Networking Institutions of Literary Modernism: Technologies of Writing in Yeats, Joyce, Gissing, and Woolf

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Networking Modernist Institutions: Technologies of Literature in Yeats, Joyce, Gissing, and Woolf explores how authors, readers, and books were linked through complex institutions that produced, distributed, organized, and manipulated literary works. More specifically, I argue that often-overlooked literary systems, such as the private press industry, postal service, and libraries, governed the interaction between books and people. In doing so, I look first to W. B. Yeats and the bookmaking traditions that shaped his notion of a sacred book of literature. By leveraging private press networks, I suggest, Yeats attempted to reimagine the book as a sacred object capable of challenging a commercialized and commodified literary world and enacting a poetic and national tradition distinct from the dominant patterns of literary production in the early twentieth century. I then trace the physical movement of texts through a study of the postal service, arguing that James Joyce reveals the various relays, diversions, destructions, and interventions associated with the movement of mail in *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), and more importantly, that Joyce's formal experiment emanates from these everyday experiences of the mail, as books, printed and delivered, settling on the shelves of private and public institutions. The fiction of George Gissing gives insight into the uses of such spaces on the eve of modernism. I argue that Gissing's chronicle of libraries and their uses in the late nineteenth century provides insight into how modernist authors' ambivalence about the library and its social consequences. Finally, I turn to the fiction of Virginia Woolf, revealing some of the ways books existed as objects in the early twentieth century. As a printer, publisher, binder, reader, and writer, Woolf recognized books as everyday objects that demanded her care and attention. In her fiction, she imagines the ways in which books simultaneously build tangible barriers and create modes of intimacy. Consequently, she inscribes a modernist sense of the book that simultaneously unites its readers ideologically while keeping them physically at a distance. By extending recent studies of modernism's response to the shifting media ecology of its day and the importance of historical readings of the bibliographical context of modernist works, I shed light on literary representations of these institutional spaces and their influence on modernist forms.

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INTRODUCTION

Vanessa Bell's illustration to Virginia Woolf's short story "A Society" depicts three women gathered around a stack of books. Yet their gazes are not directed at the books, but at each other. The books unite the women but do not hold their attention. Bell's woodcut illuminates one of the central concerns of Woolf's story: the value and purpose of book. Woolf writes of a group of women who meet at the library to explore the world beyond the bounds of domesticity. One of these women has been left a large legacy by her father under the condition that she read every book in the London Library. Discouraged by the physical impossibility of the task and doubly disheartened by the strongly patriarchal content she finds while reading the books, she insists that "[b]ooks were not what we thought them."[1] This revelation about the poor quality of the library's collection shocks the women, and to better understand this situation Woolf's characters decide to observe and interrogate the institutions of their day, especially those dealing with the machinations of men, civilization, and cultural reproduction. They find the world of airplanes, telegrams, factories, and business meetings to be immensely complex, and they come away with few reassuring conclusions except that they must task the next generation of women to believe in themselves and their powers of observation and inquiry. Books may not always be what they seem, but they are indeed a bellwether of a culture.

[1] Virginia Woolf, "A Society," *Monday or Tuesday* (London: Hogarth Press, 1921), 14.

This study undertakes a similar line of inquiry, one that examines how Woolf and her fellow modernists thought about books. What did certain authors know about books as objects? How did they represent these books in their works, and how did the institutions of the book trade shape literary form as writers responded to the rhythms and operation of a rapidly evolving media environment in the early decades of the twentieth-century? If books are not what we thought them to be, what are they?

One of the ways to begin answering this question is to examine the institutions and people responsible for designing, printing, distributing, conserving, and handling these objects. Like the women in Bell's woodcut, books, as objects, often bring literary-minded people together as they meet in bookstores, swap titles, or discuss the design or publisher of a volume. Yet their attention often shifts quickly from the book itself—its binding, paper, illustrations, and typography—to the text that it contains. Language in the form of novels, poems, histories, and the like garner interpretive contemplation, while the book object itself is thought to be an indifferent medium, if considered at all. Yet books and their institutions have much to say about the texts they contain. The complex social forms that have accreted around the written word over millennia shape the ways in which we read and write today. Consequently, the institutions that make up the book trade both shape and contain the literary works printed on their pages, and an exploration of printers, postal networks, libraries, and books of all shapes and sizes reveal much about the social and literary worlds of a given text.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Europe and America experienced a rapidly changing media ecology as new technologies and professional practices changed the nature of communications, and subsequently, the shape of the book. Writers'

relationships to these institutions changed in turn. W. B. Yeats, for instance, crafted a literary career by making calculated moves within a complex system of trade that enabled limited editions of his work to appear in an increasingly integrated transatlantic publishing environment. Public library initiatives gave writers such as James Joyce and George Gissing access to books that would have been difficult for someone of their social positions to obtain, and writers like Virginia Woolf called for a further opening of spaces such as the Oxbridge libraries and the British Museum Reading Room to women. Likewise, as the postal technologies such as the telegraph and telephone became increasingly prevalent, people's ideas about communicating across distances and the linguistic forms suited to long-distance communications changed. Literature responded, absorbing these new forms and pushing language in new directions. Literary modernism thus developed concurrently with these transformations of the book and the circuits of communication.

In describing and interrogating these phenomena of literary life in the early twentieth century, I purposefully use the word "institution" to signal both the people and things that constitute the literary act. Institutions are social forms with rules, ideologies, knowledge, and practices that network people and technologies in specific patterns that then manifest themselves in adjacent human activities. Of course, the practices and relationships that exist in the book trade necessarily appear within the pages of literature itself. As authors become increasingly inculcated in the business of making and selling books, these economic structures find expression in the form and content of literary works. An exploration of the institutional field of book production, which might include printing manuals, book advertisements, bookstore ledgers, trade publications, copyright

laws, and other professional texts, sheds light on the literary processes of the authors who participate in and influence the shaping and reproduction of these social institutions.

This view is influenced by *The Institutions of Modernism*, in which Lawrence Rainey argues that modernism might be conceived of as "a social reality, a configuration of agents and practices that converge in the production, marketing, and publication of an idiom, a sharable language within the family of twentieth-century tongues."[2] Modernism in Britain and Ireland arose in part out of a deeply intertwined infrastructure of book production and a shared understanding of what a book was and how it was to be used. Writers and readers had inherited the technological advances and organizational structures of the nineteenth-century publishing world, and in the early part of the twentieth century, writers and publishers in tune with these developments began to codify the rules of the game. Arnold Bennett, for instance, published *How to Become an Author* in 1903, providing straightforward advice about writing, style, and authorial marketing in an attempt to demystify authorship. At first glance, Bennett's text looks like an attempt to democratize the institutions of literature for the masses in the way that the public library movement opened the doors to new readers. Many were suspicious of this professionalization and commodification of art, however. Writers such as George Gissing sought to expose the hardships and alienation of the artist struggling within a literary marketplace that places the bestseller above intelligent and sensitive artistic creation. While vituperative attacks such as Gissing's seem to suggest a unified aversion among modernists to the buying and selling of books, Rainey's study of modernism's publishing

[2] Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 34.

environment demonstrates that modernism was far more ambivalent about the commercial and popular concerns than it led some to believe.[3]

Of course, the buying and selling of books—"the price of modernism," as Rainey terms it—are not the only institutional forces at play throughout the lifecycle of a book. A number of other agents and practices contribute to the making of the book and its uses. As it moves from an author's mind to printer's bed and into readers' hands, a book comes in contact with an entire social and environmental milieu that shapes the book and its reception. In his influential essay, "What Is Book History?," Robert Darnton proposes one way of thinking about these historical processes that have shaped book production. In order to better understand this messy and complex process, Darnton conceptualizes a "communications circuit" that traces the people, processes, institutions, and social pressures acting on a book as it moves from author to reader.[4] The primary nodes of this circuit are familiar to those with even a casual knowledge of how books get made—a book begins in the mind of an author; a manuscript is delivered to a publisher who, after deciding to take the financial risks of introducing it to the world, sends it to a printer. After copies leave the press they are shipped to booksellers who then stock the books on their shelves and sell copies to readers. Readers respond to authors and publishers in a number of ways from reviews to sales numbers, and the process may or may not start again with a new edition. Although Darnton's model necessarily leaves out much of the

[3] Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, 3.

[4] Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?," in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990).

individual intricacy in the ways in which books have been produced throughout history, it is undoubtedly a solid blueprint for understanding the contours of book production.[5]

As book history has evolved as a discipline, it has tended to focus on particular nodes within this communications circuit of individuals, institutions, and practices to the exclusion of others. This study sheds light on some of the often-neglected institutions of this circuit by examining the ways in which books and the institutions tasked in their creation, distribution, and utilization shaped the aesthetics and ideologies of literary modernism. The private press industry as imagined by the Arts and Crafts Movement, the postal service as a conveyor of books, the library, and the literature surrounding the proper use and potential misuses of books were important sites for modernist writers as they navigated the terms of their own authorship and represented these institutions in their works.

Although literary critics have sometimes overlooked these important institutional contexts, many modernist writers were acutely aware of their institutional standing and the changes in the publishing industry and in the look of the book. As a way of coming to terms with the technologies of literature and the institutions that governed them, writers wrote these technologies and institutions into their fiction. Printers, bookbinders, librarians, booksellers, and collectors appear as characters in even the earliest stirrings of

[5] Many other models have since challenged Darnton's, most notably Thomas R. Adams and Nicholas Barker's "socio-economic conjuncture" in "A New Model for the Study of the Book," *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, ed. Nicholas Barker (London: British Library, 1993). A summary of the developments in the field after Darnton's initial work appeared can also be found in Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books?" Revisited," *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007): 495-508.

European modernism.[6] Fiction became increasingly self-conscious about its own means of production, as shown in its exploration of those engaged in the book trade. For instance, a reading of Joris-Karl Huysmans's naturalistic novel following the lives of bookbinders in Paris, *Les Soers Vatard* (1879), is enriched by the act of holding a book. The difficult and sordid lives of the Varard sisters are not just present in the words of the novel, but also seemingly infused into the ink, paper, and binding of the book. The notion that the book one is reading might have been bound by someone very much like the characters of the novel gives the reading experience an immediacy that readers only rarely encountered. Huysmans's novel, like others of the sort, thus resonated on both textual and material levels. As we will later see, George Gissing writes the story, albeit a partial one, of London's literary world at the end of the nineteenth century.

My suggestion that the book itself is part of a literary work and is, in fact, an essential component of the literary text that complements its linguistic presences relies upon a materialist hermaneutic that understands the medium to be essential to the written message. Bibliography and book history offer methods to expand the institutional field of literature and more fully consider the ways that authors and readers understand the cultural forms that produce, deliver, and conserve their books, as well as how they seek to reimagine these spaces. Bibliography in particular, once the domain of small group of dedicated bibliophiles, collectors, and sellers, has shifted under the influence of those seeking to understand the historical consequences of the production and distribution of books and the ideas they contain. Through a focus on the material details of books—their

[6] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *The Vatard Sisters*, trans. James C. Babcock (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

paper, ink, typefaces, and bindings, among other aspects—whole social worlds can be reconstructed. In this vein, Jerome McGann argues that a text exists as "a laced network of linguistic and bibliographic codes."[7] Modernist works are central to McGann's articulation of this materialist hermeneutic because of the self-conscious deployment of material signifiers by poets such as Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats, and Marianne Moore. In analyzing these authors' works, McGann reveals a strain of poetic composition that originated in Blake's illuminated books and matured in William Morris's "materialist aesthetic," which Morris achieved through his revival of hand-printing techniques combined with medieval book design. Taken up by modernist writers, McGann suggests, this modernist orientation toward the literary book became a way of remaking Victorian poetics and striking off in a new literary direction.

