon professional role models, he can only recall a man named “Mr Vyse”, a pun underscoring his bleak view of the professions, as well as an oblique reference to Cecil Vyse, the emasculated anti-hero of A Room with A View. As we shall see in more detail, Tibby reveals to the reader masculinity’s vocational as well as sexual fate under total expertise, of professional work evacuated of all heroic content. Margaret, however, is

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104 Williams, Raymond. ‘The Bloomsbury Fraction’, in Problems in Culture and Materialism (Verso, 1980) p.166
seemingly quite unflummoxed by her brother’s lack of enthusiasm in the face of the job market, confident that “men have developed the desire for work” and that “for women, too, 'not to work' will soon become as shocking as 'not to be married' was a hundred years ago.”

(94)

Not sharing Tibby’s vocational fatigue, Margaret’s desire for work calls to her mind several role models, including her prospective husband, who has supposedly “worked regularly and honestly” (95). Such admiration for the work of the colonial classes, however, relies on some very subtle distinctions; namely, disaggregating workers and the ideologies which valorize them from ethically (and aesthetically) unworkable outcomes: “I can’t bother over results,” said Margaret, a little sadly. “They are too difficult for me. I can only look at the men. An Empire bores me, so far, but I can appreciate the heroism that builds it up.” Heroism without empire – if we can imagine such a thing in 1910 – would be what Margaret describes as “activity without civilization,” a utopian quotient so metaphysical as to be “what we shall find in heaven.” (95)

Heaven, or, perhaps, *Howards End*, since “activity without civilization” can be taken as a working definition of Margaret’s brand of vocational pretending: work written via a revised (or “appreciated”) mode of “heroism”, placed in the service of anti-civilizational or anti-normative ends. If Margaret can “appreciate” the heroism of empire, then her work is also a form of heroic appreciation. Indeed, “appreciation” names what Forster understood to be the kernel of charismatic culture-work under increasingly bureaucratic regimes of training. Margaret’s pretend work solves occupational deadlocks that were endemic to the male professions of the modernist era, and that Forster, as a critic and broadcaster as well as a novelist, felt acutely in his own career. As we can see by turning to Forster’s later work as a critic, he wished to exercise the most exuberant cultural charisma while severing it from the institutional strictures of rule-bound and hard-learned expertise.

This two-step maneuver is perhaps most deftly realized in Forster’s 1947 essay, “The *Raison D’être* of Criticism”, a lecture delivered at a symposium on music at Harvard
University. There, Forster would oppose the pleasure of “appreciation” to the skills needed for criticism. Forster turns to music as “the deepest of the arts and deep beneath the arts” in order to explicate the work of the professional critic. (120) Having, he says, “no authority” and “being an amateur whose inadequacy will become all too obvious”, he proceeds to develop a theory of criticism founded on nothing more than “a desire to listen”, a sense of “love” towards the music. But it turns out that love is a necessary but not sufficient condition for criticism, that while “appreciation ought to be enough”, unless combined with specialist training “it will not bite”. Yet training is quite literally undesirable; it “may sterilize the sensitiveness that is being trained”. (121) Stuck in this bad antithesis between amateurism and professionalism, Forster’s essay tacks back and forth, seemingly unable to find a solution, and eventually insisting that “love” must form the basis of professional culture work, even if it cannot be its entire extent.105

Simultaneously, however, there’s another mode of reconciliation being enacted in Forster’s essay, which dresses down valuable professional expertise in the modest clothing of inexperience, and thus arrives at a form of charismatic ability via the backdoor. Let us call it sprezzatura. Forster enacts this strategy by insisting on his own amateur-status as a musical critic, despite what the essay goes on to evince as a fairly impressive (if self-deprecating) repertoire of musical knowledge and skill.106 Forster’s self-effacing style thus attempts to embody what he outlines as his ideal (and impossible) professional, an individual who “is thoroughly versed in the score of the Ninth Symphony and can yet hear the opening bars as a trembling introduction in A to the unknown” – that is, as if hearing it with the “surprise” of an

105 Forster’s unsolved antithesis is indeed the undialecticisable contradiction of professional ideology under increasingly bureaucratic modes of training, evaluation and expertise, an ideology of charismatic individualism anathema to the modes of rationalization and standardization that are increasingly the professions’ everyday. See Larson p.206. For a recent account of literary criticism’s embroilment in this antithesis, see Joseph North, North asks, in a question apposite to Margaret’s de-institutionalised aesthetic activity: “How does one pursue the tenuous task of cultivating an appreciation for the aesthetic without lapsing into mere impressionism? How does one pursue this task with a rigor sufficient to qualify one’s work as disciplinary in the scientific terms recognized by the modern university?” North, Joseph. Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History (Harvard University Press, 2017) p.217

106 Quite apart from the abundance of music and musicians in his novels, musical categories such as “rhythm” are also central to Forster’s account of literary aesthetics in Aspects of the Novel.
amateur. Only such a critic “has reached the highest rank in his profession.” (131) Such listening would, Forster admits, be “super-rational”.\footnote{As the closest approximation of a real human being who can perform such a feat, Forster points to Virginia Woolf, who “believed in reading a book twice. The first time she was an archangel: she abandoned herself to the author unreservedly. The second time she was Mephistopheles: she treated him with severity and allowed him to get away with nothing he could not justify.” (132) It is telling for the argument I am making that only a queer, female member of Forster’s Bloomsbury clique could come close to performing his “super-rational” cultural criticism.}

Turning back to *Howards End*, we can see how the particular affordances of narrative allow Forster to solve this professional deadlock in more thoroughgoing ways. That is, Margaret’s “pretend” work figures precisely a “super-rational”, which is to say narrative and symbolic, attempt at solving the problems Forster could not resolve in his professional career. If the ideal critic-intellectual is the person who can listen to Beethoven in two ways at once – impressionistically and scholastically – this will no doubt remind us of the famous episode from chapter five of *Howards End*, in which the Schlegels attend a recital of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.\footnote{It is hard not to believe that Forster had this episode in mind all those years later when he wrote “The Raison d’être of Criticism”, in which he discusses passages from Whitman and Proust that involve impressionistic responses to music, describing “the state into which the hero was thrown as he sat down on his chair at the concert”. He describes this as a “criticism which has no interpretive value, yet it should not be condemned off hand.” (123)} Margaret’s younger siblings narrativize the sundered antitheses of pure appreciation and practiced expertise, alternatives which are written as mock-heroic femininity and anti-heroic masculinity, respectively.

Helen sees “heroes and shipwrecks in the music’s flood”, (26) “goblins, and then a trio of elephants dancing”, (28) absurd, synesthetic impressions which overwhelm her and send her fleeing from the concert hall mid-performance. Helen’s sheer appreciation passes over into a stereotypical Bovaryism. Unable to distinguish between aesthetic representation and experiential reality, the two become conflated, with the result that meaning is both arbitrary and deterministic: “The notes meant this and that to her, and they could have no other meaning, and life could have no other meaning.” (29) Helen’s excessive appetite for the music has not only aesthetic implications, but erotic ones; her literally fatal attraction to Leonard is sparked by his own quixotic ramblings across Wimbledon Common in his spare
time between work in mock-romantic imitation of what he sees as the heroic manliness of Stevenson and Thoreau. When Bast recounts his adventures to the Schlegel sisters following the concert, Helen listens, “her eyes aflame”, seduced not so much by Bast himself as by the mirror image – and classed derogation – of her own aesthetic romanticism. (103)

Margaret’s younger brother, by contrast, attends the concert “profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee”. (26) Tibby spends the performance berating his aunt to listen for the “transitional passage on the drum”. (28) He is so immersed in esoteric, codified knowledges (Forster has him end the novel studying Chinese grammar) that both human and aesthetic relationships take on a secondary and unreal character. If Helen fulfills the stereotype of the over-desiring female aesthete, then Tibby is a figure for masculine expertise so removed from experience as to have become scholastic pedantry. Again, this vocational identity has erotic dimensions. In the job-market conversation with Margaret with which we began, Tibby desires not her “activity without civilization” but what he calls “civilization without activity”, a dream of post-work, post-masculine decadence that Margaret ironically assures him he can find at Oxford. Tibby’s bildung passes “gently from boyhood to middle age”; he “had never known young-manliness… was frigid, through no fault of his own, and without cruelty.” (238) My intention of course is not to recuperate, nor far less to endorse, either Forster’s misogynistic portrayal of Helen or his weirdly homophobic rendering of Tibby, but to grasp these vocational and sexual stereotypes of failed heroism as foils against which Margaret defines her own brand of heroic work, her own ideal of professional and sexual identity.

Only she can mediate between the unruly desires of sheer appreciation and the rule-bound strictures of sterilized expertise to embody Forster’s ideal cultural-worker and adventuresome hero. She does so, like a good professional, by removing herself above the fray and evaluating the cultural field as a whole, and all with the kind of effortless sprezzatura we saw Forster attempt in his professional address on music. Attending Leonard Bast to collect his infamous umbrella after the concert has ended, Margaret disqualifies both
Helen’s romantic impressionism (“what is the good of the ear if it tells you the same as the eye”) and Tibby’s dry expertise (“He treats music as music, and oh, my goodness! He makes me angrier than anyone, simply furious.”). Simultaneously, she historicizes her sister’s error as itself symptomatic of the immanent development of musical styles (“But, of course, the real villain is Wagner. He has done more than any man in the nineteenth century towards the muddling of the arts.”). (33) If my own language here sounds like an overly scholastic vocabulary for describing Margaret’s fluttery chatter with Leonard on her way home from a concert: good. I mean it to jolt us into reading her “natural” style for what it is—a camouflaged form of embodied cultural capital that secures her social status and makes Leonard feel nothing so much as the fact of his own social inferiority. From his perspective as cultural aspirant, Margaret’s comments appear as the epitome of cultural acquisition, and her ability as the outcome of what he rather astutely (or inevitably) recognizes not simply as individual charisma or leisured taste, but of “reading steadily from childhood”; that is, as the outcome of an upper-middleclass aesthetic education and work regime (not only reading but reading steadily) from which he feels himself thoroughly excluded, and which he cannot acquire in the scant leisure time allotted to him. (34)

Of course, if “reading steadily from childhood” is what equips Margaret with aesthetic skills and cultural competencies, then it also names precisely the routinized aesthetic schooling that Howards End elides via its own effortless self-inception. “One may as well begin with Helen’s letters to her sister”, announces the narrator demurely, casually evoking Austen in style while surreptitiously hitting the delete key to erase the very pre-narrative of feminine bildung that formed the content of her century’s novels. (3, my emphasis) Indeed, Howards End performs this foundational elision over and again, bringing into view Margaret’s bravura intellect while rendering invisible its origin and status as a mode of work routed in educational training. Like the novel’s post-bildung timeframe, the sisters’ orphaned standing and loose guardianship under a parochial and philistine aunt (“down at Swanage no one appreciated culture more than Mrs. Munt” [12]), renders their intelligence and
imagination autogenous. Likewise, their emotional and aesthetic sensitivity is only heightened by its contrast with the Wilcoxes’ commercial philistinism (“Could [the Wilcoxes] appreciate Helen, who is to my mind a very special sort of person? Do they care about Literature and Art?” [7]). So successful has the novel been in obscuring Schlegels’ – and more specifically, Margaret’s – intellect, that it has I think bewitched even those critics who have otherwise provided trenchant critiques of modernism’s mystification of its own expert-status, and prevented us from grasping the alternative narratives of “heroic” valorization that Forster appropriates (or, appreciates?) to lend enchanted form to Margaret’s “pretend” work.

A further example can crystalize what this pretend work looks like in a more overtly vocational context, as well as bringing into greater relief its status as a new mode of narrative adventure and value-production premised on feminine intellectual ability over and against masculine action. Shortly after her engagement to Henry Wilcox, Margaret decides (much, in fact, like “Miss Quested” in what forms the premise, and drives the crises, of A Passage to India) to visit her fiancé at his workplace, the offices of the West African Rubber Company:

The following morning, at eleven o’clock, she presented herself at the offices of the Imperial and West African Rubber Company. She was glad to go there, for Henry had implied his business rather than described it, and the formlessness and vagueness that one associates with Africa itself had hitherto brooded over the main sources of his wealth. Not that a visit to the office cleared things up. There was just the ordinary surface scum of ledgers and polished counters and brass bars that began and stopped for no possible reason, of electric-light globes blossoming in triplets, of little rabbit-hutches faced with glass or wire, of little rabbits. And even when she penetrated to the inner depths, she found only the ordinary table and Turkey carpet, and though the map over the fireplace did depict a helping of West Africa, it was a very ordinary map. Another map hung opposite, on which the whole continent appeared, looking

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109 The Schlegels’ namesake references the Romantic conception of a classical education that from the 19th century onward would become the mark of professional education in distinction to more technical, utilitarian modes of training. Larson (1977) notes how “a classical education functioned as a gate-keeping mechanism for the most prestigious professional roles.” (89) Leonard’s inability to become culturally literate, then, marks him as an aspirant who belongs to the white-collar section of the lower middleclass, performing standardized cognitive functions without any workplace autonomy or creativity. In Margaret’s hands, however, the aesthetic skills nourished by classical bildung become not only a marker of status but a direct source of productivity, even of heroism. Likewise, André Gorz writes about our own neoliberal moment, in a passage that could equally apply to Margaret’s aesthetic romance, of how “post-Fordist workers have to come into the production process with all the cultural baggage they have acquired through games, team sports, campaigns, arguments, musical and theatrical activities etc.” (10) Gorz, André. The immaterial: knowledge, value and capital London. Seagull Books, 2010.

110 Lois Cucullu’s otherwise excellent reading is foremost in my mind here. While her synchronic interpretation of Howards End as “a new spatial compound of property and cultural value” is convincing, it doesn’t address the diachronic actions of Margaret’s aesthetic heroism that I am unpacking here, and thus sidelines her to the figure of a “family nanny”. See Cucullu, Lois. Expert modernists, matricide, and modern culture: Woolf, Forster, Joyce (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)
like a whale marked out for a blubber, and by its side was a door, shut, but Henry’s voice came through it, dictating a “strong” letter. She might have been at the Porphyrion, or Dempster’s Bank, or her own wine-merchant’s. Everything seems just alike in these days. But perhaps she was seeing the Imperial side of the company rather than its West African, and Imperialism always had been one of her difficulties.

At first glance, Margaret’s apprehension, mediated through the narrative voice, might be thought to reveal her so-called naivety regarding male spheres of commercial work, a naivety underscored by her idealistic separation of an imperial and West African aspect to patently Eurocentric modes of exploitation, as well as by her seeming failure to move beyond the surfaces of the office in order to comprehend structural depths. In this reading, Margaret would be less an economic agent of production (or of adventure) than a passive and somewhat unworldly intellectual spectator.

But there’s another way to read Margaret’s agency in this passage, one that arises when we think of it as a generic and gendered displacement within the symbolic field of adventure’s modes of action. Margaret’s symbolic “penetration” to the “inner depths” of the office not only poaches the trope of territorial mobility from Forster’s newly office-bound and anti-heroic imperial protagonist, it also marks a broader redefinition of such mobility as psychological. Forster is investing intangible aesthetic thought-processes with symbolic vitality and adventurous energy. But adventurous energy of a peculiarly softened – one can, I think, say feminized – kind, reflected in the passage’s continual hedging and understatement (“even when… she found only… ordinary”). Margaret’s contradictory agency in this passage blends masculine adventure and feminine amateurism to arrive at a new model of professional and aesthetic subjectivity.111

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111 The tone of this passage is redolent to what what John Xiros Cooper has pithily described as Bloomsbury’s adoption of “the oblique or even the knowingly naïve or literal perspective”, one which “could do all the work of refutation without the earnest expenditure of a great deal of puffing force.” Cooper, John Xiros. *Modernism and the Culture of Market Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 248 Bloomsbury’s demurral from protestant, industrial and masculine work ethics all was perhaps framed most lucidly (if acerbically) by their detractors. It was thus Wyndam Lewis, referring more specifically to the Omega Workshops, who complained of the “family party of strayed and Dissenting Aesthetes [who] were compelled to call in as much modern talent as they could find, to do the rough and masculine work without which they knew their efforts would not rise above the level of a
Read in this way, her adventurous impressions of surfaces in fact translate into a *sprezzatura* evaluation of economic structures. Her first impression of Henry as a metonymic “voice” behind a door – a weirdly bureaucratized echo of Conrad’s Kurtz – registers the workplace specialization that takes hold of Forster’s characters from one end of the vocational spectrum to the other under the novel’s grim depiction of late industrial capitalism. Indeed, it registers such a social malady as a soured or inverted adventure plot.\textsuperscript{112} Likewise, her nonchalant mention of the Porphyrian and Dempster’s Bank, seemingly a failure to sharpen distinctions, is in fact rather astute, here, performing what we might call a comparative, aesthetic mapping of workplace specialization that takes in the novel’s downtrodden clerk, Leonard Bast, who understands “one particular branch of insurance in one particular office well enough to command a salary, but that’s all.” (193) And lastly, what might appear as an inability to grasp the symbolic architecture of the office, with its seemingly endless regressions and its parodies of biological reproduction (“electric-light globes blossoming in triplets”) can just as much be read as a perceptually embedded critique of what Forster saw as the senseless perpetuation of an imperial regime anathema to his liberal conceptions of modernity.

To be clear, then, what I am asking us to recognize here is less Forster’s diagnosis of the specializations and degradations of capitalist modernity per se – with which we can agree or disagree – so much as what is less disputable, the way he *performs* this diagnosis (this depreciation, one is tempted to say) by embedding it in Margaret’s aesthetic impressions of surfaces. In the Jamesian idiom that was dear to Forster, Margaret is able to “guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern”\textsuperscript{113}. She is thus to a certain extent what Jesse Matz (2001) has helpfully identified as a distinctly

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\textsuperscript{112} In this, Forster goes one step further than Conrad in disenchanting imperial adventure: he doesn’t even let his hero out of the office. The one time we do learn about Henry’s work abroad is when it boomerangs back on him as his sordid sexual misadventure with Jacky, an irony that desublimates the sexual fantasies of the imperial quest.

\textsuperscript{113} James, Henry. *The Art of Fiction: And Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1948) p. 11
modernist-era impressionist, able to mediate, like Forster’s super-rational professional, between first impressions and objective truths, infusing social expertise with perceptual authenticity. But she also importantly dissents from this model of the impression, since, for Matz, the Impressionist writer’s “collaboration” with (or psychoanalytical projection onto) a socially subordinated character (women, and the lower classes) always ends in the disciplinary, Bovaristic failure or the sublimation of “utopian impulses”, and the buffing up against bad social actualities. In this sense, Margaret’s impressions are stronger, more heroic, than those explored by Matz’s account of impressionist perception, since they bare within themselves the potential to appreciate new values and leverage consequences at the level of plot. Here, then, is where the aesthetic economy of appreciation differs from that of impressionism, in its proto-capitalist ability to become super-adequate to itself, to produce a surplus of value that wasn’t in existence before the moment of perceptive action.

That Margaret’s understated vocational activities – here, as at Beethoven – take as their object the activities and conditions of other kinds of workers, is entirely congruent with the professional dimensions of Forster’s vocational fantasy. It is the special prerogative of

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115 Even Helen, whose more Bovaristic impressionist investments lead to a near fatal erotic attraction with Leonard, is rescued from the worst kinds of social-symbolic punishment – a rescue itself bound up, as we shall see, with the impression’s appreciation into something new.
116 As Matz puts it, the impressionist writer “singles out someone whose social role makes that person a likely source of material vitality. For the “strength” necessary to launch the impression into its series of successive states, the Impressionist writer turns to women and the lower classes, engineering the impression’s mediation through their greater apparent sensuous or nonintellellectual receptivity.” (9) The placing of “strength” between quotations, here, signals a canny acknowledgement that having an impression about something counts for no strength at all – unless, that is, it can be written as the alternative heroism of a new style of adventure. In this sense, I am supplementing Matz’s account of the identarian politics and psychodynamics undergirding impressionist perception with a further account of the genres that could super-charge such perception into a principle of narrative change, into a plot.
117 We might historicize this shift with Bloomsbury as one from impressionism to post-impressionism, since much of what was at stake in the second moniker (beyond any set of stylistic traits) was the recuperation of the aesthetic as a democratized sphere of social praxis. As Laura Marcus has explained, in his 1920 retrospect to Vision and Design, Roger Fry suggested that the uproar over post-impressionism had been its attack on the usual function of cultural capital, in which a “considerable mass of education” was necessary to admire art, whereas “to admire a Matisse required only a certain sensibility.” Woolf echoed this “model of intuitive response”, as Marcus paraphrases it, in her biography of Fry: “Everyone argued. Anyone’s sensation – his cook’s, his housemaid’s – was worth having. Learning did not matter; it was the reality that was all important.” As Marcus also points out, such a democratic philosophy is somewhat problematic coming from a highly educated (if not always formally trained) rentier class. But Woolf’s insistence on reality, which I take to mean a broad social praxis, is suggestive of the group’s aggressive generalization of aesthetic competencies beyond Art. See Marcus, Laura. ‘Bloomsbury Aesthetics’, pp. 166-7
professions to become reflexive in relation to their position within the totality of social labor, so as to carve open and protect their own function within a market, or what the sociologist of professionalism Magali Larson would call a “monopoly of confidence”. In order to unpack how Margaret’s impressions narratively appreciate into a certain kind of proto-professional knowledge-value we will need to scale-back and consider not only the adventure rhetoric but the romance structure of Howards End. More specifically we need to read its closure not as a capitulation to the narrative mechanisms of Victorian domestic realism – not as an inheritance plot, per Trilling – but as the symbolic locus of a new model of heroic cultural work, one that produces normative or evaluative knowledges by working on what Sarah Brouillette (2014) describes as the raw material of today’s creative class, “the general world of subjectivity and the environment.” (40) Forster’s glamorization of aesthetic subjectivity itself as a sphere of adventurous work has profound implications for how we think about the Schlegels’ occupation of Howards End, and the social, sexual and vocational meanings that attend that symbolic annexation of property.

“We know this house is ours”: A Newly Propertied Queerness

More recent queer scholarship on Howards End has, purposely or not, contributed to the project of re-evaluating Lionel Trilling’s classical liberal reading of the Schlegels’ intellectual dependency by complicating the novel’s representation of gender and sexual agency. Writing of Margaret and Ruth’s queer bond, Benjamin Bateman (2011) helpfully characterizes the older Schlegel sister as a “purposive queer agent who can rewrite the self’s own story and thus reactivate the subjugated histories of attempts to pursue intimacies off the beaten path of...
procreative conjugality.” In this reading, “Margaret’s marrying Henry in the wake of losing Ruth can be understood [not as capitulation to bourgeois heterosexuality] but as an attempt to salvage a queer connection by annexing it to a conventional, socially sanctioned one.” (190)

To conclude this exploration of heroic work and literary adventure, I want to explore this reading of a “queer” Howards End – and Howards End – by looking briefly at the narrative mechanics that “annexing” entails – a word aptly connoting an improper seizure of property.

It’s perhaps telling of the ongoing, if narrowing, divide between materialist and queer analysis, that neither of these groups of critics of the novel have picked up on what we might call the work-intensive nature of Ruth’s and Margaret’s queer bond. Their sexual attraction is largely written as the former’s valorization of the latter’s verbal flare and aesthetic ability: “I think you put it best in your letter… Yes. You’ve got it. Inexperience is the word… I think Miss Schlegel puts everything splendidly”. (58–65) In short, Margaret’s sexual charisma is inextricable from her dazzling intellect. While occupying a very different and more privileged social position, Ruth’s standpoint resembles Leonard’s in so far as her exclusion from the novel’s account of elite, metropolitan subjecthood (as residual domestic housewife, rather than downtrodden white-collar worker) places her in a more clear-sighted position to view Margaret’s forms of sprezzatura cultural-work as a bid to reground the sexual relations of property ownership and its attendant divisions of labor – indeed, a bid to reground them beyond the stark division of unpaid female domestic work and remunerated male managerial work that characterizes Ruth’s own marriage to Henry Wilcox. Ruth’s relation to Margaret’s cultural skills can be seen most powerfully in a passage in which she attends a Bloomsburyesque lunch at the Schlegel’s family home:

Yet the little luncheon-party that she gave in Mrs. Wilcox’s honour was not a success. The new friend did not blend with the "one or two delightful people" who had been asked to meet her, and the atmosphere was one of polite bewilderment. Her tastes were simple, her knowledge of culture slight, and she was not interested in the New

English Art Club, nor in the dividing-line between Journalism and Literature, which was started as a conversational hare. The delightful people darted after it with cries of joy, Margaret leading them, and not till the meal was half over did they realize that the principal guest had taken no part in the chase. There was no common topic. Mrs. Wilcox, whose life had been spent in the service of husband and sons, had little to say to strangers who had never shared it, and whose age was half her own. Clever talk alarmed her, and withered her delicate imaginations; it was the social counterpart of a motorcar, all jerks, and she was a wisp of hay, a flower. Twice she deplored the weather, twice criticized the train service on the Great Northern Railway. They vigorously assented, and rushed on, and when she inquired whether there was any news of Helen, her hostess was too much occupied in placing Rothenstein to answer. (63)

Margaret’s “demon of vociferation”, as the narrator puts it in the next sentence, indexes unstable and shifting relationships to property. What Mrs. Wilcox – here archetype of nineteenth century domestic femininity as virginal flower and dutiful mother at once – cannot follow in this passage, is not only the sudden movement of Margaret’s picaresque chatter (“all jerks”), but its slip-sliding relations to modes of consumption and production, as both landed, aristocratic leisure (figured as the “chase” of the Sunday hunt) as well as industrial manufacture (“the social counter-part of a motorcar”), a form of transportation almost exclusively associated with the Wilcox men.

This passage, in other words, seems to be equivocating about the generic problem of how to make leisured intellectual abilities translate themselves into the languages of work, property and industry. And below that discursive equivocation is a material one, as the Schlegel family home in which they are being uttered is itself earmarked to be demolished for “new buildings, of a vastness at present unimaginable”. Industrial development is thus posed as the literal usurper of bohemian domestic space, a threat which prompts, as if spontaneously, the Schlegels’ work to find a new property (and, indeed, a new property relation). As both vocational foil and love-object at once, Ruth Wilcox offers Margaret a way out of both these double binds. Their sexual magnetism is quite literally represented as an opportunity to translate cultural activity into the solid stuff of real estate. In the terms of romance, Ruth stands in relation to Margaret as a donor figure, an anachronistic source of value that cannot be authentically integrated into the story’s metropolitan, modernist
worldview – whence her ghostly presence and sudden death – but whose supplementary function as both matriarchal property owner and work-fantasy-supplier is vital to advancing the plot’s aspirational content.119

Ruth’s famous “queer invitation” has been rightly read by Bateman and others as indexing a queer mode of loving, but it is no less crucially for our purposes a proleptic sign for a queered form of working: “Come down with me to Howards End now,’ she had said, more vehemently than ever. ‘I want you to see it. You have never seen it. I want to hear what you say about it, for you do put things so wonderfully.’” (71, my emphasis) Is this an erotic invitation, or a vocational one? A date, or a job interview? Of course, it’s strictly neither, but rather a solicitation to perform a newly heroic mode of aesthetic work in order to “annex” a home for bohemian queerness. As we shall see, both seeing Howards End and saying nice things about it – in a word, appreciating it – are in no way incidental to Margaret’s coming to own it.

In a perfectly ghostly manifestation of what Robert K. Martin (1997) has described as Forster’s knack for “queer begetting” between non-filial generations, readers may recall that Ruth leaves Howards End to Margaret upon her deathbed.120 I say may recall, since the narrator does everything in her power to downplay and undermine the legitimacy of this semi-legalized deed – and surprisingly given her general accord with Schlegel interests: “Ought the Wilcoxes to have offered their home to Margaret? I think not. The appeal was too flimsy. It was not legal; it had been written in illness, and under the spell of a sudden friendship…”. (84)121 But how do we read such demurral on the narrator’s part? I would suggest that what is

119 Ruth’s function is not dissimilar to the kind of “fairy-Godmother” figures analyzed in Bruce Robbins account of fictions of the welfare state, her role being to catalyze the vocational ascendency of another character. See Robbins, Bruce. Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007)
121 There are many things to say about the under-appreciated fact that the narrator of Howards End is a woman. Suffice to say here that it challenges the idea that the narrative voice is in any straightforward or unmediated way a reflection of Forster’s own views on feminism, culture and industry, even as the plot comes to solve many of the occupational deadlocks associated with his own professional career.
being rejected here is not the principle that Margaret should own Howards End, but more specifically that she should inherit it – a form of property transfer too leisured and aristocratic to carry Forster’s nascent, productivist romance. From the perspective of the vocational romance this essay has been tracking, it is not enough that Margaret should simply inherit the property, and by synecdoche, England: she needs to work for it. Or else, pretend to. The house, we might say, functions not unlike the treasure of imperial romance, standing as a back-formation that allows Margaret to perform a qualitatively new form of heroic work.

At its decisive plot-turn, Howards End shifts into a tellingly picaresque mode, proliferating romance motifs in a time signature of sudden action and reaction reminiscent of the “and then” temporality that Northrop Frye identified with romance as such. Margaret travels to Howards End with Henry and the family doctor to “capture… Helen” and rescue her from “madness” – an offstage extra-marital pregnancy with Leonard Bast. At one point Henry tries to escape and leave Margaret behind but gets snared up on the driveway by his infant niece, while Margaret dashes out just “in time to jump on the footboard”. This episode, I am arguing, is a transvaluation of the narrative content of the imperial quest that nonetheless retains its narrative structure, in which an imperiled journey becomes the occasion for testing heroic modes of action and guile, as well as their capacities to produce forms of value.

Certainly, the style here is parodic, but as critics from Linda Hutcheon (1985) to Fredrick Jameson (1991) will remind us, parody signals not a disavowal of historical forms but an ambivalent recognition of the residual affordances or values of narrative technique for expressing new social content. Modernism knows that dilemma well. This episode, in short, embodies not simply the anti-heroism we might usually associate with Forster’s tonally dry, self-deprecating variety of modernism, but a displacement of heroism and of adventure’s

122 In that sense, this episode seems to embody another choice Schlegel motto: “There are moments when the inner life actually "pays," when years of self-scrutiny, conducted for no ulterior motive, are suddenly of practical use.” [my emphasis] The sudden temporality of this passage might be thought of as using the chronotopes of romance described seminally by Frye and Bakhtin in order to break out of the developmental, normative time schemas of nineteenth century realism.

locus of fantasy from the industrious male body – defeated, ironically, by an infant! – to the feminine aesthetic psyche.

What, then, is the telos of Margaret’s adventure if not the sublimated treasure of imperial fantasy? An answer to this question can be gleaned by considering Margaret’s own commentary on the journey at its outset: "But why should it be just like Helen? Why should she be allowed to be so queer, and to grow queerer?" (239) As we shall see, such a remark can be read as a call for sanctions not in one but in both senses of the word – most obviously a rebuke of Helen’s flighty behavior, but also, I think, a covert appeal to ground or sanction a project of bohemian social formations on a regime of aesthetic work. Margaret’s arrival at Howards End with her husband and the family doctor is the apex of Forster’s aesthetic adventure, a romance whose telos is “queerness” understood not as a principle of erotic connection but as the production of domestic and kinship relations as a subsector of modernist cultural-work. Margaret’s objection to the male medical professional and business magnate who accompany her to rendezvous with Helen is put in a free indirect discourse that brings the narrator into a relationship of collaboration, we might even say solidarity, with her vocational thoughts:

How dare these men label her sister! What horrors lay ahead! What impertinences that shelter under the name of science! The pack was turning on Helen, to deny her human rights, and it seemed to Margaret that all Schlegels were threatened with her. Were they normal? What a question to ask! And it is always those who know nothing about human nature, who are bored by psychology and shocked by physiology, who ask it. However piteous her sister’s state, she knew that she must be on her side. They would be mad together if the world chose to consider them so. (246)

This passage does nothing less ambitious than attempt to raise bohemian subjectivity to the status of a class-cadre recognizable in world-historical terms (“if the world chose to consider them so”) by reversing the civilization/barbarism dichotomy of the imperial quest in order to exoticize male vocational elites. The “horror” of civilization itself here reads like an uncanny inversion of the recent “horror” of imperial space made infamous by Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. This reverse-anthropological quest relies on a certain carefully poised perception of
a non-normative subject position. That is, as far as the narrative mechanics of this episode are concerned, being “mad together”, or defying patriarchal ideology, depends *precisely* upon Margaret’s perception of Helen’s extra-marital pregnancy as a paradigmatic moment of aesthetic appreciation, as if she were the centerpiece of an impressionist *tableaux vivant*.

Helen appears in the porch of Howards End “framed in the vine, and one of her hands played with the buds. The wind ruffled her hair, the sun glorified it; she was as she had always been.” (246)

Margaret’s appreciation of Helen as if she were a timeless work of art displaces judgement from moral to aesthetic registers, just at the moment when we’d expect it to cascade in the other direction. For just a few lines later, having outstripped Henry to the front door, “Margaret saw [Helen] rise with an unfamiliar movement, and, rushing into the porch, learned the simple explanation of all their fears – her sister was with child.” That Helen, rendered so magisterially via Margaret’s appreciative perception, should “rise”, just here, at the very moment when we – as much as Forster’s 1910 audience – would expect to see her descend into the abjected figure of the “fallen woman”, seems too algebraic an inversion to ignore. Margaret’s perception, I am arguing, appreciates – *raises in value* – a certain livable subject position for Helen by producing the normative or evaluative content of social knowledges about kinship and sexuality.¹²⁴ Her perception dissolves the boundaries upon which forms of social exclusion and sexual discipline are premised and results in the valorization of the novel familial structure that comes to inhabit the property. Seeing Helen both “as she had always been” at the same time as “with child” – without a trace of contradiction! – Margaret herself occupies a position analogous to Forster’s “super-rational”

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¹²⁴ If this sounds somewhat of a stretch, let me suggest that all I am doing here is rendering emphatic a narratological logic or connection between Forster’s ideas about aesthetics and work, on the one hand, and his values regarding kinship and domesticity, on the other, that has certainly been evoked in the language of critics preceding me: “In the last chapter of Howards End, Forster, a prophet far ahead of his time, projects an *impressionistic vision* of a radically different, more elastic middle-class family structure that presaged, in 1910, many of the characteristics now common to middle-class family.” (my emphasis) Olson, Jeane N. *E. M. Forster’s Prophetic Vision of the Modern Family in Howards End* (Texas Studies in Literature and Language, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1993), pp. 348
cultural worker, one who is both “thoroughly versed” in the musical score – the norms and laws that govern the orchestra – and yet simultaneously open to “the unknown” which is listening to every new iteration of the music.

This is the perceptual crux of Schlegelian appreciation, the ability to mediate between socially sanctioned knowledges and personal experiences and desires. It is a profoundly aesthetic capacity, even as it refuses precisely the separation between aesthetic and social spheres. The proto-vocational dimensions of this aesthetic action can be sensed in the necessity of warding off of competing competencies, discourses and qualifications which, as we have heard already, “know nothing about human nature”. Protecting her jurisdiction over the sphere of kinship, Margaret insists to Henry that she “will manage it all”, while he responds that they “had better work all together”; the doctor, versed in sterilized medical training, “murmur[s] something about a nervous breakdown”, and Margaret insists that he is “not qualified to attend my sister”. (247-248) And yet just here, upon its symbolic entry into professional workplace imaginaries, is where we must think Margaret’s counter-hegemonic perception dialectically, for the redemptive moment in which she perceives Helen is also the moment in which impression appreciates into a bourgeois property relation. It’s the culminating moment of the novel’s appropriation and transvaluation of frontier adventure rhetoric, as the phallic heroine takes for her own the forbidden territory: “[t]he keys of the house were [Margaret’s] hand. She unlocked Howards End and thrust Helen into it.” (247)

But like the heroes of adventure tumbling into the treasure-cave, the house is not yet theirs, since it hasn’t yet been worked for, or, to name the form of that work, it hasn’t yet been appreciated. Indeed, if this word’s transvaluation from aesthetic to economic registers over the course of my readings is still not persuasive, let us note one final usage placed in the mouths of the Wilcox men, who, upon discovering Ruth’s impromptu will, justify not revealing it to Margaret on the grounds of appreciation: “it isn't like [mother] to leave anything to an outsider, who'd never appreciate.” (85) It’s unclear, in this instance, whether Margaret is the subject of a transitive verb, or the object of an intransitive one, herself
appreciating in value upon the inheritance of the property. Of course, the very overlap between the two senses of the word is precisely what is at stake in this final episode, which translates a regime of aesthetic valorization (seeing Howards End, as Ruth put it) into an economy of property value (owning it). The women walk around the house admiring how their cultural accoutrements have been mysteriously arranged by the housekeeper (who “must have worked for days”[125]. Such aesthetic heroism goes on for a remarkably long time, I think, and it looks like this:

The sword looks well, though… Magnificent… It is far too beautiful… what a place for mother’s chiffonier… Oh, look at them!... Feel. Their dear little backs are quite warm… the chairs show up wonderfully… Ah, that greengage tree… I love yellowhammers… Helen uttered cries of excitement. (253–256)

Despite the cries of excitement, however, this is not the sheer Bovaristic impressionism which overwhelmed Helen at Beethoven and sent her fleeing, but rather a qualified mode of appreciation, in both the grammatical and professional senses of the word. Appreciation is combined with its opposite – discrimination – in order to arrive at a more balanced form of judgement that brings the sisters into a proto-professional relationship of aesthetic proficiency:

Where’s the piano, Meg?... The Carpet’s a mistake… this floor ought to be bare… But why has Miss Avery made them set to partners… The window’s too high… No, I don’t like the drawing room so much… It would have been so beautiful otherwise… It’s a room that has been spoilt through trying to make it nice for women. Men don’t know what we want – (253 – 256)

Raymond Williams would have identified in this passage the seed that might later grow into the fashionably distorted tree of “conspicuous-appreciative-consumption.” And certainly this scene can be read as a nascently consumerist reproduction of bourgeois taste, the shoring up

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[125] Miss Avery represents an alternative, unfulfilled line of inheritance for Howards End, having turned down Ruth’s brother’s proposal of marriage when the house formerly belonged to him. Her gratis domestic work to actually arrange the objects of the house (totally unsolicited, and therefore mystified) here stands as a reminder of the class hierarchy and exclusion necessary within the community of women for Margaret’s aesthetic romance to take place at all.
of aesthetic distinctions that are barely concealed social ones. But such a reading would, I think, be lazily (rather than critically) presentist. If we attend more closely to this aesthetic activity what must strike us as decisive is that the household objects that the sisters appreciate are not ranged on a market as fungible commodities, but appear as homely goods, or potentially homely ones, if only they can be felt about in the right ways. The sister’s shared mode of perception is distinctly feminine and anti-patriarchal (“men don’t know what we want”). What it imagines into being is not a relation to consumption, but an appreciation of new sororal kinship and domestic relations founded upon shared modes of aesthetic perception. It’s Helen – aesthetically retrained, we might say – who is given the crucial line in this regard: “We know this house is ours, because it feels ours. Oh they may take the title-deeds and the door-keys, but for this one night we are at home.” (257) In this little empire of appreciation, aesthetic feelings are sovereign.