McGann's approach has been taken up by other literary scholars who have used the data gathered from compositional histories and close studies of the material features of books to generate novel literary interpretations. Following close upon the project set forth by McGann, George Bornstein in *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* argues that the material forms of transmission carry important historical and political interpretations for modernist texts. Bornstein's understanding of genetic editing methodologies, especially in regards to his work on Yeats's manuscript materials and published revisions, led to readings that sought to dislodge then-dominant ahistorical approaches to literary modernism. In his readings of Yeats's works, the poems emerge as utterances or print events that refuse to stand still as singular, stable texts. Their evolution

[7] Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13.

over multiple drafts and numerous textual instantiations reveals the multiple and often competing meanings that emanate from individual incarnations. In a poem such as "September 1913," for instance, the political and social implications of the work are modulated by its publication in various states from its initial appearance in *The Irish Times* to its publication by the Cuala Press and also Macmillan. He concludes that as Yeats's poem moves to a contemporary anthology such as the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry,* "[t]he effect is gradually to de-politicize this extraordinarily political poem, finally reducing it at best to an artifact talking about politics rather than incarnating them."[8] Through a careful attention to these various sites of publication, Bornstein shows how political meaning shifts in response to the paratextual circumstances of a poem's publication. However, the focus on the political potential of a poem begs the question of how Yeats interpreted the publishing institutions in which he participated and how he navigated this network of technologies and actors.

Using Yeats's first collection of poems with the Dun Emer Press as a case study, David Holdeman provided a much more extensive reading of the material signifiers of Yeats's shift in tone from his early Romantically-styled early poems to a more modernist tone in the collection *In the Seven Woods* (1903). In doing so he offers extensive readings of the poems as they appear in this particular manifestation, focusing on how printers and publishers co-author a work through their orchestration of the material signifiers of the text. Holdeman's careful study shows how editing practices destabilized the notion of a stable text and how meaning can be gleaned from each separate textual event rather than

[8] George Bornstein, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 55.

the product of an author's supposed final intention. By examining the ordering of poems and their bibliographic markers, Holdeman argues that Yeats's emerging architecture signaled a new modernist poetics that "spatially reinforced his attempts to order his poems progressively and implicated the contextual codes of his works in a complex fabric of ideological allegiances."[9]

These examples from Yeats's critical reception highlight a broader trend in materialist understandings of modernist texts in which the study of little magazines and modernist periodicals further participate.[10] While these studies provide new ways of understanding individual poems and the position of certain collections within a particular oeuvre, they often overlook the larger institutional networks at play within modernist literary and book production, as well as the ways in which authors and readers leveraged these institutions for their own aims.

Accounts of the technologies important to the shaping of literary modernism have tended to chase the spectre of the new. As a technology, the codex, then almost two-thousand years old, may appear to be out of step with the mechanical revolutions of modernism. How could the book compete with the sensory delights and practical uses of the photograph, film, or gramophone? Yet the book, in some form, still dominated literary production during the period of literary modernism. There is no getting around the fact that Yeats's *A Vision*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* appeared in

[9] David Holdeman, *Much Labouring: The Texts and Authors of Yeats's First Modernist Books* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 31-32.

[10] See Mark Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

book form. This simple fact has complex consequences for those wishing to unravel the relationship between literature and the bookish institutions that hold and support it.

In this study, I investigate four authors who have long been recognized as seminal voices in literary modernism in Britain and Ireland and have had a profound influence in shaping the future of literary institutions. In their own ways, Yeats, Joyce, Gissing, and Woolf participated in and chronicled the world of books. To better elucidate the conditions of modernist writing, I explore the underappreciated mechanisms and objects, such as the private press movement, the postal service, libraries, and the materiality of books, through which readers first encountered the works of these authors, arguing that a close scrutiny of these modes of literary production is able to reshape our sense of how literature is created and sustained. I also consider the history and representation of these processes, arguing that they reveal the medium of the book to be an essential component of the modernist sensibility. Yeats's achievements as a modernist poet, for example, are inseparable from his forays into book history and the techniques and ideologies of private press production in the making of sacred books of literature. Joyce's sense of postal networks likewise shaped his experimentations in language and the contingent nature of communication across distance and time. Gissing's chronicle of the professionalization of authorship and the role of libraries as spaces for writers marginalized by class and gender reveal the opportunities and limits for those attempting to represent lives and ideas outside of conventional literary forms while speaking to the changing parameters of literary representation. Finally, Woolf forces a reinterpretation of the ordinary objects of everyday life, asking us to reexamine the very book objects, complete with their histories, social forms, human relationships, through which we experience literature.

An understanding of these authors and their institutional landscape suggests new directions from understanding how global modernism strategically adapted to and transformed institutions to support further explorations and inquiries into the role of literature in the modern world. As our own world explores and contests new media technologies and the vagaries of cultural production and distribution, this study offers us a more nuanced understanding of how modernist writers understood and shaped a media ecology that resonates even today.

* * * * *

This study is organized into four chapters, each of which takes up a particular network of modernist literary representation. The first chapter, "Yeats and the Private Press," focuses on Yeats's representations of books and book production in relation to the ideologies of the private press movement in Britain and Ireland. Beginning with the debates about labor and aesthetics raised by William Morris and other proponents of the Arts and Crafts Movement, I investigate the networks of textual transmission that appear in Yeats's work. I look specifically at his later work to see how poetic and philosophical legitimacy is purchased through certain forms of textual production and transmission in *A Vision.*

Discussions of the post office and modernism have mostly been limited to discussing desire and writing, per Derrida's formulation in *The Post Card* (1987). In the second chapter, "Joyce and the Postal Imagination," I attend to the physical spaces and lived experiences of those operating in and using the postal service to transmit letters and packages. The Irish post office, in particular, has a profound practical and symbolic place within modern literature. As the site of the Easter Rising and a hub of communications

for the Royal Mail, the General Post Office (GPO) in Dublin was symbol of colonial power, a place of everyday exchange, and a site for national resistance. More broadly in the literature of the time, the post office and its networks of exchange simultaneously represent connectivity and fragmentation, hegemonic power and resistance, the local and the global. Modernist understandings of the post represent a significant break from a Victorian notion that emphasized speed, efficiency, and fidelity. I argue that Joyce's *Ulysses* provides an intriguing representation of the postal service and its employees while participating in a fragmented aesthetic that comes out of the stops, relays, and diversions of a modern postal network.

In the third chapter, "Gissing and Librarious Networks," I explore libraries as social spaces and organizers of knowledge. One of the major institutions featured in Gissing's work is the library in all of its multifarious dimensions. Representations of the British Museum from *New Grub Street* are considered next to those of other libraries such as the newly opened National Library in Dublin, the private libraries of collectors such as Ernest McClintock Dix, and the humbler libraries of everyday readers. I look at these spaces in relation to the information science of the time, the physical architecture of such spaces, and the political debates surrounding the formation of national libraries. In looking at the construction of the modern library, I help bring modernist practices of collecting and organization into focus.

When compared to the finely crafted volumes of Morris's Kelmscott or the Yeats's Cuala Press, the design and presswork of the Hogarth comes up short. However, this doesn't necessarily imply a wholesale disregard for the material properties of the book or the book's status as an object on the part of the Woolfs. In the fourth chapter,

"Woolf, Books, and Non-reading," I consider the early fiction of Virginia Woolf, those novels and short stories completed before and shortly after the genesis of the Press in 1917, which I argue provide insight into various uses of books other than reading. For instance, in *The Voyage Out* (1915), books make up a significant portion of the cargo traveling along with Rachael Vinrace to South America. Even while the novel's characters are in the act of reading, Woolf often represents words and letters as objects rather than immaterial language. Rachael's reading practices are described as "handling words as though they were made of wood, separately of great importance, and possessed of shapes like tables or chairs." Here, I argue, printed language becomes the everyday furniture of modern life, simple objects that can be moved and manipulated and that lie at the heart of the networks of an international trade of people, ideas, and commodities, even as the objects threaten to disrupt them.

CHAPTER 1

Yeats's Sacred Book and the Modernist Private Press

Shortly after assuming the position of literary editor to the Dun Emer Press, W. B. Yeats created a row. The press, which had been set up by the poet's sister Elizabeth Corbet Yeats in conjunction with Evelyn Gleeson, a former officer of the London Irish Literary Society, was engaged in the typesetting and printing of its second book, A. E.'s *The Nuts of Knowledge*. After a significant amount of time and planning had been spent on producing the limited-edition, hand-printed book, Yeats began to doubt the quality of his friend's verse and ordered his sister to stop production. He wanted extensive edits and revisions of his fellow poet's manuscript before printing could resume. Always on guard against her brother's high-handedness and growing in her awareness of the practicalities of running a press, Elizabeth objected to his assessment and ignored the directive, opting instead to keep working on the book in order to satisfy orders and keep revenues flowing. Equally annoyed, A. E. summarized the early difficulties of the press to patron and collector John Quinn: "I am afraid if he will not let them print anything which is not on the level of a sacred book the output will be small."[1]

The tension between the practicalities of book production and the quest to ascend to the level of a sacred book characterizes Yeats's poetic life and his relationships with his fellow authors, publishers, and readers. His involvement in the Dun Emer Press, which was later renamed the Cuala Press, arose from his desire for an Irish artisanal

[1] George William Russell, *Letters from AE*, ed. Alan Denson (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1961), 48.

publisher, one distanced from the London literary scene and modern modes of trade book production. As a private press, Dun Emer allowed its authors a certain amount of freedom from traditional commercial restraints, such as the popular designs and materials used in books at the time. In this regard, Yeats's search for a sacred book led him to consider the book traditions of the past and reinvent them for his poetry and those of his friends. Yeats found rich bookmaking traditions in the art, literature, and bibliography of French decadence and British aestheticism, as well as in the traditions of his occult fascinations. Furthermore, he looked at book production in Ireland over the ages, from its origins in medieval manuscripts to its heyday of print in the eighteenth century and its decline in the following century.

While the concept of a sacred book is tethered to many ancient histories, the sacred book, for Yeats, was both utilitarian and symbolic—a ritualistic object tied to the act of reading as well as a portal to a supernatural or intellectual world. During the 1890s, he increasingly explored the ways in which literature and culture might fill the void left by the failures of Irish politics and the erosion of belief in traditional religion. He searched for a scripture that might hold the laws, traditions, and symbols on which a new literary dispensation might be established. Mysticism, magic, and poetry offered a way forward, leading to the creation of a set of Celtic mysteries that could unite various thinkers and artists in a common set of rituals and symbols. After a visit to Castle Rock in Lough Key, Yeats worked out some of the practical details and thinking behind such an outlandish venture:

> I planned a mystical Order which should buy or hire a castle, and keep it as a place where its members could retire for a while for contemplation, and where we

> might establish mysteries like those of Eleusis and Samothrace; and for ten years to come my most impassioned thought was a vain attempt to find a philosophy and to create ritual for that Order.[2]

The castle and its ceremonies and rituals never came to fruition, but the idea of them remained with Yeats throughout his career. He continued to search for the sacred objects that might help bring about these mysteries,[3] and throughout his poems certain symbols return again and again. Like the tower and winding stair, Yeats created poetic symbols from the physical objects and architecture near to hand. Formative encounters with strange and sacred books shaped his thinking about what a book could be and how it might act as a symbol and a catalyst for new poetic experiences. The Upanishads, Kabbalah, Swedenborg, and Blake, as well as resplendent volumes like the Book of Kells and the Kelmscott Chaucer, gave a sense of what the book could be and what it could do. Yeats's involvement in the burgeoning private press movement in Ireland and England at the time allowed him to create books out of these experiences, books in which the book as an art object and sacred artifact communes with the verse on the page. In word and appearance, these books disrupted conventional modes of reading and interpretation—a type of disruption that became central to the modernist literary project.

In order to understand how Yeats's books are constructed and how they operate symbolically, it is necessary to revisit what he thought about books in terms of their

[2] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald, assisted by J. Frasier Cocks III and Gretchen Schwenker (New York: Scribner, 1999), 204.

[3] As late as November 1917, Yeats questioned the spirits about the sacred objects that might function within his Celtic mysteries during an automatic writing session with his wife George. See George Mills Harper, *The Making of Yeats's* A Vision*: A Study of the Automatic Script*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1987), 37.

design, manufacture, uses, and history—what I call his bibliographic imagination. As a reader, Yeats encountered many strange and wonderful books that shaped his imagination, but his most revealing statements about the power and potential of books appear in the works he produced at the beginning and the end of his career—the short stories of *The Sacred Rose* (1897) and the mystical, philosophical masterpiece *A Vision* (1925, 1937). In these works, Yeats writes of books as the objects by which revelation becomes possible, objects that also have specific and suggestive bibliographic features that originated in the nineteenth-century book trade, the history of book design, and the aesthetic practices in Britain and the continent.

Drawing on this vision of how the sacred book of the arts might look, Yeats worked throughout his career to disrupt traditional publishing and bookmaking methods even as he published with well-known commercial publishers such as Macmillan, as well as more artistically and socially ambitious publishers such as Cuala. As his career and poetry evolved, he began to more fully realize his ideal of the sacred book by utilizing private press institutions to better control the material realizations of his works. In imagining the material sites of sacred writing and deploying these markers in his own books, Yeats inaugurates a form of modernist writing that considers the physical markers of the book and the tradition of book construction as part of the sacred ritual of reading.

Creating a Sacred Book

During the 1890s, Yeats found himself in a milieu that tied the act of printing to the arts of the visionary. With Edwin J. Ellis, Yeats studied and edited the works of William Blake, and he became fascinated with Blake's printed manuscripts and book

illustrations. He had also been traveling in the circle of William Morris, whose Kelmscott Press production had begun causing a stir in both the literary and art worlds. Blake and Morris fused the roles of poet and book-maker, and although Yeats never had much ambition to actually make books himself, he saw the artistic potential in designing unique and sumptuous books to house poetry.

Yeats's first articulation of how the book as a sacred object might function in the aesthetic climate of the times comes in "The Celtic Element of Literature" (1897), where he considers the book's potential as an important symbol for the age: "The arts by brooding upon their own intensity have become religious, and are seeking, as I think [Emile] Verhaeren has said, to create a sacred book."[4] Yeats had probably come across this idea in Stéphane Mallarmé's *le livre, instrument spirituel.*[5] There, Mallarmé declares that "all earthly existence must ultimately be contained in a book,"[6] and his essay on this idea uses the book as an extended metaphor for thinking about an all-encompassing record of existence. To further elucidate his rather opaque musings in this direction, Mallarmé draws a comparison between material forms of the newspaper and the book. For instance, he suggests,

> The foldings of a book, in comparison with the large-sized, open newspaper, have an almost religious significance. But an even greater significance lies in their

[4] W. B. Yeats, *Early Essays*, ed. Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), 138.

[5] Yeats, *Early Essays*, 324n.

[6] Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Book: Spiritual Instrument," in *Mallarmé: Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, trans. Bradford Cook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), 24.

thickness when they are piled together; for then they form a tomb in miniature for our souls.[7]

Furthermore, he argues that "were it not for the folding of the paper and the depths thereby established, that darkness scattered about in the form of black characters could not rise and issue forth in gleams of mystery from the page."[8] Mallarmé defamiliarizes the book in order to draw a sharp contrast between the codex and the newspaper. The newspaper seemed to be the defining medium of the nineteenth century. Literary realism aped its linguistic and stylistic techniques, and it increasingly became the preferred medium for a majority of readers. Yet Mallarmé draws attention to its flimsy flatness and transparency compared to the solid complexity of a book with its hidden folds and accretion of layered materials. The book's significance and symbolism lies in its material properties—its pages, ink, covers, binding—and meditating on its form can lead to revelations about the world and the book's relationship to eternal forms.

As a poet and magician, Yeats found Mallarmé's idea of the book as a spiritual instrument a seductive poetic ideal. The sacred book was a symbol for what Yeats would later call the *anima mundi*—a sort of collective consciousness or a "multiform reverie, every mind passing through a stream of suggestion, and all acting and reacting upon one another."[9] Within this flux of thought, salient symbols emerged, and the sacred book was capable of capturing these shared moments of revelation. Learning from Yeats, Ezra Pound echoed the need for a well of foundational symbols upon which poets might draw:

[7] Mallarmé, "The Book: Spiritual Instrument," 25.
[8] Mallarmé, "The Book: Spiritual Instrument," 26.
[9] Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 210.

"At a time when there is imperative need of a BASIS, i.e. what ole Unc. Wm. Yeats called 'new sacred book of the arts.'"[10] Other poets also used the sacred book to describe the literary act. George Russell, for example, echoed Yeats's sentiments in his essay "The Memory of the Spirit," in which he argues that "[a]ll literature tends to produce a sacred book by an evolution of thought of the highest minds building one upon another."[11] The sacred book became part of the way in which writers of this period discussed their influences and their metaphysical preoccupations, but more significantly, it argued for a mode of symbolism that rejected art for art's sake, preferring instead to engage in the world by providing a physical manifestation of the immaterial world. The book in its physical substantiation represented the eternal thoughts and symbols that powered poetic language.

For a poet disillusioned with British positivism, industrialization, and empire, the book as a sacred object was particularly appealing. Yeats had encountered Mallarmé's writings during his visits to Paris in the 1890s. With Arthur Symons as his guide, Yeats absorbed the ideas of French symbolism and began the process of inventing his own poetic symbols. The technology of the book became an important literary battleground—one that had decisive historical effects on the course of literature and one that poets believed that they had to win back from profit-hungry publishers and crude journalists. In his essay "Fact in Literature," Symons traces the effects of a changing media landscape in which orality and manuscript culture have given way to print and the era of the

[10] Ezra Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 240.

[11] George Russell, "The Memory of the Spirit," in *The Candle of Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 151.

newspaper. His final assessment is stark: "The invention of printing helped to destroy literature."[12] The medieval book, in his mind, was the ideal medium for literature. Medieval books were objects that required laborious copying either from memory or another similarly crafted book. The medieval book and its literary contents were not "thrown away on people who did not want them."[13] The newspaper, on the other hand, was designed to be disposable. Flimsy newsprint was made to be destroyed or repurposed to make space for tomorrow's news. Symons argues that "[w]ith the deliberate destruction of print, the respect for printed literature vanished, and a single term came to be used for the poem and for the 'news' item."[14]

The distinction between elite literary and mass cultures was increasingly blurred, and Symons attributes this loss of clarity to the changing media ecology that began with Gutenberg and had in more recent years been wholly transformed through the mechanization of the printing process. According to Symons, literature becomes threatened when it no longer has a distinctive space and a clear audience. As literature moved away from the books of the past toward the periodical, it lost its relationship to facts and reality. Since poetry and fiction appear amongst the closely printed columns of the newspaper, Symons argues, readers tend to take them as fact, rather than "an imaginative reading of the universe."[15] Writers subsequently pander to this worship of fact, and literary imagination dissolves into journalism without art. As Symons saw this state of affairs, literature was intimately tied to its medium, and if literature was to return

[12] Arthur Symons, "Fact in Literature," in *Studies in Prose and Verse* (London: J.M. Dent, 1904), 1.

[13] Symons, "Fact in Literature," 1.

[14] Symons, "Fact in Literature," 1.

[15] Symons, "Fact in Literature," 3.

to its musicality—its aesthetic presence without reliance on fact—books needed to take new shapes. One of the ways forward was a return to the forms of the past. If the book seemed to go wrong around the time of Gutenberg, the medieval book provided a way forward.

Like Symons's envisioning, Yeats's idea for a sacred book of the arts revived a medieval notion of textuality that saw a correspondence between the book and the universe. And like the ornate and sumptuous volumes of the great medieval scriptoria, Yeats envisioned books that were handcrafted and designed to confer honor as well as provide a layered visual symbolism to the words on the page. Medieval books, especially those believed to have originated from divine inspiration, chronicled the world along with its history and destiny; more than that, though, the books themselves mirrored a divine order.[16] In fact, some have argued that the rise of Christianity is inextricably linked to the transition from scroll to codex because of the ways in which the book allows one to easily flip between the prophecies of the Old Testament and their corresponding fulfillments in the New Testament.[17] Early Christian communities seemed to prefer the codex because of its portability, ease of use, and durability when constructed from parchment. The book suited the practical and spiritual needs of Christianity. This centrality of the book was only amplified during the Reformation, when the Bible and other spiritual tracts enabled

[16] See Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). Gellrich argues from Derrida that "the idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality" (34). Gellrich also proposes that within the medieval world, the book was seen as the ultimate metaphor, combining the signifier with the signified, word with material—signifying the totality that was God.

[17] Michael Lyons, *Books: A Living History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011).

the laity to connect with scripture directly, facilitating the growth of more personal relationships to the divine. In the West, the book was intimately connected to divine Judeo-Christian traditions and was likewise made in its image.

However, as Yeats recognized, the arrival of the Enlightenment and its subsequent technological advances changed the appearance and the meaning of the book. Britain's industrial revolution created further changes by bringing steam-powered presses and other advances to the book industry. While religious books were still a subject of public concern, in the late nineteenth century, discourses of the book largely focused on the improvement of printing technology, the progress in education, and the economics of the book trade. For most Victorians, books were objects advertised in newspapers and propped behind the windows of stationers' shops. They could offer distraction on the train or relaxation in quiet moments. Books were retrieved from the lending library, stacked on shelves, and dusted. They were objects of everyday life, and except for grand liturgical texts, books didn't seem like particularly spiritual instruments to the common reader.[18] The book had lost its sacred aura and had become a lusterless commodity among many.