In Hollywood there’s a name for the “fairy-dust” music, the tinselly diminuendos, that attend moments of pseudo-magical wish-fulfillment within otherwise secular and everyday plots. Helen’s remark is one of those moments, after which nothing can prevent the illiberal power of the wish. Does it not strike readers as somewhat disproportionate that

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126 If we were to read Margaret and Helen’s aesthetic work along these lines of appreciative consumption it would fall closer to what Alice Wood has described as the aspirational lower-middleclass domestic politics of interwar publications such as Good Housekeeping and Modern Home. See Wood, Alice, ‘Housekeeping, Citizenship, and Nationhood in Good Housekeeping and Modern Home’, in Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918-1939: The Interwar Period, ed. Catherine Clay (Edinburgh University Press, 23 Jan 2018) More germane here is what Morag Shiach has helpfully described as “the aestheticization of a wide range of domestic objects” (64) that was key to Bloomsbury’s queer domestic subculture, including their blending of artistic work and queered homes. See Shiach, Morag. ‘Domestic Bloomsbury’, in Rosner, Victoria. The Cambridge Companion to The Bloomsbury Group (Cambridge University Press, 2014)

127 In Forster’s vocabulary, such a collocation of aesthetic feelings and real estate ownership attempts to raise perception from the level of story to that of plot, for which the emphasis is on “causality” or the “because” of the above passage. See Aspects of the Novel, p.93

128 There is, again, something curiously presentist about the fact that the narrative moment which translates aesthetic into economic regimes of appreciation is written as pseudo-magical wish-fulfillment centering on property value. One of the unsolved theoretical problems in accounts of the creative class today is whether creativity in fact produces economic value at all. While libertarian (and economically interested) proponents of creative labour such as Richard Florida insist that the creative moment is the moment of value-added, leftist sociologists such as Andrew Ross point to the fact that much of this added value arises from the supplementary effects of gentrification and property market inflation that attend the material expansion of creative industries. From a socio-cultural perspective, however, what seems crucial is not any empirical test of added value but rather understanding the circulation of confidence narratives or discourses of legitimation that construct believable fictions of creativity as economic value. I am reading Howards End as one such narrative. One can’t help thinking, here, of Forster’s poaching of the epigraph to Lord Jim: ”My conviction,” says the mystic, ”gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it”: just as the sisters believe here in one another’s forms of feeling.

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when Margaret petitions Henry to spend one night in the house with her sister, he concludes that her request “is connected with something far greater, the rights of property itself”? (278) Reputation, certainly, even the protection of family respectability and social class, perhaps, but the rights of property itself? Isn’t that a somewhat hyperbolic conclusion at which to arrive? Indeed it is, but it is also the correct one when viewed within the romance topos that governs the closural phase of Forster’s novel, in which the glamorized work of aesthetic appreciation emergences as triumphant in securing Margaret and Helen a new home over and against the legalized entrenchment of patriarchal property rights and their phallic icons (“the title deeds and the door keys”). But such a “triumph” for feminized and queered cultural work comes at an ironic cost.

Invested with a sufficient amount of discriminating appreciation, the novel finally suggests, the cultural objects of the newly feminized Howards End take on a truly magical – and martial – power of their own. While it is Charles who is sanctioned by the law for striking Leonard with the Schlegels’ family sword – another telling instance of mock-heroic masculinity – the coup de grâce was actually delivered by the books which “fell over him in a shower. Nothing had sense.” (277) Once converted into icons of private property, the novel suggests, the appreciated cultural objects of Howards End cannot be shared, rejecting as if of their own initiative all cultural imposters and claimants to ownership while the Schlegel sisters stand by innocently. Such narrative sorcery on Forster’s part might arrogate to the sisters a significant sum of symbolic and material capital, and to the imagination a significant degree of power, but such gain comes at a loss. Culture’s ascendancy to symbolic hegemony also signals its abandonment as a utopian social alternative (“what we shall find in heaven”) and its conversion into the civilized languages of heterosexual romance and literary pastoral – languages in which, to return full circle, the “triumph” of Margaret’s “conquest” can only appear as “uncanny”.

That narrative movement, from aesthetic appreciation to propertied pastoral, is analogous to the political shift from an inchoate reimagination of the commons to a form of
aristo-bourgeois security excluding – quite literally, killing – common life. Triumph, indeed, as Wilfred Stone might have complained. But *Howards End* doesn’t so much finesse this contradiction, as Stone suggested, as it does probe the limits of the imagination conceived as a differential source of value.\(^{129}\) There is no “activity”, aesthetic or otherwise, the novel begrudgingly and no doubt ironically admits, that can blithely immure itself against the logic of patriarchal, capitalist “civilization”, no triumphant account of cultural work that does not at the same time risk being retuned to the key of bourgeois ideology – an irony that will no doubt feel all too familiar from our own cultural and economic standpoint.

Indeed, we will soon come to discuss that standpoint in its economic and cultural dimensions more directly via attending to Zadie Smith’s modernized and Americanized rewriting of *Howards End* in the context of the US research academy. The Forsterian undertones of that adaptation have been discussed at length, but by revisiting *On Beauty* (2004) in the light of the aesthetic romance I have just outlined, we can see that Smith’s reworking of the novel is an even more closely attuned reading of *Howards End* than has previously been suggested. Or, to put it another way, Smith’s novel is a particularly Forsterian reading of post-Fordist creative, capitalism, in which various kinds of cultural workers – and not only literary professionals – find themselves negotiating the now institutionally sundered poles of appreciation and expertise, love and training, pleasure and theory, at the same time as the political corollaries of these aesthetic dyads have undergone reversal. Before we get to North America, however, I want to take us on a detour to Chandrapore, to the colonial imaginary of Forster’s 1924 novel, *A Passage to India*, which can bring into negative relief the geopolitical conditions of possibility that structure Margaret’s metropolitan romance. By sending a Bloomsburyite to India in the form of Miss

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\(^{129}\) Of course, the propertied-pastoral also appears here precisely as a neo-aristocratic counter-discourse to the law of exchange, creating a space free of commodity fetishism and alienation. But precisely as a pastoral, it is also a space free of labor and its aspirations. That contradiction explains why Margaret’s “work” and her “triumph” appear as such fraught and melancholy signifiers in that final chapter. Forster wants to break out of very symbolic confine in which he has been forced to immure his ideal cultural-worker without submitting her to the “red rust” of industrial modernity fast encroaching upon the Purbeck Downs.
Quested (note the onomastic bathos) Forster suggests the jurisdictional limits and political pitfalls of aesthetic “appreciation” in a colonial domain where “culture” might be the final frontier of imperial romance.

Mis-quested, or, Bloomsbury goes to India

“I don’t myself like the phrase ‘the real India’. I suspect it. It always makes me prick up my ears.”

- E.M. Forster, “India Again”

When Adela Quested arrives in India to visit her fiancé, Ronny, at his colonial workplace, we’ve seen her once before. She’s one of Forster’s recycled characters, like Cecil Vyse from *A Room with A View*, who shows up as the anti-hero of Tibby’s and Margaret’s vocational tête-à-tête. Where Vyse is a major character become minor, Adela’s diegetic fortunes move in the other direction. Her first appearance, as Maria M. Davidis (1999) will remind us, was in *Howards End*, where she made a brief show at the luncheon held by Margaret in honour of Ruth Wilcox. Margaret had used Adela and her musical talents as bait to entice Ruth into staying a little longer (“Oh, but come upstairs for a little. Miss Quested plays. Do you like MacDowell?”). But alas, Mrs. Wilcox had to return to her husband and sons, and both she and Miss Quested soon made their exits from the apartment, and afterwards, the novel.

Adela’s reappearance in *A Passage to India* fourteen years later, however, suggests that Forster has forgotten neither her nor the bohemian milieu of which she was at first a participant. While Davidis points out that Adela is a new woman figure of sorts (liberal, feminist, progressive), her origin in the artistic milieu of the Schlegels’ apartment suggests that she is also the locus of an aesthetic romance, one now testing its modes of enchanted perception in a new jurisdictional field. Indeed, the history of criticism on *A Passage to India*
shows us that Adela has been read as both (failed) bohemian aesthete and (failed) colonial romancer. In this section, I want to suggest that those two forms of failure have more to say to one another than might have been supposed, and that, combined, they can tell us something new about the intertwined relationship between Forster’s colonial and cultural politics – and the staging of that relationship on the narrative ground of romance.

As Davidis points out, Adela’s character is the locus for testing a feminized form of imperial romance:

Adela’s desire for romance – her wish to explore the landscape – harkens back to male explorer figures of the past, who traditionally penetrate a fecund female landscape in order to bring forth its fruits for the British empire. At this point in imperial history, Adela is a reminder that the time of great imperial questing is over; the empire has been mapped and civilized enough so that even women can enter, transforming adventure into tourism. But it is also, perhaps contradictorily, that a woman who wants to explore is overly masculine and either sexually aggressive or undesirable; from a narrative perspective, she is an almost impossible figure, preferring imperial romance, as she does, over the usual desire of unmarried women, the heterosexual romance that results in marriage. Her yearning for imperial romance thus challenges both Victorian and modern sensibilities.¹³⁰

Davidis’s reading draws our attention to Adela’s intrusion upon the narrative tropes and genre codes of imperial romance, but where it could go further is in locating the crucial differences that distinguish Adela from her imperial predecessors – differences that go beyond a simple failure to fully inhabit the “impossible” position of male explorer. Adela is indeed figured as a female explorer of colonial space, but the telos of her quest would seem to have little in common with the material wealth and phantasmagoric treasure of imperial romance. Rather, what she would seem to be after is something closer to culture, desiring to see the “real India”.¹³¹

This is the generic displacement enacted by the Marabar caves, the invitation to which Adela accepts “out of adventure.” “She also liked Aziz”, the narrator continues, “and

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¹³¹ Forster, A Passage to India (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1984) p.26
believed that when she knew him better he would unlock his country for her.” (69) The caves figure in the romance trope of a hidden landscape waiting to be unlocked (much like Howards End, which Margaret “unlocked” for herself and Helen). And yet, when Adela actually arrives at the Marabar Caves with Aziz and Miss Moore, its value as a cultural destination quite literally fails to appreciate. The women “did not feel that it was an attractive place or quite worth visiting, and wished it could have turned into some Mohammedan object, such as a mosque, which their host would have appreciated and explained.” (142)

Clearly, the perceptual mechanics as well as the cultural values inherent to this form of appreciation are very different to the kinds of aesthetic valorizing performed by Margaret and the re-trained Helen. Crucially, it is not that the English women wish to appreciate the landscape themselves, so much as they wish to have it appreciated for them, by Aziz. Appreciating is outsourced, or at least routed through the colonial subject. The women’s perspective is not one of an active participant, let alone a producer of cultural objects or values, but that of a by-stander, an on-looker, or, in short, a tourist. Phenomenologically, the problem is one of aesthetic distance or perceptual mediation. The women wish to be close enough to the landscape to experience the “real India” but far enough from it so as not to have their identity subsumed by it, which would be to “go native”. Thus, they wish to experience cultural nativity vicariously, through Aziz, and when he begins talking – performatively, no doubt – about his national ancestry and the way it has been informed by national myth, Stella and Adela feel that “at last he was talking about what he knew and felt, talking as he had in Fielding's gardenhouse; he was again the Oriental guide whom they appreciated.” (143)

Appreciation is thus mediated through the racially subordinated and instrumentalized subject, whose function in this new kind of adventure plot is to lend authenticity to “their” culture – which is imagined as organic and pre-modern – so that (white) others can appropriate an

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experience of “the real India” without sacrificing their own racial superiority and metropolitan outlook.

And yet, if this is to sketch the theoretical concours of cultural appropriation that motivate Stella and Adella’s visit to the Marabar caves, it is obviously not an account of what actually transpires there. For the caves, we might say, do not appreciate. Forster writes the landscape as a kind of inverted aesthetic and imperial romance, where the perception of natural objects conspicuously yields up no value, either as a super-added content or as a form of internally hierarchized distinction. Brian May (2007) has described this as Forster’s “bathetic mode, which follows upon the disappointment of symbolist and impressionist expectations.” May pursues this bathetic mode as a political refusal of “Orientalist and primitivist gaze”, though one “not finally free from a subtler mode of romantic imperialist idealization” – one that takes the form of an “elemental” or starkly anti-symbolic (even “realist”) romance of the thing-in-itself.133

If we combine May’s reading of the Marabar as a fable of perceptual, orientalist failure with Davidis’s reading of it as a failure of the imperial romance, we can see that there is a kind of double forsaking taking place in Forster’s writing of the quest narrative. At the same time as he transvalues the prize of the imperial romance from materially extractive to culturally expropriative registers – from treasure to culture – he simultaneously and indeed literally hollows out the symbolic value sought by his heroine. The caves “were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil.” (125)

Clearly, then, Forster is rewriting what we discussed in the introduction as the crude sexual symbolics of the treasure cave. As a chronotope of late imperial romance, the treasure cave was the symbolic site of fantastical performances of homosocial male heroism narrated

as libidinalized productivity in a colonial space imagined as a super-abundant resource-extraction zone. Haggard’s caves, no less than their Hollywood upgrades, reduced “woman” to the inanimate landscape violently penetrated by the team of male explorers, rendering the female body both the symbolic source of material value and its abjected non-participant. A Passage to India critiques this crude sexual fantasy by both desublimating and reversing it, turning the symbolic assault on a landscape into an actual assault on a woman (desublimation) while simultaneously making a colonial subject the agent of such violence (reversal). But as generations of criticism has attested, these psycho-dynamic transformations are not so straightforward, since both are submitted to Forster’s extreme form of epistemological skepticism about “what happened” in the caves. As we shall see, however, that skepticism is not a blurring of Forster’s rewriting of the romance plot, but its ultimate transformation.

As sites of anti-treasure and non-value, the caves render all attempts at extraction futile. It is not just that they are materially empty – though they are that – but that they constitute a kind of sensory deprivation chamber, in which aesthetic experience no less than material extraction is rendered null:

The echo in a Marabar cave is… entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. "Bourn" is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or "bou-ourn," or "ou-boum,"-- utterly dull. Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce “bourn.” (147)

The caves engender not sensory intensity but a kind of aesthetic nihilism, and of a variety that has decidedly extra-aesthetic implications. Mrs. Moore is soon thinking of "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value." (152)

How do we read this bathetic reduction of value to sheer equivalence? One can say, with May, that it has the second order political value of refusing to romanticize colonial space, refusing to let it become the exoticized landscape onto which desire can be projected in the form of an aesthetic spectacle, whether strongly symbolist or weakly impressionist. But
this aesthetic nihilism has another value, too, I think, which gets us to the problem of
Forster’s imagination of cultural work in a colonial sphere. As we will recall from Margaret’s
forms of aesthetic appreciation, the kind of value inherent in acts of cultural valorization was
distinctly inductive and impressionistic. Values, Margaret’s forms of appreciation insisted,
weren’t to be derived from universals or general laws, whether “human nature” or “title
deeds”, but from aesthetic, sense-driven encounters with particular ethical circumstances,
encounters which, in the style of a Kantian purposefulness, could then generate new norms
according to their own immanent or autological precedent (“we know this house is ours
because it feels ours”). Margaret’s and Helen’s adventure is to bring the immanent judgement
inherent in normative claims about art (Kantianism) to extra-Art fields of value-production
(post-Kantian modernist adventure), thus aggressively expanding the jurisdictional field of
aesthetic competencies and accumulating various forms of symbolic interest from the work of
aesthetic disinterestedness.

Why doesn’t Adela do the same, or why can’t she? The answer, I think, has once
again everything to do with the status of the law, or more precisely the laws of property and
of marriage and of the legal magistrate whom Adela is considering marrying or not marrying
as she enters the Marabar caves, “thinking with half her mind ‘Sightseeing bores me’ and
wondering with the other half about marriage.” (151) In the caves, there takes place an
unrepresentable or at least unrepresented act of law-breaking. As Jenny Sharpe (1993) has
cogently reminded us, it is a form of law-breaking that forces us, like the local population, to
take sides, to be on one side of the law or on the other, backing Adela (and thus condemning
the Indian tour guide as a sexual assaulter), or backing the guide (and thus condemning Adela
as a sexual hysteric). Postcolonial and feminist criticism have more or less self-consciously
ensnared themselves in this interpretive trap over and again, as Sharpe reminds us, and the
hermeneutic contradiction stages a barely mediated political one: the transparently partisan
function of law in a colonial sphere where it’s role is to serve and protect the power of a
patriarchal ruling class (“to hold this wretched country by force” is Ronny’s description of his
own work as colonial magistrate, work to which Adela is considering becoming an adjunct). Adela is the very ground upon which the novel constructs, and subsequently deconstructs, this politico-legal antagonism, the ground of feminine innocence and virtue which is purportedly threatened by the sexual depravity of the racial subject.

Perhaps one way out of this hermeneutic double bind, or rather a way to grasp it from the outside rather than becoming entangled in it, is to see the caves not as staging a problem of justice (the intractable “what happened” of innocence vs guilt, truth vs. bluff) but as placing on trial the very aesthetic and affective foundations of legal testimony and juridical truth-making. The interrogatory apex of the trial is written in curiously aestheticized terms, as a problem of aesthetic experience. When Adela is asked to confirm Aziz’s entry into the cave,

> Her vision was of several caves. She saw herself in one, and she was also outside it, watching its entrance, for Aziz to pass in. She failed to locate him. It was the doubt that had often visited her, but solid and attractive, like the hills, "I am not--" Speech was more difficult than vision. "I am not quite sure."
> "I beg your pardon?" said the Superintendent of Police.
> "I cannot be sure . . ." (220)

During Adela’s testimony singularity of perception (“Her vision”) gives way to a multiplicity of percepts (“several caves”) and aesthetic immediacy (“she saw herself in one”) sits uncomfortably next to perceptual distance (“she was also outside it, watching its entrance, for Aziz to pass in”). The language here is subtly gothic, Adela’s “vision” and the doubt that “visited her” like a visitation sounding like sublimated content bubbling to the surface. But what if we read this partial desublimation not as sexual, but as perceptual? What if we read Adela’s visions and visitations as a the guilty conscience of aesthetic perception itself, and more specifically the guilty conscience of its fantasies of producing value, not directly in the service of the capitalist labor process, perhaps, but in the secondary sphere of a so-called civil society undergirding the maintenance of that global labor camp, the British empire? Adela’s aesthetic ambivalence can here only produce a kind of sovereign skepticism (“I cannot be sure…”), one, it would seem, not just about “what happened” but more fundamentally about the value of aesthetic perception to undergird law as such.
Adela’s sovereign doubt (“I cannot be sure…”) is the inverse of Helen’s sovereign certainty (“We know this house is our because it feels ours”). But in its finality and its narrative performativity – that is, in its modernist bid to raise perception to the level of *plot* – it shares with that certainty a critique (and a problematic one, no doubt) of liberalism’s deliberative and rationalist legal protocols, in which perceptions would add up as evidence to a verdict, and where a verdict would constitute “justice”. In both Helen’s case and Adela’s, legal hegemony (in the interests of patriarchy and colonialism both) is submitted to an *aesthetic critique*, in which feelings based on sense perceptions displace “reasons” as the basis of judgement (positively and negatively, by turns). Both *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* draw on and redeploy adventure’s affordances for *breaking the law*, for imagining sovereign action and enchanted work outside or at the edges of legal frameworks, though with very different implications in each case.

If this marks Forster as the contradictory liberal, ambivalent democrat and super-rational aesthete we knew he was all along, then it marks his work as something else, too: as yielding at crucial moments to the post-liberal sovereignty of aesthetic feeling, its sovereignty to produce *and* to destroy values according to the will of the perceiver. Adela’s sovereign doubt doesn’t only divert the conclusion of a trial and a marriage plot, but threatens to upturn the social and sexual organization of a whole colonial value-system. By demurring from the subject position of white female martyr she refuses more broadly to become the ground upon which colonial power-relations are rehearsed and reinscribed in the name of a purportedly universal system of justice. I am arguing that in Forster’s novels such a political critique is inextricable from an aesthetic standpoint, its ability to succeed, and to fail.

Reading *Howards End* and *A Passage to India* as structural inversions of the same aesthetic romance, moreover, reveals a crucial racial dimension to the jurisdictional fields of Forster’s respective fables of national prosperity and colonial decline. This chapter has argued that Trilling’s – or anyone’s – reading of *Howards End* as an inheritance plot obscures the nascent productivist imagination embedded in Margaret’s forms of appreciative perceiving.
But I wish to conclude this section by conceding that Trilling was indeed correct in a very specific sense. The fantasy of *Howards End* is indeed a fantasy of work (and not of intellectual aristocracy/propertied inheritance) but it is nonetheless a *nationally bounded* fantasy of work, one whose ultimate horizon was always the nation. Such a fantasy of work is not exportable to a sphere where racial hierarchy and colonial division fragment *ways of seeing*, where point of view is not synthesizable into the fantasy of a singular, homogenous space – “Nothing embraces the whole of India”. That geopolitical contradiction is why, most profoundly, Margaret’s forms of aesthetic perception are not immediately exportable to Chandrapore – “to see life steadily and to see it whole”, is her dictum, possible, if anywhere, in the English countryside. And those geopolitical differences are also why, as we move through this dissertation, the nation retains its emphasis as a sphere of reimagining and romancing work, beyond any biographical claims about the authors’ anticolonial politics or dislike of empire. Where Forster tested his aesthetic romance in London before exporting it to the colonies, Woolf will move in the other direction, from an allegory for colonial decline narrated as failed aesthetic *bildung* (*The Voyage Out*) to ambivalent stories of national prosperity centering on female figures of aesthetic romance (*Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, Orlando*).

As we begin to address the work of Virginia Woolf, we will continue to track the long arc of aesthetic and creative work as it begins to enter the imaginaries of the formal economy from the 1920s onwards. Woolf, too, will attempt to integrate creativity into the core of the adventure plot without submitting her heroes to the social facts of capitalist labor. Before we come to her renovated aesthetic romances, however, let’s start off where we finished up with Forster, and think for a moment about the late twentieth century destinations of the aesthetic conceived as sphere of value production, so as to gain some contrapuntal awareness of the opportunities as yet unforclosed in our earlier modernist moment. Before we return to Britain, that is, let us take a detour to North America, to consider some of the 21st
century afterlives of Forster’s aesthetic adventures in Zadie Smith’s contemporary novel about aesthetic work.

*On Beauty: From Heroic Adventure to Slacker Comedy*

In 2003, a year before the publication of *On Beauty*, Zadie Smith wrote a homage to E.M. Forster in the *Guardian* newspaper. Entitled “Love, Actually”, the article sets out Smith’s own relation to culture in ways that take up Forster’s work as both an object and as a heuristic. Smith recounts her own cultural *bildung* as torn between the same sundered poles as those in which Forster recounted his professional encounter with criticism: love and training, affect and analysis. Recounting her own early encounter with *A Room With A View*, she says it was her “first intimation of the possibilities of fiction: how wholly one might feel for it and through it, how much it could do to you.” Quite simply, she “loved it.” Soon, however, this love came up against institutional expectations and professional forms of evaluation, at which point “[a] peculiar thing happens”:

> We find that our initial affective responses are no longer of interest to the literary community in which we find ourselves. We are as Heraclitus described us: "Estranged from that which is most familiar." Suddenly this incommensurable "Love", and this other, more vague surmise - that the novel we loved was not simply "good" but even represented a Good in our lives - these ideas grow shameful and, after some time, are forgotten entirely, along with the novel that first inspired them. For no sensation empirical as love can have any importance as a "response" to novels qua novels. Can it?

As the rhetorical question might already suggest, Smith’s – like Forster – seeks to blaze a trail through this contradiction, to reconcile love with scholarly rigor, emotive response with cultural analysis. She does this once again by turning to Forster’s prose, which for her exemplifies an ethics of love in the way that it opens up the novel to a newly diverse

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array of characters and social standpoints, or what Dorothy J. Hale has called an aesthetics of alterity\textsuperscript{135}: “[Forster] expanded the comic novel's ethical space,” Smith writes, “(while unbalancing its moral certainties) simply by letting more of life in. Austen asks for tolerance from her readers. Forster demands something far stickier, more shameful: love.”

Love, in Smith’s essay, begins as a non-reflexive feeling brought to an encounter towards a text, before being reluctantly disavowed and then recuperated as an ethical strategy contained within a text, within Forster’s novels. Such a recuperation of an exterior relation via an immanent content allows for the recasting of a naïve standpoint (“I love it”) as a professional (if stylistically casualized) ethical mantra, and one that Smith broaches, curiously, via the rhetorical language of territorial annexation. Casting herself as walking in the footsteps of the modern ethical tradition of criticism that has blazed a trail before her, she writes:

Ten years ago, the idea that reading fiction might be a valuable ethical activity in its own right was so out of fashion that it took an author of Nussbaum's hard, philosophical bent to broach it without incurring ridicule. Rather bravely, she climbed the disputed mountain of literary theory and planted her philosophical flag firmly in the dirt. Her flag said: "Great novels show us the worth and richness of plural qualitative thinking and engender in their readers a richly qualitative way of seeing."

She continues: “My flag is rather weak in comparison. It says: "When we read with fine attention, we find ourselves caring about people who are various, muddled, uncertain and not quite like us (and this is good).” Smith’s and Nussbaum’s critical mantras (as ventriloquized by Smith) stage different relationships to the literary academy and its fields of expertise. Both are expressed as forms of heroism that venture into new intellectual territory in order to stake ownership over discursive truth-claims. Both insist on similar relations to the text as a field of emotive value. But Smith’s ventriloquizing of Nussbaum’s professional standpoint emphasizes the active role of a literary canon (“Great novels show us”) and couches its language in the terms of formal scholarship and intellectual rigor (“engender”, “plural

 qualitative thinking”). Smith’s own “weaker” mantra, by contrast, replaces the literary canon with a passive and nonexpert general reader (“we find ourselves”) and indeed sounds reluctant to be a mantra at all, couched as it is in a casual, conversational and even vague tone (“caring about people”, “not quite like us”) and, lastly, places its primary normative claim in parentheses – “(and this is good)”.

There is, I am suggesting, a kind of Forsterian disavowal of cultural capital and expertise taking place here – a strategic slacking – one narrativized as a waning of the strength inherent in the territorial quest narrative. This kind of weak reading pitches itself short of a methodology or theory (or indeed a full-blown adventure): it just happens to be how ordinary folks read novels, like Smith’s childhood avatar. Yet this disavowal of cultural capital – as in Forster – also expresses a legitimate democratic concern about authenticating cultural truth-claims on elite academic languages. Like Forster, Smith is seeking to recuperate a form of amateurism as the basis for a newly authorized relation to culture and even a new professional identity. She is seeking to mediate between a non-institutionalized, non-authoritative and pleasurable relation to culture and the legitimacy of cultural expertise.

Like Forster, Smith’s ambition was set out by her criticism, but perhaps most powerfully solved by her novels. Smith’s 2004 rewriting of Howards End, On Beauty, which she was composing at the same time as “Love, actually”, revolves around the contradiction he diagnosed between expertise and appreciation, training and love. Even as critics have commented on this aspect of the novel, they have declined to see it as a specifically Fosterian legacy. Smith’s novel essentially takes the implicit contradiction that was staged within the Schlegel family in Howards End – between Helen’s appreciation and Tibby’s pedantry – and she expands it across two families, thus setting it into dialectical narrative and historical motion. At the same time, Smith excises the Wilcox family, apart from a brief cameo at a
Belsey party, where they show up as owners of preppy clothes chain store looking “like the shells of two Atlantic shrimp in evening wear” and get zero lines.\textsuperscript{136}

The excising of the Wilcox plot generally goes without critical comment. After all, it’s not as if we would expect an East coast campus novel to grant much space to monied industrialists on its own terms. But what strikes me as significant about the excising of the Wilcoxes and the generalization of a Schlegelian contradiction, is the way it retroactively reveals \textit{Howards End} to have been a novel about emerging kinds of cultural work and aesthetic labor all along, so to speak. Even the most astute readers of \textit{On Beauty} and its cultural and aesthetic contradictions don’t seem to find it striking that in writing a novel about what it means to be a cultural worker in, outside or at the edge of the academy in the 21st century, Zadie Smith should turn for her template to a modernist novel that has routinely been read as a problem of commercial heteronomy intruding upon autonomous culture, Wilcoxes threatening Schlegels. Smith, I think, senses that \textit{Howards End} isn’t symbolically circumscribed by that Schlegelian-Wilcoxian struggle, but rather that its most generative narrative motor – and its relevance for a post-industrial, middleclass workforce and liberal readership – is in fact the question of what cultural work should look like, what forms of activity it should involve, what kinds of value it should produce, and which types of renumeration or payment it should seek.

Howard, white father of the left-liberal Belsey family is what Stephen Metcalf pithily describes as an “anti-aesthete, someone who despises Mozart and representational painting, and who stands before a crowd of credulous undergraduates spouting Foucauldian bromides 10 years out of date.”\textsuperscript{137} Howard’s work revolves around critically dispelling the myth that


\textsuperscript{137} Quoted in Lopez, \textit{After Theory}. p. 354
“we as human beings are central, and that our aesthetic sense in some way makes us central”.

Fundamental to the construction of such a myth is the status of the Artist and His Work, both of which, according to Howard, carry a phony humanist aura and invite phony humanist responses – like beauty.

At the other end of the spectrum is Monty, black father of the conservative Kipps family, who represents a relation to Culture that might best be described as one of connoisseurial appreciation, wherein the role of the critic is to espouse the purportedly intrinsic and universal values inherent in Great Works of Art – like Beauty – and to preserve and transmit these values via canonization. Monty considers Howard a ‘textual anarchist’, and his own cultural stewardship espouses its mission as one of protecting extant social hierarchies – from canons to professions – from all forms of positive discrimination, the irony of which his white liberal detractors never stop lambasting him about given his racial identity.

Clearly Smith isn’t interested in legitimating either of these relations to culture. Howard’s general critical posture to displace the sovereignty of the human sits uncomfortably next to his enormous ego, and his fundamentalist austerity in the face of aesthetic pleasure is revealed to be hypocritical given the promiscuity of his sexual passions, which manage to generate two extra-marital affairs in the course of a single novel. Monty, on the other hand, fares no better, his moral rectitude being revealed for moralistic posturing when we discover that he’s sleeping with a young volunteer at his church who is also an unenrolled auditor whom he refuses to help gain entry into Wellington.

On the one hand, then, these extremes of cultural expertise and appreciation are reminiscent of the two poles of cultural activity represented by the Schlegel household. On the other, however, their political valences and gendered implications have changed significantly under altered historical and institutional conditions. The historical and institutional fate of expertise and appreciation in On Beauty echoes Joseph North’s recent account of the shift from “criticism” to “scholarship” within the academy over the course of the twentieth century. North’s account specifically addresses the history of literary cultural
work, but is also highly germane to adjacent disciplines such as art history and indeed the cultural theory under which Howard would no doubt classify his own work. North narrates the gradual historical displacement of literary criticism by literary scholarship as one of the waning of radical, world-making forms of aesthetic appreciation and the rise of non-radical (descriptive, analytic, symptomatic) forms cultural theory. After new criticism in particular, Leavis’s still problematic concern for the cultivation of “aesthetic capabilities” is displaced by “aesthetic judgement”, limited to cultural objects proper (a canon) and to the task of ranking them in terms of their purportedly intrinsic value. Is Mozart superior to Beethoven, or vice versa?138

Monty is a symptom of and a participant in this long durée shift in the political function of aesthetic appreciation. But so is Howard, who represents the left’s reaction formation against conservative forms of cultural valorization. He is exemplary of what North describes as the left’s broad retreat from the work of participating in culture as the terrain upon which alternative (and better) values can be imagined and constructed. Symptomatic of North’s account of the post-Leavisite academic left, Howard’s work centers on the demystification of value as such (as humanist illusion) and the transformation of criticism into a variety of what Eagleton has called a form of “technological expertise… renouncing any wider social relevance”. (quoted in North, 11) Indeed, while half the students in Howard’s class puppet his Foucauldian bromides, the other half sit stupefied, barred from participation by the academic jargon they lack as the uninitiated. Ironically, the principal speakers in the class are Zora and Victoria, the respective daughters of Howard and Monty, suggesting that the conversion of aesthetic appreciation into cultural expertise has facilitated not meritocratic forms of entry, but a neo-Aristocratic apprenticeship-system in which institutional and social advantage is inherited by the children of the male professoriate and the highly educated middle-classes.

Between these two extremes, there is what we might describe as a general economy of cultural and aesthetic practices in which participants vie to enter (and indeed to exit) certain jurisdictional fields, ones by no means restricted to the academy. Like Tibby, who attends Beethoven with “the full score open on his knee”, Howard’s undergraduate daughter, Zora, attends a Mozart concert with her family with discman in hand, from which she listens to “Professor N. R. A Gould carefully guid[ing] her through each movement.” Poor Zora,” the narrator ironically adds, “she lived through footnotes.”

It is not my intention here to give a full account of the cultural practices of the novel’s myriad students and workers in the sphere of culture, which is a task that has been undertaken admirably by other critics. Instead, I want to make another very basic point – one derived from my Forsterian reading of the novel – the significance of which has, I think, been overlooked by critics up until now.

To suggest that On Beauty brings out the latent productivist imaginary of Forster’s cultural fable (the emergence of forms cultural perception as work) is not to say that Howards End is somehow magically prophetic of twenty-first century capitalism, nor that it foretells the particular everyday realities of its cultural workers. Indeed, it is the differences between the two novels that most clearly illuminate the altered historical conditions that they mediate. The most striking of those differences is the totalization of what Kathi Weeks would call the “work society”, the universalization and naturalization of the wage and salary relations and with them the broader ideology of workerism. For with perhaps one exception in the form of Monty’s wife – and a notable one at that, considering her sudden death – everyone works for pay in On Beauty, and if they don’t, like Zora or Jerome, then they can be said to be quite literally and non-symbolically training for their entry into a formalized labor-relation. In

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140 As Weeks puts it, work has become the “primary means by which individuals are integrated not only into the economic system, but also into social, political, and familial modes of cooperation. That individuals should work is fundamental to the basic social contract; indeed, working is part of what is supposed to transform subjects into the independent individuals of the liberal imaginary, and for that reason, is treated as a basic obligation of citizenship.” Weeks, Kathi. The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries (Duke University Press, 2011) p.8
short, there is no more pretending, no position from which work can be critiqued from the outside.

The fact that *On Beauty* oversees the more total integration of the aesthetic into capital via a fully-fledged creative economy has implications for the genres that are felicitous for narrating vocational aspirations. Margaret didn’t work in a *formal* sense (she didn’t have a job). Rather, she represented a gendered and classed subject at the anterior historical threshold of work (“‘not to work’ will soon become as shocking as ‘not to be married’ was a hundred years ago”). The generic felicity of adventure, then, was to lend Margaret the heroic agency of a work ethic (as if from the future) without entering her into the gendered jobs that would corrode that ethic via processes of automation and deskilling, as typist or as secretary, as per the new the woman novel. One hundred years later, after the triumph of capitalism over communism, and neoliberal capitalism over its more social democratic varieties, Margaret’s dictum (not to work is shocking, for anyone) has become all too true, at least in so far as workerist ideology has succeeded in outlawing the possibility of producing and legitimating value production in a non-work sphere, even as it also produces and delegitimates a growing mass of structurally unemployed and unemployable non-workers.¹⁴¹

Smith’s novel seems to suggest that in the era of globalization and flexible work adventure is no longer a felicitous language for narrating vocational aspirations. Indeed, Smith’s novel persistently registers its own belatedness in relation to a great age of past adventure. When Howard sets off to retrieve his son, Jerome, from England, where he has fallen in love with Monty Kipps’s daughter, the taxi driver notes “wistfully” that Howard is “[a]lways flying”. (25) For the perpetually exhausted Howard, however, travel reflects the glamor of a bygone age, of his father’s generation for whom “[t]ravel had seemed the key to the kingdom… [o]ne dreamed of a life that would enable travel.” In Howard’s present, travel represents the over-work of the conference circuit or else estranging encounters with urban

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¹⁴¹ This totalization of workerist ideology is perhaps shifting as I write, in the midst of an unprecedented unemployment crisis that could render certain forms of work economically obsolescent.
renewal in his former East London neighbourhood. In short, travel stages disenchanted encounters with capitalist modernization and work relations. For this reason, it has become totally de-collocated from adventure as a language and an ethic of aspiration. Unlike *Howards End*, the aspirational or utopian quotient of *On Beauty* involves not super-adding more energy expenditure to non- or proto-work activities – the affordance of masculine adventure, applied to female social reproduction and to leisure – but subtracting energy to make work less – less arduous, less exhausting, less heteronomous. It is the genre of the slacker comedy.