Yeats's concern thus responded, in part, to the general decline in the art of bookmaking at the end of the nineteenth century. Changes in the printing industry throughout the nineteenth century had made very large print runs of inexpensive books possible, and publishers rushed to sell these books to a public interested in cheap, disposable reading material. Yeats noticed the discrepancy between the rather grand

[18] See Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

books printed in the eighteenth century and the flimsy books in paper covers sold at railway stations and newsagents across the British Isles. The Dublin book trade in particular produced an inferior product in Yeats's mind. He went so far to note the foul smell of Irish books that were bound using rotten glue.[19]

Others had similarly raised the alarm about the sorry state of fine typography and bookmaking at the time. Most notably, William Morris tried to change the tide of printing in England with the Kelmscott Press and his other arts and crafts industries. Yeats was tied into the activities of Morris through his attendance at French lessons and socialist meetings at the Kelmscott house, and Morris's attention to the material book as an art object that unites poetry and printing came to influence Yeats. In fact, one of Yeats's most prized possessions was a copy of the famed Kelmscott Chaucer, which he received for his fortieth birthday through a collection taken up by his friends. The poet displayed the volume prominently on its own lectern in his household.

Yeats saw the private press model championed by Morris as one way of achieving a physical form that would be commensurate with the abstract qualities of the sacred book of the arts towards which he was working. However, many of his early attempts proved unsuccessful. Throughout the 1890s, A. H. Bullen published a number of Yeats's works, and in 1902, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* received a shoddy treatment by the Caradoc Press. Bullen had commissioned the work with H. G. Webb, who had opened a press in Chiswick in imitation of the Kelmscott style. Unfortunately, Webb did not have Morris's impeccable design sense, and the Caradoc books suffer from a lack of unity in the layout and ornamentation as well as inferior materials. *Cathleen* appeared in paper boards with a

[19] Yeats, *Early Essays* 171.

leather spine in an edition of 300. Eight additional copies were printed on Japanese vellum and bound with silk ties.[20] At its worst, the book could be seen an eyesore, with its garish rubrication and zoomorphic designs that looked more like a tangled knot of twine than the carefully interlaced figures in the Book of Kells.

Writing to famous printer Sydney Cockerell, Yeats registered his displeasure with the construction of his latest volume: "Bullen has published a little play of mine, Kathleen ni Hoolihan, at the Caradoc Press—and though it is better than mechanical printing it is bad enough. I am sorry I agreed to it. It is not worth the price and I am ashamed to hear of anybody buying it."[21] Determined to avoid repeating this misfortune, Yeats asked Cockerell to prepare "directions that cannot possibly be misunderstood" for the binding of his latest volume, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, to be published again by the "petulant" Bullen. Even sacred books must trade in the marketplaces of modern Europe. Yeats assumed that readers "will be all the more glad to buy the vellumn [sic] copies if the design is not made common by printing it on all copies in some poorer way" as he discussed the reprinting of *The Wind Among the Reeds* with a view to a new binding with gold tooling and vellum paper.[22]

Yeats's claims to the creation of sacred books, as well as his literary quarrel with his sister Elizabeth over the publication of Russell's poems, become much more complex when considered in light of the publishing institutions of the time. Yeats was preparing Russell's book for a new publishing venture trying to establish itself within the Irish

[20] Allan Wade, *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats*, 2nd and revised ed. (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1958), 56-57.

[21] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume III, 1901-1904*, ed. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 236.

[22] Yeats, *Collected Letters: Volume III*, 228.

literary scene. The Dun Emer (Cuala) Press dedicated itself to Irish authors and books made by Irish women with local materials. In a publishing age increasing characterized by inexpensive books and ephemeral periodicals issuing from London, the Dun Emer used an iron hand-press to craft limited-edition books. In doing so, the press tapped into existing bookmaking currents in England, and its inspiration and success came from the influence of William Morris and printer Emory Walker, both of whom had popularized the English arts and crafts movement's notion of the beautiful, handmade book, as well as the fashionable demand for distinctively Irish designs and handicrafts stimulated by cultural nationalism. The press strove to "find work for Irish hands in the making of beautiful things."[23] Yet W. B. Yeats, as literary editor, had his own personal and artistic aims that sought to unite his ethereal ideas to material practices.

Throughout his life, Yeats identified works he considered to be influential in the development of his personal style and that of his age, and he used the term "sacred book" to demarcate these works of special importance. He remembered Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* as an early "sacred book" after he encountered the text as a child in a manuscript of Edward Dowden's *Life of Shelley*.[24] Later in life, he recalled that "[p]erhaps 'Faust' 'Louis Lambert' 'Seraphite' & 'Axel' are our sacred books, man self-sufficing & eternal, though "Axel" is but a spectacle, an echo of the others."[25] With the exception of Goethe's *Faust*, Yeats's selections seem to be unlikely sources for the creation of lasting sacred texts. However, each in its own way reveals key elements of

[23] Dun Emer Prospectus (1903), quoted in Liam Miller, *The Dun Emer Press, Later the Cuala Press* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1973), 15.

[24] Yeats, *Autobiographies* 170.

[25] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats,* gen. ed. John Kelly, Oxford University Press (InteLex Electronic Edition, 2002), 817.

Yeats's own spiritual and literary apprenticeship. Each of these works represents books as more than literary props or realist details. Books are symbolically powerful, and their material properties are carefully presented for those attuned to the long-standing traditions of bibliographic transmission. *Faust* is the archetypal tale of supernatural knowledge and use of a grimoire to obtain it, and *Seriphita*, another tale of a young man's search for spiritual knowledge, has similar bibliographic passages, such as its lengthy discussion of the works of Swedenborg. Balzac had grouped *Seriphita* along with the loosely autobiographical *Louis Lambert* (1832) in a volume entitled *Le Livre Mystique*. The latter novel draws upon the romantic trope of the found manuscript, or in this case, the reconstructed manuscript. The novel is the narrator's attempt to record for posterity a lost manuscript written by a boyhood school friend whose genius and interest in the metaphysical leads him to the writings of Swedenborg and his followers. After the death of Louis Lambert, the narrator writes of this lost book that "[i]n all probability Father Haugoult sold . . . as so much waste-paper to some grocer in Vendôme, never imagining the value of the scientific treasures whose still-born germs were thus scattered by the hands of ignorance."[26] Here, as in much of Yeats's works, a lost or hidden book often contains the keys to some enlightenment or the path to some otherworldly knowledge. In the opening pages of *Louis Lambert*, an education through books defines the young Lambert. His early experiences with the Bible "decided his destiny" and led to a childhood where he "begged and borrowed books throughout the little town; obtaining them by that persuasive charm whose secret belongs to childhood and which no one is

[26] Honoré de Balzac, *Seraphita,* trans. Clara Bell-O'Shea (London: J. M. Dent, 1897), 199-200. [WBY owned the translation by Clara Bell-O'Shea, 106.]

able to resist."[27] The small personal libraries in Balzac's Vendômois lent books to the curious son of the local tanner shaping his early intellectual life and the spiritual journey that occupies the reader throughout the novel.

Louis Lambert is a loosely autobiographical account of Balzac's own adolescence at the Oratorian College de Vendôme and his interest in Swedenborgian teachings. It also bears traces of Balzac's deep knowledge of book culture. Only a few years before the publication of the novel, he had tried his hand at publishing, printing, and typefounding. He failed at each of these enterprises but not without observing their habits and structures. His keen eye for the details of everyday life resulted in careful descriptions of books, libraries, and sites of reading more generally. In *Louis Lambert* in particular, Balzac records how the French Revolution caused a redistribution of books that had for centuries been guarded by the Church and aristocracy. Lambert studies his uncle's library, a collection of books gathered from the pillage of Church and aristocracy holdings. As the narrator notes, Lambert's uncle "had been able as *pratre assessment* to cull the choicest works from the precious collections which were sold in those days by the weight."[28] One of these books seals the poor boy's fate, as Madame de Staël discovers Lambert reading a translation of Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* on a park bench. She takes the book from him, and impressed with the young boy's knowledge of the Christian mystic, she decides Lambert is a "Seer" and becomes his benefactor.[29] Yeats's own semi-autobiographical novel, *The Speckled Bird*, shares many similarities with Balzac's novel in both the experience of strange and wonderful books and the

[27] Balzac, *Seraphita*, 156.
[28] Balzac, *Seraphita*, 6.
[29] Balzac, *Seraphita*, 9-10.

unorthodox teachings the books urge their protagonists toward. They are objects at the very center of the intellectual development of the protagonists and a symbol of their rich and tumultuous inner worlds.

Swedenborg's system of correspondences reveals similar connections between the book and self. The Swedish mystic writes that books are symbols of "the interiors of the mind of man, because in them are written all thing appertaining to his life."[30] For Yeats also, the book is representative of an interior self. Just as hermeticism sees a correspondence between the physical and spiritual worlds—as above, so below—the book is a faded version of human consciousness and spirituality. This is evident in Yeats's later poems in which the book becomes a symbol of Yeats's vulnerability in the display of his public self, as in "Vacillation" or "An Acre of Grass."

However, this ideal sacred book didn't always work out in the practical world. Yeats was also frequently on the lookout for books that might meet his sensibilities. While in New York, he received an unappealing privately printed book that he decided to "send to Lolly [Elizabeth Corbet Yeats] as a bad example." He also sought out books from the American Roycroft Shop, which George Russell had discussed with him. These poorly produced knockoffs of Kelmscott books received only abuse from Yeats: "[N]othing could be worse. The books are eccentric, restless and thoroughly decadent."[31] As the poet would soon discover, the making of beautiful books was a difficult task. He saw the private press model as one way of achieving a physical form that would be

[30] Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Dictionary of Correspondences, Representatives and Significatives, Derived from the Word of the Lord* (Boston: T. H. Carter & Sons, 1868), 43.

[31] Yeats, *Collected Letters: Volume III,* 496.

commensurate with the abstract qualities of the sacred book of the arts towards which he was working. His associations with Morris, the Cuala Press, and other private press institutions were the means to achieve this end.

Yeats's first significant engagement with book design and the tradition of bookmaking came in *The Secret Rose*. Early reviews of the book almost always point to the paratextual aspects of the first edition: most notably, the illustrations by the author's father, John B. Yeats, and the cover design by Althea Gyles. When Yeats first met Gyles, she was living on the first floor of the Dublin Theosophy Society and was very active in the occult artistic circles of the time. She designed the book as a grimoire.[32] In the cover design, Yeats's central poetic symbols find visual form, and a careful examination of the cover illuminates many of Yeats's efforts to create a body of Celtic mysteries through his fiction and poetry. The rosy cross at the center of Gyles's design interweaves the symbolic unities that dominate Yeats's writings. The rose bush unites male and female energies in the lovers emerging from the branches. Light emanating from the central rose pierces the darkened background. The tree itself grows out of the bones of a dead Celtic warrior with helmet, spear, and shield, and out of this ancient figure the tree's branches interweave in a rough imitation of the interlacing of Irish manuscripts such as the Book of Kells. The back cover consists of a circle with an octagon formed by arrow points with a rosy cross at its center. All of these elements reappear again and again throughout Yeats's work, most notably in the writing and illustrations of *A Vision*. *The Secret Rose* is

[32] Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 64.

an early example of the care that Yeats took to bring meaningful design to his literary work as a way of building a sacred book.