Indeed, what marks Smith’s novel as distinctly post-industrial and in tune with the dynamics of the creative economy is the way that work processes constantly subsume and render productive what were formerly leisure and socially reproductive activities. “*Buying records he loved was now part of his job*”, Smith writes of Carl (a black Leonard Bast of sorts for the era of the new economy) when he gets a job compiling a hip-hop archive as a university music librarian. “Everybody kept telling him what a great gig he had, getting paid to do nothing.” (373) Although Carl represents the most generically dominant site of slacker comedy in the novel, he is not in any straightforward sense, we should add, the sight of a non- or post-work utopia, since his own internalized workerist norms cause him to defend the legitimacy of his activity (“*buying records he loved*”) as a labor relation. He thus remains strongly within an instrumentalized work logic. “But it wasn’t nothing”, thinks Carl, “Professor Erskine Jedge himself had written Carl a welcome letter that said he was part of the effort to ‘make a public record of our shared aural culture for future generations’. Now, how is that nothing?” (373) The irony here is not only that Carl’s work becomes legitimate when stamped with academese, but also that (unbeknownst to him, and therefore dramatizing the irony) he’s only been offered the job as compensation for the fact that he is no longer permitted to audit Claire Malcom’s poetics seminars due to clamp-downs on non-enrolled students driven by Monty.

Carl’s eagerness to defend his work against charges of slackerism results in its opposite, a kind of hyper-productivity or typing disease in which he writes hundreds of pages
of pseudo-academic interpretation on the history of abstract motifs in hip-hop which, if not entirely parodic in their content – Smith clearly wants us to know he’s smart – take on a comic dimension in their disproportion to the administrative duties of his job role.

“[E]conomically and time-wise it didn’t make any sense to do this – no one was going to pay him more for the extra work.” (374) And, needless to say, Carl does not progress into a tenure-track research position, instead absconding from his post and from the novel (good for him, one can’t help thinking) once the whiff of liberal philanthropy that got him the job in the first place turns into the acrid stench of liberal condescension – Zora telling him that he should be “grateful”.

If Carl’s hyperactivity represents the possibility of fracturing the relation between the wage relation and the “the autonomy and freedom of labor”, as Lazzarato would say, then such fracturing is always at greater risk of failing than it is succeeding – whence, the comedy – precisely because it seeks to do what has become historically impossible: represent value outside of the universally legislated value-form. But Smith, holding the pen, knows one thing more: that it can’t make sense even for narrative, not without straying too far from the imperatives of realism, or at least a certain economic reality principle.

While Carl might abscond from the novel, however, the question he poses does not: is there another generic variety of slackerism that can fracture the work relation, and that can lend form to an agency at odds with institutional and economic imperatives? Here is where we must turn to Smith’s own ending and view it from the perspective of the aesthetic romance we excavated from Howards End. On the face of it, Howard’s disastrous tenure track job talk might seem a very different note to end upon than Forster’s, but in fact both endings seek to recalibrate and broaden the jurisdictional fields of aesthetic competence, and to make aesthetic appreciation the ground for reimagining kinship relations. Despite his macho relation to cultural expertise, then, Howard still harbors a utopian quotient of workplace feminization in the new economy. To jolt unfamiliar memories and adjust those unaccustomed to the familial implications of this reading, a brief plot recap. The final chapter
of the novel finds Howard separated from his wife, Kiki, who has left him after his series of adulterous affairs. In the final episode of the final chapter, Howard gets in his car to drive into Boston and deliver his make-or-break tenure-track lecture. In its very first lines, this episode suggests that something is qualitatively different in Howard’s point of view, in which the regularly policed boundaries between Art and experience (indeed boundaries tout court) have begun to corrode and collapse:

Howard drove through Wellington and out of Wellington. He watched the blistering day undulate outside his windshield; he heard the cricket’s string section. He listened, on his car stereo, to the Lacrimosa and, like a teenager, turned it up high and kept his window down. Swish dah dah, swish dah dah. As the music slowed, he slowed, entering Boston and meeting up with the Big Dig. He sat in its maze of unmoving cars for forty minutes. (440)

Emerging from this passage, I would suggested, are the first lines of an aesthetic romance in which life is appreciated as if it were a work of art, in which the human senses (he watched, he heard, he listened) work as an integrative force against even the most elemental forms of specialization in order to bind natural and cultural spheres (insects and the Lacrimosa) into an experiential whole. At the center of this whole is Howard himself, who is conspicuously unalienated from aesthetic experience and even mystically unified with it (“as the music slowed, he slowed”). It’s quite remarkable how Smith manages to suspend this final episode between (aesthetic) romance and (slacker) comedy. For the enchanting deceleration that Howard experiences in his car, to the point even of an invigorating dislocation from biographical time as he becomes “like a teenager”, is also, more prosaically, a traffic jam, and one that makes him not just slow but late, late for his colleagues and his tenure-track lecture, late for work. “I’m late Smith. I’m now very late”, he tells his PA on the phone.

There’s something more-than-logistical about that masculine lateness, about its stubborn embeddedness in a present. Not: I will be late, but: “I’m now very late”. A lateness taking place perpetually now, and one that is forced into relief by the uncomfortable (even sexually repulsive) experience of unwanted speed, by the economic imperative to be on time.

Parking the car several blocks from the gallery, Howard “slammed the door of his car and
began to run, looking it remotely over his shoulder. He could feel sweat dribbling between his buttocks and sloshing in his sandals, readying his instep for the two water blisters that would surely have formed by the time he reached the gallery.” (440) In the gallery at last, Howard takes to the podium and “apologiz[es] for his lateness” before “visualiz[ing] “with perfect clarity the yellow folder that remained where he had left it, on the back seat of his car, five blocks from here.” Knowing what we know of Howard’s inability to improvise, his tendency to speak in stock-phrases and pre-rehearsed clichés, that folder at this moment powerfully signifies all of his formal knowledge and professional expertise, and its absence leaves him like a magician without a wand, in need of some providential magic for his survival.

It’s at this moment that On Beauty most powerfully rewrites Howards End, a moment in which Howards lateness becomes more than the comic ironization of belated masculinity. Like Margaret arriving at Honiton with a doctor and husband, this is the moment in which aesthetic experience is disaggregated from forms of institutionalized expertise and placed directly in the service of producing kinship relations, a moment which Smith writes as a peculiarly unspecified kind of romance: “The lights began to go down, very slowly, on a dimmer, as if Howard were trying to romance his audience.” Seeing his wife alone in the audience, Howard strolls through the PowerPoint of Rembrandt’s paintings in silence, one minute at a time, until he gets to the last one, Hendrickje Bathing, 1654, a picture of “Rembrandt’s love”. It depicts:

a pretty, blousy Dutch woman in a simple white smock paddled in water up to her claves. Howard’s audience looked at her and then at Howard and then at the woman once more, awaiting elucidation. The woman, for her part, looked away coyly, into the water. She seemed to be considering whether to wade deeper… Howard looked at Kiki. In her face, his life. Kiki looked up suddenly at Howard – not, he thought, unkindly. Howard said nothing. Another silent minute passed. The audience began to mutter perplexedly. Howard made the picture larger on the wall, as Smith had explained to him how to do. The woman’s fleshiness filled the wall. He looked out into the audience once more and saw Kiki only. He smiled at her. She looked away, but she smiled. Howard looked back at the woman on the wall, Rembrandt’s love, Hendrickje. Though her hands were imprecise blurs, paint heaped on paint roiled with the brush, the rest of her skin had been expertly rendered in all its variety – chalky whites and lively pinks, the underlying blue of her veins and the ever present human hint of yellow, intimation of what is to come. (442-3)
In this final passage of the novel comic lateness becomes something qualitatively new and indeed ceases to be lateness at all to the extent that the present is no longer measured in its relative value as a relation to the time of work. This is Howard’s end, and the end of the professional fantasy generated for the creative economy by *Howards End*. But it is also Howard’s beginning, his moment of redemption in a novel that otherwise renders him a target of irony and comedy.

As we shall see more sharply in our next chapter, adventure contains almost inexhaustible resources for narrative *speed*, an affordance that was already implicitly seized upon by Margaret in her forms of quickened imaginative action and, at times, raised to level of narrative discourse: “There are moments when the inner life actually "pays," when years of self-scrutiny, conducted for no ulterior motive, are *suddenly of practical use.*” [167, my emphasis] Such “sudden” use-values for the inner-life or the imagination are a canny way to lend agency and narrative consequentiality to emergent vocational subjects desiring recognition for their aesthetic capacities without actually “paying” them – hence Forster’s scare quotes – by entering them into a wage or salary relation. But that set of historical problems is not Howard’s. The desire he embodies is not for more work, but less, or rather the opportunity to be less determined by its subjectivizing imperatives and its pre-rehearsed scripts. For Howard, and for us, lateness becomes once again an enchanting slowness, and slowness a dilated present in which aesthetic appreciation expands beyond a connoisseurial relation to Art-as-status or aesthetics-as-expertise to become a recuperation of experience and of the familial. That is the particular kind of analogy on display here, in which Howard’s silent appreciation of the paint is also a silent recuperation of his marriage. It’s probably also a silent repudiation of his prospect for tenure, and perhaps even his job, as the audience’s perplexed muttering can mean little other than professional dismay at his career suicide. But therein, of course, lies the particular quality of *post-work* romance that blazons from this dimly lit scene, in which Howard escapes, however momentarily, from the imperatives of the work society.
As much as we will want to credit this scene with achieving a certain dislocation from a totalized economic logic, however, we will also want to recognize and reckon with the fact that it is also a problematic one from the perspective of gender and race, as Kiki herself takes the place of the appreciated real estate, Howards End. Moreover, Howard’s appreciation of the painting and the paint as an analogy to his love for his wife might render him an enchanted subject of aesthetic romance, but it renders Kiki a passive and peculiarly white-washed muse via the “whites”, “pinks” and “yellow” that define Hendrickje as “human”. And if really seeing the painting, perhaps for the first time in his career, is analogous with really seeing the woman, perhaps for the first time in his marriage, and even if that dual or expanded aesthetic gaze is ambivalently reciprocated (“not, he thought, unkindly”) what of the result? To reboot or not to reboot a tired, monogamous marriage seems to be the only option obliquely on offer, here, suggesting a serious curtailing of the radical kinship possibilities imagined into being a hundred years earlier by Margaret’s form of aesthetic perception. Seeing Helen as both “with child” and “as she had always been” was a far more trenchant critique of the gender and sexual codes of Forster’s present, a far more radical recuperation of sororal kinship and alternative familial structure, than Smith’s ambivalent aesthetic and sexual romance.

In particular, what’s been lost in Smith’s post-Fordist adaption of Forster is the queer moment of critique inherent in his cultural fable, the challenge to heteronorms and patriarchal property relations posed by Ruth and Margaret, and their triangulated or proto-coupled relationship to Howards End. While Kiki and Carlene Kipps also share a brief rapprochemen in which the former discusses the road-not-taken in previous attractions to women, Carlene is even more devoted to Husband and Family than Ruth Wilcox. But most importantly, the women’s bond bears no symbolic relationship to the novel’s closure. There is no translation of their queer desire into Howard’s enchanted forms of aesthetic perception. To be clear, I am
in no way bemoaning Smith’s failure to stage this symbolic transaction. Rather, I am pointing to its absence as a way to suggest the broader curtailing of experimental sexual formations under a new mode of creative capitalism that would, in theory, usher in precisely the kinds of sexual liberalization for which modernist-era characters such as Margaret were so hungry.

The formal incorporation of alternative-kinship into capitalist work processes spells the end of kinship conceived as a site of transformation for, let alone a ground of resistance to, capitalism. The workplace imagined as an alternative kin-structure marks the novel’s most trenchant site of satire and critique, exemplified not only by Howard’s and Monty’s unethical and even exploitative workplace affairs but also by Levi’s gig in the thinly fictionalized Virgin Records Store, which brands itself as a “family rather than a hierarchy”, a “community [of] shared ideas, values, interests and goals” run by a “mythical British guy who… was like a graffiti artist”. (180) Here, work brands itself as a racially and sexually inclusive kin-unit, one with artistic sensibilities at its core, but only, it turns out, so that disciplinary and managerial procedures can work more effectively as forms of feminized soft power governing “tough work for bad pay”. From making kin to managing personnel. This is the long twentieth century disenchantment arc that connects *Howards End* with *On Beauty*, and is the reason why kin-making can no longer be a fantasy immanent to work, at least in the post-Fordist era depicted by Smith’s novel. But that same novel also has no rigorous answer to what kin-making looks like outside of capitalist work and tired heterosexual institutions. It thus offers aesthetic appreciation as a kind of placeholder for the future, an “intimation of what is to come.”

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142 There’s a historical irony here, I think. Kiki and Carlene’s relationship doesn’t need to be smuggled into the symbolic economy of the novel as a property relation or as any other kind of sublimated content because in millennial America Kiki can just talk about how she used to like women. But there’s something lost with this liberalization and casualization of sexual queerness. Talking about sex is just talking about sex, not the possibility of imagining a whole different way of life. Everything is permitted, such that nothing needs to be transformed. 143 This managerial spirit was certainly immanent in the seed of Margaret’s aesthetic expertise, as she insisted to Henry at the plot’s turn, “I will manage it all”.

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As we shall now explore, however, the idea of aesthetic work as kin-formation did not die with *Howards End*, nor was it finally laid to rest in the Marabar caves, successful as they were in destroying the vestiges of the Victorian marriage plot. Rather, Forster’s fantasy of aesthetic appreciation dovetailing with more adventurous forms of cohabitation and sexual filiation would take a different kind of flight in the work of Virginia Woolf, to whom we shall now turn in order to continue developing a contrapuntal relationship between modernist and post-Fordist fictions of aesthetics and capital.
“Suddenly there came a moment”: Virginia Woolf’s Precarious Adventures

In our last chapter we began to understand Forster’s peculiar romancing of interiority as the emergence of a productive aesthetic psyche. Margaret’s forms of creative perception, I argued, resulted in extra aesthetic affects, centering on the creation of queered kinship formations and woman-centered property relations. Turning to Woolf, we will continue to track the emergence of enchanted aesthetic perception, while also introducing new problems and questions. As with Forster and with Bowen, these problems and questions about adventure, gender, sexuality and work are often most concisely framed by Woolf’s non-fictional (though one could hardly say unimaginative) writing, while her novels can be read as presenting imaginary, though by no means straightforward, answers and solutions.

In turning to Woolf, we will also seek to thicken the geopolitical context of Bloomsbury’s aesthetic romances by bringing into greater relief the relationship between shrinking global frontiers and renovated imaginaries of national work. Like many of her feminist contemporaries and Bloomsbury colleagues, including Forster and J.M Keynes, Woolf saw the closing of global frontiers and the spluttering of the imperial engines not only as a crisis for Britain’s geopolitical dominance, but as an opportunity for rethinking the values and constituencies of work in market societies. In her early fictions such as *The Voyage Out*, there is already a strong sense that models of imperial growth are anathema to narratives of women’s development, even as a national project of renovation is as yet beyond the horizon. Woolf’s mid-career novels such as *Mrs Dalloway* frame gendered critiques of patriarchy and capitalism within a national frame of social and economic reference. This diegetic shrinking of global outlook has famously rendered Woolf the target of political charges of parochial Little Englandism.\(^\text{144}\) And, indeed, in her late work, Woolf quite clearly turns back to parochial forms of English life in order to imagine the organically integrated cultural space of

\(^{144}\) See, for instance, Levinson, Michael. *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)
the nation. But in between *The Voyage Out* and *Between the Acts*, Woolf’s high modernist fictions of the 20s seek to forge a compromise between limitless global frontiers and bounded visions of national space, a compromise, we might say, between relentless adventure and restful pastoral. They do so, I will argue, as reversed adventure narratives, which revise the gendered and geopolitical frame of the imperial quest.

Woolf’s high modernist fictions imagine national space itself as a frontier of value production, geographically and culturally distinct from imperial contact zones yet presenting analogous opportunities for adventure and enchanted agency for a new middleclass, female workplace constituency. These mid-career fictions thus anticipate what Timothy Mitchell has described as the imagining of “economic growth in new terms, not as material and spatial extension but as the internal intensification of the totality of relations defining the economy as an object.” Anticipate rather than enact because while *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando* all imagine economic growth as the internal (national) intensification of the relations of production, they do so not entirely under the bounded horizon of “the economy as an object”. As per the Keynesian thought of the 20s, metropolitan market economies appear in Woolf’s mid-career novels as irrational, unbounded, plural and cosmopolitan, rather than as bounded national spaces. As Jenifer Wicke (1994) has argued in a seminal article on Woolf’s high modernist, metropolitan style, such a dynamic conception of the economy is enacted by and through Woolf’s prose, in which the encounters of consciousness are often also encounters with objects of consumption.

In this chapter, however, I will be modifying and extending Wicke’s seminal thesis about Woolf’s Keynesianism to suggest that consumption – and its generic corollaries in female flânerie – was only one pole of Woolf’s reimagination of economic “intensification” in the high modernist period. If we turn our attention to the language of adventure in Woolf’s

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mid-career novels, we can see that they also contain resurgent fantasies of metropolitan work, and that the reimagining of the economy enacted by Woolf was just as much bound up with the volatile nature of labor markets as it was with commodity markets. The interwar era of women’s labor integration presented itself to Woolf as a particularly fraught kind of contradiction, wherein new vocational prospects also spelled new forms of degradation and alienation. Her works don’t offer anything like a sociological or realist account of jobs for women, but they do, this chapter wagers, register imagined forms of vocational agency, enchantment and precarity at a formal, characterological and stylistic level. From the perspective of Woolf’s creative workers, national space appears as a precarious sphere of action, shot through with risks and contingencies as much as vocational opportunities.

Central to Woolf’s modernist appropriation of the adventure chronotope, is her appreciation of its capacity to represent a particular kind of narrative and historical time, the time of what Bakhtin called the “suddenly” and Northrop Frye the “and then” of romance. These narrative time-signatures are much older than modernism and its modernity, but their anti-developmental logic and relationship to enchantment and precarity came to rhyme with modernist ambitions to represent new logics of work. In this chapter, I will suggest how we might historicize the sudden tense of adventure as encoding forms of mental plasticity and market volatility that tread a fine line between vocational enchantment and occupational hazard.

Woolf has been read as a chief innovator of the novel’s temporal organization, and we have various and compelling theories about how to historicize such innovation, ranging from the feminist to the postcolonial. This chapter offers a fresh account of Woolf’s experiments in novelistic time, centering on the emergence of new workplace imaginaries and

their expression through the narrative temporalities of adventure. In their will-to-suddenness, her creative heroes – Elizabeth Dalloway, Lily Briscoe and Orlando – thus at times come close to embodying what Sianne Ngai has theorized as the aesthetic category of the “zany”, one characterized as “an aesthetic of action pushed to strenuous and even precarious extremes.” As Ngai persuasively argues, zaniness is closely attuned to insecure and performative regimes of work. Originating with the itinerant and sporadically employed actors of the commedia dell’arte, Ngai reads in the post-Fordist era a rekindled rhyme between the frenetic action of the zany and precarious regimes of affective and aesthetic labor. The zany gives form to a vocational subject in whom it is difficult to distinguish the difference between the qualities of the individual and their labour-power. As aspects of selfhood and “personality” become increasingly integrated into the production process, all activity takes on the aesthetic of a precarious performance. Moreover, marked by what Ngai describes as the workplace “hypertrophy of the ‘aesthetic function’” (242) in modernity – what an older kind of Marxism might call the society of the spectacle – zaniness is an aesthetic of symbolic gratuity. When acting out one’s selfhood as surface and image becomes integral to work, self-expression and individual “identity” are no longer distinguishable from self-stylization. Orlando will remind us that such potentially comic syndromes predated the post-Fordist era, even as they were combined with more serious social and sexual opportunities that were to be eclipsed in that later historical and generic moment.

We could, then, say that zaniness is what lies at the far end of adventure’s will-to-suddenness, a thirst for and compulsion to action and performance so intense that it passes over into bodily injury and even narrative disorganization. As Daniel Harris has theorized them, “zany comedies are structureless journeys through worlds of dangerous and volatile objects. Every prop, every character, is… a potential projectile.” (quoted in Ngai, p. 185) They might also, I think, be described as post-modern adventures, in which the narrative...

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teleology (and imperial-era ideology) of investment plan>journey>value extraction has been
deconstructed under the sign of work’s more thoroughgoing reorganization and
complexification. But our post-modern moment isn’t Woolf’s, and her creatives –
genealogically antecedent to but non-identical with contemporary modes of workplace hazard
– are thus not merely comic figures for work’s potential injuriousness, but also avatars of its
late enchantments and opportunities for a gendered segment of the labor-force.

The female segment of the modernist era workforce experienced its own historically
specific forms of precarity: physical precarity during the war, contractual precarity with the
marriage bar and other legal impediments to work, and sexual precarity as they entered
patriarchal and male dominated workplace institutions. Woolf has been read as an astute critic
of all of them.151 But to those well documented forms of occupational risk, our readings will
add one more: the psychological precarity attendant upon enduring (and advocating) new
affective and aesthetic regimes of labor. What kinds of energy-expenditure and exhaustion are
involved in creative and affective work? What sorts of discomfort, pain or anxiety arise when
affects and aesthetic perceptions are turned into forms of labor? What does the burn-out of an
aesthetic romance look like? Woolf was, I will argue, an astute responder to all of these
questions – perhaps, though this is not my primary concern, because she felt them at a
personal, visceral level. Her answers to such questions can be most powerfully read by
attending to the transformations of adventure romance that animate many of her fictions.

Before we arrive at those fictions, however, we shall take a speedy detour through her
essays, in order to see how adventure arises as both a site for critiquing imperial modes and
fantasies of work, as well as an opportunity for re-enchanting work along new gender and
sexual lines. This detour will begin by returning to Woolf’s famous (or infamous) series of
lectures, A Room of One’s Own (1929), which, alongside Three Guineas (1938), is taken to
constitute one of her more thoroughgoing treatise on gender and modernity. A Room is best

151 See Black, Naomi. Virginia Woolf as Feminist (Cornell University Press, 6 Aug 2018) and Zwerdling, Alex.
Virginia Woolf and the Real World (University of California Press, 1986)
known the for the eponymous space of its title, which, along with an independent income of five-hundred pounds a year, constitute the material foundations necessary for creative success as a writer. Naturally, this claim has undergone the full spectrum of critique, ranging from accusations of social snobbery and even neo-aristocracy to leftist recuperations that read it as clarion call for income and property redistribution anticipating the radical feminisms of the 1960s and 70s. My intention here, however, is not to survey these debates, nor less to arbitrate them, but rather to suggest that the argumentative volume they have cumulatively blasted across the critical airwaves has obscured an alternative workplace fiction embedded in Woolf’s talks, one which can form the basis of a novel reading of her gender, sexual and workplace politics. That alternative workplace fiction begins with Kipling.

**Woolf’s Adventure Manifesto, or, A Room of One’s Own**

What sort of workplace fiction arises from *A Room of One’s Own* if we turn to its rhetorical and historical engagement with adventure, as both critical concept and literary genre? We can begin to answer this question by turning to Woolf’s intervention in debates about fiction and style at the crossroads of the Victorian and modernist eras. Under the umbrella question of what sorts of fiction it is possible and desirable for women to write today, Woolf turns to Kipling as a goad in order to dramatize the style and sexual politics to be avoided by emergent women writers. Kipling’s novels, Woolf insists, practice the kind of self-conscious male virility that it would be the task of a new, gender-fluid fiction to overcome. Woolf’s algebraic critique of Kipling’s adventure novels emphasizes their male misogyny and imperial power-complex. His fiction is full of

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152 See Black, Naomi. Virginia Woolf as Feminist, ch.5 for a summary of this criticism.
officers who turn their Backs; and his Sowers who sow the Seed; and his Men who are alone with their Work; and the Flag—one blushes at all these capital letters as if one had been caught eavesdropping at some purely masculine orgy.153

With characteristic economy, and comedy, of style Woolf delivers a polemic critique of the literature of empire, here, one that feminist and postcolonial criticism would spend years parsing. In this account, the romance of late Victorian adventure provides an imaginary space in which empire-work can be written as intensely erotic bonds between men, as what Woolf whimsically calls “a purely masculine orgy”. The fact that Woolf’s female reader is “eavesdropping” on this orgy signals the intimate, even constitutive, relationship between its potentially anti-normative queerness and its male misogyny. In this Sedgwickian triangle of desire, male adventure writes imperial production as an opportunity for male eroticism precisely in so far as it abjects women from its modes of action and its forms of work, including them only as excluded onlookers. Trenchant as it is, such a critique wasn’t so far from adventure writers’ own self-avowed (if ambivalently ironized) descriptions of their fictional ambitions, as Rider Haggard reminded us in our introduction. Moreover, such a reading of the sexual dynamics of adventure will hardly surprise us today, either as critics of empire and patriarchy, or indeed as consumers of popular romance. But what is remarkable in Woolf’s iteration of this critique, and what will place A Room in a new and more adventuresome light, is the reversibility of its sexual and workplace geometry.

Such reversibility, Woolf suggests, arises at the site of contemporary shifts in the gendered division of labour. That is, if we start with Woolf’s reading of Kipling and work our way backwards through A Room of One’s Own, we can see that “adventure” also names opportunities for figuring queer bonds between women, bonds centred on their entry into metropolitan, rather than imperial, workplaces. We’re all familiar with Woolf’s apocryphal example of women’s fiction by Mary Carmaechal entitled “Life’s Adventure”. But I would suggest that we have not drawn out the implications of why Woolf labels that piece of fiction

**adventure** writing. One answer can be provided by turning to her own description of its content. “Life’s Adventure” gathers Woolf’s importantly all-female audience around a workplace scene of female same-sex desire that surely rivals Kipling’s:

‘Chloe liked Olivia. They shared a laboratory together…. ’ I read on and discovered that these two young women were engaged in mincing liver, which is, it seems, a cure for pernicious anaemia; although one of them was married and had—I think I am right in stating—two small children. (83)

This is, I think, the closest Woolf will come to making a sex joke, and it’s one so camouflaged and condensed that some adult glossing may be necessary. While “Life’s Adventure” dares its audience to imagine the workplace as the scene of same sex desire – a desire highlighted by Woolf’s aside that her audience needn’t blush, “such things do happen” – the possibility of such desire is bitterly undercut by the medical connotations of bodily purity that is the remedial object of the women’s labor. Chloe and Olivia are stoically mincing the body’s self-purifying organ to produce a scientific remedy for bad blood (“anaemia”), a racialized moniker for sexual dissidence to which we will return later in this chapter. Talk about work as a pyrrhic victory. With abyssal irony, the workplace is figured both as the condition of possibility for queer sexuality and woman-centred kinship, at the same time as its modes of production are literally placed in the service of manufacturing heterosexual sanguinity.154

For this reason, Woolf seems to be teasing her audience, the historical entry of women into the workplace must go beyond seizing the means of (male) production, and contest the very meanings of production, the social narratives, economic values and forms of

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154 Claire Jones notes how laboratories were spaces of hypermasculinity described as analogous to imperial romance: “Writers of scientific memoirs used experimental work as a vehicle for constructing personas that recall the adventure heroes of Edwardian fiction such as Conrad’s Marlow (Heart of Darkness) or H. Rider Haggard’s Allan Quatermain (King Solomon’s Mines).” Jones, Claire. “The Laboratory: A Suitable Place for a Woman? Gender and Laboratory Culture around 1900”, in Cowman, Krista & Jackson, Louise, A. *Women and Work Culture (Britain c.1850-1950)* p.182

Sharon Marcus’s gloss on this passage in *Between Women* doesn’t take its sexual punning into account, and thus does seem to elide the same-sex desire in this passage from Woolf, where something other than female friendship seems to be at stake. See Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton University Press, 2009) p.257-9
subjectivity and kinship produced through working. This is of course at one with the provocation Woolf would issue to women in *Three Guineas*, where she implored female professionals to make themselves as little in the image of their male counterparts as possible. But it is also an ambition that I am rerouting in Woolf’s immanent critique of adventure, one which will animate a rereading of her fictions and non-fictions alike.

Surveying *A Room of One’s Own* more broadly we can see that “adventure” is also a way to nominate in shorthand women’s desire to escape feminine narratives of domestic staidness via the imagined energies of quickened mobility. The thwarted desires and unchanneled labor-power of creative femininity are figured as counter-factual, hyperbolic forms of spatial movement. Judith Shakespeare “was as adventurous, as imaginative, as agog to see the world as he was.” (48) Charlotte Brontë’s palpable gender resentment stemmed from the fact that “had been made to stagnate in a parsonage mending stockings when she wanted to wander free over the world.” (74) And Jane Austen, otherwise generously appraised by Woolf, was constrained as a writer only by the fact that she never “travelled; she never drove through London in an omnibus” (69) – an experience which will ring with romance when we get to *Mrs. Dalloway*, even if it might initially appear on the dowdy side.

In all of these cases women’s creative impulse is figured as form of spatial wonderlust, and an up-rootedness from the embedded spaces and traditions of a feminine domestic sphere. And in none of them does it require the private room, independent oncome nor sexual detachment characteristic of the essay’s workplace title-space. Such wonderlust is not only a romance trope on its own terms, but becomes one more so in its embeddedness within a Manichean opposition between sheer power and pure restraint, exalted adventure and suffocating homeliness.¹⁵⁵ Woolfians will no doubt recognize this as a recurring opposition

¹⁵⁵ For another curious appropriation of romance wonderlust in US literature see Gertrude Stein’s short story, “Melanctha” in *Three Lives*, where the eponymous central character moves in and out of erotic attachments via the repeated trope of “wondering”, one which seems to signal a process of fluid de- and re-cathexis. The figure of the “wonderer” represents the aristocratic side of British romance running from *Waverley* onwards, in which the passive hero is blown about by the forces of history, a trope which for Lukács brought concrete historical forces into view. If we applied Lukács’s insights to *Melanctha*, the story might be read as a historical fiction of sexual modernization.
across her *ouvre*, and as DiBattista and Nord have recently reminded us, the construction of a stifling, traditional domestic space, inhabited by that mythic figure, the Angel in the House, was a necessary fiction and hyperbolic goad rather than a description of women’s experience in any extant historical present.\(^{156}\) The affordance of such a hyperbolic figure for Woolf’s feminism was in drawing an emphatic, even normative, distinction between Victorian and modernist forms of female selfhood, and thereby refusing the narratives of strategic essentialism that would construct women’s vocational rights and unique labor-power upon their motherly, wifely and domestic capacities.

Yet, ironically, in order to demolish the Victorian Angel and her House, Woolf found herself swinging the wrecking ball of another kind of nineteenth century caricature. The stark bifurcation between feminine domesticity and masculine adventure created, I am suggesting, a problem for Woolf, since it ends up looking more like a symptom of what the essay astutely diagnoses as gender antagonism and sexual alienation than a solution for feminism in her own present. We are, in a sense, rehearsing at a gender-political level the central *literary-compositional* problem so brilliantly elucidated by Woolf’s talks, the problem of how to create an androgynous, or, in more contemporary vocabulary, gender-queer, literature out of materials that bear the boldened signature of gender-binarism. Not only, then, is it politically insufficient to simply insert women into men’s jobs (the problem dramatized by Chloe and Olivia); neither is it rhetorically nor culturally sufficient to simply swap angelic domesticity for frontier *wonderlust*, and, as if by doing so, celebrate the heroic entry of women into the narratives of modernity. It’s all very well nominating women as the paradigmatic adventures

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It’s a fictional goad that raises its head again, for instance, in a much later talk entitled “Professions for Women”, in which Woolf would speak of the “two of the adventures of [her] professional life… The first — killing the Angel in the House — I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet. The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful — and yet they are very difficult to define.” As we shall see, adventure was also an ally in that second, unsolved task of narrating women’s historical experiences of embodiment.
of a brave new world, but, as Woolf knows too well, “[o]ne could not go to the map and say Columbus discovered America and Columbus was a woman”. (85)

Like Forster, then, Woolf will seek to transform adventure’s masculine chronotopes for the task of imagining feminized forms of workplace creativity. Yet, more preoccupied and troubled than Forster with the weight of adventure’s man-centered history, she will find herself going further than him in the task of dismantling and rebuilding the poetics of adventure’s forms of agency. As Clive Bell said of all artistic forms in relation to contemporary practice, adventure will be for Woolf both “canal” and “goad”. From it she will mine and transform modes of narrative and character-construction for the new purpose of catapulting women into modernity and its work, while avoiding (as Forster could not) turning her women-creatives into petit sovereigns and property adventurers. To get more of a taste for the storytelling affordances of adventure, and specifically its relationship to modernist character-building, we need to turn to another of Woolf’s essays on a pre-Victorian adventure romance: Robinson Crusoe, from which she recuperated not libidinal nor spatial narrative resources, but what we can call affective ones.

**Robinson’s Labor, or, Adventure as Affect**

Woolf’s peculiar reading of England’s foremost adventurer can be brought into relief by comparing it with that of another modernist and contemporary. It was James Joyce who saw in Robinson the “true symbol of British conquest”:

> the manly independence; the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence… the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity. Whoever rereads this simple, moving book in the light of subsequent history cannot help but fall under its prophetic spell.157

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As an exilic Irish subject, Joyce had firsthand experience of British colonialism, and it’s from within such a perspective that he critiques Robinson as the “prophetic” imperialist, the harbinger of an emerging regime of imperial domination and exploitation to follow. And given subsequent world-history, who would blame him? But Woolf was not only situated in a more privileged position vis-a-vis the violence of empire (though we would no doubt want to qualify this in various ways); she was also more alert to the affordances of positive criticism — what Forster would have called appreciation — often favoring aesthetic and political recuperation to ideological demystification. She thus reads Crusoe not primarily as an imperious warmonger, but as a happy craftsman:

And so by means of telling the truth undeviatingly as it appears to [Defoe] — by being a great artist and forgoing this and daring that in order to give effect to his prime quality, a sense of reality — he comes in the end to make common actions dignified and common objects beautiful. To dig, to bake, to plant, to build — how serious these simple occupations are; hatchets, scissors, logs, axes — how beautiful these simple objects become.158

Woolf’s reading of Crusoe as the embodiment of dignified labor might seem idiosyncratic, but it is not by any means unique. Her criticism can be situated in a long line of interpretations preceding and following her, which read Robinson Crusoe as an island utopia rather than a proto-realist novel.159 Most famously, for Marx, Crusoe had achieved the ideal of communism, the overcoming of labor’s specialization and alienation, even if he ironically lacked the community in which to socialize his products. Woolf reads in Crusoe’s work a utopian impulse towards de-specialization, with what I think we can recognize as an understated emphasis on the coproduction of gender and work – masculine manual labors sitting alongside feminine domestic ones in perfect harmony. Note, here, the grammatical, the

159 See Hulme, Peter. Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797 (Routledge, 1992) for a concise discussion of the novel’s history of criticism from realist and romance/utopian perspectives. For a contemporary example of the latter perspective, see Danon, Ruth. Work in the English Novel: The Myth of Vocation (Routledge, 2020) “The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe is a utopian novel and as such it provides not merely a sense of what becoming human has meant but also a sense of what it could mean. Crusoe creates a new world on the island, a world related to but different from the one he has left.” p.22

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almost musical accord of those rhythmic infinitives – “to dig, to bake, to plant, to build” – because they will return in ultra-upgraded form, later.

As well as its emphasis on breaking down gendered divisions of labor, Woolf’s reading of Crusoe’s pluralized activity has another important feature – its emphasis on exteriority or exteriorization, or what I will soon be calling affect. In its affinity with actions and objects, the dignity of Crusoe’s labor is not figured in psychological but embodied terms. Indeed, Woolf makes a point of this elsewhere in her essay, explaining that:

[Defoe] takes the opposite way from the psychologist’s — he describes the effect of emotion on the body, not on the mind. But when he says how, in a moment of anguish, he clinched his hands so that any soft thing would have been crushed; how “my teeth in my head would strike together, and set against one another so strong that for the time I could not part them again”, the effect is as deep as pages of analysis could have made it. (59, my emphasis)

Apart from being an astute reading of Defoe’s style, this is also, I think, quietly surprising praise coming from one of modernism’s pioneers of interiority in the mid 1920s. Indeed, in contrasting Defoe’s embodied prose to “pages of analysis” I would suggest that Woolf has on her mind here the Dostoyevskian lineage of modernist psychology with which she allies her own writerly practice in essays such as “Modern Fiction”, and which she was taking to a new level in Mrs Dalloway, written over the same period as she was reviewing Robinson Crusoe. The interpretive payload of these perhaps esoteric confluences will become much clearer as we turn to Woolf’s fictions. For now, I wish to underscore Woolf’s recuperation of Crusoe’s body as a turn to affect, to the representation as well as the experience of individualized emotion as it becomes exteriorized via an economy of persons and objects. To be clear, Woolf’s recuperation of the adventurer’s body is not a recuperation of affective labor or emotion work – though they, too, will become operative terms in our analysis shortly – but to affect or embodiment as the representational horizon of the laboring body as such.

160 Curiously, Forster performs a similar recuperation of Defoe’s Moll Flanders in Aspects of the Novel: “Of Defoe’s characterization, he writes: “How heavily and pretentiously a modern psychologist would labour to express this! It just runs off Defoe’s pen”. (67)
Labor is what desublimates modernist interiority (“pages of analysis”) into embodied experience and corporal sensation.

Does modernist fiction look different under this embodied light? That’s a big question, so let’s start with a smaller one. Does “Modern Fiction” look different under this embodied light?

From myriad impressions to bodily splendor

Modern fiction is solipsistic affair, or at least by the account given in Woolf’s 1921 essay of the same name. For the modernists, she argues, the interest lied in the “dark places of psychology”, in registering the “myriad impressions” received by the “ordinary mind”. Such a claim inveighed against Edwardian “materialism”, “solidity” and the “tyranny” of extroverted plot, exemplified for Woolf by parlor realists such as Galsworthy and Wells. The story is a familiar one, whose political ramifications have been rehearsed at length. But if we return to “Modern Fiction” in the light of Robinson Crusoe – a perverse critical maneuver, perhaps – another aspect of the story becomes visible. Towards the end of that essay, Woolf places a limit on the value of psychological interiority and contrasts it with a counter-tendency conceived in curiously nationalized and even racialized terms.

In the last paragraph of the essay, she rhetorically expatriates the genealogy of literary psychology, suggesting that while “they” (the Russians) “unquestionably see further than we do… perhaps we see something that escapes them.” (154) The bifurcated national pronouns of this passage repatriate Woolf’s readership as implicitly British. More than that, she constructs such a collective subject as a genealogical blood line, “an ancient civilization which seems to have bred in us the instinct to enjoy and fight rather than to suffer and understand.” (my emphasis) This imagined national community delights in “humour”,

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“comedy” and, most relevant for our purposes, “the splendor of the body”. Such bodily splendor, I will be arguing, can only be understood within the Keynesian imaginary of the national intensification and gendered reorganization of labor-power, as well as the generic imaginary of the transformation of adventure romance. Woolf’s splendorous body is the adventure-body of the creative woman-worker embedded within a newly nationalized vocational frame. If such a hypothesis begins to sound like sheer class narcissism and puerile wish-fulfilment, then let’s anticipate such a valid critique by adding the caveat that imagining a creative, feminized and even queered economy for work will bring with it new contradictions and novel forms of alienation and disenchantment.

The Voyage Out, and then in again: from failed bildung to novel adventure

Where, then, do we begin to trace the rise of Woolf’s adventuresome creatives? Certainly, her first novel, The Voyage Out (1915) figured a protagonist with creative and more specifically musical talents. Jed Esty has persuasively read The Voyage Out as a residual bildungsroman for the era of late imperialism, in which “colonialism introduces into the historicist frame of the bildungsroman the form-fraying possibility that capitalism cannot be moralized into the progressive time of the nation.”162 In this reading, Rachael’s biographical failure to maturate into a well-rounded national subject is an allegory for the uneven development of the colonial periphery under late imperial rule. From the residual historical perspective of imperial decline and generic dissolution, Esty’s reading certainly makes sense. But if we shift our historiographical lens from residual to emergent perspectives, we can say something else of The Voyage Out as a way of presaging our readings of Woolf’s later fictions.

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162 Esty, Unseasonable Youth. p.17
The dissolution of the soul-nation allegory of the bildungsroman under the sign of late imperialism looks from an emergent perspective like the grasping for new languages and genres to express female selfhood, and particularly those apposite to vocational maturation.\textsuperscript{163} Rachael’s embeddedness in a modified plot of colonial adventure and frontier romance represents an ambivalent reallocation of the protocols of the quest narrative to a female protagonist. Poaching the forms of agency inherent in masculine adventure is something the novel directly thematizes and problematizes. Evelyn, one of the tourists at the hotel where Rachael is staying, tells another guest that she would like to “raise a troop and conquer some great territory and make it splendid.” Reminded by her male companion that “[t]hey’re all conquered already”, Evelyn responds: “It’s not any territory in particular… [i]t’s the idea, don’t you see? We lead such tame lives. And I feel sure you’ve got splendid things in you.”\textsuperscript{164}

Such an exchange well exemplifies the problems and the opportunities of adventure in the era of closing global frontiers. Evelyn wants adventure, but can’t imagine how to realize it outside the violent and racist protocols of territorial “conquest”, rendering her (like almost all the female characters in the novel) a semi-parodic figure of quixotic longing floating free of any determinate personal or political goal. Rachael herself is figured as ambivalently switching between the agent of territorial romance and the object metaphorically penetrated by heterosexual, masculine fantasies. Indeed, it could be said that Woolf (like Bowen after her) rewrites the marriage plot by laminating it onto a soured, Conradian quest structure, with Rachael alternately the subject and the object of narrative desire. At the plot’s climax, Rachael and Terrance embark on a touristic journey to visit a

\textsuperscript{163} It’s worth noting that the novel’s colonial plot is contrasted against a very brief opening episode in which England is sketched as a nightmare of professional rationalization and industrial modernization, a place full of people with “appointments to keep, who drew a weekly salary” (3), and then as “a great manufacturing place, where the people were engaged in making things, as though the West End, with its electric lamps, its vast-plate glass windows all shining yellow, its carefully finished houses, and tiny live figures totting on the pavement, or bowled along on wheels in the road, was the finished work. It appeared to her a very small bit of work for such a large factory to have made.” Yet the colonial/vacation plot really offers no positive alternative to these modern ailments.

\textsuperscript{164} Woolf, Virginia, \textit{The Voyage Out} (Penguin Books, 1992) p.124
local village, yet the tone and symbolism of such a passage is anything but lighthearted. As the pair travel along the river:

In some strange way the boat became identified with [Terrance], and just as it would have been useless for him to get up and steer the boat, so was it useless for him to struggle any longer with the irresistible force of his own feelings. He was drawn on and on away from all he knew, slipping over barriers and past landmarks into unknown waters as the boat glided over the smooth surface of the river. (252)

Given Rachael’s persistent metaphorization as a colonial landscape and open body of water, figuring Terrance as the boat moving downstream renders his desire for her disturbingly implacable and frighteningly possessive (an “irresistible force”). Indeed, Woolf writes the moment of marriage proposal as a stark and bitterly ironized property relation: “She was his for ever. This barrier being surmounted, innumerable delights lay before them both.” (267)

But if writing Rachael as the erotic object of a colonial quest renders her disturbingly passive as the treasure of male desire, then it also allows Woolf to defamiliarize – or, more precisely, to exoticize – the conventions of the marriage plot and heterosexual romance. Like Margaret travelling to Howards End and worrying about the “horror” portended by modern medicine for modernist kinship relations, Woolf, too, exercises a reversed racist anthropology, in which the traditions and ceremonies romanticizing Western sexual and property relations appear foreign and strange set against the “uncivilized” background of colonial space. Under the dream-like sign of the romance chronotope and via Rachael’s estranged perspective, identity itself soon becomes a specter, as she wonders: "Are we on the deck of a steamer on a river in South America? Am I Rachel, are you Terence?” (257)

Certainly, following Esty, we can read this as an instance of Rachael’s failure to stabilize into a mature bourgeois and sexual subject, but such failure can also be conceived as an opportunity cost. Placing Rachael at the heart of an exoticized landscape allows Woolf to narratively estrange the symbolic thread tying gender to sexual to property relations, and to render marriage and heteronormativity in general a question rather than a closural mechanism.
Woolf as yet has no answer to that question, and, unable to conceive another destiny for her heroine outside of marriage, she subjects her to what feels like a protracted and not altogether narratively coherent death. But what I am attempting to recuperate from Woolf’s early novel of uneven colonial/female development is the inchoate possibility that adventure’s rhetorics and chronotopes might be dislocated from a colonial context (Evelyn’s “conquest”) in order to provide alternative languages of subjectivity and selfhood to that of female *bildung*. To see that potential emerge into literary practice, we must shift to what is in a certain sense the companion novel to *The Voyage Out*, one which oversees the repatriation of several of its characters, as well as its narrative frame, to a metropolitan *milieu*. Where *The Voyage Out* used extensive territorial adventure to break open the complacent closural mechanisms of the marriage plot, *Mrs Dalloway* can be read as an intensive adventure that seeks to infuse woman-centered romance with sexual charisma and workplace enchantment.

In turning to the 1920s, we will see all those features of adventure that we recuperated from Woolf’s essays – its capacity to queer work, its affordance for metaphorical mobility, its resources for translating interiority into affect – emerge as principles of narrative composition driving vocational transformation.

I will also take the opportunity, here, to engage with Jennifer Wicke’s seminal reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and metropolitan modernism in general, as an aesthetic of volatile market economies. Wicke persuasively reads what Williams described as the metropolitan perception of Woolf’s interwar novel as mediating a Keynesian impulse to understand the “market comprehensively, dynamically [and] chaotically” (14), yet her observations only refer to the realm of consumption and not that of production. By turning our attention to adventure as an enchanted sphere of work we will emphasize a shift of focus from commodities to workers. In particular, I will focus on a minor but infamously contentious character in the novel, both for feminist studies and for modernists invested in the “spatial turn”, while showing why neither of these groups of critics have fully grasped her significance to the novel's wider symbolic (and workplace) economy: namely, Clarissa’s
enigmatic daughter, Elizabeth Dalloway. While Wicke, along with all other readers, suggests that “there is no Bloomsbury depicted in Mrs. Dalloway, no character who could "be" a Bloomsberrie”, (14) reading Elizabeth via the mediatory tropes of adventure reveals her character space as indeed one of creative work and performative sprezzatura.

Peter Walsh, or, Robinson 2.0

Woolf’s novel of metropolitan experience at the interwar mediates historical shifts from imperial expansion to national intensification by disarticulating adventure from 19th century modes of male storytelling and rearticulating it with queer female desires centred on resurgent imaginaries of work. It’s a little noted detail that Woolf’s novel opens by bringing to a diminutive conclusion an off-stage colonial adventure narrative, as Clarissa recalls that her adolescent crush, Peter Walsh, will soon be returning from his work in British India ("He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull").165 Peter’s “dull” or disenchanted repatriation is not the romantic homecoming of an imperial hero but an anxious search after work amid an embarrassing effort to extricate himself from an adulterous love affair – a form of literary “adventure” usually reserved for dangerously transgressive women. Peter’s unemployment is written precisely as a failure to activate the chronotopes of male virility traditionally attendant on the quest narrative. His outmoded vocational identity is figured as a parodic performance of the signature spatial trope of adventure, the penetration of female coded space by a homosocial team of men set to the rhythms of enchanted work. Peter first appears in the diegesis bursting into Clarissa’s dressing room, clutching the pocketknife that will become a kind of impotent fetish object as he pursues elusive new woman figures around the streets of London before snoozing on a bench in Regents Park.

165 Woolf, Virginia. Mrs. Dalloway (Harcourt Brace, 2015) p. 3
Clearly, Peter fulfils no fantasy of sexual mastery. Rather, he becomes another of those occasions for Woolf to snap the thread tying regimes of imperial work and forms of misogyny to adventurous modes of storytelling. But like so many of the residual figures of empire in Woolf’s work, Peter isn’t only the relic of a world of outmoded heroic masculinity, since his work is also the nostalgic yet still-enchanted occasion for experiencing the quickened temporalities of adventure. Unlike Forster, who denigrated the colonial classes from the get-go, Woolf invests their work with residual enchantment precisely so it can be stripped from them and transferred to a new vocational constituency all the more thoroughly.

Peter’s work is written by Woolf in the generic chronotope of adventure described so illuminatingly by Bakhtin as a perpetual “sudden tense”. As opposed to the gradual, developmental schema of biographical-time or narrative realism, adventure-time follows no law of causality from stable character to social world, but is rather an enraptured experience of heterogeneity and contingency, a chronotope of the “suddenly” or of “chance time”:

Moments of adventuristic time occur at those points when the normal course of events, the normal, intended or purposeful sequence of life’s events is interrupted. These points provide an opening for the intrusion of non-human forces – fate, gods, villains – and it is precisely these forces, and not the heroes, that in adventure-time take all the initiative. Of course the heroes themselves act in adventure-time – they escape, defend themselves, engage in battle, save themselves – but they act, as it were, as merely physical persons, and the initiative does not belong to them.166

Within the speedy, staccato time-signature of romance, the male hero does not “have the initiative”, as Bakhtin puts it. He certainly acts, but in acting he is blown about by the Gods,

166 Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (University of Texas Press, 2010) p.85 Bakhtin’s most immediate historical object here is the Greek Romance, and while I do not want to suggest that his description of the Classical adventure chronotope can be taken as an idealist model for all adventure genres to follow, the features that he identifies do indeed remain remarkably strong tendencies in adventure literature throughout the modern period, from Defoe to Haggard, even as they conflict with competing genre tendencies such as biographical time and the time of progressive modernization. Moreover, the lingering hold of such a chronotope upon literary genre is accounted for by Bakhtin’s own account of the historicity of genre: “These generic forms, at first productive, were then reinforced by tradition; in their subsequent development they continued stubbornly to exist, up to and beyond the point at which they had lost any meaning that was productive in actuality or adequate to later historical situations. This explains the simultaneous existence in literature of phenomena taken from widely separate periods of time, which greatly complicates the historico-literary process.” (85) My argument is that the modernist period is not yet that moment in which the adventure chronotope has “lost any meaning”, despite historical conditions that might appear to render it superfluous, outmoded or psychologized.
or, to use a more secularized vocabulary, by the deified forces of an unstable market economy that appear not fully within human comprehension and control. Woolf writes Peter Walsh’s enchanted relationship to his work via precisely this romance chronotope, at the same time as she critiques its foundations in modes of imperial violence. Feeling stultified amid the plush interior of the Dalloway residence, Peter recalls his work in a moment of sudden, paratactic acceleration: “and at once everything seemed to radiate from him; journeys; rides; quarrels; adventures; bridge parties; love affairs; work; work, work!” (42) As with Woolf’s reading of Kipling’s men – but now set to the rhythms of narrative time – Peter’s “work” distils an abbreviated but nonetheless pluralized sexuality (his “love affairs”) and other truncated adventures into the enchanted tempos of the sudden tense at the very syntactical level of the sentence. Like Bakhtin’s heroes-of-old, thrown about at the mercy of the Gods, Peter’s empire-work at the frontiers of global capitalism is written as a sort of enraptured heteronomy, an enchanted precarity. “What’s happened to you?” asks Clarissa:

"Millions of things!" he exclaimed, and, urged by the assembly of powers which were now charging this way and that and giving him the feeling at once frightening and extremely exhilarating of being rushed through the air on the shoulders of people he could no longer see, he raised his hands to his forehead. (42)

“Millions of things” were at the novel’s opening the contents of the kind of bad Edwardian character realism that Clarissa’s impressionist consciousness impatiently disregarded (“when millions of things had utterly vanished…”). But they return here as a form of reenchanted objectivity or as an affective relationship to work, and one not unlike the “simple objects” of Crusoe’s unalienated labour (“hatchets, scissors, logs” etc.). And yet, if Woolf is granting Peter a certain amount of enchantment, then she still marks her distance from the glib popularizations of empire-work by containing such enchantment and such somatic thrill within the psychic realm of nostalgia: Peter is remembering his work, not doing it. As such, we might say that Woolf ushers in (and petitions for) the passing of imperial regimes of accumulation by psychologizing adventure, by submitting its principles of extroverted action to the cerebral mechanisms of modernist interiority. In this she is not so far from modernists
such as Conrad or Graham Greene, both of whom have been read as rewriting the imperial quest as an exploration of anxious masculine interiority. The difference, here, is that in rendering extensive adventure nostalgic and psychologised, Woolf is also preparing to pass on the generic baton of romance from one kind of worker to another, from a regime centred on expansive accumulation to one of nationally intensified value-production premised on feminine creativity. This scene is the equivalent of that one in Howards End where Margaret penetrates to the inner depths of Henry’s office in order to produce aesthetic knowledge. For Woolf chooses just this scene of nostalgic, nineteenth century adventure to introduce a new candidate for its chronotopic narrative power. Enter into the room Clarissa’s daughter, Elizabeth Dalloway. Like Peter, she too is jobless, not approaching retirement but positioned at the anterior edge of work, though of what kind is to be decided. This encounter between post- and proto-workers rings like a bizarre moment of nemesism within the novel, Big Ben striking the half-hour between them “with extraordinary vigour”, Woolf writes, as if signalling some inchoate yet decisive change of workplace shifts.

**Elizabeth Dalloway Goes to (The Labour) Market**

Whereas for Peter Walsh the sudden tense of adventure recalls a historically fading mode of production, for Elizabeth it affords the possibility of exiting the schedules, or, to borrow a phrase from Elizabeth Freeman, the chrononorms, of heteronormative feminine development. Feminist criticism has persistently read Elizabeth as a site of subversive

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167 See my introduction for fuller discussion of this point.
168 As Freeman develops the term, “chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate what the sociologist Evitar Zerubavel calls “hidden rhythms,” forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege.” (3) We can add to those privileged time forms here, the time of development or maturation, which privileges certain kinds of becoming over overs, recognises certain kinds of “maturity” over others. Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. (Duke University Press, 2010)
female agency within the text, while spatial accounts of modernism have brought attention to her as a site of women’s financial empowerment. By now combining these readings under the generic sign of adventure, we will not only suggest their mutual imbrication, but their further elaboration towards a new thesis about work, sexuality and kinship. For no matter how positive their interpretations, all critics have agreed that Elizabeth is the site of naïve workplace aspirations. But having uncovered the resources of Bloomsbury sprezzatura in our last chapter, we shall see that Elizabeth’s amateurism and even quixotism might be more persuasively read as reconfiguring under camouflage aesthetic capability towards a new workplace imaginary.

While it is Clarissa’s nostalgic kiss with Sally Seton that is usually the locus of lesbian/queer readings of the novel, Elizabeth is involved in her own contemporary love intrigue with her tutor, Miss Kilman. Kilman, however, is less the site of queer possibility as the projection of Clarissa’s own sexual anxiety onto a subject of national betrayal. Clarissa thinks of Kilman as “Elizabeth’s seducer” and Woolf characterizes her desire as something like a fetish, even a lack of the “proportion” that is otherwise the novel’s shorthand for violent sexual normalization: “If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted.” (129) The problem with such desire, for Woolf, beyond its identity politics, is that it is intensely, even fetishistically, individualist, a possessive pathology rather than a collectively oriented social praxis. Kilman’s unreciprocated feelings for Elizabeth, then, represent not so much the narrative failure of queer desire, as a foil against which Woolf’s young proto-worker can stage a more thoroughgoing and vocationally oriented conception of “queer”, and one, crucially, that draws its narrative energy from the chronotopes of adventure.

170 For an excellent summary of this criticism, see Barrett, Eileen. “Unmasking Lesbian Passion”, in *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings* (NYU Press, 1997)
Upon leaving her tutor behind, Elizabeth feels nonetheless estranged from the gender and sexual normalizing effects of the male gaze, which she feels writing her into clichés of reproductive heterosexual femininity, comparing her “to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies; and it made her life a burden to her”. (131) Contra Wicke’s argument that the novel renders modernist consciousness and modern consumption constitutive of one another, Elizabeth shows a marked distaste for the modern allures of the department store and its promises of satisfying desire, its goods focalized through her in lists of Flaubertian bathos (“brown, decorous, striped, frivolous, solid, flimsy”). In this distaste for consumption she differs from the dystopic figure of the all-desiring women diagnosed by Rita Felski.171 Against the subjectivizing effects of heteronormative schedules of development and consumerist narratives of self, Elizabeth finds herself (with the radical passivity a romance hero) boarding an omnibus that suddenly transforms into a “pirate” in an extended metaphor of parodic adventure:

Suddenly Elizabeth stepped forward and most competently boarded the omnibus, in front of everybody. She took a seat on top. The impetuous creature – a pirate – started forward, sprang away; she had to hold the rail to steady herself, for a pirate it was, reckless, unscrupulous, bearing down ruthlessly, circumventing dangerously, boldly snatching a passenger, or ignoring a passenger, squeezing eel-like and arrogant in between, and then rushing insolently all sails spread up Whitehall.” (132)

Fantastical as this scene is, it’s only partly metaphorical – or, better, reminds us of metaphor’s material etymology as a mode of transportation in the modernist period of the petrol engine. These so-called “pirate buses” were in fact real capitalist ventures that sought to compete with the state-regulated London General Omnibus Company.172 Reaching their most intense
numbers in 1924 – the same year as Woolf’s novel – such stray vehicles dangerously circumvented the proscribed routes to avoid traffic and increase profits. Given this embedded historical reference – and even, I think, without it – we can read the narrative speed and cosmopolitan imagery of Woolf’s piratic metaphor as a romance figure for capital’s emerging intensification of national value-production, under the pressure of which metropolitan space is experienced as a new economic and entrepreneurial frontier. The narrative torsion created by capital’s intensification becomes readable, here, in its effects on women’s bodies. This imagery of capitalist intensification dislocates Elizabeth from traditional, developmental schemas of “proper femininity” and female bildung, instead melting her into similes in which identity takes on a modern, and indeed, modernist, kind of fluidity:

And now it was like riding, to be rushing up Whitehall; and to each movement of the omnibus the beautiful body in the fawn-coloured coat responded responded freely like a rider, like the figure-head of a ship, for the breeze slightly disarrayed her; the heat gave her cheeks the pallor of white painted wood; and her fine eyes, having no eyes to meet, gazed ahead, blank, bright, with the staring incredible innocence of sculpture. (132)

On the one hand, this thermal trope of transformation under “heat” will feel familiar to us as a strategy for representing capital’s disintegrative effects on stable social words and traditional identities. From The Communist Manifesto through nineteenth century industrial novels such as Hard Times, to Berman’s classic, All that is Solid Melts into Air, capital has been metaphorized via hot, combustive metaphors. It’s an industrial metaphor par excellence. But here, it undergoes considerable post-industrial modification. For the “heat” acting on Elizabeth transforms her not so much into air, as into Art – even, perhaps, into Bloomsbury arts and crafts, the “white painted wood” feeling to me distinctly like a Charleston interior.

The fantasy of productivity embedded in Elizabeth’s adventure, then, is first of all the fantasy of a certain kind of subject. Or, more precisely: it conceives the kernel of capitalist transformation to be the vigorous production and proliferation of subjectivities themselves.

one whose key trope is located along the paratactic or metaphorical axis of narrative, one that
is specifically associated with the suspension of temporal metonymy (“but what was the time?
– where was a clock?” (134)) Aboard Woolf’s piratic omnibus, the machinations of capital
appear as a form of art-making whose outcome is the construction of multiple and flexible
selves. It’s in this context that we might better understand Elizabeth’s perplexing, non-
familial and somewhat incoherent racialization, her “dark” complexion, her “Chinese eyes in
a pale face; [her] Oriental mystery”. Woolf is, I think, leaning into racialized discourses of the
non-normative sexual body in order to positively dislocate Elizabeth from narratives of
hegemonic national and sexual belonging. Her proliferating identities appropriate the logic of
potentially genocidal abnormalization as an opportunity to eject normative narratives of
identity and personhood. Via this proliferation of selves, there is a broader opportunity to
reconceive the “impersonality” of modernist art-forms as a symptom of a new phase of
capitalist work culture, in which aspects of selfhood are being vigorously particularized as
productive processes.

Certainly, as Marx insisted over and again, capital always produced a subject as well
as an object, social relations as well as commodities, whether in factories or in households.
But there is something qualitatively new about Elizabeth’s form of subjectivity, or, we should
say, her subjectivities. For the it’s the plurality of her selfhood across a singular body that
seems decisive, and which points towards a new stage of capitalist intensification wherein the
production of subjectivity itself becomes a primary component of the production process, and
thus a primary prize of the adventure story.173

But Elizabeth isn’t only a subject repeatedly remade, but a subject able to remake
other subjectivities. Like Margaret auditing Henry’s office, her adventure-trope perception is
primarily concerned with evaluating the vocational fields and subjectivities of other workers.

173 André Gorz is one of many contemporary commentators to note this aspect of post-Fordist labor: “In becoming
the foundation of a value-production based on continual innovation, communication and improvisation, immaterial
labour tends in the end, to become indistinguishable from a labour of self-production.” (13) André Gorz.
Onboard the bus, she sees “buildings without architects' names, crowds of people coming back from the city having more power than single clergymen in Kensington”. (133) Like Margaret’s, such perception might at first appear naïve or surface-bound, but it also works as a form of aesthetic knowledge, a diagnosis that with vocational power and economic modernization comes alienation from the products of labor, even imaginative labor (whence the nameless architecture).

The purpose of Elizabeth’s adventure is precisely to invent kinship relations that don’t glibly reproduce extant divisions of labour and forms of alienation (the trap in which Chloe and Olivia found themselves stuck.) Like Margaret, Elizabeth seeks to carve open a wider jurisdiction for the aesthetic sense and secure a monopoly over kinship formation outside and beyond the household. It’s just here, where we might read her aesthetic impressions as most quixotic – and where previous readers have done so – that they are in fact most astute. It’s that Bloomsbury sprezzatura again, taken by Woolf to new heights: “She liked people who were ill. And every profession is open to the women of your generation, said Miss Kilman. So she might be a doctor. She might be a farmer. Animals are often ill. She might own a thousand acres and have people under her.” (133) The irony here is acerbic, as women’s so-called innate capacity for care is transformed by Woolf into comic schadenfreude (“She liked people who were ill”). But the target of such irony is not Woolf’s minor protagonist, but rather the realist (one is tempted to say Galsworthyan) expectation that the novel produce a “peroration”, as Woolf scorned in A Room, on the contemporary problem of work for women. Instead of offering an authorial statement on women’s jobs, Elizabeth’s character-space wagers that work can be more thoroughly reimagined under the sign of generic transformation, under the chronotope of a new kind of aesthetic romance.

In other words, I would argue that there is indeed a kind of Bloomsbury worker being imagined into being here, but that the only way to observe her at work is via the mediatory tropes of narrative adventure. As Elizabeth travels East into the working district of the city,
Woolf transforms the poetics of adventure, blending frontier romance with domestic gothic in order to deconstruct the generic and workplace organisation of gender binarism. She walked just a little way towards St. Paul’s, shyly, like someone penetrating on tiptoe, exploring a strange house by night with a candle, on edge lest the owner should suddenly fling wide his bedroom door and ask her business, nor did she dare wander off into queer alleys, tempting bye-streets, any more than in a strange house open doors which might be bedroom doors, or sitting-room doors, or lead straight to the larder. For no Dalloways came down the Strand daily; she was a pioneer, a stray, venturing, trusting.

With no small degree of stylistic virtuosity, Woolf solves in a stroke the formal problem that Forster could not. In lending Margaret the tropes of adventure as a trojan horse for entering workplace and propertied imaginaries, he rendered his heroine in the phallic shape of a petit-sovereign (“she unlocked Howards End and thrust Helen into it”), even as she enacted outcomes that were antinormative and queer. Woolf transforms the very form of adventure tropes, such that the agency encoded in them is no longer purely masculine nor feminine, but a hybrid of the two, a manoeuvre perhaps most algebraically encoded in that haute Woolfian phrase, “penetrating on tiptoe.”

Such novel tropes are not merely the form into which the content of a new kind of work will be slotted. It is important to grasp that part of what is being produced in this episode is style itself, or the self as a mode of (adventurous) stylization. The modernist innovations of generic appropriation and hybridization are being arrogated to Elizabeth in order to lend her a particularly vital kind of modern subjectivity: protean, dynamic, inessential, creative, desiring, and most of all able to deal with and even capitalize upon sudden environmental changes and forms of urban chaos. Under this sudden chronotope of

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174 I would suggest that the domestic gothic is in some ways the nineteenth century female equivalent of imperial romance, a genre for enchanting and libidinalizing women’s dominant sphere of work.
175 Given what follows, I read this queering of gender normativity as a broader disruption of the relationship of “entailment” linking gender to sex to sexual orientation and attachment, one that has been identified as a broader feature of Woolf’s work by queer studies scholars such as Madelyn Detloff. See Detloff, “Woolf and Lesbian Culture: Queering Woolf Queering”, in Virginia Woolf in Context. ed. Randall, Bryony & Goldman, Jane. As Margaret Hennessey puts it in a more general maxim: “Intelligible genders are those that inaugurate and maintain, “relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire.”” Hennessey, Please and Profit, p. 115) Drucker also notes that “sexual inversion” and “congenital homosexuality” were practically synonymous in the sexiological discourses of the modernist era, such that female masculinization often, though not always, figured same-sex desire. See Drucker, Peter, Warped. P 118
work and adventure, identity becomes a theatrical performance, an amalgam of surfaces, a cluster of symbols and signs. In its representation as a relentlessly externalizing surface, such style is an upgraded version of what I earlier described as affect, the exteriorization of psychology and interiority onto an economy of objects – indeed, selfhood now counts itself amongst those objects, rather than existing on a plane above or below them.

Where Peter Walsh experienced residual modes of imperial expansion as the *psychologization of adventure*, Elizabeth experiences the modernist psyche as the *adventurization of psychology*, her imagination coming to *act* on the city’s workplaces in order to produce the image of a different organisation of gendered bodies and sexual desires. Propelled forward by the modified chronotopes of sudden adventure, Elizabeth’s modernist creativity turns the workplaces of the city into an uncanny home for otherwise unwritable sexual desires, a space of “queer alleys, tempting bye-streets”, and of experimental kinship structures from which patriarchy is a conspicuously absent as an organising principle: “She liked the geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood of this uproar. It seemed to her good.”

*It seemed to her good.* That’s something like Forsterian appreciation, an aesthetic judgement of taste that draws normative social implications while nonetheless demurring from specifically *moral* registers of discourse. Indeed, if Elizabeth’s adventure performs the traditionally feminine work of imagining and regulating new kinship structures and forms of community, then it does so in startlingly aestheticized terms, as a form of art-making. For as readers will be well aware, her adventure reaches its apex not with any form of queered habitation or resettled domestic structure (there is no Howards End for Elizabeth) but in something more like the style of a Byronic sublime, a truly utopian (both ecstatic and non-existent) space from which social reifications have been (almost) vanished. The passage is a remarkable one, and is worth quoting at length since we will return to it from a very different perspective with Elizabeth Bowen:
A puff of wind (in spite of the heat, there was quite a wind) blew a thin black veil over the sun and over the Strand. The faces faded; the omnibuses suddenly lost their glow. For although the clouds were of mountainous white so that one could fancy hacking hard chips off with a hatchet, with broad golden slopes, lawns of celestial pleasure gardens, on their flanks, and had all the appearance of settled habitations assembled for the conference of gods above the world, there was a perpetual movement among them. Signs were interchanged, when, as if to fulfil some scheme arranged already, now a summit dwindled, now a whole block of pyramidal size which had kept its station inalterably advanced into the midst or gravely led the procession to fresh anchorage. Fixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be fresher, freer, more sensitive superficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled surface; to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately possible; and in spite of the grave fixity, the accumulated robustness and solidity, now they struck light to the earth, now darkness. (135)

I think that what we have in this passage is a metaphor for the relationship of aesthetic perception and creative work to historicity itself. This passage suspends us between fixity and motion, stasis and change, the “solemn assemblage” of a “solid” and “robust” (one can, I think, read, Victorian) present, and the “immediately possible” of modernity’s future-tense. If Elizabeth’s sight is the site of aesthetic perception’s workfulness, then this nebulous image is a sign of that work’s capacity to produce new values and new attachments as such, beyond any specified social content or normative criteria (beyond any sublimated love affair or middle-aged crush, à la the Kilman and Clarissa plots). What is being tested here, we might say, is aesthetic perception’s capacity to de-reify (or, if you like, to nebulize) the social milieu in general: that is its most elemental form of work. If that sounds somewhat speculative as a specifically workerist (rather than say, leisurely or escapist) imaginary, then let us hear the Defoean echo at the heart of this passage: to change, to go, to dismantle. Don’t those

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176 The question of attachments is key, here. Clarissa thinks Elizabeth “extremely immature, like a child still, attached to dolls, to old slippers; a perfect baby” and wants her to grow into a mature vocational and sexual subject in the “Dalloway family… tradition of public service”. The sudden time signature of adventure, however, is precisely what enables Woolf to eject this developmental and teleological organization of “attachments” in favor of a kind of hyperaesthesia and flexible cathexis. Sexologists like Ellis saw “hyperaesthesia” as a neurotic symptom of what they described as sexual inversion. Yet I think in this episode Woolf is trying to redefine and reappropriate a kind of queer aesthetic sensitivity and mobile attachment as a kind of proto-productive capacity, a sign of a dynamic and flexible working subject. Elizabeth embodies something close to what Marcuse would later call “polymorphous perversity”, and to which he would attach fully utopian consequences. But from a post-Fordist standpoint that is perhaps just over the horizon of Marcuse’s theory, this polymorphous desire looks equally like the kind of flexibility and love of change required by a new phase of capitalism, one which emphasizes short term projects, temporary contracts, loose professional and personal ties, and constant mental and physical mobility.
infinitives sound curiously like those which animated Crusoe’s utopian work (“to dig, to bake, to plant, to build”), returned here as the immaterial processes of the aesthetic psyche?

Elizabeth might have appeared to generations of critics as a site of naïve workplace aspiration, but she is in fact sign of the most utopian impulses of the aesthetic under capital, the turning of self and world into exquisite signs and images, into art. But just here, at this utopian threshold, is where we must think such a proto-workerist capacity dialectically (and therein recognise it as other than straightforward wish-fulfilment or class narcissism). For while Woolf’s sublime nebula might solve the problem of fixing (or, to use a term that will soon animate our analysis, marking) desire in a symbolic location (like Howards End), it thereby loses the capacity to externalize and objectify itself, to become social praxis and human attachment. Without reification, there is no socially shared experience. In remaining nebulous, Elizabeth’s work ultimately fails, or refuses, to become anything more solid than artful air, even as it temporarily reintroduced a degree of bodily splendour back into workplace imaginaries. At the end of this episode, that is, we get a sense that the aesthetic psyche, unwilling to permanently manufacture itself into anything concrete, comes starkly to confront its own hypertrophy, its own exhaustion and limit. Such a limit is written as the reconcretion and restabilization of style, and the reintegration of self-identity back under the organising principle of a proper, patriarchal name: “Calmly and competently, Elizabeth Dalloway mounted the Westminster Omnibus.” (135)

After style’s nebulous expansion, that feels like a somewhat devastating fall from grace, somewhat akin to the aesthetic punishments dished out to Jessie Matz’s impressionable impressionists. But it is also – like the space of Howards End – a form of protective immural; for by the logic which Woolf has herself set in motion here, the apogee of aesthetic romance would be tantamount to self-disintegration, the subordination of all forms of identity and attachment to a principle of radical destabilization and disintegration – and thus, finally, the eradication of selfhood and even of meaning as such (a risk we’ll be courting in our next chapter). Indeed, if we move from thinking about Elizabeth’s adventure in isolated terms and
consider it within the wider economy of the novel’s workplace imaginaries, we can see how her particular form of aesthetic romance manages contradictions that to other characters manifest only as meaning fractured and romance disenchanted.

I take it as instructive that Elizabeth’s adventure should be bookended by Peter, on the one hand, and by Septimus on the other. They represent not only class-stratified forms of male dispensation and injury stemming from imperial and vocational crisis; Woolf also stages such representations via the disenchantment of adventure romance. Peter, as we have already seen, represents adventure-time displaced into nostalgic memory, while Septimus is a paradigmatic example of what Paul Fussell has described as the military chivalric adventurer disillusioned by the experience of mechanized mass warfare, compelled to the front to save a pastoral idyll of old England that explodes upon contact with the trenches.

Moreover, by shifting directly from Elizabeth’s East End adventure to Septimus’s traumatic consciousness, Woolf is I think encouraging us to view her exposure to precarity as a subjection to the same kind (if a lesser degree) of historical forces that wounded him. In other words, Woolf is self-critically raising the suggestion that Elizabeth’s “adventure” might simply be a psychological misdescription of impending workplace precarity. Septimus’s sense of foreboding apprehension is repeatedly written as a kind of fragmented, modernist montage of adventure’s romance *motifs* of seafaring and treasure hunting that just a moment before animated Elizabeth’s aesthetic adventure: “Every power poured its treasures on his head, and his hand lay there on the back of the sofa, as he had seen his hand lie when he was bathing, floating, on the top of the waves, while far away on shore he heard dogs barking and barking far away.” (136) Beyond this rhetorical dischord, we should note that Septimus experiences the sudden tense of adventure as a form of disorganized trauma. Both Elizabeth and Septimus, that is, are characterological sites of crisis upon or across which developmental time is fractured and broken. Yet while for Elizabeth such fracturing is an enchanted *breaking out* of the oppressive temporalities of heterofeminine *bildung*, for Septimus it is a *breaking up* of the cognitive and narrative schemas that guarantee a fundamental grasp of time’s basic
continuity and non-contingency.\textsuperscript{177} We could indeed say that for Septimus the most far-reaching imperative of Elizabeth’s adventurized psyche has in a sense already become all too painfully true: anything is indeed “immediately possible” for him at any moment, as the future persistently threatens to cascade into sudden and unpredictable injury and death.\textsuperscript{178} It’s worth noting as well that Septimus feels that he has “committed a crime”, a feeling which refers both to his participation in the project of mass death and his erotic feelings towards his officer, Evans. Septimus, in other words, is the site on which the extra-legal sovereignty ideologically afforded to the adventurer passes over into the guilt of illegality. Elizabeth’s aesthetic perception might crack open and reorganize the sedimented norms and rules of kinship, gender and sexuality, but in doing so she does not go so far as to conceive herself as a \textit{criminal}, even though her desires might indeed appear “unlawful” if written in a less mediated narrative language.

What we are fleshing out, here, is the psychic and generic tightrope walked by Bloomsbury’s creatives, at the far end of which they already sensed extreme forms of workplace precarity, psychological exhaustion and narrative disenchantment. That might sound like an unlikely and somewhat hyperbolic telos for modernism’s enchanted creatives, but as we move through this dissertation and towards the present moment, it perhaps won’t. For now, we can note that precarity was indeed already \textit{incipiently} present in Elizabeth’s capitalist adventure. The piratic omnibus was “reckless, unscrupulous, bearing down ruthlessly, circumventing dangerously”. In Elizabeth’s case, however, such precarity is perhaps closer to what I have already described as the kind of zany comedy theorized at length by Sianne Ngai than it is to post-traumatic (or indeed work related) stress disorders. In

\textsuperscript{177} I am reminded here of a suggestive formal claim by Maria DiBattista, which I am attempting to lend some historicist motivation: “The unknown is the primal lure to adventure, but who could survive a life of unrelenting adventure, in which every moment would startle and surprise, in which life would not unfold, but erupt in one unprecedented and unpredictable experience after another, administering to the ego a series of shocks that would not relent even for the elderly?” DiBattista, Maria. “Virginia Woolf’s Sense of Adventure”, Literature Compass. Volume 4, Issue 1, pp. 203-217.