Gyles took inspiration from a book at the center of "Rosa Alchemica." The book that contains the history and teachings of the Order of the Alchemical Rose has many of the design features that appear on the bindings of *The Secret Rose*. After the narrator arrives at the temple of the magical order, he is presented with a book that will assist in his initiation:

> I turned to the box, and found that the peacocks of Hera spread out their tails over the sides and lid, against a background, on which were wrought great stars, as though to affirm that the heavens were a part of their glory. In the box was a book bound in vellum, and having upon the vellum and in very delicate colours, and in gold, the alchemical rose with many spears thrusting against it, but in vain, as was shown by the shattered points of those nearest to the petals. The book was written upon vellum, and in beautiful clear letters, interspersed with symbolical pictures and illuminations, after the manner of the Splendor Soils.[33]

Yeats's bibliographic description comes out of his contact with various kinds of books. The peacock book-shrine, the vellum covers, and the symbolic illuminations can be seen in Irish medieval metalworking, the bindings of the Kelmscott press, and the alchemical manuscripts at the British Museum. *The Secret Rose* does not come close to approximating the opulence of these books, but it does demonstrate Yeats's sensitivity to

[33] W. B. Yeats, *The Secret Rose: Stories by W. B. Yeats, A Variorum Edition*, ed. Warwick Gould, Phillip L. Marcus, and Michael J. Sidnell (London: Macmillan, 1992), 141.

the material books around him and his desire to replicate these books in fiction, if not in practice.

Yeats searched the bibliographic traditions of his time in order to find a form that might be able to contain a new literary era. Hugh Kenner argues that Yeats was "an architect, not a decorator; he didn't accumulate poems, he wrote books."[34] Yeats's books became architectural marvels, and like the lasting image of "the winding ancient stair," the book became a symbol of grand design and the climb to metaphysical contemplation. Individual poems fit into the larger structure of the published piece. The book as an object was a part of this larger plan, and he took great pains to craft the bibliographic details of his books. Although the young Yeats had relatively little control over the periodicals and books where his verse first appeared, later in life he found ways to take control of the bibliographic mechanisms by which his work would appear. Furthermore, his editorial pursuits sought to shape the literary tastes and legacies of his time.

Critics have long sought to understand Yeats through an examination of bibliography and material textuality. Yeats's earliest readers saw the advantages to reading his books within the framework of their publishing history. In a review of *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), the anonymous critic comments on the loss of meaning as poems are reprinted in various forms:

> Probably Mr. Yeats' readers will recognize most of the poems which are included in the "Wind Among the Reeds." Some are from his plays, some from "The Celtic Twilight," some from "The Secret Rose"; others have appeared in magazines or

[34] Hugh Kenner, "The Sacred Book of the Arts," in *Gnomon* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958), 14.

> Irish periodicals. In one or two instances they lose by severance from the context, where they appeared with a vivid and strange beauty.[35]

Yeats builds new contexts through the forty pages of notes appended to the volume, but the work loses many of the rich associations of *The Savoy*, for instance.

Later scholars noticed the remarkable variety of Yeats's books and sought to read the material markers of the texts alongside the poet's words. Jerome McGann recognized the importance of the "double helix of interpretation" that exists when linguistic codes meet the bibliographic codes embedded within typography, book design, ink, and paper.[36] Likewise, George Bornstein and David Holdeman provided extensive readings of Yeats's poetry within the context of the specific bibliographic codes.[37] Holdeman has argued that "E.C. Yeats assisted her brother in the construction of a fundamentally new and fundamentally modernist bibliographical architecture that served as the model not only for *In The Seven Woods* but also for the first editions of most of Yeats's subsequent poetic volumes."[38] These studies emphasize the importance of editorial theory and bibliographic context for a richer understanding of Yeats's poetry and the multiplicity of meaning accrued through Yeats's revision and republication. However, they neglect the very specific ways in which the book as an object, poetic symbol, and mode of literary transmission functioned for Yeats. In arguing that Yeats's modernist poetics involved the material sites of reading, the book as a thing—including narratives of technologies of writing, design, art, and labor—must be explored. In light of these critical approaches, a

[35] "The Gaelic Melancholy," *Literature* (April 29, 1898): 439.
[36] See McGann, *The Textual Condition*, 1991.
[37] See Bornstein, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*, and Holdeman, *Much Labouring: The Texts and Authors of Yeats's First Modernist Books*.
[38] Holdeman, *Much Labouring*, 31.

consideration of Yeats's notion of a sacred book of the arts offers new insights into the book as a spiritual and symbolic object, as well as into the institutions that Yeats relied upon for the physical making of books.

Yeats's early ideas about the symbolic resonances of the physical book appear in his short story "Rosa Alchemica", which shares its title with a fictional volume at the center of the story. Yeats's narrator is a scholar of the occult tradition who has written a critical history of alchemy "in the manner of Sir Thomas Browne,"[39]a gesture toward a time in which the history of science and the arcane arts of alchemy, kabbalah, and astrology intermingled. Browne's wide-ranging oeuvre also comments on the creation of fictional books and the books' role in stimulating the search for new knowledge. The *Musaeum Clausum or, Bibliotheca Abscondita: Containing Some remarkable Books, Antiquities, Pictures and Rarities of several kinds, scarce or never seen by any man now living* (1684) describes a library of imagined books, and in doing so, it gently and humorously stokes every bibliophile's desire for discovery and rarity. Yeats's narrators discover similar cabinets of curiosity containing uncommon books capable of radically altering the courses of their lives. In "Rosa Alchemica," the Dublin home of the narrator contains works of Christian ecstasy by Crevelli and Francesca and ancient pagan idols in bronze, and the narrator takes particular pleasure in his library:

> I had but to go to my bookshelf, where every book was bound in leather, stamped with intricate ornament, and of a careful chosen colour: Shakespeare in the orange of the glory of the world, Dante in the dull red of his anger, Milton in the blue-

[39] Yeats, *Secret Rose*, 126.

> grey of his formal calm; to know what I would of human passions without their bitterness and without satiety.[40]

Books, in their verbal and material presence, allow one to live vicariously through the panoply of human passion and experience without suffering the vulgarities and hardships of actual living. The library also begins to define a set of important symbols for Yeats. Here color is fused with feeling and literary form, and within the context of Yeats's other writings, the bindings reveal intertextual associations through the invocation of these carefully chosen chromatic symbols. Likewise, the book as a symbol suggests the "desire for a world made wholly of essences"[41]; however, the book in its materiality always seems to ground its reader in some physical reality that he or she cannot escape, as is evident from the final pages of the story.

Yeats's fiction often turns on the discovery of a rare and sacred text and the book's effect on the spiritual journey of the narrator. The volume at the center of "The Tables of the Law" is his most elaborately detailed bibliographic representation. According to legend, Joachim of Fiora, a twelfth-century Christian mystic, wrote a prophetic text that was passed secretly amongst the followers of Joachim, and at the beginning of Yeats's story, the book has found its way to Dublin to the household of Owen Aherne. Aherne explains the legend of the book, saying:

> He had many followers among the more extreme Franciscans, and these were accused of possessing a secret book of his called the *Liber induces in Evangelium aeternum.* Again and again groups of visionaries were accused of possessing this

[40] Yeats, *Secret Rose*, 127.
[41] Yeats, *Secret Rose*, 126.

> terrible book, in which the freedom of the Renaissance lay hidden, until at last Pope Alexander IV. had it found and cast into the flames.[42]

The legendary history of the book, its heresy and destruction as well as its potential for creative energy in proclaiming the era of the Holy Spirit in Renaissance Italy, makes it a source of revelation for Aherne, who goes out into the world to discover the new laws upon which this new era will fulfill itself. Seemingly lost for centuries, Yeats writes the book's history into its materiality, which he carefully details:

> The bronze box was made by Benvenuto Cellini, who covered it with gods and demons, whose eyes are closed to signify an absorption in the inner light.' He lifted the lid and took out a book bound in leather, covered with filigree work of tarnished silver. 'And this cover was bound by one of the binders that bound for Canevari; while Giulio Clovio, an artist of the later Renaissance, whose work is soft and gentle, took out the beginning page of every chapter of the old copy, and set in its place a page surmounted by an elaborate letter and a miniature of some one of the great whose example was cited in the chapter; and wherever the writing left a little space elsewhere, he put some delicate emblem or intricate pattern.[43]

After Aherne gives this description of the book, the narrator picks up the tome, feeling the pages and "holding it close to the candle to discover the texture of the pages." The narrator, like Yeats's reader, is unable to read the secrets within and can only approach the book through these external sensual and material details.

[42] Yeats, *Secret Rose*, 153-54.
[43] Yeats, *Secret Rose*, 154.

A volume's provenance frequently received Yeats's careful attention. Provenance is a marker of the unique associations that an object gathers as it passes through different hands. The book itself moves through a series of owners, each of whom embellishes the text according to his or her artistic skill and taste. A goldsmith by trade, Benvenuto Cellini designed ornamental boxes such as the famous salt cellar made for Francis I of France. The cellar shows male and female figures representing sea and land with accompanying vessels for salt and pepper. The cellar, one of the few surviving examples of Cellini's miniature sculptural work, contains elements similar to the box created to hold the *Liber inducens in Evangelium atternum*. Cellini himself provides a lengthy description of the cellar in his autobiography, which John Addington Symonds translated into English in 1887. According to its sculptor, the cellar, now held at Das Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, suggests "the interminglement of land and ocean" with two figures with intertwined legs--a woman holding the bounty of earth and the man holding a trident and riding on the waves.[44] Yeats must have admired its delicate handiwork and careful composition with its unity of opposing forces--land and sea, woman and man, and pepper and salt. Cellini also admitted to dabbling in necromancy and other occult practices, which feed the mystery and mystical lineage of the *Evangelium atternum*.

These types of treasure bindings were revived at the beginning of the twentieth century thanks to the training and examples proffered by the Arts and Crafts movement. The famous firm of Sangorski and Sutcliffe in London produced luxurious and intricate

[44] Benvenuto Cellini, *The Life of Benvenuto Cellini,* trans. John Addington Symonds (London: John C. Nimmo, 1887), 224-25.

bindings using precious jewels and gold. Francis Sangorski and George Sutcliffe had both trained under famous binder Sydney Cockerel, a friend of Yeats, at the London County Council's Central School of Arts and Crafts during the 1890s. Their binding for *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1911) is an archetypal example of the mixture of medieval and contemporary approaches to the making of original treasure bindings such as the one that Yeats sought for his own books. Ireland, as we shall later see, has its own medieval traditions of book shrines, examples of which Yeats would have encountered in Dublin's National Museum.

Cellini also designed the metal work for a book of delicate illuminations by Giulio Clovio, one of the last great masters of manuscript illumination. Clovio miniaturized the style of High Renaissance painting to the pages of the book. His most famous work, *Adoration of the Magi* in the Farnese Hours, gives an impression of the "soft and gentle" book in which he "took out the beginning page of every chapter of the old copy, and set in its place a page surmounted by an elaborate letter and a miniature of some one of the great whose example cited in the chapter; and wherever the writing left a little space elsewhere he put some delicate emblem or intricate pattern."[45] In addition to these fine embellishments, Joachim's text was bound by an anonymous book binder who had gained fame through his work on the library of Demetrio Canevari, Renaissance bibliophile and physician to Pope Urban VIII. These bindings, identified by a central cameo of Apollo upon his chariot, were sought after by bibliophiles and exhibited widely.

[45] Yeats, *Secret Rose*, 154.

For instance, the Burlington Fine Arts Club, located on Savile Row, exhibited a number of books from Canevari's library in a 1891 exhibition of book bindings.[46]

The *Evangelium aeternum* is an imagined work of Renaissance excellence, combining the work of notable artists in the plastic arts, illumination, and book binding. Although the story is silent about the details of the great revelation, the exterior aspects of the book are meant to communicate the mystical spirit of the book. The overwrought description in the story can be seen as Yeats namedropping fairly obscure figures from Renaissance history; this namedropping places Yeats in a tradition of contemporary writers who attempted to resuscitate the reputations of such artists. Pater, John Addington Symonds, and others rehabilitated these Renaissance figures for English-speaking audiences. Also, the Arts and Crafts movement revived hand-crafted decorative objects made using techniques and styles from medieval and Renaissance craftsmen.

The most striking characteristic of the Eternal Gospel within "The Tables of the Law" is the way in which the potential for revelation comes from a long tradition of book construction and ornamentation. In searching for the catalyst of a new era, Yeats returned to old technologies of the book as opposed to looking toward newer technologies of the word. Neither the gramophone of Stoker's *Dracula* nor the telegraph of James's *In the Cage* or Joyce's newspaper in the "Aeolus" section of *Ulysses* was able to provide the forms of revelation that Yeats's sacred books incited. The form of the codex, with its two-thousand-year tradition and technologies, carries a rich symbolic and mythological weight that Yeats draws upon in creating a modern literary dispensation.

[46] Burlington Fine Arts Club, *Exhibition of Bookbindings* (London: Metchim and Son, 1891).

Yeats fused the aesthetic traditions of literary decadence, the Arts and Crafts movement, the occult, and Irish cultural nationalism to create a sort of sacred book at the origins of modernism. Yeats defined the role of the book as a ritualized object and site of symbolic meaning for writers to come, and his books reveal the coordinated efforts of those engaged in the book trade in establishing the book as a meaningful aspect of literary experience. Throughout Yeats's writing, the book is a powerful literary symbol, and his published books contain a specific material symbolism informed by the history of books. Yeats drew from a diverse but interrelated set of bookmaking traditions from the decadent books of late nineteenth-century England and France, fantastical and deeply layered occult books, and the annals of Irish bookmaking. In order to mobilize this complex nexus of literary and bibliographic symbols, Yeats engaged the private press as a malleable set of institutions that allowed him to create books distinct from the commercialized sphere of the late Victorian book trade and the modes of literary production it privileged.

Through a focus on the material book and its transmission, we can see that Yeats is not merely interested in remaking literary tradition, but rather, he is also attuned to the material processes through which tradition is passed from generation to generation. To understand and affect traditional forms, Yeats deploys a conscious manipulation of the physical terms of this inheritance. Yeats's fictions have garnered much less attention than his poetry, prose, or political activities, yet it is within these fictions that he lays the foundation for the notion of textual transmission and its relation to the material book that runs throughout his career. The burgeoning private press industry of the period allowed

for this imagining of the book and gave Yeats the institutions he needed to realize his ideal.

The Golden Book of Aestheticism and the Yellow Book of Decadence

The publisher of Joyce's *Dubliners*, Grant Richards, reflected on the world of books at the beginning of his literary career in London at the end of the nineteenth century. For a moment, he thought, he had entered an era in which the worlds of high society and style intersected with the literary and artistic: "For people talked incessantly of the *Yellow Book* and of Lane's authors—and Heinemann's. Just then books were fashionable."[47] Fin-de-siècle British literary life buzzed with the elegantly decadent illustrations and writings of the Beardsley circle. A collaboration between publishers Elkin Mathews and John Lane, the periodical took its name from the color of salacious French novels and the smoggy haze of London's streets. This new quarterly of decadence united letterpress and illustration in a well-designed hardback volume. In design and marketing, it inaugurated a new era in periodical publishing. It announced itself loudly, designed to be easily recognizable because for many, reading its contents seemed less important than being seen with it. *The Yellow Book* was a testament to the freethinker and the chic conspicuous consumer. Through the Bodley Head, Lane and Mathews had created a new visual idiom for literary publishing in England.[48]

[47] Grant Richards, *Author Hunting by an Old Literary Sportsman* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1934), 85.

[48] See Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 12, and James G. Nelson, *The Early Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Of course, the end of the nineteenth century was a prosperous time for books in general. Print runs were up. Prices were down. And newspapers and periodicals were circulating in record numbers. As popular forms of reading became increasingly available, the nostalgia for the books of days gone by also increased. The end of the century saw an upsurge in the interest in antiquarian books. Andrew Lang's *The Library* and John Burton's *The Book Hunter* introduced antiquarian collecting to a larger reading public. A keen appreciation for the objects of the past was a romantic gesture in a world of middle-class consumer objects, and bookshops, auctions, and collectors' periodicals were spaces for likeminded literary types to talk about books.

Writers as well as publishers picked up on this trend. Richard Le Gallienne, a contributor to *The Yellow Book* and a member of the Rhymer's Club, often took the physical book as his theme. As an aspiring young writer, he found companionship in the Liverpool bookshop that he fictionalized in the novel *The Book-Bills of Narcissus* (1892). The first book published by the Bodley Head was his *Volumes in Folio* (1889), which included poems such as "A Bookman's Complaint of his Lady," "Who has not Loved an Elszier?," and "A Ballad of Bindings." These love songs to books are indicative of an age that found romance in a world of old books.

For some, however, the bookishness of the age was yet another sign of its decline. Never one to pass up an opportunity to bite the hand that fed him, Shaw wrote that "[o]f all the consequences of that deluge of schooling which has taught everybody to read, and made cheap books remunerative to capitalists, none is more appalling than the ease with which a clever and imaginative young man may, for a few shillings, provide himself with

an exhaustive second-hand experience of life."[49] Nevertheless, many young men and women attained a firsthand experience through the secondhand book trade, and their literary education came from the fashionable books of the time—books that often made cameos in the art of the age.

Indeed, even the visual arts of the age had a love affair with the physical book. Echoes of the reading habits of the British decadents of the 1890s can be found in Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations to Wilde's *Salomé* (John Lane, 1907). Beardsley draws decadent books into the drama of the play. Two separate plates both titled "The Toilette of Salome" depict the dancer's preparations before performing for Herod. Amongst the vaguely eighteenth-century attire and shelves of cosmetics, perfumes, and other bibelots resides a small shelf of books—Zola's *Nana* (1880), Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes* (1869), the writings of the Marquis de Sade, Abbé Prévost's *Mamon Lescaut*, and Appelieus's *The Golden Ass*. Beardsley repeats the trope with a second set of books in another view of the toilet. Here Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* (1857) and Zola's *La Terre* (1887) sit amongst other unrecognizable volumes. The books are part of the sensual and erotic accoutrement of the age. Salomé's perfumes and unguents are part of her seduction, but so are her reading habits. The books, drawn in simple lines with titles scrawled on their spines, act as the syllabus of decadence.

Yeats's sacred book had its origins in these fashionable books, as well as changes in British commodity culture at the end of the nineteenth century and the literary reactions to an increasingly commodified material world. British aestheticism and French

[49] Bernard Shaw, *Bernard Shaw's Book Reviews: 1884-1950*, ed. Brian Tyson (University Park: Penn State Press, 1996), 84.

decadence, transported to England in the 1890s through George Moore, Arthur Symons, and Oscar Wilde, reacted to prevailing notions of materialism by reinvesting objects with symbolic, spiritual, and aesthetic qualities often neglected in earlier Victorian fiction and poetry. This larger reorientation of objects extended to the book, which took on new significance for writers such as Walter Pater, J. K. Huysmans, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and Oscar Wilde. Yeats assiduously read these writers and integrated many of their strategies for reinventing the sacred book as both a physical object and a textual site of transcendent wisdom.

Huysmans, whom Yeats had most likely encountered through Wilde and Symons, paid special attention to the material and sensual aspects of the book and its production in his novels. Before completing his most famous work of decadence, *A rebours* (1884), he penned the naturalistic novel *Les Soeurs Vatard* (1879), which chronicles the working and personal lives of sisters in the French bookbinding trade. As Huysmans examines the sordid environment of a commercial bindery, he reminds his readers that the unfulfilled and tragic lives of women like the Vatard sisters are sown into the covers of the very book he or she is holding.

M. Folantin, the protagonist and common man version of Des Esseintes in *A Vau-l'eau* (1882), attempts, failingly, at identifying with the people around him by taking up their interests. He tries on the habits of a bibliophile as a way to enter into the simple, happy existence that he sees in those around him. Huysmans writes:

> He had consulted catalogues, leafed through dictionaries and thumbed through specialized publications but he had never discovered any real curiosity, and in any case he could well imagine that possessing them would never fill that empty hole

> of boredom which was starting to yawn wider and wider in his whole being. Unfortunately, you couldn't develop a taste for books just like that, and anyway apart from the out-of-print editions that his extremely limited resources prevented him from buying, there were hardly any volumes M. Folantin cared to procure.[50]

Huysmans's characters desire some kind of transformation in themselves from contact with books.

In *A rebours*, Des Esseintes surrounds himself with books as he attempts to create a completely artificial space, one more perfect than nature itself. He even goes so far as to have the walls covered in morocco-like books.[51] The house becomes a kind of book into which Des Esseintes has bound himself. The decor is fitting, given Des Esseintes's desire for his life to imitate art; he is quite literally living between leathered book boards of a novel, blurring the lines between art and life.

Within his country retreat, Des Esseintes's library is a prized possession, and like everything else, it is obsessively curated. He abhors bad paper and dislikes the typefaces of ordinary books, which look to him "like hobnails in a peasant's books."[52] He even goes so far as to have books specially printed for him, buying his own stock of typefaces from Lyons, England, and America for his "archaic reimpressions of old texts." For these works, he buys papers from all over the world and even has special papers made with gold threads imbedded in them. Through this minute detail to the construction of his books, he is assured of having a unique object, not a mere copy that anyone can buy at a

[50] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *With the Flow*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Hesperus Press, 2003), 24.

[51] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature,* trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 2003), 16.

[52] Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 131.

bookseller's. Printing inherently suggests the multiplicity of a text, but Des Esseintes uses the technologies of reproducibility to create a singular artistic experience. This is best exemplified by Huysmans's sensual bibliographic description of Des Esseintes' copy of Baudelaire:

> . . . printed with the admirable episcopal type of the old house of Le Clere, in a large format similar to that of a mass-book, on a very light Japanese felt, a bibulous paper as soft as elder-pith, its milky whiteness faintly tinged with pink. This edition, limited to a single copy and printed in a velvety China-ink black, had been dressed outside and lined inside with a mirific and authentic flesh-coloured pigskin, one in a thousand, dotted all over where the bristles had been and blind-tooled in black with designs of marvelous aptness chosen by a great artist.[53]

In this passage, Huysmans teaches one how to read the material book. Its typeface, format, paper, ink, and binding all have historical, symbolic, and sensual quantities. Des Esseintes' connoisseurship takes into account all of the mundane details of book production that were largely meant to be invisible to readers. At the time Huysmans was writing, railway station novels were selling thousands of copies, and the books were made to allow readers to sink into the experience of the books and then easily dispose of the books thereafter. Des Esseintes works against this fashion by creating books that are art objects in and of themselves.

Huysmans's novel figures in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) as the "yellow book . . . without a plot" that transforms the tale's protagonist. It is fitting that *A Rebours*, which meditates on the role of books as objects, should become one of

[53] Huysmans, *Against Nature*, 132.

these literary objects in another work of fiction. For writers of the period, *A rebours* was a "breviary of decadence" or "Bible and his bedside book."[54] Oscar Wilde refused to denounce the book at his trial, as if the renunciation of this sacred text might undo his heresy.[55] Huysmans's novel had taken on a sort of religious significance for those who had lost faith in the conventional pieties of the Victorian age.