\textsuperscript{178} For a discussion of Septimus in the context of war trauma, see Saint Amour, Paul. \textit{Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form} (Oxford University Press, 2015)
Ngai’s account of post-Fordist zanies, performativity and style are no less the markers of a flexible model of selfhood. However, her account is centred on a specific economic sector – service work – in which the imperative to perform one’s selfhood is tied to the necessity of fulfilling a predetermined vocational function. The precarity of such a situation is in the heteronomy or alienation of selfhood is breeds, as behaviour becomes literally a commodity to be consumed. (Arlie Hochschild powerfully describes this as the problem of the relationship between your “face” and your “feelings” when both are being unevenly expropriated.179 We’re not quite at that threshold with Elizabeth, who’s adventurously styled performativity – something closer to the exaggerated theatricality of camp – seems as much a form of artistic and sexual self-experimentation as it does vocational alienation.

Yet by turning now to Woolf’s next novel, *To the Lighthouse*, we can see more clearly the risks that artistic self-styling might be rendered a form of emotional and affective service. In Lily Briscoe Woolf creates a protagonist (with one eye still on Elizabeth Dalloway) who is caught between artistic self-expression and the performance of affective labor for men. Moreover, by reminding readers that Woolf’s novel centres on a reconfigured adventure plot described by the book’s rather Stevensonian title, I hope to draw some new conclusions about the relationship between Lily’s artistic observations and the Ramsey family’s belated quest.

*To the Lighthouse: Managing aesthetic perception*

In her diary, Woolf famously described *To the Lighthouse* as an ‘elegy’, but an elegy for what? Certainly, it can be read as a personal elegy for the deaths that had been wrought upon her own family, given that she had purposefully placed something of her mother and father

into the figures of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey. Yet, as Lois Cucullu has persuasively argued, To the Lighthouse elegizes more than such biographical coordinates would suggest. For Mrs. Ramsey’s death, no less than her bodily and emotional exhaustion from years of biological childbearing and household work, also nostalgizes an entire Victorian matriarchal and domestic social order. In Cucullu’s account, the elegizing of the matriarch is a space clearing device to make way for a new kind of modernist ‘expert’ class in the figure of Lily. Modernists like Woolf, she argues, gain their own cultural stature by “denigrating and replacing the moral authority of ‘woman’, as defined by Victorian matron and society hostess, with their own expert narratives more synchronous with a mobile and worldly aggregate.”

If Lily displaces woman-centered domestic romance, on the one side, then, Cucullu argues that she also supplants male adventure, on the other. Certainly, as she points out, the novel begins with the attenuation of a mock epic journey under the domestic sign of a ‘weather delay’, the result of which is largely written as James Ramsey’s comically outsized oedipal rage directed against his father. In the closing scenes of the novel, Cucullu argues, it is “Lily’s reverie, and not the voyage the chastened Mr Ramsey leads, [that] significantly dominates and concludes ‘The Lighthouse’. The amateur Lily and her painterly representation prevail over epic and domestic diegesis.” (88) Such a reading is persuasive, but in focusing on rupture and displacement (in genre, class and generational terms) it passes over some of the novel’s more peculiar hybridizations of adventure and domestic scenes, masculine and feminine ideologies, and expert and amateurish codes of practice. Lily doesn’t simply replace masculine adventure with her own form of modernist cultural production, but oversees adventure’s transformation into a newly observational and detached form. From a sociological perspective, such detachment is indicative of emerging regimes of expertise and management, but such detachment also has a transformative or utopian moment if we attend

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to the novel’s displacement of the accumulative telos of adventure – treasure – by a new logic of ‘the gift’.

As with Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse employs the fantasy of masculine adventure only as a fading mediator between aesthetic perception and enchanted work. Although not an empire man like Peter Walsh, Mr Ramsey’s academic work is written similarly as an ironic interiorization of adventure, as striving for the “[q]ualities that in a desolate expedition across the icy solitudes of the Polar region would have made him the leader, the guide, the councilor”. Ramsey famously views his own intellectual work as a parodic quest through the alphabet, finding himself anxiously stuck at the letter R and fearing that he may never reach Z. Male knowledge and expertise is stripped of its heroism in its representation as a form of infantile illiteracy, one stuck at certain threshold in developmental and teleological time. Yet Woolf doesn’t so much oppose Lily to this psychologized chronotope of male romance and adventure as mark her, initially at least, as its constitutively excluded outside. Sitting next to Paul at Mrs. Ramsey’s famous dinner of Boeuf en Daube, Lily thinks of him “glowing, burning; she, aloof, satirical; he bound for adventure; she, moored to the shore; he, launched, incautious; she solitary, left out”. (73) Hearing of Paul’s plan to scour the beach for Minta’s lost brooch, “Lily wanted to protest violently and outrageously her desire to help him… and thus herself be included among the sailors and adventurers.” (74) And yet, when she offers her help, Paul laughs as if to say: “Throw yourself over the cliff if you like, I don’t care.”

As in A Room, what we see emerging here is a bifurcated gendered and generic architecture, in which feminine domestic staidness and masculine heroic adventure relate to one another via a stark, binary opposition. At the same time, we see how the telos of adventure is itself being quietly transvalued, the treasure of imperial romance here appearing as a lost broach, a symbol for feminine domesticity and sentiment. Even in its first section,

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181 Woolf, Virginia. To the Lighthouse (Wordsworth Classics, 1994) p.20
then, the novel affects a subtle transvaluation of adventure’s narrative content, displacing epic male heroism with domestic ideals of care and kinship. Note, however, that Lily is in fact excluded from both of these versions of adventure, permitted neither into the realm of extensive epic (“bound for adventure”) nor a redomesticated quest structure (hunting for the broach). The novel marks an ambivalence in this sense, wanting to domesticate adventure without simply enchanting household labor as such.

Indeed, Mrs. Ramsey herself is not so much a site of non-adventure as much as its bad re-enchantment as a compensation for domestic care work. Sitting in bed, knitting, “[h]er horizon seemed to her limitless. There were all the places she had not seen; the Indian plains; she felt herself pushing aside the thick leather curtain of a church in Rome. This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting.” This subjunctive and interiorized quest is governed by a logic of compensation (imagining all the places she hasn’t seen) and totally private (“for no one saw it”). Most crucially, perhaps, Mrs. Ramsey’s imaginary of adventure involves the cancellation, rather than the modification, of subject-formation, its precondition being the abandonment of “attachments” such that the self is “free for the strangest adventures.” Such interiorized adventure might be a “triumph over life”, a form of “peace…rest…eternity”, but it cannot for that very reason be integrated into life, into the practice of socialization and attachment-formation.

The ambivalence with which the novel domesticates adventure can perhaps be seen most clearly in the ‘Time Passes’ section. There, the events that would usually structure and differentiate entire generic plots are placed in ruthlessly disenchanted brackets that are narratively traumatic in their unprepared-for suddenness. It’s as if the suddenness which in Mrs. Dalloway dislocated Elizabeth from the schedules of heteronormative bildung returns here as the form of traumatic time experienced by Septimus, in which the present threatens to jolt readerly experience out of its narrative patterns and schemas. Marriage, childbirth, war, as well as the literary success of Mr Carmichael’s somewhat opportunistic poetry (successful only because of a wartime revival of the mode). The parenthesizing of these life-events is
another one of those ways that Woolf signals the massive generic displacements that structure her art, a conspicuous bracketing of the content of historically sedimented literary genres – marriage plot, chivalric adventure, kunstlerroman, etc. As Cucullu points out of Mrs. Ramsey’s death, in an observation we can extend to all of the parenthesized non-events of the section, there is a kind of space-clearing exercise going on here, on the heels of which Lily will come to occupy the key site of narrative agency.

But there’s something else we can say of ‘Time Passes’, also, when we think of it as part of a refigured adventure plot. It is, I think, an occasion for the semi-enchantment of paid, household service work. Mrs McNab and Mrs Bast (in whose name we might hear an echo of Jacky from Howards End) act as caretakers of the house in order to prepare it for the return of the diminished Ramsey family. Like Miss Avery from Howards End, or Lucy from Mrs. Dalloway, their household labor is the precondition for the more exalted forms of intellectual and creative activity that will come to fill the grounds shortly. But in them we should, I think, hear more than an echo of Bloomsbury’s class guilt, or of Woolf’s own bad conscience about her exploitation of a servant class, which has been explored at length by Alison Light.²⁸²

We should also hear the fragment of an adventure plot, for McNab is figured as a ship at sea. “As she lurched (for she rolled like a ship at sea) and leered… and rolled from room to room”. She “bowed down…creaking”, but also oversaw a “magnificent conquest”, a “triumph”. If the women aren’t vessels, then they’re redolent of rowdy seafarers, “stooping, rising, groaning, singing… Oh, they said, the work!” (104) All this is still, obviously, extremely problematic from a political perspective, and my intention isn’t to recuperate any kind of simplistic, heroic subjectivity for Woolf’s interned workers, who receive their orders via curt missives from the Ramsey’s next generation of “young ladies”. (105) But I do want to suggest that if read via these fragmented adventure tropes, the ‘Time Passes’ section of the

²⁸² See Light, Alison. Mrs Woolf and the Servants: The Hidden Heart of Domestic Service (Penguin, 2008)
novel might be understood to harbor a spirit of semi-enchanted work rather than simply alienated and interned labor.

Indeed, the content of this work is itself curious if read in relation to the literary adventure motifs that metaphorize it. McNab and Bast’s work may take place in a domestic scene but it is also dislocated from the demands of direct familial service and care work by the fact that the house is empty. The women are custodians of the house, but also of its culture, literally cleaning its books. Their aforementioned “triumph” is “over long rows of books, black as ravens once, now white-stained, breeding pale mushrooms and secreting furtive spiders”, and more specifically over the “Waverley novels” which they “fetched up from oblivion” with their cleaning. (104) Bast and McNab’s work, that is, involves literally staying the mold that is overgrowing the canon of British romance, rescuing Scott from fungal decay. Miss Avery of Howards End might have “worked for days” to prepare the house for Helen and Margaret’s effortless appreciation, but that work remained below the horizon of the novel’s diegesis, let alone the horizon of enchanted romance.

Yet, if these women are in one sense being valorized as agents of adventure via their safekeeping of culture, then they are in another sense being newly excluded and disenfranchised. For their narrative participation in the genre is figured precisely as an external one, figured as the hulls of sea-vessels that carry around the heroes, or else as the precarious workforce exposed on deck. This generic and tropic exteriority corresponds to a cultural-vocational one, for the women’s care of the books and other cultural objects of the house extends no deeper than (cleaning) surfaces. The books’ interior, their meaning, is thoroughly off-limits, and the only depth on show is that which marks McNab’s status as a corporeal rather than intellectual agent, one mindlessly consuming the products of empire (she worked “jovially, with the hot tea in her”). McNab’s and Bast’s cultural stewardship is not for themselves, in other words, but for another, for Lily, who, at the end of ‘Time Passes’ emerges as the sleeping beauty for whom all their labors were endured, as she “laid her head on the pillow in the clean still room and heard the sea” and “the voice of the beauty of the
world… too softly to hear exactly what it said.” (105) It might have said: sublime dreams are sweeter on clean sheets.

On the one hand, then, Woolf asks us to recognize the class inequality, even exploitation, structuring these women’s relationship, and more broadly the relationship between household labor and cultural production – especially when it works, Bloomsbury style, from home. Lily arrives in her own square brackets and with her own baggage, washed, presumably, of both the coastal mold and the liberal guilt growing around the house. Although she might be symbolic of the novel’s renovated account of cultural work – and in that sense the symbolic benefactor of the cleaners’ household regime – Woolf also exercises some canny misdirection by rendering Lily skeptical of book-learning and the literary pretensions of the aging poet, Carmichael. No paintbrushes nor easels profit from McNab’s scrupulous scrubbing, rendering Lily’s claims to visual culture and creativity autochthonous in relation to the newly scrubbed Waverleys displayed in the household interior. And anyway, she perhaps strategically occupies the garden, marking her escape from the confines of Victorian domestic praxis, while her gaze takes us to a final frontier beyond it.

Indeed, before we say more about Lily’s particular kind of aesthetic activity, we will want to note how stringently it is differentiated from both paid household work and unpaid wifely emotion work of the former Mrs. Ramsey. In ‘The Lighthouse’ section Mr Ramsey comes to hyperbolically (and comically) figure the male demand for feminine sympathy that used to be supplied by his wife. After breakfast he approaches Lily because “an enormous need urged him, without being conscious what it was, to approach any woman, to force them, he did not care how, his need was so great, to give him what he wanted: sympathy.” (112) Lily knows that she “ought to have floated off instantly on some wave of sympathetic expansion… but she remained stuck.” (113) Ramsey’s exorbitant demands upon Lily’s sympathy not only unwantedly interpolate her as the provider of emotional services, but are figured as prohibiting her creative impulses. For Lily soon finds she “had taken the wrong brush in her agitation at Mr Ramsey’s presence, and her easel, rammed into the earth so
nervously, was at the wrong angle.” (118) Domestic and creative regimes of work are thus written as mutually exclusive, the demands of the former disarraying the toolkit of the latter. Yet, as with her predecessors, Margaret and Elizabeth, Lily’s creativity is not so much antidomestic as seeking to integrate questions of kinship and social relations into aesthetic romance, with extremely ambivalent consequences.

**Lily Briscoe, or, “some secret sense, fine as air”**

Lily might be a painter, even a celebrated icon of modernist and feminist innovation, but her painting itself represents a peculiarly violent relationship to representation. Painting involves the “risk” of “frequent and irrevocable decisions” and yet “[s]till, the risk must be run; the mark made.” (118) The risk of marking is the risk of rigidifying and congealing meaning, one that Lily’s first stroke is not able to completely dispel. She “scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space.” The language here is remarkably of physical violence (scoring) and territorial dispossession (enclosing), almost as if the painting itself were a disenchanted, abstracted inversion of the pastoral setting in which Lily finds herself enclosed, with “the wall; the hedge; the tree” hemming her in as much as providing her with the seclusion for and subject of her painting. Painting might be what allows Lily to escape from the dread of service work and from what she scorns as “such and such relations to people”, but it brings with it new relations to *things*, to the rigid objecthood of the artwork. Art is thus no transcendent nor autonomous sphere disconnected from the social, then, but register’s a kind of incarceration of the aesthetic sense within confining institutional and media-bound parameters.

It’s precisely against this aesthetic limitation that Lily’s observation of the family quest becomes vital, since what it allows her to do is to expand her aesthetic vision beyond the enclosed borders of the canvas and embed it into (or colonize it across, depending on your
perspective) social relations at large. Lily’s observation of the Ramsey adventure, like her painting, also surprisingly involves the exercise of a decision-making capacity, even though by any account she should have no power over the family psychodrama unwinding in the boat. “Lily decided that in that very distant and entirely silent little boat Mr Ramsey was sitting with Cam and James. Now they had got the sail up; now after a little flagging and hesitation the sails filled and, shrouded in profound silence, she watched the boat take its way with deliberation past the other boats out to see.” (121, my emphasis) Again: “Yes, that is their boat, Lily Briscoe decided, standing on the edge of the lawn. It was the boat with the greyish brown sails, which she saw now flatten itself upon the water and shoot off a cross the bay. There he sits, she thought, and the children are quite silent still.” (127, my emphasis)

There’s a form of quietly magical thinking at play here, I think, in which Lily’s vision arrogates to itself the quickened power not only of heightened observation, but of social authorization. Lily appears, that is, to be the subject of a nascent economy of observation and decision-making, a managerial economy of power from a distance imagined as the new adventure of a feminized artist-class. But what form does this management take, and what is its relation or non-relation to the novel’s renovated adventure structure?

If we follow seminal critics such as Williams and Jameson in reading the literary figure of the ship or boat as a mediated representation of social totality via an imagined, knowable community, I think that we can read the Ramsey’s adventure (and Lily’s observation of it) as dramatizing a workplace fiction of sorts. And if we think more broadly about how this knowable community of work interacts with the economy of the visible and its distribution across the final section’s multilayered frame narrative, we can see that Lily’s capacity to see all places her at the symbolic apex of an optical hierarchy at the other extreme of which is the working class Malacaster and his anonymous son, figures who perform the

183 We will remember that Margaret also encoded her own aesthetic activity as a form of management, assuring Henry that she would “manage it all” at Howards End. Her managerial ambitions, however, were not separated from praxis in the same way that Lily’s are: they were still “hands on”.

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physical labor of transforming nature’s raw materials, catching fish while themselves netted in those square brackets that seem to block all light from outside. Next in the hierarchy is James Ramsey, who performs the mixed brain- and body-work of logistics, steering the boat dead straight, “forced to keep his eye all the time on the sail” under the tyrannical gaze of his father. (122) “A rope seemed to bind him there, and his father had knotted it, and he could only escape by taking a knife and plunging it…” (139) If this is the familial oedipal comedy returning from ‘The Window’, then it is one which now seems to be curiously generalized to workplace imaginaries, as James thinks, “whether he was in a business, in a bank, a barrister, a man at the head of some enterprise, that he would fight, that we would track down and stamp out – tyranny, despotism, he called it – making people do what they did not want to do, cutting off their right to speak.” (137) From this perspective, Mr Ramsey appears not only as the family patriarch, but as a figure for dictatorial managerialism more broadly, a kind of industrial foreman characterized by a mixture of intermittent observation and theoretical knowledge, peering over the top of the book in which he is absorbed to check his son’s progress. Mediating between these figures is Cam, whose empathy for both her brother and her father plays the function of the feminine emotion work that Lily had refused to perform at the outset of the quest. But Cam’s empathy performs a diagnostic as well as conciliatory function, registering the detachment and alienation created by distance from the shore, and by implication, from Lily’s panoptical gaze. “They don’t feel anything there, Cam thought, looking at the shore, which, rising and falling, became steadily more distant and more peaceful.” (136)

And, indeed, Cam is right, for the distance that separates Lily from the Ramseys is one which quite literally figures the waning and abstraction of emotional connection via Lily’s observational and disinterested stance on the quest:

So much depends then, thought Lily Briscoe, looking at the sea which had scarcely a stain on it, which was so soft that the sails and the clouds seemed set in blue, so much depends, she thought, upon distance: whether people are near or far from us; for her feeling for Mr Ramsey changed as he sailed further and further across the bay. It
seemed to be elongated, stretched out; he seemed to become more and more remote. (142)

The frame narrative of ‘The Lighthouse’ section dramatizes a Taylorist logic in which organizational complexification and hierarchization results in the increasing separation or bracketing of labor [catching and cutting the fish] from its observation (which seemed to “become more and more remote.”) This distension of the space between labor and its observation makes even national production appear as if it’s moving offshore, towards the horizon of its own hazy invisibility. The becoming-managerial of aesthetic vision is marked by the novel as a transition from perception to knowledge, embodied to cognitive registers. In the final section, Lily feels that “the effort of looking at [the lighthouse] and the effort of thinking of him landing there, which both seemed to be one and the same effort, had stretched her body and mind to the utmost.” And this is a shift moreover that results in forms of extreme fatigue written as the disenchantment of the sudden tense, leaving Lily “feeling suddenly completely tired out”. (154)

Lily’s distance from national identity, metonymized, as with Elizabeth, by her oft-repeated “Chinese eyes”, not only sets her apart from the developmental schemas of white, middleclass, feminine bildung – what previous critics called her “spinsterhood” – but also marks the possibility for a different regime of erotic and social attachments than those dramatized by the petit-Freudian jealousies and micro-aggressions that plague the psychic and sexual lives of the Ramsey family. Conversely to Elizabeth, Lily’s outsider-status manifest not in unruly attachments but in detachment and distance. If on the one hand, this detachment

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As James Knapp points out, what was distinct about Taylorism specifically as opposed to the general trend of workplace efficiency and specialization was the severing of consciousness and observation as managerial capacities from laboring as non-cognitive ones. See Knapp, James F. Literary Modernism and the Transformation of Work (Northwestern University Press, 1998) p. 3 - 15

Jameson’s recent article on Conrad’s The Shadow-Line is also instructive here: “The captain is now the locus of information that Taylor wished the manager to be; but the labourers have gone below deck.” So removed is Lily’s perspective that she can’t even appear to see Malacaster and his son, her decisions governing only the level of middle management. See Jameson, Fredrick. “Time and the Sea”, London Review of Books [available at: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n08/fredric-jameson/time-and-the-sea]
figures a kind of abstraction and centralization of decision-making capacities and the waning of emotional connection as a face-to-face, domestic ethic of care, then on the other it can be conceived as a depersonalization or de-cathexis of attachments and their democratization via the logic of a nascent gift economy or universal welfare system. That seems to me the double or dialectical logic dramatized by Lily’s oversight of the family quest, which might figure a kind of Leninist dialectic whereby the seed of a planned economy emerges from a centralized, managerial imaginary of the aesthetic becoming work. Such a utopian threshold is figured via Lily’s (impossible) observation of Mr Ramsey himself, who “sprang, like a young man, holding his parcel, onto the rock.” (154) The parcel represents the legacy of Mrs. Ramsey’s Victorian philanthropy (“His wife used to send the men things.” (113)). But it represents it, as we have seen, via a newly depersonalized adventure narrative overseen by an artist/manager class. Lily inaugurates a new economy of attachments (one exceeding the interpersonal ethics of friendship or erotic union) and a new symbolics of adventure (one reversing the logic of accumulation-as-treasure). But she does so, ironically, by entering a functionalized and depersonalized structure of feeling, a welfare state bureaucracy in solution, we might say.

Whence, I think, Lily’s tiredness, which seems to register the cognitive fatigue that presides over such a centralization of care and aesthetic capacities. Indeed, Lily might uncannily remind us in this moment of Henry Wilcox, who, at the end of Howards End appeared as “[e]ternally tired”. Yet while Henry’s tiredness was the result of a kind of managerial anesthesia, a life in which he had “noticed nothing”, as Forster put it, Lily’s fatigue is more accurately described as the result of a burgeoning regime of hyperaesthesia, the expansion of the aesthetic into hitherto uncolonized terrains:

One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, [Lily] reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. Among them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty. One wanted most some secret sense, fine as air, with which to steal through keyholes and surround her where she sat knitting, talking, sitting silent in the window alone; which took to itself and treasured up like the air which held the smoke of the steamer, her thoughts, her imaginations, her desires.
What kind of superpower is represented by Lily’s “fifty pairs of eyes”? Is it a form of empathy and care, or surveillance and biopower? Does Lily’s “treasur[ing] up” of “thoughts…imaginations…desires” (like the air surrounding the industrial waste product of the steamboat\textsuperscript{185}) represent a personal connection between two souls or an impersonal desire to observe and govern the soul? These ambivalences are, I think, unanswerable, and Woolf’s novel leaves us with a truly ambiguous picture of the function and the trajectory of aesthetic capacities conceived as a new adventure of social and economic praxis. In her next novel, she would turn back to these questions from a different compositional perspective, one which seems to grant thoughts, imaginations and desires the freedom to expand into new symbolic territory. Yet, as ever, that expansion brings new kinds of risks and anxieties.

\textbf{Orlando’s Equivalences: “Everything, in fact, was something else”}

\textit{Orlando} is often presented as a kind of aberration in Woolf’s career, a flight into fancy and imagination discontinuous with her more serious novels. Indeed, Woolf herself seemed to take such a view, writing in her diary that the book was a “writer’s holiday” from the “serious poetic experimental books whose form is always so closely considered.”\textsuperscript{186} Woolf’s 1928 romp may indeed lack the seriousness and planning of her previous works, but when viewed in the genealogy of adventurous female creatives running from Elizabeth Dalloway through Lily Briscoe, \textit{Orlando} and its eponymous protagonist can equally be read as the culmination of novelistic problems pertaining to time, gender, sexuality, imagination and capitalism that

\textsuperscript{185} That is, Woolf’s weird metaphor can’t quite seem to decide whether Lily’s “secret sense” is part of the logistical machinery of capital, or a quality of the environment outside of it.

had remained episodic or character-bound in previous fictions. Orlando invests creativity with a three century heritage, and seeks to find a special kind of place for it in modern society.

*Orlando* is also Woolf’s most thoroughly revised adventure narrative, one which reverses most fundamentally the geopolitical and gendered coordinates of romance for the modern era. The book is structured as an inverted adventure, moving from archaic to modern, male to female, from martial masculinity to cultured femininity. Like its predecessors, *Orlando* begins with satiric invocations of masculine heroism and barbaric action, the young nobleman swinging at the severed head of a ‘Moor’ at it hangs from the rafters of his country house. Colonial violence appears as a domesticated masculinity ritual, one which fails to secure Orlando any kind of prestige or mutual recognition from peers. As for Orlando’s hobbies, so too for his writing, which displays a kind of crude masculinity that is expressed as naive romancing writing, full of “Kings and Queens of impossible territories; horrid plots confounded them; noble sentiments suffused them”. (11) It’s not so much that the young Orlando occupies a position exterior to cultural production, then, as that his writing is highly conditioned by his gendered and classed identity, displaying an aesthetic of masculine action and an output rate conditioned by a logic of aristocratic abundance. “Thus had been written”, we are told, “before he was turned twenty-five, some forty-seven plays, histories, romances, poems; some in prose some in verse, some in French, some in Italian; all romantic, and all long.” (57) This economy of abundance, however, finds itself in tension with a counter-tendency at odds with Orlando’s social position. While it was, “for a nobleman an inexpiable disgrace” to publish, the young Orlando soon feels that his “feverish labor” needs to “communicate with the outer world”, a need that puts him in touch with the famous Nicholas Greene, a comically aloof writer in need of patronage, and one with little intention of helping Orlando to find a literary audience. (61)

The character-space, “Orlando”, in other words, registers a tension between the creative impulses of the individual and the structures of publication and circulation specific to a given mode of production. In this sense, Orlando’s dialectical individuality feels “modern”
from the start, even as the degree of tension between individuality and the “spirit of the age” increases as we move forward in time. As for creativity, so, too, for sexuality, which is marked by an individual angst and counterfactual longing. Just as the young Orlando cannot have his poem and publish it, so too are his love affairs hindered by crises of sexual availability and reciprocity. Heterosexuality in particular is nothing in *Orlando* if not the space of a value equivocation, one whose key trope is the metaphor. The female love-objects of Orlando’s early life are relentlessly, one might even say ruthlessly, metaphorized, such that sexual enchantment and disenchantment feel as much like discursive states as bodily acts, or perhaps the site of the body’s translation into discourse. Sexuality is the site of the individual’s capacity to produce images. Upon first viewing Sasha, Orlando’s first love, the narrator reflects:

Images, metaphors of the most extreme and extravagant twined and twisted in his mind. He called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald and a fox in the snow all in the space of three seconds; he did not know whether he had heard her, tasted her, seen her, or all three together. (For though we must pause not a moment in the narrative we may here hastily note that all his images at this time were simple in the extreme to match his senses and were mostly taken from things he had liked the taste of as a boy. But if his senses were simple they were at the same time extremely strong. (29)

Woman’s incessant, and somewhat comic, metaphorization nonetheless marks her at the site of fungibility in a patriarchal system of amorous exchange and expropriation, a marriage market. But such fungibility is also what marks woman as a category essentially ungraspable, unfixable, outside of all essentialisms and final stabilities. This non-fixability is dramatized by Sasha’s fleeing England, a fugitivity that leaves Orlando feeling like a lone adventurer stranded on a desert island, “the swirling waters took his words, and tossed at his feet a broken pot and a little straw.” (48) When Orlando’s second love affair goes as sour as the first he finds himself thoroughly disenchanted with the domestic scene, and “did what any other young man would have done in his place” (87) – he goes abroad on adventures.

If Orlando flees heterosexuality and disenchantment into an adventure plot, however, this is also where *Orlando* breaks from the logic of male romance. For the fleeing from domesticity
into the peripheral zones of the global economy is written not as a fantasy of femininity’s 
abjection, but its sudden and magical eruption at the core of the romance plot in the form of 
the change of sex that marked the novel as scandalous in its own time. Strenuous masculine 
action is displaced by a protracted sleep, at the end of which Orlando emerges a woman. Like 
Forster’s description of Helen Schlegel with child at Howards End, Orlando’s change of sex 
displaces moral and biopolitical registers into aesthetic ones. The transition might be a 
revelation of “THE TRUTH”, but such truth is writable only as a moment of aesthetic value, 
even of beauty: “No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing. His 
form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman’s grace.” (102)

The displacement of moral registers by aesthetic ones is partly what licenses 
Orlando’s fantastic change of sex, allowing Woolf to break with realist continuity and 
developmental forms of gendered identity for a new logic of character androgyny. But the 
eruption of aesthetic intensity as constitutive of Orlando’s change of sex is also a way to 
inaugurate the aesthetic as a sphere of alternate feminine value – to heterosexuality, to landed 
ownership, and to formal economies in general. Indeed, there is a sense that Orlando’s change 
of sex has to do with everything besides sex itself, the narrator declaring upon the heels of the 
transformation that we would be wise “to let other pens treat of sex and sexuality; we quit 
such odious subjects as soon as we can.” (103) There’s irony and dissimulation here, of 
course: what else could be more apposite to Orlando’s change of sex than “sex and 
sexuality”? But there is also something else going on in this rejection of particularizing 
discourses about the sexual body, a rejection that allows Woolf to suggest that Orlando’s

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187 I am reluctant to call this a “trans” logic in any straightforward way, not least of all because of the criticism the 
novel has received from trans communities in its representation of sexual transition as whimsical and painless. 
That’s not to say that the novel hasn’t become an important cultural object for trans questions and adaptations in 
the present, but that any trans reading of Orlando would have to carefully reckon with the dangers of historical 
anachronism and projection with a sensitivity I do not have time to fully exercise here. 
For a detailed discussion of how Orlando has “been policed away as an inappropriate object for trans studies”, see 
Coffman, Chris. “Woolf’s Orlando and the resonances of trans studies”, in Genders, Issue 51, 2010. For the 
purposes of this argument, I am more interested in how Orlando’s change of sex represents a shift in the imagined 
locus of aesthetic productivity in modernity, from male authorship to female aestheticism.
change of sex is in fact part of a much larger change, one which cannot be sectioned off from other spheres of experience and identity, not least of all, aesthetics.

For perhaps the most marked change that takes place in Orlando after they become a woman is the expansion of their aesthetic sense, an expansion that precisely renders them as out of place in the genre of male adventure into which they have been conspicuously reborn. After becoming a woman, Orlando enters a desert romance plot, going to live with “Gipsies” and taking on their everyday habits and customs. But this plot stages no modernist return to a primitivist arcadia of decommodified relations, since Orlando’s aesthetic sense persistently and awkwardly exceeds that of dominant use-value in an agrarian society. “[The Gipsies] noticed that Orlando often sat for whole hours doing nothing whatever, except look here and then there; they would come upon her on some hill-top staring straight in front of her, no matter whether the goats were grazing or straying.” (105)

Soon, Orlando’s aesthetic sense becomes a recoded quest for writing, adventure’s blank spaces on the map appearing as textual spaces not yet filled up with meaning: “But she made ink from berries and wine; and finding a few margins and blank spaces in the manuscript of “The Oak Tree”, managed, by writing a kind of shorthand to describe the scenery in a long, blank verse poem, and to carry on a dialogue with herself about this Beauty and Truth concisely enough.” (107) What Orlando has refound at the heart of this modified romance plot is the activity of writing, yet one that in its very inception seems to feel the modern economic pressures of efficiency and concision, appearing as it does as a concise shorthand in a gridded manuscript. Returning to London, Orlando finds herself entering Victorian cultural regimes that only intensify these tendencies. Professional society is taking

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188 This is another example of how Forster and Woolf rejected the kind of modernist primitivism to which male writers like Hemingway and T.E. Lawrence were attracted, and is one of the features that distinguishes their metropolitan and ex-urbanized romances from those analysed by Nicholas Daly in Modernism, Romance and the fin de siècle (Cambridge University Press, 1999). The global periphery is not figured as an arcadia of premodern, unalienated relations, but as a space limiting what Hobson called the “higher kinds of industry” associated with Western producers and consumers. Let’s be clear, the anthropological assumptions underlying these different imaginaries of value are both racist, but they are racisms with very different implications for the imagination of modernity and more specifically for the imagined economic and social boundedness of Western nation states.
shape around her, and when Orlando reapproaches Nicholas Greene, he has shifted from patronized poet to professional author and agent donning a grey suit with an alarming cluster of credentials hovering around his name (“he was a Knight, he was a Litt.D; he was a professor. He was the author of a score of volumes. In short he was the most influential critic of the Victorian age.”) If nobility’s autonomy from commercial imperatives had bred in the young Orlando the desire to “communicate with the outer world” then modern writers have gone to the other extreme, turning out “trash that serves to pay their tailor’s bills.” (205)

My intention here is not to arbitrate between the two hyperbolized (and very modernist) extremes of aristocratic autonomy and commercial heteronomy, but to suggest how Orlando mediates them, via a renovated adventure plot that gives rise to the aesthetic as a form of queered social praxis. For this is finally Orlando’s vocation, not so much to fulfil the role of the long-aspiring author, but to integrate aesthetic sensibility into the most fundamental levels of experience, such that writing and living become coeval: “Life? Literature? One to be made into the other? But how monstrous difficulty.” (210) What is needed is a kind of super-charged aesthetic sense, one which Orlando only gains when she becomes truly contemporary with the novel’s (and Woolf’s) present year. The dovetailing of self with present tense is written as a form of hyperaesthesia in adventure’s sudden tense, a sensual alertness so acute as to approach the threshold of pain: “her thoughts became mysteriously tightened and strung up as if a piano tuner had put his key in her back and stretched the nerves very taut; at the same time her hearing quickened; she could hear every whisper and crinkle in the room so that clock ticking on the mantelpiece beat like a hammer.” (218) With her initiation into the diegetic present, Orlando is literally transformed into an aesthetic instrument, and modernity becomes generalized as a condition of aesthetic shock. But to what uses should such self-instrumentalization be put, and how should such shock be channeled and managed? What are its proper spheres of action and work? These are the questions that motivate the contemporary section of the book, as Woolf’s character takes a tour of modernity defamiliarized by their three-hundred-year-old perspective.
Precisely like Elizabeth Dalloway, Orlando’s encounter with the present begins with consumption and with the department store, a space now mystified almost beyond recognition. Like Kafka’s émigré protagonist in *Amerika* (published the year before Orlando, incidentally) Orlando marvels at the lifts with shuttle people between floors in a kind of satirically spatialized caricature of social “mobility” under mass consumerism which causes her “belief in magic [to] return”. Temporarily enchanted by this consumerist mystification, Orlando revels at different departments and is reminded of “the treasure ships” that used to anchor at “Wapping in the time of Elizabeth”. As the allusion would suggest, consumption is ultimately a glamorized sphere of colonial expropriation and imperial looting, and one in which Orlando can find no happy or enduring form of agency. On the contrary, it’s a space where the earlier problems associated with metaphor and fungibility specifically in relation to women and the heterosexual marriage market return with greater topical range and seriousness, a space in which everything is becoming something else:

> How strange it is. Nothing is any longer one thing. I take up a handbag and I think of an old bumboat woman frozen in the ice. Someone lights pink candle and I see a girl in Russian trousers. When I step out of doors – as I do now… what is that I taste? Little herbs. I hear goat bells. I see mountains. Turkey? India? Persia?” Her eyes filled with tears. (223)

The affect entextualized by this scene is a weird one, I think, a kind of exaltation and melancholy together. Commodities are not only exchangeable with other commodities or with money, but with memories and with feelings. Experience itself becomes subject to the logic of exchange and the self is integrated into market fungibility. But this is, remarkably, a dialectical problem, since the universal exchangeability of everything (“to change, to go, to dismantle”, we might say) is what allows Orlando to escape from the tyranny of a singular self.

Following her initiation into modernity, Orlando’s selves proliferate until she has “a great variety of selves to call upon… all these selves were different and she may have called upon any one of them.” (226) There’s a revelry to this multiplicity and difference, an escape
from feeling “sick to death of this particular self” and a possibility for “attachments elsewhere” (225-6). But there is also a sense of loss, fragmentation, disintegration, which makes Orlando pine for a surprising kind of psychic autonomy. Orlando seeks her “one self”, even a “true self”. But as soon as the possibility of this true self is uttered it becomes entangled in the thirst for status and for celebrity. “To dine, to meet; to meet, to dine; fame–fame!” (228) Those infinitives look curiously like the ones which celebrated the work Crusoe, and then the work of the aesthetic psyche in Mrs. Dalloway, returned here as a parody of the literary Worker’s embroilment in economies of symbolic capital. The capitalization of the Imagination in the form of the publication of ‘The Oak Tree’ means its submission to social economies of prestige and, worse, of price.

If Orlando finally finds herself caught between multiple fragmented selves, or one singular self, consolidated by forms of commercial recognition and valorization (“fame”), is there a way out of this bad antithesis? Is there a way to use the aesthetic sense to consolidate selfhood without falling into economies of consumption or prestige? The answer is perhaps to be found in Orlando’s fraught relation to her intellectual property and real estate. Upon publication of the poem, Orlando worries: “What has praise and fame got to do with poetry? What has seven editions (the book had already gone into no less) got to do with the value of it?” (238) Wrought by this worry, she eventually leaves the manuscript “unburied and disheveled on the ground”, a gesture of fraught disavowal and self-disinvestiture.

Just as ambivalent is the form of disinvestiture that sees Orlando lose her family home upon the lawsuit that determines her biological sex female. The lawsuit frames a blistering critique of patriarchal male inheritance that closely echoes Vita Sackville-West’s own disinheritance from the property upon the death of her father. But there is also an opportunity in Orlando’s fugitive stance to cultural ownership and real estate, which is what perhaps marks the book finally more than a melancholy roman a clef. For the house isn’t so much lost as transformed into a proto-museum, preserved and immured against modernization and decay with conservational tools such as lavender bags and public signs (“Please do not
The house now “belonged to time now; to history; was past the touch and control of the living”. (232-3) Whether or not this museumification is biographically related to Sackville-West’s own efforts to preserve the house and turn it into a publicly accessible space is debatable. What is more interesting is the way such a process anticipates a new kinds of cultural praxis and communal accessibility to England’s heritage that would emerge in the 1930s and 40s with the rise and increasing public prominence of non-profit institutions such as the British Arts Council and the National Trust. Indeed, Knoll, the Sackville estate on which Orlando’s fictional seat is based, was transferred to the National Trust in 1946, leading precisely to the kind of museumification that Woolf’s novel uncannily anticipates.