However, such alchemy of the soul eludes the likes of Des Esseintes and M. Folantin. Later in his career, Yeats draws upon Huysmans's sensual attachment to the book; in this moment, however, Yeats binds a transformative energy to this object, one capable of shaking the ennui felt by Huysmans's figures of decadence.

In "Rosa Alchemica," the book does bring about a great transformation for the disciples of Michael Robartes, even if the narrator is excluded from this vision. After arriving on an island in the West of Ireland to participate in the ritual of some new Celtic mystery, the narrator finds himself in a world of books secluded away like Des Esseintes. There is a magical component here, as we shall see shortly, but Yeats's language borrows heavily from the decadent sensibility about books as objects.

Along with the influences of French decadent writers, Yeats was also indebted to the British aestheticism of Walter Pater, who had his own particular interest in the representation and symbolism of books. As the young Yeats formed his idea of the role of the book in modern society, he looked to another work, Pater's singular novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885).

[54] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 252.
[55] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 316.

> Three or four years ago I re-read *Marius the Epicurean*, expecting to find I cared for it no longer, but it still seemed to me, as I think it seemed to all of us, the only great prose in modern English, and yet I began to wonder if it, or the attitude of mind of which it was the noblest expression, had not caused the disaster of my friends. It taught us to walk upon a rope, tightly stretched through serene air, and we were left to keep our feet upon a swaying rope in a storm.[56]

Yeats revisited Pater as a way to better understand the tragic circumstances of his companions in the Rhymer's Club. Pater may have represented a way of living based on vivid experience, one always threatening to collapse. *Marius* presents the philosophical struggles of a young man as he moves toward a Paterian notion of epicureanism, but it also speaks to notions of literary transmission and tradition important to the aesthetic movement and the young Yeats.

The novel is essentially the movement of the protagonist through a world of books and ideas. Marius searches for a kind of sacred book and finds it early on in the novel in a book introduced to him by his friend and companion Flavian. Marius presents a manuscript version of the Apuleius *The Golden Ass* to his Flavian—"the book of books, the 'golden' book of that day, a gift to Flavian as was shown by the purple writing on the handsome yellow wrapper, following the title *Flaviane!* [. . .] It was perfumed with oil of sandal-wood, and decorated with carved and gilt ivory bosses at the ends of the roller. And the inside was something not less dainty and fine, full of archaisms and curious felicities . . ."[57] The book is important in the narrative because of its lengthy retelling of

[56] Yeats, *Early Essays* 235.
[57] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 40-41.

the story of Cupid and Psyche as well as its sensual features. Its importance as a literary text and as a token of intimacy between Marius and Flavian is communicated through the craftsmanship of the scroll and its scents and tactile pleasures. As Charles Whibley notes in his introduction to the important English translation of Apuleius in 1893, the late Roman decadent despised only one quality: the commonplace.[58] A similar dislike for the common prevailed in the books produced during this period, a trend that Yeats would later adopt for his own books.

Marius asserts a special relationship to things, one that is revealed when everyday objects are used in religious ritual:

> And those simple gifts, like other objects as trivial--bread, oil, wine, milk--had regained for him, by their use in such religious service, that poetic and as it were moral significance, which surely belongs to all the means of daily life, could we but break through the veil of our familiarity with things by no means vulgar in themselves.[59]

For Pater, objects contain a significance that is lost through repetitive use. Religious ritual offers an alternative perspective on these objects and allows Marius to see the poetic and moral significance inherent in things. Books, or written texts more broadly, have a special place within the pantheon of everyday objects. They are both vulgar things and instruments capable of "relieving the ideal or poetic traits, the elements of distinction, in our everyday life."[60]

[58] Charles Whibley, introduction to *The golden ass of Apuleius translated out of Latin by William Adlington anno 1566* (London: D. Nutt, 1893).

[59] Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 7.

[60] Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 39.

The exchange of books cements certain relationships through networks of dedication, presentation, lending, and gifting. And within this process, aspects of the physical exchanges and significations of these books are as telling as their written inscriptions. Within Yeats's literary circle existed a complex network of collaboration and emotional intimacy that becomes apparent when closely examining the books produced and exchanged. This is true for casual and more formal bonds. For instance, in 1901 Yeats gauged his friendship with the illustrator Althea Gyles through the books entrusted to him. Gyles had recently become romantically involved with the publisher Leonard Smithers, who had fallen in wealth and social standing since the days of *The Savoy* and would declare bankruptcy in a year's time. Previously Yeats had banned the publisher from evenings at Woburn Buildings because of his frequent drunkenness and his reputation for publishing erotica from the likes of Burton, Wilde, and others. Gyles had agreed to design a bookplate for Yeats, but her falling out with Yeats delayed the piece. Yeats informed Gregory that Gyles "hardly means a final quarrel as she has left a number of her books with me including some in a loose brown paper which she has asked me not to look at — I conclude they have affectionate inscriptions. I keep all these to evade the bailiffs but refused some improper Japanese ivories which are probably loans from the admirable Smithers."[61] Books are at the center of this private drama among poet, illustrator, and publisher.

Physical books negotiated the erotic entanglements of figures such as Wilde and Gyles, and for the writers and readers of the nineties, the book was a sensual one, an

[61] *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume II, 1896-1900*, ed. Warwick Gould, John Kelly, and Deirdre Toomey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). W. B. Yeats, letter to Lady Augusta Gregory, December 21-22, 1899.

object meant to be touched, smelled, and tasted. Victoria Mills argues that relationship between the bibliophile and the books in late-Victorian fiction is a corporeal one and related to "the expression of sexually marginalized masculine identities."[62] Yeats inherited some of this erotic energy of the book as it is communicated through the sensation of exchanging and holding books. This is most evident in his manuscript book presented to Maud Gonne in October 1891 during the tumultuous aftermath of the death of Parnell and Gonne's son George. Yeats titled the book *The Flame of the Spirit* and had it bound in white vellum with gilt-edges. In his own hand, Yeats copied seven poems in ink, and for future poems he left blank pages, some of which had tentative titles penciled in.[63] Roy Foster describes *The Flame of the Spirit* as "a shared possession" meant to link Gonne and Yeats. This is a telling description because of the ways in which the book differed from a straightforward gift, suggesting a single transfer of an object. In fact, Yeats intended this manuscript to evolve along with their relationship. The unwritten poems and the blank pages suggested an ongoing bond, an inchoate sense of their personal and poetic relationship. Despite this intention, Yeats was never to return to the book to record in verse the various connections and heartbreaks that he suffered along with Gonne, although his ever-changing feelings toward her can be found in the published poems and prose over the course of his life.

[62] Victoria Mills, "'Books in my Hands — Books in my Heart — Books in my Brain': Bibliomania, the Male Body, and Sensory Erotics in Late-Victorian Literature," in *Bodies and Things in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, ed. Katharina Boehm (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 132.

[63] Bornstein describes the manuscript and some of its poems in detail; see *Material Modernism*, 227-228.

The Flame of the Spirit was meant, in part, to participate in and ameliorate Gonne's suffering through intimate poems of spiritual discovery and erotic love. The book itself appears in the poem "When you are old":

> When you are old and grey and full of sleep
> And nodding by the fire, take down this book
> And slowly reading, dream of the soft look
> Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep:

Here the book becomes an *aide-mémoire* for beauty and youth lost. The proximity of the end rhymes of "book" and "look" suggests how the tome might be used as a looking glass into the past. The book becomes a sort of mystical object that induces the reader to dream of past loves, especially of the "one man [who] loved the pilgrim soul in you." The injunction to "take down this book" shifts in meaning depending on the book in hand and how the reader understands the "you" in the first line.[64] While the poem first appeared in print in *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892), the bibliographic features of the manuscript copy of *The Flame and the Spirit* supply much more private and intimate connotations.

Shortly after receiving *The Flame of the Spirit*, Gonne joined the Order of the Golden Dawn. Clearly the book was more than a token of Yeats's love; the spiritual and occult aspects of the poems—as well as the manuscript's form of intimate transmission—suggest the various levels on which the book operated. *The Flame of the Spirit* clearly takes inspiration from the erotic and sensory features of the decadent book, but it blends

[64] Bornstein, *Material Modernism*, 47-48.

this form of the material book with another of Yeats's images of the sacred book: the occult volume.

In retrospect, Yeats felt that he had found intellectual brethren in the symbolists, but ultimately he was not greatly influenced by them. Instead, his own magical experiments and visions drove his art.[65] The book as understood by French symbolism or British aestheticism was in constant conversation with another type of book altogether—the magical or occult book and it talismanic and ritualistic capacities. The making of manuscripts satisfied, at least temporarily, the interwoven impulses of symbolism, decadence, aestheticism, and the world of magic.

Yeats's Occult Books

The Flame of the Spirit sold at a Sotheby's in 1987 to an unknown buyer, and it has since disappeared from public life, returning to the personal and hidden world of Yeats's original intention, yet in a new and unique place and set of relationships.[66] Although there is a loss whenever an important manuscript such as this moves into the shadows of private ownership, the book hidden away from the public eye has its own charm and hermeneutics. The book, as it appears in decadent literature, called for display, exchange, and decoration. It was meant to be seen, as it was a sign of taste, sophistication, and conspicuous consumption as much as the personal indulgence of beauty. Yeats, however, intended *The Flame of the Spirit* to be a magical document, as

[65] InteLex 6239.
[66] Bornstein, *Material Modernism*, 170n2.

well as a handcrafted token of affection, and as such, it contains traces of a different tradition of bookmaking.

Yeats's magical beliefs are well documented. His interest in secret organization and closed sects of like-minded individuals led to an interesting form of esotericism that often relied on the book as the primary transmitter of secret truths. Esotericism does not profess wisdom for the masses but truths held in secret and learned through a special literacy bestowed upon the initiated. In his examination of esoteric forms of writing in Western philosophy, Arthur M. Melzer defines the features of esoteric writing by focusing on its particular mode of transmission:

> An esoteric writer or writing would involve the following characteristics: first, the effort to convey certain truths—the "esoteric" teaching—to a select group of individuals by means of some indirect or secretive mode of communication; second, the concomitant effect to withhold or conceal these same truths from most people; and third (a common but not strictly necessary characteristic) the effort to propagate for the sake of the latter group a fictional doctrine—the "exoteric" teaching—in place of the true doctrine that has been withheld. Esoteric writings employ many modes of concealment. One of the most common and most effective strategies is simply limiting access to the very texts that contain esoteric teachings.[67]

The Flame of the Spirit practices these forms of esoteric concealment. The manuscript as a book form implies a very limited audience, and the poems included in the book take on

[67] Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 1-2.

unique resonances when read in manuscript. Yeats's fictional books often take on the esoteric modes of communication where the concealing and revelatory properties are carefully balanced in opposition.