But if this is one fate for national culture at the end of Orlando, then Orlando herself anticipates a different path for culture as an embodied aesthetic capacity. For if the house undergoes a kind of historic fossilization, then Orlando is, on the contrary, the site of an extreme aesthetic intensity. Wondering round her former estate, “[s]he noticed the separate grains of earth in the flower beds as if she had a microscope stuck to her eye. She saw the intricacies of twigs of every tree. Each blade of grass was distinct and the markings of veins and petals.” (235) These are powers of observation that rival even Lily Briscoe’s, whose “fifty pairs of eyes” have now been bolstered by technological prosthetics. But with such heightened aesthetic sensitivity comes the rise of mental stress, written as a kind of torsion of adventure’s sudden tense to the point where it approaches pain: “Braced up and strung up by the present moment she was also strangely afraid, as if every time the gulf of time gaped and let a second through some unknown danger might come with it. The tension was too relentless and too rigorous to be endured long without discomfort.” (235)

I suggested in relation to Mrs. Dalloway that Woolf was anticipating a continuum of experience between Elizabeth Dalloway’s exalted, adventure-troped perception and Septimus Smith’s disenchanted trauma at the hands of capitalism’s war machine. Here, that continuum is fleshed out in a single character-space: “Orlando”, whose severance from property is also a subjection to the sudden tense of a precarious regime of aesthetic work. Elizabeth Dalloway
poached the suddenlys of adventure-time to break out of heteronormative schedules of feminine development. Yet, such poaching remained episodic, a parenthesis that could not be generalized across the novel’s diverse social and vocational matrix. There was a problem of attrition, in other words, of narrative speed exhausting itself and thus necessarily shifting into a different chronotopic signature. In *Orlando*, Woolf turns this whole problem inside out.

Rather than focusing on the ruptural moment, the intensity of the dilated present, she distends the historical range of her narrative such that we race through three centuries of English history in less than three-hundred pages. She is thus able to maintain the diegetic speed of narrative in the *present* without submitting it to sudden accelerations and decelerations. She lends the enchantment of adventure-time a principle of *endurance*, such that it metabolizes its energy at a more efficient and stable rate. But this endurance of continual rupture, continual change, leads to new kinds of stress, fatigue, exhaustion. The suddenness of adventure has become the suddenness of distended precarity.

In other words, I am suggesting that there is a kind of pracariatization of aesthetic perception taking form at the end of *Orlando*, one in which the female body is subjected to a regime of continual alertness, raw receptivity, and stark exchange-values as it moves from one self to another. For the hyperesthesia of which Orlando is the locus inaugurates a logic of equivalence in which *all* identities become destabilized, such that “everything was partly something else, and each gained an odd moving power from this union of itself and something not itself so that with this mixture of truth and falsehood her mind became like a forest in which things moved; lights and shadows changed, and one thing became another.”

(237) The same logic of the self’s exchangeability, in other words, which allowed for queer “attachments elsewhere” also results in stark forms of self-alienation. Sianne Ngai has hypothesized that the zany often constitutes camp’s failure, and I think that’s precisely the historical transition we see in motion at the end of *Orlando*, where a tonally whimsical and
frivolous spectacle of gendered and sexualized theatricality gives way to a disenchanted logic of workplace performativity and psychic fungibility.189

At the climax of Orlando’s (and Orlando’s) kalaedascopic vision of self is the narrative displacement of the pastoral entirely, with its stable property relations and leisurely and contemplative relationship to value, by a kind of hallucinatory desert romance landscape. Orlando looks out at the land which used to be hers, which suddenly “shook itself, heaped itself, let all this encumbrance of houses, castles and woods slide off its tent-shaped sides. The bare mountains of Turkey were before her. It was blazing noon. She looked straight at the baked hill-side.” (239) Here are the two contradictory logics with which Orlando ends, then. On the one hand, a principle of museumification, of historical preservation and conservation, of a spectatorial relationship to national culture (“please do not touch”). On the other hand, a principle of radical destabilization, of the precariatization of the aesthetic sense and the displacement of pastoral equipoise by a stark image of England as a deracinated, delocalised frontier-space.

Indeed, we might reduce this contradiction – as Elizabeth Bowen will shortly – to that between particularized place and abstract space. Orlando, for all its celebrated antimimeticism, seems to have still hit upon a generic and historical fork in the road of Woolf’s career, and if we were to go further, into the 30s, I think we would see that she, along with a much wider cadre of English intellectuals from T.S. Eliot to J.M. Keynes, took the first path, the path of national and local particularism and of an auto-anthropological relationship (and fantasy) to national culture.190 But this crossroads, one registered as a fraught tension or shuffling between the locales of pastoral and adventure, is a useful heuristic for us (and not an interpretive dead-end) because it allows us to think about what the second path might have looked like had Woolf followed colleagues such as Elizabeth Bowen down the rabbit hole of the aesthetic’s relentless modernization and literary adventurization. With Bowen, as we shall

189 “Zaniness contrasts to camp and often figures the latter’s failure.” Ngai, Sianne. Our Aesthetic Categories. p. 12
190 See Esty, A Shrinking Island.
see shortly, the mediated figuration of exchange becomes the representation of exchange as quite literally a business model (of adventure tourism) in which women’s bodies and their aesthetic sense become the site upon which aesthetic management and workplace precariatization is played out. I would like to conclude, however, by thinking briefly about *Orlando*’s afterlives in our own post-Fordist moment.

**Orlando: between the publisher’s office and the oak tree**

Sally Potter’s cinematic 1992 adaptation of *Orlando* develops the novel’s two paths for culture while also injecting them with contemporary concerns, anxieties and possibilities. In one of the penultimate scenes, we witness Orlando sitting across from a grey suited Nick Greene in a starkly monotone, bureaucratic office building seeking publication for ‘The Oak Tree’.

> It’s really very good… written from the heart… I think it’ll sell… provided you rewrite a little, you know, increase the love interest… give it a happy ending… by the way, how long did this draft take you? [Orlando looks at the camera]191

In this pared back scene, culture has become an industry like any other, subject to managerial logics and deskillling, as the male editor passes judgement on the woman’s aesthetic creation before interpreting it as the expression of feminine interiority (“written from the heart”) and in need of boosted sentimentality (“love interest… happy ending”), judgements expressed in ironic ignorance of the massive quantities of work that went into producing it (“how long did this draft take you?”). This is less a creative economy, then, than the bureaucratization and management of creativity. But crucially, Orlando doesn’t answer Greene’s question, nor does

191 Potter, Sally. *Orlando.* (Adventure Productions, 1992) [1.24.33-1.25.06]
she speak at all, preferring to remain at least affectively outside structures of commercial recognition and expropriation. Like the novelistic Orlando, who leaves her book “unburied and disheveled on the ground”, there is a kind of disavowal of intellectual property in Orlando’s silence, a disavowal which is once again in tension with another conception of culture as pastoralized museumification.

The scene cuts to another, of Orlando motoring out of London with her child (who has become a daughter rather than a son) and arriving at a kind of art-installation-cum-country-house-museum. [Figs. 3&4] Unlike the novel, however, this space does not feel like a conservative alternative to the modernization of aesthetic capacity, but a further sphere of culture’s commercialization and management. Orlando stands with her child alongside picture-snapping tourists (who conspicuously fulfil the Western stereotype of the far-Eastern cultural consumer) staring back at us, the viewer, as we assume the position of her former aristocratic portrait on the country-house wall. [Fig.5] The viewer, in other words, is interpolated as ‘England’, and consumed as a spectacle in a globalized cultural tourism industry.

But if the film registers the encroaching economization of cultural heritage as consumer spectacle, it also invents a new space entirely in its final scene, in which we encounter a kind of queered hybrid of biological reproduction and cultural production in the image of Orlando’s daughter roaming the fields with camcorder in hand. The scene is reminiscent of the hay harvest at Howards End and of Helen’s single parent occupancy with her child. [Fig. 6] Yet there’s a difference in this version of the pastoral, located in the fact that the child is not simply represented but granted the agency to herself represent. For what becomes visible in that final scene is less the pastoralized background of the meadows and the oak trees, but the grainy and blurred medium of the film focalized through the camcorder itself as Orlando’s child runs around the field creating film.

There’s a dialectic to that blurred picture. Immanently to the diegesis it represents the technological apparatus of the camcorder itself, and thus of a kind of regenerative and
feminized relationship to place via the DIY ethos of today’s participatory art practices. But, from a perspective heterogenous to the diegesis, the visibility of the medium inevitably also reminds us of the very film that we are watching, of the product we have purchased from whichever disparate location we are viewing, and of the technological apparatus of a wider industry of cinematic production, circulation, marketing and consumption. In its relocalized and “familiarized” attention to a globalized medium, the film thus suspends us uneasily between community embedded creativity (outside a heteronormative family structure) and commercial culture-production, art as a socially embedded praxis and art as a global industry.

What is at stake here is the very provenance, ownership and situatedness of the means of culture’s production.192 “What has seven editions (the book had already gone into no less) got to do with the value of [poetry]?” Orlando had asked in 1928. (238) Sally Potter seems to be asking something similar in 2005. What is the value of film as a medium and to whom does it belong as a form of praxis?

I draw our attention to these questions not only because they connect Orlando (1928) with Orlando (1992), but also because they point us towards the final frontier of modernist adventure, to the expressive medium itself as the contested means of production between aesthetics as a socially embedded praxis and culture as a globalized industry.

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192 In a way, what seems like a particularly modern, self-reflexive focus on the means of cultural production reflects a constitutive feature of romance. As Martin Green notes: “In the modernist adventure [by which he means Defoe onwards], the adventurer defeats the challenges he meets by means of the tools and techniques of the modern world system. By tools I mean guns or compasses, and scientific knowledge, such as when an eclipse is due, and so on. By techniques I mean things like keeping a diary and keeping accounts and the puritan examination of conscience and the conviction of righteousness; but also any rationalized and systematized and demystified habits of thought” (23) Green is right, of course, as far as industrial and technocratic modes of production are concerned. But when the “tools and techniques of the modern world system” become devices like cameras, production studios, creative imaginations etc. we would expect to see a concomitant change in the props of adventure writing, which would then come to self reflexively mirror the means of aesthetic representation (in this case, the filmic apparatus) since both are integrated into the modern capitalist world system. See Green, Martin. Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire (Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1980) p.23
"Bowen terrain cannot be demarcated on any existing map; it is unspecific."

- Elizabeth Bowen, *Pictures and Conversations*

Virginia Woolf famously dated modernism’s emergence to “about the year 1910” – December, to be precise. But she might have dated it one month later, for during the winter of 1911 another young writer was experiencing a different kind of cultural revolution. That year Elizabeth Bowen was twelve, and she was “finding the world too small” (246). Her schooling was cramping her “romantic approaches” to learning by its petty insistence on “quibbling truths”, and she had developed “a sort of grudge against actuality.”

And so the young Bowen turned to the “soaring unrealism” of Rider Haggard (247). Haggard’s very name evoked in Bowen the apocryphal image of “some kind of Erl-king or demon horseman” (247). Reading *She* released Bowen from her “first winter of discontent” and planted her in a transfigured landscape whose chief allure was that it rewarded a maxim of “triumphant obstination”: “want any one thing hard enough, long enough, and it must come your way” (249). In short, the young Bowen had found in Haggard both a principle of literary composition (male quest romance) and a redemptive phenomenological relation to reading (wish-fulfilment).

What interests me about Bowen’s reflection on Haggard, however, isn’t the retroactive insight it provides into her twelve-year old psyche, but rather the barely disguised conceit by which that adolescent perspective is placed in the service of making a bid for Bowen’s own emerging power as a writer and culture-worker. Bowen’s apocryphal childhood images of Haggard (“was this some kind of Erl-king”) acknowledge him only as an epic relic of a lost age, nonchalantly declining to credit his status as both one of the *fin de siècle*’s most

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successful authors and the trailblazer ahead a romance genre still making inroads into the cultural territory of 1911. If Bowen begins by acknowledging her desire for an education that could satisfy her “wish for accession to full power, fuller power, really, than I could see at work anywhere in the normal scene” (246), then she ends by drawing that power from Haggard’s own prose while displacing him from the very act of writing: “It was – did I realize that all the time – Horace Holly, not ever, really, She-who-must-be-obeyed, who controlled the magic. Writing – that creaking, pedantic, obtrusive, arch, prudish, opaque overworded writing... what it could do! That was the revelation that was the power in the cave!” (250, her emphasis). In one deft stroke, Bowen shrinks Haggard’s stature as author, displacing him first by his narrator, Horace Holly, and then by synonyms for his bad style, while simultaneously arrogating to herself via “revelation” the power of writing to transcend the existent, “The power of the pen. The inventive pen.”

Bowen’s reflections on Haggard were prepared for radio broadcast in 1947 as both European modernity and its artistic modernisms lay in ruins. It was, in some ways, a curiously belated moment from which to make a bid for the succession of male quest romance by a youthful literary modernism, when the artistic and social ambitions of both movements were clearly lying scattered in the rubble. Then again, that moment no doubt offered Bowen a distance from the past that would not have been available to her adolescent self, nor to the earlier theorists of an adolescent modernism, such as Virginia Woolf. In a gesture of fraught disavowal, Bowen claims that she hadn’t once during the intervening thirty-six years picked up the book that was so “historic” for her twelve-year-old self. In this chapter I claim that in a sense she had never put it down, that quest romance retained its formal and phenomenological powers for Bowen as a writer, and that she, like Forster and Woolf, was one of its key appropriators and reinventors during the modernist period.

However, as Bowen’s remarks demonstrate, this appropriation entailed risks. While she claims from Haggard the power of innovative forms of writing to transcend reality, her reflections also register the highly gendered anxieties inherent in such a bid for cultural
prestige. If Haggard’s cave holds the allure of a kind of writing-power, then Bowen’s readerly quest must escape its clutches and avoid the grizzly end suffered by his female antagonist: “Did I then, I must ask, myself aspire to ‘She’s’ role? I honestly cannot say so. ‘She’ was she – outsize absolute of the grown-up. The exaltation I wanted was to be had from the looking-on” (249, her emphasis). The peculiar kinds of distance (psychic and vocational, aesthetic and social) implied by the term “looking-on” encodes an ambivalence both about the power of writing to transcend the (bad) real, and about the kinds of self-narration or “role”-playing that might be necessary to affect such transcendence. After all, what was the use in escaping the “quibbling truths” of a cultivated claustrophobia only to find oneself entrapped in the primitive jungle of masculine terror?

Feeling “[h]emmed in by what seemed to be too much safety” and “bored and hampered” by her feminine schooling, Haggard’s fiction might have provided an imaginative escape of sorts, but it was one to a primitive world in which misogynist danger and colonial death lurked around every corner, a world pervaded by “necrophily” in a style that was “blood-curling”. At a biographical level, Bowen (much like Woolf) situates her taste for gothic adventure in opposition to the over-cultivation of feminine modes of socialization and the fetishizing of domestic staidness. But at the same time, she also contextualizes her childhood thirst for romance within a wider circuit of historical and geopolitical transition. Her fondness for Haggard’s imperial adventure stories is contrasted not only with a history that is obsessed with the “quibbling truths” of the past, but also with a geography in which “something shriveled and shrank: there was no undiscovered country, they told me, now. What a prospect: what an absence of prospect, rather!” (246) In situating romance as a psychological palliative for closing imperial frontiers, Bowen echoes Haggard himself, who had wondered several decades earlier, “[where] will the romance writers of future generations find a safe and secret place, unknown to the pestilent accuracy of the geographer, in which to lay their plots?” (Quoted in McClure, 11). Haggard’s recuperation of epic masculinity in the
heterotopia of a “lost world” was meant to provide an imaginative solution to this problem, as Bowen herself identifies.

But if Bowen and Haggard’s anxiety is comparable, their answers to these questions are not. Haggard’s fiction had sought to dramatize a detour through so-called primitive space as a way to rescue what he called “minds jaded with the toil and emptiness and vexation of our competitive existence”, and to do so via plots of romantic capitalism and re-enchanted production that simultaneously abjected women. A closer look at Bowen’s text, however, reveals her skepticism not only about the gender dynamics but, more fundamentally still, about the simulated and consumerist nature of just this form of masculine escapism. In that faux-naïve tone that we must by now have come to expect from Bloomsbury and its associates, Bowen’s youthful perspective recalls She not only as a gothic encounter but no less as a feminized domestic consumer good, the book appealing to her for its “cover: a solid, homely and edible pink-brown, suggesting cocoa or milk chocolate.” (249) By positioning Haggard’s books as comforting commodities, Bowen strips them of their purported masculine primitivism, situating the romance genre as one marketized compensation amongst others in a system of exchange and competition that spans from metropolitan center to colonial periphery – chocolate and cocoa being germane here not only for their connotations of children’s bedtime stories, but also for their embeddedness in the regimes of global imperialism that they would soothingly have us forget. In Bowen’s critique of Haggard’s Romance, then, there is no easy “outside” to modernity, and least of all via the advanced cultural products that seek to simulate such an outside. Bowen’s critique in effect upturns the usual dynamics of Bovaryism, making Haggard’s novels into gastronomic treats while refusing to straightforwardly consume them.

Indeed, Bowen goes even further than this in disenchancing the magical thinking of imperial adventure by suggesting that the fantasy-producing mechanisms of She are finally reducible to writing itself. In another quietly heretical maneuver Bowen had situated Haggard’s “creaking, pedantic, obtrusive, arch overworded writing” as the “magic in the
I call this out as heretical not only because Bowen turned to writing to displace Haggard-as-celebrity from his authorial throne (and arrogate authorial power to herself) but also because the “writing” of romances such as *She* was precisely supposed to disappear via the kind of “jocular” style identified by Bowen, a disappearance which staged (stylistically) the stripping away of style as over-civilized refinement (use, Jamesian realism) in a textual process homologous with the primitivism staged at the level of plot. Or, as the narrator of *King Solomon’s Mines* puts it better than I can:

> And now it only remains for me to offer apologies for my blunt way of writing. I can but say in excuse of it that I am more accustomed to handle a rifle than a pen, and cannot make any pretense to the grand literary flights and flourishes which I see in novels—for sometimes I like to read a novel. I suppose they—the flights and flourishes—are desirable, and I regret not being able to supply them; but at the same time I cannot help thinking that simple things are always the most impressive, and that books are easier to understand when they are written in plain language, though perhaps I have no right to set up an opinion on such a matter. ”A sharp spear,” runs the Kukuana saying, ”needs no polish”; and on the same principle I venture to hope that a true story, however strange it may be, does not require to be decked out in fine words. (7)

By situating “writing” itself as the origin of romance’s magical thinking, Bowen disenchants the stylistic fantasy-effects that are now revealed as nothing other than operations of style itself, pulling off the cloak to reveal the pullies and winches beneath the sorcerer’s costume.

But this disenchantment is ambiguous and, as we shall see, dialectical, since the pullies and winches – “creaking, pedantic, obtrusive, arch” – are nonetheless still upheld as a kind of magic in the very moment of their demystification: “writing… what it could do! That was the revelation that was the power in the cave!” To understand this dialectical problem, and to historicize it, we need to turn, as we did with Forster and with Woolf, from propositional to imaginative modes of writing, from Bowen’s essays to her novels, and to think the latter as once again attempting to solve occupational problems that reached logical and historical deadlocks in the former. How can romance provide an escape from capitalist commodification and competition when it is a itself a commodity produced and exchanged in
a cramped and competitive literary market? How can writing conceived as a demystified, professional competency, also become the site of a new primitivism or “magic”? And most fundamentally of all: can adventure, or some fragmented, retroped remnant of it, still be modernized and demasculinized by Bowen to create a space for non-alienated work, non-reified selfhood and non-coercive sexual experience?

“Move Dangerously”: The Service Worker as Commercial Romancer

While we have been drawing these questions from Bowen’s late remarks on Haggard, we can also put them to her mid-career 1932 novel, To the North, which raises remarkably similar problems in narrative form. Bowen’s novel centers on a glamorous professional businesswoman, Emmeline Summers, who is the co-owner of a Bloomsbury travel agency which sends men on package holidays to the European periphery. On the one hand, Emmeline’s character signals a new degree of economic power for women during the interwar period, in which they become primary agents of productive processes rather than manipulated objects of consumerist ones. Emmeline – whose very name recalls the recent heroism of Pankhurst sisterhood – represents the daring entry of women into new fields of commercial and professional production, as documented by social historians of the period. The first of Bowen’s female protagonists to pursue a career, she represents a historical moment in which the kind of vocational advancement petitioned for by Woolf in her manifests has, in a sense, come true. Emmeline is an independent property owner existing outside of the protocols of marriage and family (co-habitating with her former sister-in-law) and is even engaged in what initially appear to be intellectually stimulating forms of professional work alongside female co-workers. Her office is, initially at least, “a studio to

her, even a shrine.” (124) This was one half of the imperative of A Room of One’s Own, to integrate women’s cultural ambitions and artistic skills into the authorizing languages and valorizing structures of the formal workplace – the other half being to simultaneously transform those languages and structures in order to feminize and queer not just the means but the meanings of “production” itself. And it’s at this second, dialectical threshold that To the North falters, and in faltering reveals the dangers that were (and are) attendant on Woolfian investments in work, as well as in its cultural sponsor, adventure.

Woolf’s private room and its semi-autonomous, proto-professional agent are already fraught symbols of both a portal into and a cautious distance from the world of formal work. Transforming that room into a commercial office and its occupant into a business owner, then, signals the intensification of capitalism’s capture of female workers and their gendered social abilities into capitalist economic structures. Emmeline is both an agent in and a symptom of what Harold Perkins has called the “service revolution” that massively accelerated after 1911 (the same year, incidentally, as Bowen’s modernist Wunderjahr +1). To the North symptomatizes (as well as registers at a granular, everyday level below the threshold of sociological analysis) this economic acceleration in the figure of the female travel agent, a job which entails the expropriation of feminine domestic, affective capacities, as well as bohemian cultural competencies and aesthetic faculties, by commercial regimes of productivity. Moreover, it does so by placing its central character at the heart of a plot that oversees the commercialization and commodification of the extensive imperial adventure story now repackaged for eager holiday-goers. A kind of meta-adventure story, To the North dramatizes how (male) fantasies of territorial escape from metropolitan rationalization and workplace alienation get produced by (female) service workers, and enquires into the effects of such work on the social and sexual identities of consumers and producers alike.

By making her protagonist an author and broker of romantic journeys, Bowen anticipates a kind of economic generalization of the kind of service-function performed by the romance author in her broadcast on Haggard. Like Haggard’s books, Emmeline’s services
provide palliative escapes from metropolitan modernity and capitalist competition via the consumption of a product that promises, in Haggard’s words, to take the user to some “secret place, unknown”, a consumerist fantasy that will feel familiar enough to us today in our world of hyper-consumerist, surveillance capitalism. Such a fantasy was perhaps produced in the first place, as John McClure has pointed out, by late imperial romance itself, which promised escape from the “banal, quotidian world of calculation and compromise from which the heroes of romance are always in flight, and the globally routinized world that only became imaginable about one hundred years ago, a world utterly devoid of romantic regions.”*195 Yet, as Bowen’s critique of Haggard has already suggested, global routinization is not only the place from which romance promises escape, but the very economic substrata of advanced capitalism that organizes the production and servicing of such fantasies on a mass scale—one comparable, Bowen dryly reminds us, to the production of goods such as cocoa and chocolate. While To the North registers the intensified manufacture of romance’s constitutive fantasy of a “secret place, unknown”, we shall also see that her novel asks whether a different kind of utopia is possible, one that isn’t identical with the mass produced simulacra of masculine heroics.

Before we get to that other utopia, however, we need to understand how Emmeline works, and more specifically how her services are simultaneously escapes from and symptoms of what McClure calls global routinization. This is a contradiction that Bowen registers early on as she has her protagonist explain her work to an acquaintance and potential client (the two are not strictly distinguishable) at a party:

‘I am a shipping agent: I run a travel agency.’
‘I see. Like Cook’s.’
‘No.’
‘Just a travel agency… How very nice.’
‘Yes, it is nice. Evidently this was an affair of passion: glancing once or twice at his white tie, no higher, always returning her eyes to her frosted glass – in which she kept tipping about an icy circle of lemon, a long spray of mint – she began to talk rapidly, fully alive. Our organization is really far-reaching,’ she said. ‘We can tell anyone almost everything: what to avoid, what to do in the afternoons anywhere – Turkestan, 195

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* McClure, John A. Late Imperial Romance (Verso, 1994) p.3
Cracow – what to do about mules, where it’s not safe to walk after dark, how little to tip. We have made out a chart of comparative dinner times all over Europe, so’s people need not waste their evenings; we are just bringing out a starred list of places good out of season and manufacturing towns that sound awful where there is really something to see. We keep very much up to date. My partner is doing a rather interesting graph of civic intelligence. We’ve got a slogan: “Move dangerously” – a variant of “Live dangerously”, you see. It took us some time to think out, but I think it’s effective. We’re having it stamped on our circulars. (23)

Like Haggard’s fiction conceived as a gastronomical treat exchanged in a marketplace,

Emmeline’s services provide an escape from metropolitan modernity that is really an intensification of consumerist logic. In monomaniacally calculating, textualizing and commodifying the experiences on offer to her clients, Emmeline’s services end up reproducing the very metropolitan rationality from which they purport to be an escape. What “everyone feels is that life, even travel, is losing its element of uncertainty”, Emmeline offers, “we try to supply that. We give clients their data; they have to use their own wits.”

Emmeline effectively does the work of touristic administration described at length by James Buzard (1993) (and derided by Forster in his novelistic accounts of foreign travel):

Readers were offered the structured freedom of choosing their itineraries from the range of options covered by Baedeker and Murrey; the books suggested durations for visits, computed in hours for museums, markets and temples, and in days for whole towns or regions. The middleclass tourist on a much-anticipated and limited holiday required a more finely calibrated gauge of the value of various destinations that had hitherto seemed necessary: Florence thus became a five day city, ‘Rome and environs’ merited a fortnight, and so on. 196

There is something extreme about the fastidiousness and humorlessness with which Emmeline goes about this work. In a recent article, Keri Walsh has drawn readers’ attention to a series of allusions in the novel to Italian futurism and its political connections with fascism. Emmeline’s “slogan” from the passage above, Walsh points out, is derived directly from Mussolini’s. Her cat is called Benito. Her lover has a sister whose partner is called Oswald. Her office, like a Marinetti manifesto, “radiates speed”, and the novel as a whole

engages what might be called a futurist aesthetic. Walsh uses these connections to argue that *To the North* is “a loose *roman a clef* based on the Mosley and Mitford circle of British fascists, and that Bowen's aversion to their connections to Mussolini and Hitler in the early 1930s set the terms for her reaction to the politics of Futurism as they fused with fascism in this period.”

For the purposes of my argument, however, there is perhaps a further and more structurally materialist way in which this novel might be read as a warning against a certain kind of “totalitarian” logic; namely, the way in which the spirit of productivity incessantly threatens to become totalized across all aspects of the lifeworld, including, or especially, that of leisure, revealing a dictatorial governmentality at the heart of market economies themselves.

A kind of embryonic version of Adorno’s bleak critique of US mass culture at mid-century, leisure-time in Emmeline’s enterprise is being remade as a warped image of the Taylorist work process, an activity ruthlessly scheduled (“comparative dinner times all over Europe”), efficiently stripped of superfluous detail (“so’s people need not waste their evenings”), and subjected to teleological logics (“where there is really something to see”). The compulsory nature of this transformation is audible in that eerie line, half declarative, half imperative: “We can tell anyone almost everything”. Leisure is here depicted as little more than a premade fantasy that grimly retrained the worker in the phenomenology of his work at the same time as it permits him to recover – this work logic itself, you’ll have noticed, being painstakingly explained at an afterhours party, as Emmeline’s own professional schedules hardly respect the vocational/domestic distinction any longer. Like the cynical individual who ends Adorno’s essay on the culture industry, Emmeline’s interlocutor both sees through the sham promises of such commodified romance (“but with so much forethought surely your clients are always only too safe”) and yet consumes its promise of risk all the same (“It has made me want to begin to travel all over again.”) What seems to

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197 Walsh, Keri. *Elizabeth Bowen and the Futurist Imagination* (Journal of Modern Literature, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Fall 2017), pp. 21
finesse this contradiction is the Kafkaesque way in which the production of desire is not calibrated to an anonymous market, but tailored to you, specifically. “Forgive my asking,” Emmeline confirms after she has carefully explained her slogan once more, “but after all you are one of the public: do you think you have taken the point now?” (23)

To put this differently, we might say that To the North mediates the massification of the ideology, if not the actual material relations, of coterie production and consumption (much as Bowen’s novels themselves popularize Woolf’s modernism for a middlebrow market, as more than one critic has noted). It is in this particular sense, I think, that To the North might be understood as Bowen’s Bloomsbury novel. Written in the early-thirties but set in the mid-twenties, To the North can be read as a late modernist (even emergently post-modern) critique of many of the aesthetic and vocational ambitions of high modernism precisely as they were routed (per this dissertation) through an engagement with fin de siècle romance. Emmeline’s travel agency is conspicuously located in the heart of Bloomsbury on Woburn Place, adjacent to the Woolf’s residence at Tavistock Square – at which she was a visitor, if never quite an insider. Asked by our now familiar party acquaintance whether she “deal[s] only with Bloomsbury”, Emmeline replies:

‘No’… A shade of distinct displeasure passed over her face; evidently that kind of thing had been said before. ‘All round Woburn Place,’ she said fluently, ‘there are temperance hotels full of people from Wales and the North, so intoxicated at having left home at all that they are ready to go on anywhere. When they walk round the square after breakfast they see our posters. (24)

Emmeline’s off-hand remarks rebrand the area as an emerging commercial district catering to non-metropolitan, even nationally peripheral addicts of experience (as a substitute, we infer, to alcohol), rather than the bohemian home of cultivated English taste.

There’s more than topographical in-joking at stake in this geographical pun, however. Bowen’s novel oversees the commodification of the ‘journey’ chronotope on which Forster and particularly Woolf had paraded their fantasies of elite professional subjectivity as consumable aesthetic spectacles by pastiching specific episodes from their high modernist
novels. I very much doubt it is a coincidence that Bowen has one of her own minor
characters, Pauline – the novel’s foil for virginal femininity and cultural naivete – take
exactly the same bus on which we observed Elizabeth Dalloway in our last chapter. Pauline
possesses all of Elizabeth’s youthful inexperience without, crucially, activating its function as
camouflaging embodied symbolic capital. Pauline’s journey starts from exactly the same
structure of feeling as Elizabeth’s, waiting in the shadow of oppressively (if now also
comically) heteronormative clock-time: “Pauline was alone in the flat, waiting for her uncle
Julian to come home. Life was not gay here: the late afternoon ticked away by small clocks
all over the flat, had been more than long.” (40) As it did for Elizabeth, urban transportation
presents the opportunity for escaping from bourgeois and heterosexual claustrophobia. But
there the shared coordinates end, for Pauline’s journey stages not libidinalized, psychological
ability but the commodification of literary style itself:

[S]he had asked miss Patrick, the housekeeper, if it would be suitable for a young girl
of her age to go out all alone for a ride in a bus... Mrs Patrick, with hospital nurses in
mind, said it depended entirely on the character of the bus. Taking thought, she had
recommended the No. 11. The No. 11 is an entirely moral bus. Springing from
Shepherd’s Bush, against which one has seldom heard anything, it enjoys some
innocent bohemianism in Chelsea, picks up the shoppers at Peter Jones, swerves
down the Pimlico Road – too busy to be lascivious – passes not too far from the royal
stables, nods to Victoria Station, Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament,
whirs reverently up Whitehall, and from its only brush with vice, in the Strand,
plunges to Liverpool Street through the noble and serious architecture of the City.
Except for the Strand, the No. 11 Route, Mrs. Patrick considered, had the quality of
Sunday afternoon literature; from it Pauline could derive nothing but edification. (40)

Having seen the ‘real thing’ in our previous chapter, we are in a position to see this as an
(extremely funny) attack on a Woolfian fantasy of professional selfhood, one in which urban
mobility combines with impressionist perception in order to model what I argued was a
particular kind of proto-vocational subject. Elizabeth’s unruly desire, here, has become a
watered down “edification”, while its projection has been replaced by petit bourgeois
repressions. The symbolic prestige of Woolf’s proto-professional form of impressionist
perception was located in its ability to invest everyday objects (buses and the concrete cities
they traverse) with an exquisite immateriality and aesthetic value via the mediating capacities
of modernist style. In Bowen’s deflation of this fantasy, metaphor is always sliding back into
dowdy personification and drab description, unable or unwilling to summon the Woolfian
energy of leaping from shifting grounds to outlandish figures. Instead of this fantasy of
professional subjectivity, we get “Sunday afternoon literature”, or writing that ironically
marks its own (commercial) status as expressively impoverished.

Indeed, this vignette is in a sense paradigmatic of Emmeline’s own cultural and
affective work, which converts journeys’ enchantments and the impressions of the traveler
into packaged experiences and non-expressive textual records. “[Clients] come in when
they’re back and give us their impressions”, she tells her party acquaintance, “we get them	
tabulated. It keeps us in wider touch. My partner can’t move, he gets sea-sick and air-sick and
quite often train-sick, and I haven’t got time to go everywhere. So we are glad to work in with
clients” (24).198 Neither aesthetic impressions nor journeys can be sublimated into artistic
style, since both are being rechanneled into commerce. And this economic process has
implications for the novel’s form beyond isolated episodes of intertextual pastiche.

As several critics have noted, Bowen’s novel is in fact awash with travel, much of the
action taking place on trains, planes and other modes of transportation, even as the story is
largely centered around two houses and an office. Yet, as the same critics have pointed out,
these incessant journeys alienate characters from each other and from their environments. “A
large proportion of the action takes place on something that is moving, and by which, like
fate, the characters are moved”, writes William Heath.199 Or as Maud Ellman has put it,
“[w]hat Bowen’s forms of transport have in common is that they sabotage ‘free will’, a
concept dismissed by the heroine of To the North as ‘a mistake’” – presumably, as we shall
see, because her job is to manufacture it. “Despite the constant movement of the characters,
they rarely act off their own bat; another force controls their restless choreography.”200

198 Emmeline’s firm is essentially profiting from the free labor that goes into user-generated content, a practice
widely seen to fuel the monetary accumulation of data across today’s social media sectors.
199 Heath, William. “The Jacobean Melodrama of To the North”, in Elizabeth Bowen: Modern Critical Views
(Chelsea House Publishers, 1987) p. 34
These critics provide valuable insight into the experiential quality of travel in Bowen’s novel, but how can we further specify and historicize this mysterious “fate”, this unnamable “other force” to which they allude over and again, one which sound much like the “non-human forces” characteristic of Bakhtin’s romance chronotope? Shifting from abstract to empirical modes of analysis, Ellman suggests it is the logistical character of modern transportation itself, which renders characters “motionless in motion, relinquishing their will to the machines that drive them.” (103) But what renders Bowen’s characters alienated aboard transport is not so much any physical mode of conveyance as the way such journeys relentlessly stage the self’s encounter with commercial writing and textualization. Even the novel’s climactic car crash, in which Emmeline speeds into oncoming traffic, produces intensities that are less about bodily immediacy and more about the semiotic mediation and stylistic opacity. In the last instance, it might just be that Emmeline is indistinguishable from the text that writes her.

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle have powerfully described this phenomena in a deconstructive reading of the novel in relation to its locomotive motif of traveling or ‘going’: “Going is that which, conjoining self and language (‘a shout’, ‘TO THE NORTH’, ‘her spirit, now launched like the long arrow’) and rendering it impossible to conceive the former without the latter, is nevertheless other to them, gone on, gone before, gone away.” Such deconstructive readings bring to our attention something very important about the dense linguistic texture of To the North, while stopping short of what I think are the most biting historicist claims we can make about Bowen’s novel. To say that Bowen’s characters are conjunctures of self and language points, in my view, to the novel’s staging of a new phase of capitalist commodification, in which experience itself is increasingly difficult to imagine outside of reified textual mediation. The figure of the travel agent is a particularly dense node for tracking the rise of such self-textualization. Via forms of linguistic inscription and

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201 Bennett, Andrew and Royle, Nicholas. Elizabeth Bowen and the dissolution of the novel (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) p.40
behavioral grammar, it marks the capture of domestic skills and emotional competencies that previously remained non-formalized insofar as they were exercised outside systems of commodity exchange and commercial services.

That is, *To the North* symptomatizes the relationship between writing and subjectivity at a moment when both are becoming thoroughly integrated into consumerist capitalism – in Emmeline’s case, via the product of travel. Emmeline’s job is to sell journeys by transforming herself into a kind of textualized performance, a marketing copy, of her own firm. In this proto-postmodern mode of production, the high modernist, post-Romantic separation between writing as culture and writing as commerce—writing as representing the values of a lifeworld and writing as representing exchange value—has begun to erode. The symptoms of this erosion are algebraically represented in Emmeline’s office via the ironic reduction of the sacred locality of the Lake District, with its connotations of English Romanticism as the scenic antithesis of English industry, to the bureaucratic label of the office box file as a token of consumable experience:

Gently, with a series of feathery touches to right and left, Emmeline rounded the rambling old gentleman down the straight path into business. Though he had no wish to leave England so soon his wife, it appeared, was determined to do so; he did not care where they went as long as it was not again to Biaritz. Guessing that he spoke no languages and would want bridge, Emmeline reached down the appropriate files, marked: ‘Lakes’. (33)

Files ready at hand for those who “want bridge”: even the elision of articles here seems to perform the abrupt move from aesthetic *Judgement* to market *preference*, from artistic value to consumer choice. The ‘Lakes’ indexed here are not only a reduction of cultural experience to commodity but then, further, of commodified experience to its textual index – after all, we only see the box file itself, never anything so racy as Windemere rushed by tourists. In other words, the novel starkly refuses to take us beyond Emmeline’s own restricted perspective in the division of service labor, instead providing us with a view into the blast furnaces of an emergent mode of production in which writing itself has become productive machinery furnishing the fantasies, desires and subjectivities requisite for touristic consumption. Like
that which emerged from Haggard’s cave, writing is indeed the medium of power in *To the North*, though at first sight there appears to be no “magic” or enchantment to this whatsoever, only pullies and winches, graphs and tables, disenchanted, techno-professional competencies.202

We can describe this means of production as what Eva Illouz (2012) calls the “textualization of subjectivity”. Following seminal sociologists such as Warran Susman (2003), Illouz’s theory of “emotional capitalism” draws our attention to the increasing textualization of self as the medium and ground for forms of “emotional competence” that externalize feeling so it can become reusable script for new professional and service sectors.

As Illouz explains it:

Like cultural competence, emotional competence is translatable into social benefit, as professional advancement or social capital. Indeed, for a particular form of cultural behavior to become a capital, it must be convertible into economic and social benefits; it must be convertible into something agents can play with in a field, that will give them a right of entry, or will disqualify them, or will help them seize what is at stake in that field. Even more than traditional forms of cultural capital... emotional capital seems to mobilize the least reflexive aspects of habitus. (63)

Emmeline’s work, we might say, mediates the ‘becoming reflexive’ of this new productive habitus, the integration of relatively non-standardized and non-marketized (if still belabored) aspects of domestic feminine selfhood into commercial regimes of work. “Gently, with a series of feathery touches to right and left”, Emmeline does indeed ‘seize’ what is at stake in this social field: desire itself. It’s as if Woolf’s ‘Angel of the House’ had been awoken from her modernist grave and made to set up shop on the street adjacent to her author. Except that Bowen’s “angel” – tellingly, a keyword of Emmeline’s character – plays a more active (that is, cultural) role in producing male subjectivity than the account embedded in Woolf’s critique (and hyperbolic caricature) of women’s domestic subservience. There, woman had

202 In her unfinished and posthumously published *Pictures and Conversations* Bowen began to sketch a theory of the novel that (very weirdly) conceives language itself as the agent of plot. Or, as she puts it: “Plot is diction. Action of language, language of action.” See Bowen, Elizabeth. *Pictures and Conversations* (Penguin Books Ltd, 1975) p.170 Under what socioeconomic circumstance does “diction” or “language” become plot and action, indeed, become adventure? I am trying to answer that question.
been troped as a ‘mirror’ for reflecting in enlarged size men’s narcissistic self-image; here, it seems impossible even to posit self-image or desire, male or female, prior to the subject’s encounter with a market and with experts of emotional competence such as Emmeline. On the one hand, then, Emmeline’s work is the occasion for writing woman as an active agent of production, while on the other, such agency is itself diagnosed as alienating the subject who exercises it from herself.

This is because emotional competence – like all systems of professional competence – increasingly draws its authority from a shared and standardized system or grammar. Conceived as a form of competence, emotions don’t have anything very specifically to do with the person who performs them, Bowen suggests. “Listening critically” from the next room, Emmeline’s business partner, Peter, “thought Emmeline’s manner insufficiently feminine; he could have done it better himself.” (33) In this regime of alienated emotion work, anyone can ‘do’ feminine ‘manner’; performative behavioral codes become detached from notions of deep psychological selfhood. Indeed, Emmeline herself “adored fact – the exact departure of trains – and had taught herself to respect feeling.” Still, in the office this respect is exercised with fastidious calculation, as

[Emmeline] received newcomers with sympathy, even with tenderness, while Peter’s air of unwilling respect to a client’s intelligence was highly flattering. If they were not always efficient (in the most exacting sense) they were solicitous; their two charming grave young faces turned his way gave any client a sense of his own uniqueness; their rather high rate of commission was justified by a personal touch freshly and delicately applied. Arriving at one’s destination one found a postcard, stamped with the office slogan, wishing one every pleasure. … They were persuasive… [t]ourists went in wishing to paddle from Heyst and came out viewing without passion the abstract purities of distant provincial towns to which she had sent them could feel sure that in Bloomsbury Emmeline would passionately be estimating their reactions. A gentleman from the north who, after a frightful fortnight in Silesia (which he had expected to find at the toe of Italy, full of orchestras), went in to wreck the office, was found with a large handkerchief, beseeching Emmeline not to cry… She had not wept: he had mistaken the blink behind her spectacles. (92)

The emotional dead-pan here is characteristic of Bowen’s style across her oeuvre, but in this novel about emerging service work it can be historicized as a symptom of the instrumentalization of what Forster would have called “personal relations”, the conversion of
non-marketized human relationships into affects calculated to produce certain social and ultimately economic outcomes. In Illouz’s terms this is a phase of capitalism in which “the private and public spheres have become entwined with each other, each mirroring the other, absorbing each other’s modes of action and justification, and ensuring that instrumental reason be used in and applied to the realm of emotions and, conversely, making self-realization and the claim to emotional life become the compass of instrumental reason.” (112)

Only such a historical process of emerging emotional instrumentalization explains the grim stylistic parallelism between “their two charming grave young faces” and “their rather high rate of commission”, separated, or rather connected, by a semi-colon, as comparable features of a business model. The client with his oversized handkerchief stands before Emmeline as a figure of redundant pathos, while the flatness of her spectacles – another repeated motif, along with her “hollowness” – reminds us that there might be no humanistic psychological depth to be had from Emmeline: she is “flat” in Forster’s sense of being reducible to “a single idea”, as he would have put it – the profit motive.203

This constellation of economic and subjective conditions has implications for how we think about social economies of work, not to mention economies of libidinal reciprocity and kinship. Emmeline’s office stenographer, Miss Tripp (a pun that combines diminutive journey with a minor mistake) exemplifies the cost to personnel of this new mode of service work. Like a new economy intern, Tripp works for “ten shillings a week and the experience” (33), but when the experience turns out to be closer to exploitation than the exaltation she had expected, she protests to Emmeline that it is like working for “a stone” (125). Tripp embodies avant la lettre the new economy expectations that work should be an experience of creative adventure and a fulfillment of one’s deepest cultural ambitions, even as she spends her day fulfilling menial clerical tasks. She wishes “to write a great, the really great, political novel… This career, mapped out daily in further detail, had all the mournful brightness of an

alternative one does not adopt.” (122) Emmeline’s relation to Tripp is that of the creative industry employer channeling employees’ cultural zeal into profitable forms, expecting Tripp to “stay late at work with her when there was high pressure: devotion to the business had been assumed.” Indeed, for Emmeline, the workplace is, at the outset at least, a “a studio… even a shrine”, a heady mixture of Romantic and theological ideology that, as we saw in previous chapters, still characterizes today’s high-end creative industries. (124)

What this model of employer-employee relationality makes no space for is group interest based on gender. Thinking Peter’s arrogance a “walking reproach to Cambridge”, Tripp wonders: “Where were the smiles, the gleams of satirical understanding, the dear sense of impositions endured together, of jokes shared grimly enough, that should cement an association between females?” (121) Even Emmeline’s self-confessed failure to empathize with her worker is put in a language of emotional double-entry: “Of Tripp’s interior, Emmeline had not for a moment attempted to take account.” (124) In other words, even in a workplace where emotional competence is a primary means of production, this does not make for a psychologically “connected” – as Forster would put it – or affectively integrated community of workers, since such work is directed outwards towards relationships that can render surplus-value, while employees remain mere tools of profit.

Is there no way out of this grim dystopia of capitalist relations, no “secret place, unknown” against which this tide of emotional calculation and business rationalization can be stemmed? In Forster and Woolf, the residual space of the pastoral and the English countryside provided some respite against the very tendencies of creative capitalism those novels were otherwise (as I have been arguing) secretly advancing. We see now, perhaps, why Margaret’s internment in Howards End, Elizabeth’s containment in the Dalloway household, Lilly Briscoe’s intermittent countryside vacation and Orlando’s ironic habitation of their country seat represented reluctant forms of residual gentrification, providing a cushioning effect against the processes of modernity otherwise expounded by those pioneers of twentieth-century capitalism. To the North might contain a pastoral retreat in the form of Lady Waters’
country home, but its ironic title (“Farraways”) and incidental function in the plot as a location for weekend getaways, signify that it will be no ballast against the psychological forces of advancing capitalism. Where Forster and Woolf modernized the country house, Bowen mourns it, and with it a rural England that she (more reactionary and more conservative than both of them) sees as threatened by new urban economies of work and gender. Indeed, the very *chronotope* of the pastoral – its spatial isolation and slowed-down tempo – is precisely what the speed-aesthetic of *To the North* cancels, let alone its actual locations, which are nothing but a joke. The pastoral might represent something that Emmeline wants insofar as it holds open the possibility of a life outside the heady velocities of capital, but Bowen’s novel cannot imagine it as a realized social possibility in the way that Forster and Woolf could. In Paris on a business-trip-cum-romantic-get-away (the two are not strictly distinguishable):

Emmeline, who had sent so many clients flying that her Bloomsbury offices seemed to radiate speed... longed suddenly to be fixed, to enjoy an apparent stillness, to watch even an hour complete round one object its little changes of light, to see out the little and greater cycles of day and season in one place, beloved, familiar, to watch shadows move round one garden, to know the same trees in spring and autumn and in their winter forms. (144)

Indeed, this description itself echoes Bowen’s evocation of Woolf at the end of *English Novelists*, where she had described her work as evoking the “familiar “now” – the familiar scene, in cycles of light and darkness, in hearing of the rhythm of tides.” Late modernism, as Jed Esty (2003) has described, would eventually turn back to the pastoral and its particularized evocations of Englishness as Britain’s global economy shifted back onto a national footing. Yet Bowen’s novel stands at a historical and cultural crossroad wherein shrinking global frontiers do not necessarily point to an attenuation of the dynamics of capitalist development but its intensification via new regimes of consumer capitalism and

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204 Reader’s interested in Bowen’s melancholy and nostalgic relationship to her own family seat are referred to Bowen, Elizabeth. *Bowen’s Court* (Collins Press, 1998)  
female labor integration. The map in Emmeline’s office recalls the one in Henry Wilcox’s office and, as in *Howards End*, it becomes the symbolic site on which this geopolitical transition is staged as an uncanny generic displacement:

Maps were maps, the world shrank in its net of red routes, of rails and airways: this was a small office regarding a courtyard, where Tripp bumped her elbow and Peter crackled his finger joints. Light, centring round one figure, withdrew from the distance, from continents into which she had shot her travelers like arrows, from rippled seas, ribbed hills, white-and-shady cities into which this office had been the arch. (125)

As with Margaret, who “penetrated to the inner depths” of Henry’s office in order to read the map as a “whale marked out for blubber”, there is a Conradian echo in this quotation, as Emmeline “shot her travelers like arrows”, a weirdly auto-anthropological primitivism in which she herself would seem to assume the position of modernism’s unknown colonial other, an impenetrable exotic landscape figured via a kind of fleeting micro-gothic amidst this otherwise drab, bureaucratic scene.

And, indeed, from another and dialectical perspective we can say that Emmeline, *imago* of emotional rationality, is indeed this exotic object, too. All surface, she tempts us into projecting depths; nothing but performance, she spurs fantasies about what lies beneath; all mapped out and tucked in at the edges, Bowen seems to goad us into thinking, surely, there must be some “secret place, unknown” at the heart of her human being? Indeed, as astute readers will have realized already, this “us” isn’t so much the “reader in general” as a heteromasculine phenomenology of reading – one contained in as well as critiqued by the novel itself in the character of Markie, Emmeline’s lover and a figure for an erotic adventurer seeking to occupy her sexual subjectivity. Again, granting Walsh’s observations about Markie’s links to Oswold Mosely, we can indeed affirm that there is something totalitarian about his character, though what seems decisive here is the way he dramatizes a sexual relation that would dictate absolute control over Emmeline as a provider of sexual and emotional services. As a barrister, Markie embodies hyperbolically both the State’s cold rationality and statistical calculability as well its ultimate recourse to inflicting violence upon
the bodies of its subjects. He handles words, we might say, to echo Haggard’s Alan Quartermain, like a “sharp spear”, stripping away ornament and style in favor of an instrumental power that always portends more than textual violence: “So please do wear yellow and do not be late again.” Alienated as a managerial subject of textual selfhood while at work, Emmeline is reduced in the novel’s erotic economy to the object and instrument of Markie’s totalitarian desire. By turning now to the novel’s sexual rather than workplace economy, then, we can track these dynamics as they both continue to colonize Emmeline’s subjectivity and open up a potential space beyond commodified labor, reified selfhood and alienated sexuality.

“Some idea of adventure”: The Heterosexual Economies of Professionalism

On the face of it, the plot of To the North is fairly linear and straightforward. Emmeline begins the novel as a successful if rather emotionally wooden businesswoman. Soon, she meets Markie, lawyer and lose acquaintance of her flat mate and sister-in-law before her husband’s (Emmeline’s brother’s) death in the war. Markie pursues Emmeline in the spirit of an impulsive nihilist – a satanic villain, as more than one critic has described him – and the two begin a pre- or extra-marital relationship in secret – the final form of the preposition designating the intrigue of the plot. Eventually, Markie gets bored and breaks all ties, while at the same time Emmeline’s business begins to go into decline under the pressure of larger and more efficient firms. Meanwhile, Emmeline’s sister-in-law, Cecilia, is forced by her aunt into outing Emmeline and Markie’s affair under the sign of bourgeois propriety, inviting the now ex-lover to dinner despite Emmeline’s protestations that whatever existed between them is over. Furious with Markie for accepting the invitation, Emmeline ends the novel by driving the two away from the dinner party and, in a climactic coup de grace, speeding up the M1 at greater and greater velocities before finally ending both their lives in a head-on collision, the
intention behind which remains distinctly murky. The novel’s ending, then, combines erotic and economic forms of failure into a naturalist climax which is neither tragic nor melodramatic but, as we shall see, decidedly abstract and impersonal.

Critics have understandably been unsure of how to interpret this ending. It seems to embody for Emmeline a kind of hyperbolic agency, and yet one that is both suicidal and homicidal – world destroying – in its inevitable trajectory towards death. As William Heath (1987) has described it:

At the moment she drives the small car head on into the large one, she experiences for the first time a completely objective awareness, and the event itself is neither Emmeline’s suicide nor her deliberate punishment of a transgressor, but the translation of the irrationality of her love into the physical actions of her life. Emmeline ceases to exist personally and becomes a force. (33)

As with Ellman’s description of “another force [that] controls their restless choreography”, this description of the novel’s climax is both evocative and leaves more to be said. What form does this “force” take in the text? What precisely is its relationship to the novel’s sexual economy, and to its vocational one? And most importantly for this argument, how can we historicize it as a new move in the history of adventure writing? I will ultimately argue that this force is a paradigmatic instance of that space that its author flagged as "Bowen terrain”, which “cannot be demarcated on any existing map; it is unspecific.” Enacting a deterritorialization of adventure’s mobility tropes, the novel’s ending discovers a new way to disaggregate the enchantment of romance from its commercial, masculine desiderata, to make Emmeline a participant in adventure’s rhetorics without becoming a conduit for male fantasies of power and escape as either vocational subject or sexual object.

We are in a sense, then, back at the question which had troubled Bowen in her critique of Haggard: how could one stage a feminist recuperation of the narrative “power” of male romance without making “woman” or “femininity” into its degraded object? Bowen’s answer in 1947 would be couched in terms of a particular kind of standpoint on and identification with romance: “Did I then, I must ask, myself aspire to ‘She’s’ role? I honestly
cannot say so. ‘She’ was *she* – outsize absolute of the grown-up. The exaltation I wanted was
to be had from the looking-on” (249, her emphasis). The peculiar kind of distance implied by
“looking-on” seems to resolve into neither subject nor object, but into a standpoint or
phenomenology that is neither active nor passive, an “exalted” form of observation, an
impassioned impersonality. Again, I will come to discuss how this other phenomenology of
“looking-on” is one closely associated with that unspecific “Bowen terrain”. But for now, we
need to grasp the significance of the fact that if the novel’s vocational economy makes
Emmeline into an alienated managerial subject of adventure rhetoric, its libidinal economy
threatens to make her into an exploited object of adventure’s masculine fantasies.

In this reading, Markie is less criminal or villain – his usual critical catchphrases –
and more the decadent male-professional persona that characterizes imperial romance’s
Hyde-like protagonists. He is not *outside* the law so much as embodying the supplementary
violence that subtends legal instrumentality and cold rationality as it comes to be felt on
women’s bodies. This combination of rationality and force is troped in the language of
imperial adventure and territorial penetration. Markie is described as a kind of erotic pirate
invading Emmeline’s personal space: “He sailed in her waters under Cecilia’s ensign”, (49)
Bowen writes, signaling the way he insinuates himself into Emmeline’s life under the
disguise of a friendship with Cecilia that does not really exist. When Emmeline discovers this
fact “something weakened in her defenses that were not till now defenses, so unconscious had
they been and so impassable.” Like Woolf in *The Voyage Out* Bowen in effect rewrites the
domestic courtship plot via the language of physical force and territorial annexation, with
Emmeline as the symbolic virgin territory into which Markie seeks entry. Even his romantic
letters, those literary icons of civilized propriety, have a kind of marshal power to them,
infiltrating into domestic and sexual interiors. Indeed, we first discover of the couple’s liaison

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[206] See Hensley, Nathan. *Forms of Empire* (OUP, 2016) for an excellent analysis of this characterological dynamic
in the context of Victorian liberal democracy and its supplementary and continual foreign wars, a context
embodied for Hensley in the contradictory registers of romance’s marshal yet democracy-espousing
megalomaniacs.
when Markie’s letter – a series of logistical and sartorial imperatives for their next meeting – finds Emmeline alone in her room at Farraways. After reading it, she [p]ushed this bumptious letter into a drawer, but still did not feel quite alone.” Markie’s letter makes Emmeline feel “as though someone had touched her” and she is struck by a mixture of “pleasure and trepidation”. (46-47)

The double response – pleasure and trepidation – is crucial here. On the one hand, Bowen’s writing of the domestic love plot as one of imperious male force vs embattled female defense deromanticizes heterossexual romance and heteronormative sentimentality by rendering them the domain of sheer power struggle – trepidation. One the other hand, however, there is something newly thrilling about the way that Bowen demystifies the erotic contract so as precisely to grasp it as a gendered relation of power – a thrill that she takes as much from D.H. Lawrence as from Woolf. If Markie marks the possibility of total possession by the sexual other, then such a prospect is both alienating and alluring in its promise at least of a kind of self-obliteration:

For some time she had found his physical personality vaguely unpleasing, though she took little stock of these things: she jumped as though she had been struck the first time he put out her way an eager but nerveless hand. He had the effect of suspending her faculties not unpleasantly, like some very loud noise to which one becomes accustomed. (49)

This courtship plot, then, is written not as the authentic discovery of self-identity in heterosexual partnership (as in Austen), nor even as a kind of queer inversion of that logic (à la The Well of Loneliness, say), but as the possibility of “not unpleasantly” – which is, crucially, not quite to say pleasantly – losing oneself in an act of erotic surrender. Such an act, as understood here, is essentially non-egotistical and – in its analogical generality of happening to “one” – perhaps even non-personal.

However we define this “effect” comparable to a “very loud noise”, we can be sure that it is not the one that Markie desires. While it might be an effect of his presence, it is not for him, to whom Emmeline’s “faculties” represent precisely the treasure of feminine warmth.
as a prized sexual service. This weird “suspension” of faculties, I am suggesting, becomes more intelligible as a phenomenological space when we contrast it with what Markie wants from Emmeline: romantic depths of feminine feeling. Like the touristic clichés that pepper the novel’s commodified landscape, such sexual authenticity is only writable (better, Bowen will only write it) as a kind of hackneyed male adventure plot. When the couple travel to Paris together Markie feels that “some idea of adventure asserted itself through his waking faculties: she was lovely and opposite him, they were flying to Paris.” (136) Markie’s “waking faculties” contrast with Emmeline’s “suspended faculties” and signal his sexual as well as professional egotism in opposition to her tendency towards self-negation. His desire has a prehensile quality, enacting its force through the medium of a kind of techno-erotic writing. On board the plane to Paris, Markie, aware that Emmeline is thinking of her work and not of him, begins scrawling notes on the Tatler:

What IS the matter?... Can’t be True… Can’t believe we’re together two whole days. You ARE nice to me… These two days must be intolerable or perfect. You must know what I want: all I want. If I COULD marry, it would be you. I don’t know what this means. I didn’t think this could happen. For God’s sake, be kind to me. Understand? (136-138)

Jeez. Scripted on the commercial surface of the magazine, Markie’s techno-erotic declarations read not unlike advertisements, seeking in efficient and imperative shorthand to stoke desire and affection (“be kind”) and incite either its reciprocation (“perfect”) or its repudiation (“intolerable”). To this Manichean strategy, Emmeline responds only with a kind of neutrality, deferring further conversation until Paris. Beneath his needy emotional surface, she is conscious of his “remoteness and uneagerness”, his “momentary coldness”, viewing his expropriative strategies with the opposite of feminine passion and rather observing with a kind of self-protective distance. Insofar as this episode – and their sexual relationship more broadly – dramatizes a kind of “adventure”, then, as Markie himself thinks about it, it is one in which the usual topos of masculine fantasy has been upturned. Emmeline’s measured sexual subjectivity, enacting a kind of neutrality or “suspension” of emotional and erotic
faculties, refuses to become naturalized as the sub-rational terrain onto which penetrative male fantasy can be projected. Emmeline, like her author, we might say, does not “aspire to She’s role” – a role of powerfully oppositional (and therefore destroyable) femininity – preferring a stance more resembling of the “looking-on” which Bowen had characterized as her own imbrication in adventure’s phenomenological matrixes. Again, this looking-on nominates a space between subject and object, active and passive. Emmeline does nothing so strong as to refuse Markie’s advances, which would indeed grant him emotional traction of some (“intolerable”) kind. Instead, she views these advances (and her own reactions) with the self-reflexivity of performance, in the same way that the “feathery touches” delivered to her clients are scripted emotional currency:

I love you so much,” she said, withdrawing her hand to steady herself, a little away from him, against the side of the taxi. Markie – either in protest at her withdrawal or because she deprived him of words – looked at her oddly, a shade satirically. (148)

What we’re seeing here is the kind of de-differentiation of expressive and instrumental emotion, documented by sociologists such as C. Wright Mills and Arlie Hochschild, as aspects of personality are dragged into the production process, even after the “working day” (now something of a misnomer) has come to an end. Yet, Emmeline’s performance of emotional cliché not only enacts the residual depersonalization of humanist authenticity in a non-work sphere, but also provides a kind of protective mask separating her from Markie. Projecting himself onto this surface, Markie admires it as Emmeline’s “charm”, much as Henry Wilcox had admired Margaret’s “cleverness”; but as with Margaret, Emmeline’s “charm” or emotional performance is not really for Markie, but a defense against him.

This residual workplace performance has a remarkable effect on him even as they first arrive in Paris. “Traveling at high velocity”, as Bowen characterizes the modality of his

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erotic energy, “he had struck something – her absence – head on, and was not so much shattered as in dull recoil.” (142) Emmeline’s “absence” – her refusal either to placidly embody or to forcefully negate the imperative, “be kind” – causes Markie to search almost monomaniacally for her presence, touching her, “slipping” and “sliding” his fingers across her body in order to gain the assurances in flesh that he cannot secure via the now hollowed-out rituals of amorous communion. Even as the courtship plot proceeds as if automatically through the mapped and managed generic coordinates of romantic dinners and city strolls etc., Emmeline remains irrevocably elsewhere—a characterological displacement that sends Markie into what Hugh Haughton aptly describes, in his introduction to the novel, as “the throws of sexual terror and imperial Angst of an almost Rider Haggard kind”. (iv) Indeed. Emmeline’s impenetrable emotional surface renders Markie like one of Haggard’s decadent-professional heroes, regressing to barbarism in the face of a feminized landscape to which they cannot gain entry:

[1]he edge of his mind was restless with superstition: like natives before the solid advance of imperial forces, aspiration, feeling, all sense of the immaterial had retreated in him before reason to some craggy hinterland where, having made no terms with the conqueror, they were submitted to no control and remained a menace. Like savages coming to town on fair day to skip and chaffer, travestying their character in strange antics, creating by their very presence a saturnalia in which the conqueror may unbend, feeling crept out in him from some unmapped region. (151)

This passage enacts nothing less than a reversal of the psychodynamic trajectory of gender and desire in the modern period from Flaubert to Freud. As Rita Felski (1995) and others have explored at length, we would usually expect femininity to occupy this “unmapped region” of archaic and labile desire, both sub-rational and pre-modern. Indeed, imperial romance was itself integral to producing this kind of feminine subject. In Felski’s seminal account, such efforts to situate woman as excessively desiring subject have everything to do with the rise of a consumerist phase of capitalism that requires the production of desire itself. Bowen takes that gendered and sexual topography, and she reverses it.
To match Markie’s regression to a kind of “primitive” state of manhood, the hyper-civilized landscape of Paris is auto-exoticised by Bowen, its high-bourgeois parks coming to resemble Conradian jungles:

Emmeline – hearing footsteps everywhere on the baked slippery grass, and leaves tearing as couples pushed through the undergrowth, seeing through the haze of myopia the shadowy hot-green forest – looked round her vaguely as though she did not know where she was, though a thought may have crossed her mind: had their triumphant cool flight been simply for this?... The forest humming with pleasure translated itself for his anguished senses into a saturnalia; distraught with the agitations of a vicarious delicacy he hurried Emmeline on, drawing her, with a hand still under her elbow, up avenue after avenue, wheeling her angrily round where perspectives met. (144)

In this auto-exoticised writing of the imperial-cum-urban-quest, the very habitus of heterosexual urban leisure and enchantment has become, to echo Conrad, a special kind of “horror”, staged as the penetration of frighteningly other space. Like Margaret journeying to Howards End wondering “[w]hat horrors lay ahead”, such auto-ethnography attempts – with still-racist implications discussed already – to reverse the binary of civilization/barbarism on which hegemonic social values (like “the couple”, or “normal”) stake their prestige and their claims to cultivated, dispassionate truth over and against their constitutively excluded (“queer”) aberrations. In Emmeline’s (and Bowen’s) vision of Paris, however, heteronormativity becomes a kind of totalized aberration in itself: “There wasn’t anywhere else”, thinks Emmeline: “other couples were everywhere.” (150) In this last remark, in which heterosexual normalization becomes itself globally gridded, we might begin to grasp the urgency of that other “Bowen terrain” that “cannot be demarcated on any existing map”, and which seems to index a space of non-specificity.

This final thought of Emmeline’s raises another set of problems associated with her neutrality towards heterosexual norms. If her managed, emotional performativity provides a kind of defense against Markie’s dictatorial desire, then it doesn’t necessarily open up a space of active agency or self-authorship, doesn’t re-allocate power so much as withdraw from the field of power-relations altogether. It does so by enacting a kind of non-dialectical subject,
one beyond humanist forms of social reciprocity entirely, and yet one still beset by its own
doubts about such a pyrrhic victory: “had their triumphant cool flight been simply for this?”
The thought is Emmeline’s, but the line and even its cadences echo that famous passage from
Wordsworth (“was it for this / That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved / To blend his murmurs
with my Nurse’s song”), and the allusion points to some reserved quantum of romantic
subjectivity that regrets the human costs of self-performance as a form of sexual defense.

In other words, is there some space, the above passage seems to worry, where
Emmeline can be the active agent of adventure—of enchanted work and desire — and not
simply its self-obliterating sexual *topos*? Is there a standpoint beyond the kind of “looking-
on” embodied by her emotional surface? Is there an outside to the necessary defense of the
pre-rehearsed “named emotion” (“I love you so much”) as Jameson has recently called it?
Jameson’s recent treatise on realism reminds us of the urgency of something that we have
known about modernism for a long time: that it draws its expressive energy and its formal
innovation from the depths of the emotionally ineffable. With Forster or Woolf we would
have no trouble affirming such a post-Romantic hypothesis. Woolf, no doubt, would have
plunged into Emmeline’s core in order to rescue that reserve of feminine subjectivity-for-
itself, reducible to neither commercial nor sexual modes of exchange: For Bowen, as we must
now appreciate, such depth is no longer possible when its communicative performance as
surface (as “feathery touches” and “love”) has been so thoroughly reified.

*But another kind of surface is possible:* one that is not an inauthentic copy of a
humanist original, but a kind of autonomous stylization of adventure’s speed-rhetorics that
refuses to go beyond surface, to go beyond *writing*. To begin to get a feeling for it, we must
turn back the clock on Emmeline and Markie’s Paris adventure and rejoin them aboard the
airplane, amidst the loud hum of the cabin, which in fact offers a different kind of corporeal
adventure to the one greedily imagined onboard by Markie (“she was lovely and opposite
him”). For the airplane episode also becomes the metaphorical vehicle for a different dialectic
of textuality. In this alternative chronotope of the text, writing is not so much performed as
allegorized via Markie and Emmeline’s differential points of view as they gaze at the ground below:

Surrey and Kent looked flatter and, like something with which one has ceased to have any relationship, noticeably less interesting – he had never liked either much. The grass, lawns and meadows, poorer in texture than he expected, looked like a rubbed billiard cloth. But to Emmeline some quite new plan of life, forgotten between flight and flight, seemed once more to reveal itself: she sat gazing down with intensity at the lay-out of gardens. No noise, no glass, no upholstery boxed her up from the extraordinary: as they smoothly mounted and throbbed through the shining element she watched trees and fields in the blue June haze take on that immaterial loveliness, that foreign and clear intensity one expects of the sky. (136)

For Markie, the view from the aircraft appears (or perhaps fails to appear) as if it were as flat as the “dull” legal report he still holds in his hands, and becomes the occasion for straightforwardly namable and even quantifiable emotional relations (“less interesting”, “never liked”, “poorer”) whose overall tone is one of mild yet comfortable contempt. For Emmeline, however, the exact same surface is lined with what Jameson has called “affect” or “intensity”, the latter word appearing twice in this short extract. Affect is that which “float[s] above experience without causes and without the structural relationship to its cognate entities which the named emotions have with one another.”

It is, to recall Emmeline’s earlier thinking, a kind of “suspension” of emotional and cognitive faculties. It has the non-destined quality of the Event, or that which here “reveal[s] itself”, and is opposed explicitly to the temporality of past-present-future: “forgotten between flight and flight.” Affect, for Jameson, begins as bodily experience but soon takes on the generality of an impersonal eruption of unnamable feeling in which mediation has been stripped away, or hasn’t yet sedimented into reified nominalization, in which, you might say, “no noise, no glass, no upholstery” intervenes between the self and the world as both “foreign” and “clear”. And it is, crucially for our purposes, that modernist tendency which opposes the reification of meaning as such.

Here, it is nothing less than the emergence of a new kind of utopia of the textual that wishes to find an outside or underside to commodified emotions as either commercial or sexual.

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209 Jameson, Antinomies of Realism (Verso, 2013) p. 35
currency. Earlier, when Markie had scrawled on the *Tatler*, “*What IS the matter?*”, Emmeline had been forced to name her emotions like a child pointing at a picture book. “*Happy*”, she had written, projecting a surface that would deflect Markie’s hunger. But even while moving us through this pantomime of heteroromance, we can now see that Bowen is also moving us into an entirely different terrain of adventure, one not based on place (à la Haggard, and indeed Forster and Woolf to the extent that they replaced adventure’s locales) but *suspended* as a kind of abstract and disembodied *space*. Such abstract, stylized space is indeed that “Bowen terrain [that] cannot be demarcated on any existing map; it is unspecific.”

We might understand the emergence and dissolution of this textual space as a kind of onomastic dialectic of the Emmeline and the Markie, the unbounded space of a feminine affect and the bounded space of masculine Meaning. If language reifies emotion and experience more broadly by giving it “proper names”, by specifying and *marking* it (“marked: Lakes”, to recall Emmeline’s anti-Romantic office box file, “a whale *marked* out for blubber”, to recall Henry’s map), then such reifications are *lined* here with a kind of surface-value that does not point beyond itself. In this late modernist suspension of the signifying faculties of language, text and self become truly dissociated, non-functions of one another. This affective space is one in which Emmeline fails to materialize as a terrain onto which male desire can be projected. It renders her neither physically touchable nor affectively appropriable, but almost ontologically unspecifiable. It relies for its activation on the airplane as a kind of prop, but is as much a utopia of textual autonomy as it is one of the futurist self-as-machine. This passage opens a space of *de-specification* on the very surface of textuality, which, as soon as it appears seems simultaneously to disappear *back into textuality*, back into territorialized reification. As Markie and Emmeline approach Paris “the serrated gold coastline-line and creeping line of the sea were verifying the *atlas*” (137), as “France was mapped out in pink fields” (139) as “a glaring plan of the suburb tilted and reeled”, as the affective field, the space of the line, becomes, in other words, garishly re-textualized and re-Marked.
It’s worth remembering that Woolf had already attempted this kind of surface
stylization of adventure as a resolution to her own feminist revisioning of romance. At the end
of Elizabeth Dalloway’s re-territorialization of adventure’s sexual and vocational tropes,
Woolf had suspended us above the city in those celestially signifying clouds:

> Signs were interchanged, when, as if to fulfil some scheme arranged already, now a
> summit dwindled, now a whole block of pyramidal size which had kept its station
> inalterably advanced into the midst or gravelly led the procession to fresh anchorage.
> Fixed though they seemed at their posts, at rest in perfect unanimity, nothing could be
> fresher, freer, more sensitive superficially than the snow-white or gold-kindled
> surface; to change, to go, to dismantle the solemn assemblage was immediately
> possible; and in spite of the grave fixity, the accumulated robustness and solidity,
> now they struck light to the earth, now darkness. (136)

The difference here from Bowen is the presence (almost theological) of meaning as such:

> signs were interchanged. Woolf – too addicted to meaning to cast it off entirely – can’t resist
> placing this image of nebulous ecstasy in the service of historical rupture. What I called in my
> last chapter her Defoeian infinitives (“to change, to go, to dismantle”) are still working, still
> protesting against the “solemn assemblage” of an all-too-solid, late-Victorian present.
> Progress needs to get done; change becomes “immediately possible”. Writing such rupture
> into language – indeed, writing it as the climax of a new emplotment of adventure – was no
> small task, but in its very eagerness to tear the fabric of the present and open up some new,
> heterotopic space, Woolf’s suspended adventure remains within the logic of a certain kind of
> instrumentality, a certain work ethic.

Bowen’s clouds are not working. They do not mean but are an escape from the work
of signification as such, the work of marking as both a commercial and a sexual service:

> therein lies their value in a literary plot where sign-making (to echo Woolf) is relentlessly
> placed in the service of producing exchange-values and heteronorms. Emmeline’s escape into
> the clouds represents an adventure of pure mobility, not only de-territorialized but dislocated
> from the specifying functions of language itself.

And now, having travelled through this suspended textual space, we are in a position
to recognize its doubly analogical status with another, more straightforwardly mimetic form
of human intimacy that is not able, as it were, to take flight within the text. For in its siding with a kind of non-signifying surface aesthetic, this suspension of faculties becomes cognate with a more domestic counterpart to which the novel cannot give full form. I am here referring to Emmeline and Cecilia’s co-habitation with one another, a woman-centered domestic arrangement in a novel otherwise frothing with needy masculinity. Their relationship is the novel’s only model (at the level of plot, in any case) for a different form of intimacy reproductive of neither commercial nor erotic modes of reification, nor phenomenologies of penetration and loudness. It is, like the clouds, a stylized aesthetic of the surface:

In their life together, as in a quiet marriage, Emmeline and Cecilia, inquiring less and less, each affectionately confronted the other’s portrait of her own painting, finding it near enough to reality. It is this domestic confidence, this happy and willing ignorance of another heart that is most quick to suffer and least deserves betrayal. (148)

I don’t think it would be an over-statement to say that this queer phenomenology of the surface, this queer, quiet habitation of surfaces, is the closest this otherwise deeply negative novel comes to offering a promesse du bonheur. Yet it is one, like all the queer intimacies peppered through this dissertation, which cannot find its realization as social and erotic praxis. If it is that relationship which the novel least wants to “betray”, then it is also precisely that which it does betray via the inexorable march of its totally banalized marriage plot, which pairs Cecilia off with the mind-numbingly dull Julian Towers, remarkable only for his fine clothes and nice car. When Emmeline hears of the engagement via telegram while on her second holiday with Markie to Devizes “something slid down in her like a dead weight”:

Timber by timber, Oudenarde Road fell to bits, as small houses are broken up daily to widen the roar of London. She saw the door open on emptiness; blanched walls as though after a fire. Houses shared with women are built on sand. She thought: ‘My home, my home.’” (207-8)

What’s so startling about this passage from the perspective of the novel’s feminist critique is the way that it writes the marriage plot not as a romantic superstructure but as the relentless
march of capitalist productivity as the women’s shared home becomes the victim of an
eviscerating real estate boom – in fact, not an inaccurate description of Cecilia and Julian’s
money-driven marriage.\textsuperscript{210} Indeed, this the proposal seems to jolt into hyper-drive not only
marriage as an institution of capitalist development, but capital’s developmental energies
more broadly, which turn against Emmeline like the forces of fate that blow around the heroes
of imperial romance:

\begin{quote}
[Emmeline’s firm] became more regular, more efficient – but so were Cook’s, so
were Lunn’s. Emmeline saw from the faces of clients how the whole character of the
office changed. Coming in to project their holidays they missed that old radiant
assurance, that sense of the whole world offered them smiling: holidays became just
one more thing to be undertaken, this end of a grueling summer. Cook’s were
quicker, Dean and Dawson’s more central: just perceptibly, clients were falling away.
\end{quote}

This economic decline plot, coming on the back of the dissolution of Emmeline and Markie’s
short-lived romance, ushers in the closural phase of the novel, in which Cecilia – in
something like a Forsterian muddle – invites Markie to dinner in order to bring into the open
a relationship that is already over. The final scene of the novel, in which Emmeline speeds up
the M1 and smashes into oncoming traffic is usually read as a deeply pessimistic form of
closure, one in which “no alternative action is possible”, as one critic has characteristically
put it.

But having taken our detour through the novel’s exploration of the adventure
phenomenologies of depth and surface, and having seen how surface can offer the provisional
ground for a different kind of textual (and economic and sexual) space, we might now be in a
position to read this ending very differently indeed, not as naturalist calamity but as a utopian
space which suspends the logics of both consumerist commodification and sexual
appropriation. To get there, we have to join Emmeline in her car.

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{210} In this industrial destruction of queer domestic space, we might also recall \textit{Howards End}, in which the
Schlegels’ London home is earmarked for demolition to make way for “new buildings, of a vastness at present
unimaginable”. Forster, \textit{Howards End}. P.64
\end{footnote}
“Her spirit now launched like the long arrow”: textual line as queer utopia

Cars zip back and forth across Bowen’s novel transporting various cultural and economic meanings and anti-meanings. Visiting Lady Waters in the country at one point, Emmeline discusses the complex meanings and experiences attendant upon the motorcar with the Vicar, who is of the opinion that

Modern life becomes increasingly complex. It seems a short time since motoring was itself a pleasure. As in fact, it still is to me; I never fall short of that anticipation with which I first mounted my brother’s high red Minerva – of a type, Miss Summers, that you would not remember: it had a door at the back. I wore a dust coat and goggles; the ladies were heavily veiled. I am still surprised at the speed with which things fly past. But nowadays the whole incentive to motoring seems an anxiety to be elsewhere.

‘I know,’ agreed Emmeline.
‘Do you share this indifference?’ inquired the vicar anxiously.
‘No, I like driving my car.’ (64)

The vicar’s nostalgic recollection of motoring calls to mind an era when it was still embedded in codes of gender chivalry and masculine heroics, in which male agency and female passivity are figured via the roles of driver and passenger respectively. Such a gendered technological imaginary is redolent of the image of the car in *Howards End*, where it signaled a residual, imperial heroics via its Wilcoxian associations with the rubber and commerce. Here, however, the car-as-symbol is also imbricated in new regimes of intensified consumerist escapism via its mollification of a “desire to be elsewhere”. Emmeline can appreciate this anxiety – perhaps, we might think, because it is crucial to fueling the male appetites she serves in her office – but she is also importantly set apart from it, sets herself apart from it by her typically corrective response. ‘No, I like driving my car.’

Emmeline’s penchant for driving, then, marks her as both an active agent of economic processes, and yet one who has to navigate the complex vectors of consumption and compensation inherent in driving as a form of escapism from modern alienation. Her
enjoyment in driving contrasts both with Markie’s technophobic, postindustrial character (“[He] did not drive a car because machinery bored him”) and Julian’s motoring towards social status, signified by the Bentley in which he courts Cecilia. The task for Emmeline, then, is to find a mode of driving that falls into neither of these bad alternatives – compensation in the consumerist marketplace nor social status in the erotic one. The novel’s closing scene suggests that Emmeline will escape these coordinates by literally as well as symbolically out-speeding them, using the adventurous mobility of the car to out-maneuver both the degraded commercial culture of the city and the heterosexual culture of the couple.

When, at the novel’s ending, Cecilia’s dinner party finally comes to a painful close, failing in both intent and outcome, Emmeline offers to drive Markie home. In the car, he suggests that they give their relationship one more chance, while Emmeline is insistent that it’s over. Emmeline’s agency in this startling final scene is expressed via the trope of sheer mobility, as “speed streamed from her unawares.” (245) This mobility is written as an urban intensification of the generic spaces of foreign travel and imperial romance. When Emmeline sees a road sign for the North recalling the novel’s own title, the writing seems to point us to both to a national/commercial frontier (the “North” from which her customers earlier flocked) and to a textual frontier, one signaled by the passage’s self-reflexive preoccupation with the sign’s typography:

Like a shout from the top of a bank, like a loud chord struck on the dark, she saw: “TO THE NORTH”, written black on white, with a long black immovably flying arrow.

Something gave way.

An immense idea of departure. Expresses getting stream up and crashing from termini, liners clearing the docks, the shadows of planes rising, caravans winding out into the first dip of the desert – possessed her spirit now launched like an arrow. (244)

We will come back to the strange status of writing in this passage, but it’s worth pausing for a moment, here, on the wider matrix of the motorcar at the twilight of Britain’s imperial power, where it signaled a shift not only of geopolitical frontiers but of the spaces into which
fantasies of escape were projected, a moment, we might say, where “caravans dipping out into the first dip of the desert” (imperial romance) were being displaced by a different kind of romance of travel and of speed. Enda Duffy:

Clearly, when one drove at new speed, distances were foreshortened and space condensed. Consider that the promise of speed pleasure appeared at the moment when the age of empire was at its height, but just when awareness was dawning that it would soon effectively be over. The new offer of speed as pleasure participated in this political and cultural turn to the extent that it exemplified a move away from projecting desire onto the faraway exotic locale, and onto personal effort and intensity experienced on one’s own body. In the late Victorian period, the boy’s adventure novels spawned with the rise of pulp fiction were likely to be imperial romances, as in the tales of H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. By the twenties, the new heroes were more likely to be race car drivers or adventurers who endured massive hardship to break some record of endurance, rather than colonial explorers. Pleasure as heterotopic fantasy was being replaced by pleasure in the sensation of personal strenuousness. Territoriality mattered less than mobility, and speed was envisioned not only as pleasure but as a measure of extraordinary personal power.

Emmeline’s speed certainly indexes this new kind of de-territorialized power diagnosed by Duffy, which Bowen uses to rescue some kind of agency for Emmeline disjointed from degraded commerce and compensatory masculinity, with their mutually imbricated dreams of territorial escape. But one is less sure whether this new, abstractly mobile space could be said, here, to afford anything so personal as “pleasure” – a named sensation, we might say, that, as Duffy suggests, is actually quite compatible with the car as consumerist token. What seems to be more at stake is Emmeline’s removal from, or, better, suspension above, the realm of corporeal and even cognitive sensations altogether. The “suspension of faculties” that we saw as an original effect and antidote to her relationship with Markie and its various forms of affective work now becomes a “total loss” of faculties, written into the experience (or really, the anti-experience) of speed:

Like earth shrinking and sinking, irrelevant, under the rising wings of a plane, love with its unseen plan, its constrictions and urgencies, dropped to a depth below Emmeline, who now looked down unmoved at the shadowy map of her pain. For this levitation a total loss of her faculties, of every sense of his presence, the car and herself driving were very little to pay. She was lost to her own identity, a confining husk. Calmly, exaltedly risking and balancing in this ignorance she looked at her hands on the wheel, the silver hem of her dress and asked herself who she was:

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turning his way, with one unmeasured swerve of the wheel, she tried to recall Markie.

What is at stake in this remarkable climax of modernist impersonality, then, is less a model of a new type of person, professional or sexual, or even a new model of literary character, so much as the dissolution of personhood and character altogether and the transferal of enchantment to a certain kind of disembodied textual space and mobile techo-professional competency: *enchantment as writing*. Emmeline’s “spirit now launched like an arrow” recalls for us the black and white text of the sign from which she is now practically indistinguishable.

Inscribed as this surface-space, Emmeline is absolutely unappropriable and non-exploitable as either emotion or as flesh. Markie, still exemplifying the novel’s sexual phenomenology of heterosexual penetration, is hungry for “that unknown presence within her outline – a presence that slipped behind veils every time they kissed [and which] made his fingers, jumping and burning with fresh excitement, tighten about her tense cold wrist as she drove.” Against this final, grasping of heterosexual possessiveness is counterposed the truly remarkable moment of the crash, which Bowen uses, we might say, to split the atom of Haggardian adventure, dispensing with territorial dreams of escape and sexual fantasies of penetration and arriving at a disembodied space of pure, textual surface. This is a space in which language conspicuously fails to *specify*, in which its most basic communicative functions have been exploded, landing us in that “unspecific” terrain that “cannot be demarcated on any existing map”:

‘Stop for a moment,’ he pleaded, mustering some kind of calm.
What he said meant nothing: speed streamed from her unawares. The road was not empty; swinging almost up the right bank she shot ahead of a lorry: traffic approached them, twice she seemed magnetized into, twice he was stupefied by rushing arcs of light, in which for two moments he felt her suspended by him, fingers just on the wheel. Their survival was barest fortuity: one car pulled up behind them and someone, shouting, looked back… ‘Emmeline,’ he repeated, in desperately wary approach.

She still heard nothing, or heard some singing silence inside her brain: as the wild swing of their lights scythed the dark ahead his agonized apprehension, a thousands vibrations of impact drew a sharp line, like fog round a lamp, round the
circle of mindless serenity where she sat merciless, ignorant of their two lives. Dreading as much as a breath’s touch on this taught ungoverned speed, Markie sweating, bit back exclamations, keeping his hand from her hand. He coaxing her gently, he reasoned; as often when they had been alone together. He watched the next lights dawn like doom, make a harsh aurora, bite into the road’s hard horizon and, widening, flood the Great North Road from bank to bank. His fingers an inch from the wheel, wondering he dared stun her, he said hopelessly: ‘Emmeline…’ with the last calm of impotence. As though hearing her name on his lips for the first time, dazzled, she turned to smile. Head-on, magnetized up the heart of the fan of approaching brightness, the little car, strung on speed, held unswerving way. Someone, shrieking, wrenched at a brake ahead: the great car, bounding, swerved on its impetus. Markie dragged their wheel left: like gnats the two hung in the glare with unmoving faces. Shocked back by the moment, Emmeline saw what was past averting. She said: ‘Sorry,’ shutting her eyes. (245)

Although on the face of it this might be a deeply negative ending to an equally negative novel, I want to suggest here that in this negativity there is a kind of Adornian truth-content. What cannot be expressed at the level of plot or “social content”, as he may have called it, here finds a different and more thoroughgoing kind of expression at the level of style – but a style not extraneous to Bowen’s dialectical thinking of adventure. What this passage enacts is the stylistic return of that queer phenomenology which we saw “betrayed” as plot, and which I have already suggested was the novel’s closest approximation to a promesse du bonheur.

That is, if Emmeline and Cecilia’s “quiet marriage” consists in “inquiring less and less”, in a kind of “happy and willing ignorance” of the other’s representation as surface or as “painting”, then such a phenomenology becomes, here, precisely that which the reader herself is being propelled towards adopting as Emmeline herself becomes a sheer textual surface (“her spirit now launched like the long arrow”), an abstract entity existing – if the word could still be said to apply – in a state of “mindless serenity… ignorant of their two lives”. This passage, in other words, embeds or nests or sublimates a queer phenomenology of the surface within the very car crash of heterosexual romance and professional aspiration. The shutting of the eyes which closes this passage is on the face of it Emmeline’s “death”, but such a biological process hardly captures what is being more radically foresworn by Bowen, which is the very affordance of the late-modernist novel-form to render psychological and humanist
depths – as she sees it – for the impersonal dictates of capital and the inhuman desires of heterosexual power.

What becomes newly visible in that forswearing is the very texture of Bowen’s writing, the very value of its style beyond any communicative or even mimetic norm. Early critics of Bowen censured her for her “excessive and extraneous stylistic ticks” which “interrupt the reader’s unproblematic absorption in and validation of the text.” (Brooke quoted in Osborn, 1987, p.1) And that is indeed where we end up here, wading through treacly sentences, lost amidst the architecture of proliferating subclauses and circumlocutions: but we are now in a position to appreciate how this turn to textual surface is a way to break with the alienation of both self and language in economic and sexual plots. And yet, if the turn to style signals on the one hand a space antithetical to the style-negating practices of Haggard et al, to the “sharp spear” of adventure writing, and thus returns us to the modernism-as-style thesis of The Political Unconscious, then on the other it creates the very heterotopic space that Bowen had recuperated via her own immanent critique of male romance: “Writing – that creaking, pedantic, obtrusive, arch, prudish, opaque overworded writing... what it could do! That was the revelation that was the power in the cave!” (250, her emphasis) In the final section of this chapter, I want to suggest some possible destinations for this fantasy of disembodied writing in the age of creative capitalism.

From the romance of travel to the work of Transit: Rachael Cusk’s impersonal fictions

Bowen’s To the North hasn’t been the object of adaptation in the same way as Forster’s and Woolf’s works have. However, I would suggest that Bowen’s fiction finds its contemporary counterpart in autofictions such as Rachael Cusk’s Outline Trilogy. Despite being based on personal experience and mediated via a thinly fictionalized narrative voice, Cusk’s novels extend the logic of impersonality as it is mediated by capitalist modernization, and more
specifically by the creative economy. Cusk’s trilogy centers on a literary author – whose name, we discover only late in the first novel, is Faye – who travels to Athens in the wake of separating from her husband and the father of her two children. Cusk has spoken on more than one occasion of the decision to set Outline in Athens as a way to “underwrite” the experimental form of her novel by locating it at the site of Homeric epic.

Beyond this effort to secure a measure of authority and authenticity for her fiction, however, there are broader resonances between the Odyssey and Outline. Cusk’s novel, like Homer’s epic, constitutes a vocationally and sexually perilous quest into the unknown, in which encounters with strangers and unfamiliar locations generate the narrative momentum of the story. Moreover, like Homer’s Odysseus and the wider cast of classical adventure, Cusk’s protagonist is not a developmental figure, but a fully formed yet psychologically flat, person. There is no deep psychological personhood in Cusk. What we get instead is Faye’s detailed descriptions of the speech, appearance and behavior of other people around her. As a focalizing device, this allows for an almost intrusively observational first person protagonist, and despite the label of autofiction, there is something profoundly anti-naturalistic about the way that Cusk’s characters offer up their souls to Faye, as she becomes a kind of giant eye and ear for other people’s thoughts, desires, confessions and subjectivities while remaining herself absent.

There is, then, a kind of writer’s fantasy built into the storytelling structure of Cusk’s novels, in which the other appears as transparent, accessible and self-narrating, offering up no apparent resistance to the omniscience of the narrative voice nor the imperatives of almost eerily precise communication. This voice is a deeply impersonal, nearly anonymous one, for whom experience and recording, intimacy and writing, living and representing, appear to have been folded into one another. This is a kind of ultimate de-differentiation of creative work and non-work spheres, as living and writing become coeval and co-productive.

Like Bowen’s To the North, then, there is a kind of chilly atmosphere to Cusk’s trilogy, in which humanist warmth and feminine depth of feeling is displaced by the exercise
of techno-professional competencies, by incessant writerliness. Indeed, everyone speaks, or has their speech relayed as if it was written out as prose beforehand. As in Bowen, moreover, this lack of humanist depth and feminine warmth is to be grasped as a feminist move which allows Cusk to remove her protagonist from circuits of affective work and economies of emotional labor while remaining the ultimate artist-observer “looking on” the lives of others.

The relationships in Cusk’s trilogy for the most part constitute weak ties. They thus give form to the kinds of loose social formations that arise around itinerant and temporary workplace regimes. Faye travels to Athens in the first place to teach a writing class, and most of the people she encounters are new acquaintances who briskly enter the novel and exit it just as quickly. This social transience gives the novel its peculiar emotional texture, in which human relationships and human kinship structures last only as long as the workplace events, schedules and contracts that guarantee their proximity or the strategic professional aims and needs that motivate their temporary necessity.

Relationships often develop quite literally on the move, on transportation, and, as in Bowen, travel has both a logistical and an existential quality of homelessness about it. Or at least the dislocation from “home” understood and felt as a stable relation to property and biological kin (the narrator’s almost entirely absent two boys, who call her occasionally from the other side of the world to ask where there tennis racket is, or why they need to stay with their father. They represent the disenchanted pull of traditional feminine household care work that the Trilogy sloughs off at the outset). Audiences often ask Cusk if her divorce influenced her ability to write this new kind of fiction, to which she – always a scrupulous formalist – replies that she had to do away with the “form” of marriage that had previously hampered much of her writing. And this is what seems decisive, that Faye is “freed” both from the relative securities of the stable heterosexual couple form and its attendant forms of closed intimacy and fixed property, and, also, “free” to wander – like a modern Melanctha – around Europe making new ties and new, fleeting forms of intimacy while engaging sporadically in writing, teaching and networking. In *Transit* (2016) we follow Faye around London, often
accompanied by the itinerant workers who are rebuilding her house. The novel quite literally stages the question of how to build a home when everyone is on the move, in transit.

What comes in the wake of the collapse of the traditional family structure? This is the question that motivates Cusk’s novel at both a biographical and a more broadly historical level. The radical blankness of cusk’s narrator is an oft discussed conceit: can it be understood as the blankness or really the open question of what a subject might look like, and to what it might attach, after the structures of meaning and intimacy which formally valorized it (or at least granted it recognition) have disappeared?

Cusk has said of Kudos that: “The only real writer in the book is the person writing the book, is Faye. She’s swimming about in this element that she herself has become very suspicious of.” That’s also a description of Emmeline. Both characters are highly literate professionals who struggle to differentiate between their work and their non-work life. For both characters writing is a technical competency as well as a form of expression and ground for intimacy. For both it becomes a kind of habitable space or element, an environment, something one can “swim about in”. The strange thing about Cusk’s comment is that Faye is one of several writers in the book, and in the trilogy more broadly, suggesting that Cusk is placing a premium on the word “real”. What makes a real writer? Talking of her own writing practice Cusk speaks of long periods of gestation and of “just living” without any attempt to record or to fashion life into literary form, which then comes in a second moment of composition. In the novels, Cusk has managed to make this “just living” into a form in its own right, one centered on passivity and receptivity, on a kind of sociologically distanced and value-free recording. There is no suspense and no plot telos. Even the individual episodes, interactions and conversations seem to trail off just before they reach their climax. The books seem to worry about whether it’s even still possible to write a story, a believable fantasy of narrative progression and meaning, after writing has become an impersonal and economic tool. In that worry, Cusk is at one with Bowen. And like Bowen, the utopian moments in her novels come not with moments of surprising and spontaneous emotional depth (as in Rooney)
but in moments of abstraction where language is momentarily detached from its normative
signifying practices and dramatized as something radically other with respect to
communication and even narrative, a space outside of the symbolic (and therefore economic)
order:

The class was a fiction writing class: I taught it each week. There were twelve
students who sat around tables arranged in a square. The classroom was on the fifth
floor: at the start of term it had been light at that hour, but now it was dark outside,
and the windows showed us our own reflections etched in glare against an eerie
backdrop of over-blown, dirty yellow clouds. The students were mostly women. I
found it hard to attend to what they were saying. I sat in my coat, my eye continually
drawn to the window and to the strange cloudscape that appeared to belong neither
to night nor to day but to something intermediary and motionless, a place of stasis
where there was no movement or progression, no sequence of events that could be
studied for its meaning. Its yellowed formless components suggested not nothingness
but something worse. I heard students speaking and wondered how they could believe
in human reality sufficiently to construct fantasies about it. I felt them glance at me
often as if from a great distance. Increasingly they were speaking, I realized, not to
me but to one another, building among themselves the familial structure that I had
acquainted them to, the way that children, when they are afraid, will retreat to the
rules and regulations of what they have learned to regard as normality. (Transit, 106,
my emphasis)
Conclusion

In this short conclusion I want to use the keywords of the chapters to gain some critical purchase on sociological accounts of creative capitalism post-’68. I will briefly relate the keywords of the chapters to debates about work, value and kinship today, and suggest how they might provide a different kind of purchase on contemporary problems, and a different standpoint from which to critique modes of exploitation and recuperate potential sites of resistance to the rule of capital.

Appreciation

Appreciation can be taken as one instance of what André Gorz has described as *savoir* (as opposed to *connaître*), the kind of embodied and practical “know-how” (“practical intelligence”, as Stevenson called it) that characterizes labor-power in post-industrial, knowledge driven economies. As Gorz writes of post-Fordist management discourse, “This remarkable text does not refer to science or formal knowledge (*connaissance*) but to intelligence, imagination and experimental knowledge, which together make up ‘human capital’. The terminology breaks totally with cognitivism and scientism.”212 From the perspective of capital, this preference for *savoir over connaiss ance*, intelligence over training, is a preference for worker-led adaptability and innovation over the rote delivery of discrete tasks necessary to the Fordist production line. This means a shift in the site of value production and extraction: “Value has its source today in intelligence and imagination. The individual’s knowledge (savoir) counts more than machine time. As the bearers of their own capital, human beings bear a part of the company’s capital.” (4)

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There is nothing *ethical* about this predilection for embodied knowledge on capital’s behalf, for Gorz. The preference for *savoir* is not a preference for the “humane workplace”, as Andrew Ross has ironically put it. Rather, it is the result of the awkward fact that certain forms of intelligence and judgement, evaluation and interpretation, cannot, as yet, be performed by machines nor computers, nor abstracted into general rules and formula: “professionalization is not able to translate into formal knowledge and officially sanctioned procedures – or even into science – the totality of forms of practical knowledge drawn on by professionals. A significant *remainder* of such skills escapes formalization to a greater or lesser degree.” (43) What is the value of this remainder?

In my Forster chapter I argued that “appreciation” was one embodiment of *savoir*, aesthetic knowledge drawn from outside of systems of professional credentialing and training, even as it was partially a result of elided aesthetic (female, middleclass) schooling. This was the particular vocational contradiction that Margaret vicariously solved for Forster. As a cultivated, upper-middle class woman, Margaret’s aesthetic capacities leant her the embodied intelligence to produce normative knowledges about the social and sexual environment surrounding her. Lending Margaret’s appreciation the heroic form of adventure while keeping it outside of formalized systems of work was precisely a way to represent the remainder of embodied capital by refusing to incorporate it into commercial structures and vocations. Margaret’s intelligence wasn’t so much a “remainder” *left behind* after processes of abstraction and training had been completed, then, as an externality *not yet* incorporated into formal structures of work. What is the difference between an externality, a capacity or form of intelligence historically anterior to capitalist work processes, and a remainder that escapes formalization because it cannot be submitted to processes of abstraction and codification? The first is an externality that hasn’t *yet* been measured by the market; the second is an externality which can’t be fully incorporated into quantitative measurement of the value form, as *yet*.

For Gorz, “the increasingly qualitative and unmeasurable character of labour throws the pertinence of the notions of ‘surplus labour’ and ‘surplus value’ into crisis. The crisis of
the measurement of value throws into crisis the definition of the essence of value and, as a consequence, the system of equivalences governing commodity exchange.” (36) Is there a difference in the form of the crisis resultant on the not-yet-measured, as opposed to the crisis of the unmeasurable? Would it be right to say that the depth and richness of the lifeworld inherent in the not-yet-measured is greater than the depth and richness of the lifeworld inherent in the unmeasurable, because the unmeasurable is the thin remainder that is left after all else has been measured? That is to say, as a form of feminized, adventurized proto-work, “appreciation” can produce values outside of hegemonic bourgeois structures – queered subject positions and property relations, a genuinely new social habitus, even as it imagines itself as a form of proto-work. But what Zadie Smith showed us is once you incorporate the “savoir” of appreciation into the connaître of formalized regimes of work, into universities, training, systems of intellectual production, circulation and exchange, its capacity to produce values outside of the dominant economic and social and sexual status quo is severely diminished. Appreciation in Smith’s novel either produces exchange value (by bolstering the symbolic prestige of art Art objects), or else dominant, patriarchal social values such as the white, heterosexual couple form (as in Howard’s whitewashed appreciation of Kiki).

In other words, what might be lost by structural sociological rather than historical material analysis is the difference between the emergent and the dominant, and thus a different kind of remainder and reservoir of value. This opposition between the emergent and the dominant (between the modernist and neoliberal moments) is not simply a temporal or teleological difference between then and now, past and present, but a difference in the historical phase of becoming into which forms of praxis have emerged. “All the characteristics of the postindustrial economy”, writes Lazzarato, “(both in industry and society as a whole) are highly present within the classic forms of “immaterial” production”, including “cultural production”.”

solution”, as Williams would have said. The task for a historical perspective is to seize on that difference-in-similarity, that otherness-in-identity.

Part of that otherness is to do with the gender and sexual dimensions of embodied knowledge, which is to say, through the history of modernity, women have embodied their labor power to a greater extent than men, whether via the labor of reproduction or that of care and affect work. Federici:

[T]he body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor. 214

Although theorists of the present refer to “immaterial labour”, what is “immaterial” about such regimes is the outcome and not the process of work (and even then, such immaterialization implies a kind of techno-utopian erasure of the massive amounts of energy and infrastructure that subtend digitized data and services). “[I]mmaterial labor”, Lazzarato writes, involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as “work” – in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.” (132) Such values are produced precisely via embodied know-how (savoir). To a certain extent, then, the locus of the body as the traditional zone of work and resistance for women has become generalized as pervasive feature of labor-power for everyone, of any gender, working in post-industrial sectors, where workers’ humanist capacities become part of the company’s capital. This means feminism can teach us something about the general condition of labor and the means of resistance in the present. (At the same time, there has been a partial retrenchment of patriarchal structures such that women are often expected to hire their bodies to both white-collar/professional labor and unpaid reproductive labor, the contradiction of the double burden analyzed by historians of the twentieth century.)

The unevenness of the body as a zone of extraction and value production is, to my mind, what makes utopian or “virtual” claims about the immaterial highly problematic. For Autonomists such as Hardt and Negri, Gorz’s savoir has become the “multitude” of living labor, which, for them, “is organized within the capitalist enterprise independently from capitalist command; it is only afterward, and formally, that this cooperation becomes systematized in command.” For Hardt and Negri, “capital is not presented in the role of organizing labor-power, but rather in that of registering and managing the autonomous self-organization of labor-power. In this sense the progressive function of capital has come to an end.” (278, my emphasis) But if the embodied and institutional remainder or multitude of labor is autonomous from command, if associated living labor has detached itself entirely from capital, then what is the difference between Google and communism? What is yet to be achieved or experienced that isn’t already extant in the ontology of labor?

I would suggest, in other words, that what Hardt and Negri’s account is missing is a longue durée perspective on the history of the commodification and colonization of the self and its social environments. The social habitus of immaterial labour and of the creative economy – “the autonomous self-organization of labour-power” – is as much an outcome of capitalism’s incorporation and commodification of resistance as it is a space of freedom. As Boltanski and Chiapello put it:

Duress must be internalized and justified; and this is the role sociology has traditionally assigned to socialization and ideologies. Contributing to the reproduction of the social order, they have in particular the effect of enabling people not to find their everyday universe uninhabitable – one of the conditions of a durable world. If, contrary to prognoses regularly heralding its collapse, capitalism has not only survived, but ceaselessly extended its empire, it is because it could rely on a number of shared representations - capable of guiding action – and justifications, which present it as an acceptable and even desirable order of things: the only possible order, or the best of all possible orders. These justifications must be based on argument that are sufficiently strong to be accepted a self-evident by enough people to check, or overcome, the despair or nihilism which the capitalist order likewise constantly induces – not only in those whom it oppresses but also, on occasion, in those who have responsibility for maintaining it, via education, transmitting its values.216

I would argue that what Hardt and Negri are really describing is the *internalization of duress*, and of the ideologies which have justified capital in ever more intensified forms. If it looks like the mechanisms of capital are merely exercising a kind of rent-from-affar over “autonomous self-organization of labor-power” then isn’t this because we as workers we have been socialized to collectively internalize command and inducement to the point that work need no longer look like work, but might look like adventure, or like art-making, or like an inclusive family unit, or like a “game” with bonuses and gold stars awarded for greater speed. As Lazzarato puts it, immaterial labour is even more authoritarian than Fordism since “capitalism seeks to involve the worker’s personality and subjectivity within the production of value. Capital wants a situation where command resides with the subject him- or herself, and within the communicative process.” (136)

What a longer historical perspective allows us to see the slow process of sedimentation whereby these communicative and expressive ideologies become internalized. Woolf’s Elizabeth Dalloway responded to the machinations of the Piratic Omnibus “freely like a rider, like the figure-head of a ship” – which is to say, not really “freely” at all, but in fraught tension with the machinery of modernization and the pressures of self-commodification. Modernism’s female adventure is the site where this contradiction comes starkly into view, where powerful ideologies of capitalist inducement can still be grasped as powerful discourses of capitalist duress.

Suddenly

What’s the temporality of labor in the present regime of post-Fordism, and what is its relation specifically to the temporalities of creative labor? The temporality of work under Fordism was stable at both the scale of the workplace and the social contract. The production line relied on the repetition of discrete tasks performed at pre-determined intervals. The broader
timelines of work and family were stable and developmental to the extent that individuals were expected to devote their time to one or two firms and climb gradually via steady promotion. Likewise, the temporality of the Fordist family was incremental and developmental to the extent that it followed normative schedules of advancement (i.e. courtship, engagement, marriage, house purchase, childbirth, upsizing, exurbanization, retirement etc.) These were ideologies more than realized ideals, it will be admitted. As both Kevin Floyd and Heather Hicks have pointed out from different perspectives, such normative familial and sexual chrononorms were explicitly encouraged by the Fordist firm (not least of all by Ford’s own) because their stability complemented the kind of reliable, unimaginative, hardworking individual necessary for national industrial production. This is not the case for contemporary regimes of immaterial labour and mental work, which rely on and produce a very different kind of subject, one which organizes their time more like an artist. As Andrew Ross has put it:

In respect both to their function and the use of this [modern] work mentality, it looks as if artists are steadily being relocated from their traditional position at the social margins of the productive economy and recruited into roles closer to the economic centers of production. Indeed, the traditional profile of the artist as unattached and adaptable to circumstance is surely now coming into its own as the ideal definition of the postindustrial knowledge worker: comfortable in an ever-changing environment that demands creative shifts in communication with different kinds of clients and partners; attitudinally geared toward production that requires long, and often unsocial, hours; and accustomed, in the sundry exercise of their mental labor, to a contingent, rather than a fixed, routine of self-application.217

How did this subject come into being, discursively as well as materially? Sarah Brouillette traces its discursive emergence back to the behavioral psychology of the 60s and 70s in writers like Maslow and Peters, who petitioned for a new kind of flexible worker, one able, as Maslow put it, “to live in a world which changes perpetually, which doesn’t stand still”, a person “comfortable with change, who enjoys change, who is able to improvise, who is able to face with the confidence, strength, and courage a situation of which he has absolutely no

forewarning.” (qtd in B, 36) I would say that is also a pretty good description of the adaptability of figures like Margaret Schlegel, Elizabeth Dalloway and Orlando, all of whom embody the kind flexibility and openness to the future and its opportunities that we find in discourses about the creative worker from the mid-century to the present. (“Margaret hoped that for the future she would be less cautious, not more cautious, than she had been in the past.”)

Routing such temporalities though the narrative protocols of adventure, rather than the post-Romantic artist, however, reveals a different genealogy for the rise of this flexible personality. Most centrally, perhaps, it reveals the psychic and embodied dangers inherent in flexible work, rather than the enchanted temporalities of inspiration. In other words, the temporality of romantic inspiration which has come to define the stereotype of the worker as loving change and being open to opportunity and newness at any moment, erases the bad feelings of stress and apprehension that comes with the emergence of such subjectivity. But adventure doesn’t. The sudden temporality of adventure gives form to the contradiction that enchanted suddenness in the workplace sits on a knife edge with disenchanted precarity, as Woolf demonstrated so clearly. Lazzarato has characterized the three predominant affects of post-Fordist modernity as opportunism, cynicism and fear. At least two of these are prefigured by the suddenness of adventure temporality: opportunism and fear, and cynicism is arguably what arises when the subject fails to accommodate itself to the contradiction between the first two terms. Andrew Ross narrates how Silicon Alley workers actually solicited the precariatization of contracts, the rise of project work and freelance style employment (even as an employee), as well as sub-average pay for discounted labor – the first three because they were seen to increase the enchanted riskiness of the work, the last because it meant that colleagues were doing the job for the “work itself”, and not simply for remuneration. The first three features are precisely what Lazzarato means by “opportunism”, the idea that we are all (even as employees) individual entrepreneurs looking out for our own “chance”, our own “risk”, our own opportunity, unhampered by the patriarchal “authority” (or
responsibility) of the firm. This state of work was foreshadowed by the suddenness of psychological modernist adventure, the feeling of unknown danger and challenge lurking round the next corner, in the next imaginative leap. It’s the antithesis of the Fordist production line. After a certain amount of time and endurance has been spent, however, it inevitably leads to fear, to a longing for stable ground, for home, for a lifeworld outside of constant change and revolution. This is no doubt why so many high-end tech works are also spiritual gurus and back to nature fanatics. But when opportunism fails to ward off fear (because of under- or overwork, exhaustion, stress etc.) then it becomes nihilism and cynicism, and this is what we see in Bowen and also in Cusk, where extreme suspicion of communication and its capacity to enchant and even to mean has taken the place of the adventure of work.

One might be tempted to chalk up this kind of cynicism and nihilism to a certain reality principle and to say, with Bowen and with Cusk, that all investments in work are bound to be illusionary under capital, and to agree with Weeks that we need to move towards and fight for a postwork society. But the very ideology of opportunism and its sudden chrononorms are precisely what render immaterial labor in proximity with a certain kind of freedom, a freedom from routinization and standardization and a freedom from a more static and hegemonic social world that was characteristic of high Fordism and its dominant, developmental ideology of the hetero-nuclear family as an end in itself. Lazzarato has described this potential freedom as having the quality of the event: “What the transformation of the product [of immaterial labour] into a commodity cannot remove, then, is the character of event, the open process of creation that is established between immaterial labor and the public and organized by communication.” (my emphasis, 144) This is what Brouillette means when she says that the raw material of the creative class is “the general world of subjectivity and the environment”, which is another way of saying that not all of the worker’s ideas, thoughts, imaginations can be subsumed into the commodity, in the way that the repetitious movement of a hand on a production line can (which is also why improvisation and refusal to
work systematically was still a form of resistance within Fordism in a way it no longer can be). Yet, for contemporary immaterial labour there remains an openness, a contingency, a randomness, which is, as Lazzarato suggests, the space of possibility. “Suddenly there came a moment”: those moments of being in Woolf which we are used to chalking up to a kind of late Romantic temporality of inspiration – they are also, if read via adventure, moments in which the world, the general world of subjectivity and the environment, gets worked on, gets reconfigured, becomes different. That space of difference is still a space of potential freedom within contemporary modes of creative work, even as it is also a new space of precarity.

**Writing**

If the chrononorms of suddenness are what allow savoir to have a fundamentally uncertain relationship to the future, then writing – in its broadest sense of textual systems, alphabetical or otherwise – is what threatens to convert savoir into system and from, reifying it as representation and commodity. It is in writing, in systems of inscription and codification that the unbounded know-how of creativity and the contingent temporality of its work become staticized and fixed. Bowen diagnosed this as the danger of “marking” and it was for her a distinctly masculine tendency inherited from the long nineteenth century development of male-centered professions set on credentialing and formalizing knowledge: whence Marky’s textual monomania and his legal and proto-totalitarian precision with words. But Bowen also presided over the formalization of female affect and emotion work, what I called with Eva Illouz “emotional competence” i.e. the formalizing of aspects of uncodified feminine subjectivity. For Illouz, emotional competence involves the rise of “an intensely specialized emotional culture”, in which emotions are not just described but vigorously produced and nuanced.

Isn’t this the kind of textualization of self that we see at work in contemporary autofictions from Sally Rooney to Rachel Cusk, in which emotional knowledge of self and other becomes the site of a particular kind of textualized middleclass romance? Sarah
Brouillette has recently described this process in relation to Rooney as a culture of therapeutic individualism, in which


\[\text{there is some correlation between being a novel reader and being a person interested in oneself as a therapeutic subject, a self with a psychology that should be explored and cared for and improved and fortified. The novel in English has long become, among other things, one site for the exploration of inner lives, especially those of people in particular social strata, namely bourgeois with university education and not insignificant private wealth; and novel reading can be a kind of therapy and can encourage people to understand themselves as therapeutic characters in journeys of self-discovery.}^{218}\]

That Rooney manages to derive enchantment from the minute description of emotional depths places her in a lineage of Romantic individualism that also characterized Woolf. For Rooney, self-writing, the evermore specialized and nuanced description of subjectivity, can still be a sphere of aesthetic and emotional value, even as she registers the tension between deep humanism and new forms of technology, communication and capture. (The “texting” exchanges of *Conversations with Friends* are superlative in this regard, evincing a kind of techno-communicative impoverishment of language and of the epistolary form, one reminiscent of the dangers inherent in the clipped efficiency of the Wilcoxi“telegram”, and yet remaining a ground of intimacy with its own tender rules of engagement and reciprocity). This is indeed the dialectic that sociologists such as Illouz read in “emotional competence”, which is at once an impoverishment of communicative richness and the basis for new and different forms of sociality. As she Illouz puts it so well:

> In the process I have described, it is virtually impossible to distinguish the rationalization and commodification of selfhood from the capacity of the self to shape and help itself and to engage in deliberation and communication with others. It is the same logic which has made emotions into a new form of capital, which has also made relationships inside the corporation more accountable. It is the same cultural formation which has made women demand an equal position in the public and private spheres that has also made intimate bonds dispassionate, rationalized and susceptible to crass utilitarianism.\(^{219}\)

\(^{218}\) Brouillette, Sarah. “Sally Rooney’s Couple Form” [available at: http://post45.org/2020/06/sally-rooneys-couple-form/]

Cusk’s writing represents this dialectic in its most extreme form. The *Outline* trilogy relays exchanges of intense emotional intimacy and confession in a kind of level, measured, writerly tone. Speech is written reported rather than direct such that there is no variation in emotional pitch even as people convey the most intimate life events and intense feelings. Yet, this totalization of writing and textuality as the very air in which characters move about also creates, as in Bowen, a different kind of space outside of Illouz’s dialectic, a space where writing can become autonomous, can be lifted out of its degraded commercial environments and nebulized as a space of expression and affect floating free of any singular individual or communicative norm. This is the still the space of creative adventure under advanced capitalism which prevents Cusk’s work from becoming totally claustrophobic and nihilistic. But it is also precisely what prevents it becoming a story about new and different kinds of attachments, rather than a romance of removal and distance. Cusk is still struggling with the very Bowenesque question of how to integrate creativity and imagination into social life with others when such capacities are being constantly expropriated by the very logics of one’s professional identity as a “writer”. She thus reminds us of the importance of continuing to find a space for feeling and imagination that is reproductive of neither pessimistic if heroic exile nor glib, cheery-faced participation, which is the ongoing and contested space sought out by aesthetic romance.
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