More generally, Yeats's magical doctrines concern the unity of individual memory and the ability to accesses this universal memory through the invocation of symbols. For Yeats as well as generations of magicians, the magical invocation of symbols is deeply tied to the creation of texts, especially books. For the magical novice, books often act as a primary site of initiation, a source of knowledge, and a magical talisman. Yeats described his own introduction to magic and the occult through Samuel MacGregor Mathers, English translator of some of the most famous grimoires housed in the British Museum at the time. In his search for images that would produce "some moment of passionate experience" in which he could write his poetry and form deeper understandings of the world, Yeats found himself caught in the endless association of symbols. Yeats recognized this condition as one in which "a cabbalistic manuscript, shown me by McGregor Mathers, had warned me of; astray upon the Path of the Chameleon, upon Hodos Chameliontos."[68] Mathers claimed to have been directed toward the spirit world through a novel by Bulwar Lytton, the popular writer and prominent occult figure in nineteenth-century Britain.

The book was a magical tool, an alchemical handbook, and a vault for sacred mysteries. Yeats inhabited this world of strange books. While in London, he frequented Watkins Books in Cecil Court, which specialized in the occult and where Yeats would

[68] Yeats, *Early Essays*, 215.

often discuss theosophy, magic, and the supernatural.[69] He studied the *Splendor Solis*, a striking sixteenth-century alchemical manuscript, in the British Museum with its Renaissance-style illuminations depicting a bizarre alchemical hot tub and strange dragons among other curiosities. The initial attraction of the occult book is often its fantastic and preposterous illustrations, complex diagrams, and figures that provide the secret visual symbolism for these arcane modes of thought.

The reputation of mystic, poet, and printer William Blake was only expanded through a fascination with the printed manuscripts on which his poems gained notoriety. Blake's technological genius in devising a new form of relief etching to combine the processes of printing word and text resulted in a form of illuminated poetry that contained the reproducibility of modern art with echoes of the uniqueness characteristic of the medieval workshop. Yeats considered Blake's visual and poetic creations during his research for *The Works of William Blake* (1893), which he wrote and edited with Edwin J. Ellis. Yeats and Ellis devote a chapter of the first volume to the manuscript book. "Readers of Blake have constantly heard of 'The MS. Book.' . . . a little volume of about a hundred pages, each measuring six and a half inches wide by eight inches high, began life as a sketchbook," wrote Yeats and Ellis, giving great attention to the material aspects of Blake's poetic design.[70] The third volume even contains lithographs of the prophetic books. This monumental, although today rarely consulted, edition of Blake pointed Yeats to the importance of the material book.

[69] Geoffrey M. Watkins, "Yeats and Mr. Watkins' Bookshop," in *Yeats and the Occult*, ed. George Mills Harper (Canada: Macmillan of Canada, 1975), 307-310.

[70] William Blake, *The Works of William Blake: Volume I*, ed. Edwin J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893), 202.

Yeats drew upon the mythology of alchemist Nicholas Flemel as he imagined his relationship to Gonne as a mystical partnership, an alchemical union of man and woman.[71] Yeats read about Flemel in Arthur Edward Waite's *The Lives of Alchemistical Philosophers* (1888), wherein Waite recounts the legend of Flemel's discovery of the philosopher's stone. By profession Flemel was part of the book trade of medieval Paris. As a scrivener, he had access to the most influential texts of the day as he copied them into new manuscripts for his customers. Through his successful business, he turned manuscripts into gold. His reputation nevertheless rested on a more preternatural form of alchemy, but one that was also mediated through books. As Waite tells it, an angel presents Flemel with a mystical tome that reveals the secrets of alchemy. Another source, one credited to Flemel, indicates that the scrivener purchased the manuscript that "had been stolen from some of the Jewish nation or else found in some place."[72] Both legends agree on the centrality of a book that communicates a secret and heavily coded text whose mysteries led Flemel to the philosopher's stone.

Yeats, clearly drawn by the search for the mystical book, wrote a short story that meditates on a similar story. In 1892, Yeats published "The Devil's Book" in *The National Observer*, and the story was wholly revised and published in *The Secret Rose* as "The Book of the Great Dhoul and Hanrahan the Red." In this early tale involving Yeats's character Red Hanrahan, the hedge school teacher encounters a book in a small village bookshop in Ireland. The book is open to a page full of "singular diagrams," and

[71] William T. Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 121-22.

[72] Arthur Edward Waite, *Lives of alchemystical philosophers based on materials collected in 1815 [. . .] account of the spiritual chemistry* (London: G. Redway, 1888), 96.

instead of purchasing the poteen he originally sought out, he asks for the book. The shop owner informs him that the book had been taken off of a French ship that had wrecked itself upon Irish shores years earlier. The book is titled "Grimoire of Pope Honorius," the name of a popular magic book that had supposedly been written by the Catholic pope of the fourteenth century. This book, which combines Catholic practices with early forms of Christian mysticism, fuses Catholic and pagan practice. Hanrahan finds a "receipt for making spirits appear," and using the blood of a bat writes the name of Cleena of the Waves on a piece of paper torn out of "a book which he had taught English in his hedge-school, and called 'The Lives of Celebrated Rogues and Rapparees."[73] Here Yeats invokes two important traditions in the print culture of nineteenth-century rural Ireland. The Catholic grimoire and inexpensive chapbooks telling of the deeds of highwaymen and outlaws were extremely popular and equally condemned by Catholic clergy and the Protestant Ascendency. Yeats invokes both in this magic union to create a bond between his supernatural ambitions and the popular reading habits of those he would write about in loosely ethnographic books such as *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888) and *The Celtic Twilight* (1893). Much like the later "Rosa Alchemica" or "The Tables of the Law," Hanrahan's experience with the book leads to tragic consequences as he is cursed by the spirit he has invoked and burned out of his house. The fire does not touch the book, and he sells it to "the Faery man of the Great Spring," who buys it so that people whose butter had been stolen by witches "would employ no one but him to charm the butter again."[74] A book capable of raising spirits and charming butter was part of

[73] Yeats, *Secret Rose*, 190.
[74] Yeats, *Secret Rose*, 194.

Yeats's ritualized understanding of the book as object, which came in part from the uses of books in his own magical practices.

In Edwardian Dublin, book publishing shared an address with occult activities. In 1904, George Roberts and Seumas O'Sullivan had begun publishing books under the imprint Whaley and Company from 27 Dawson Chambers in the heart of Dublin. Both Roberts and O'Sullivan held membership in AE's Hermetic Society, which met in the same building. Their partnership would later result in the Maunsel Press, which was one of the most influential publishers of the Irish literary revival. Yeats's occult associations with Roberts also led to Maunsel buying up Bullen's unsold sheets of *The Secret Rose.*[75]

The historical connections between the printing trade and movement of mystical ideas and secret societies also turned up in Yeats' research. Harold Bayley, a Francis Bacon enthusiast and editor of the journal *Baconiana*, penned a number of quasi-academic works on the symbolism of the watermarks of Renaissance papermakers.[76] Yeats had studied his works and was greatly influenced by Bayley's commentary on the

[75] Clare Hutton, "'Yogibogeybox in Dawson Chambers': The Beginnings of Maunsel and Company," *The Irish Book in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Clare Hutton (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 41.

[76] Most reviewers of Bayley's works praised his literary style and inventiveness of argument while dismissing his methodologies and conclusions. One reviewer in *The Bookman* praised his "specious cleverness" (R. W. Kemp, "Nine Books of the Month," *The Bookman* [July 1909]: 531), while Claude Levi-Strauss called Bayley's work impudent in chasing his own personal whims and logic in his interpretation of symbols. Strauss noted its popularity among readers while dismissing its lack of evidence, sound reasoning, and digressiveness. However, he found value in the workings of a mind so adept at interpreting symbols in such creative ways. He suggests that "[i]f such a work is not completely disregarded, but remains, in spite of everything, worthy of attention, it is because it constitutes—in itself and by virtue of the large audience that it has found—a first-rate psycho-sociological document" (Levi-Strauss, "The Art of Deciphering Symbols [In Four Lessons to be Followed or not to be Followed]," *Diogenes* 2, no. 5 [1954]: 101-108).

use of occult symbols. Bayley had studied watermarks made by late medieval and Renaissance papermakers to demonstrate the spread of occult knowledge through networks of European craftsmen and the paper and books they created. His grand claims about the secret history of the book trade have apocalyptical consequence. At one point, he writes: "Now the chronicles of paper making, and of her younger sister printing, form the epic of this 300 year warfare between Light and Darkness."[77] Shared affinities between occult symbols and the iconography of watermarks led Bayley to conclude that the twelfth-century Albigenses, who had been forced out of the region by the Church, had subsequently dispersed across Europe with their professional skills and mysterious knowledge.

Bayley gives examples of the alchemical symbols found within watermarks and argues that the papermakers engaged in such practices. However, he fails to notice the ways in which paper-making—or almost any artistic act—attempts to transmute base materials into something transcendent. In the case of paper, linen rags are saved from the midden and changed into the surfaces that become the canvases of written and visual art for centuries.

Modern scholars have pointed to the Albigensian heresy and its subsequent uprooting by the Church as a major force in the spread of the book in thirteenth-century Europe. Christopher de Hamel argues that an increased demand for pocket-sized Paris Bibles came from Dominicans tasked with traveling to the South of France to crush the

[77] Harold Bayley, *A New Light on the Renaissance Displayed in Contemporary Emblems* (London: J. M. Dent, 1909), 6.

heretical movement. The presence of a Bible conferred authority on its carrier, and the text defined "the Scriptures as a single and sacred entity."[78]

The National Book of Ireland

In the late twelfth century, Giraldus Cambrensis, who generally had little complimentary to say about the Irish, nevertheless lauded their books. After viewing the Book of Kildare, he surmised that its various colors, designs, and drawings "must have been the result of the work, not of men, but of angels."[79] Over the course of a millennium, few things seemed to have changed in Ireland. The tradition of bookmaking in Irish society was a contentious one. In 1849 Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had signed the famous Book of Kells housed at Trinity College Dublin. One indignant commentator imagined the moment of desecration:

> Slowly, majestically, stupidly, they draw near the Book. Porters and Fellows bow low, little fat lady takes pen from prostate Dean's hand, the spirits of the books on all the shelves swoon within their bindings at the deed. You can read it still on an outraged page, the signature of the two—
>
> "Victoria Regina,
>
> Albert."[80]

[78] Christopher de Hamel, *The Book: A History of the Bible* (London: Phaidon, 2001), 133.

[79] Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. John J. O'Meara (London: Penguin, 1982), 84-85.

[80] D. L. Kelleher, *The Glamour of Dublin* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1920), 23.

Luckily for generations of Irish Republicans, they had signed a modern flyleaf to the book that was erroneously thought to be part of the original manuscript. These modern pages were subsequently removed by conservators in 1953.[81] Various groups have laid claim to the great manuscripts penned by monks in medieval Ireland, and they have always represented a measure of cosmopolitanism and a fierce localism. As liturgical documents of the Roman Catholic Church, they originated in a tradition that stretched across world. As physical artifacts, their constituent materials, such as the indigo used for blue pigment, most likely travelled from Asia to Iona. Nevertheless, these great treasures suggest the local genius and craftsmanship of the Irish, and they show a continuity in Irish artistic production from the Middle Ages to the modern world.

Much like Cambrensis, nineteenth-century travelers to Ireland were struck by the contradictions between a rude and insalubrious reality juxtaposed with the grandeur and beauty of book art. Capuchin priest James Halpin, writing about the Book of Dimma in 1890, described visitors' experience of encountering Dublin's shabby exterior compared to the wondrous riches and treasures to be found in Dublin's museums. He records the decay and emptiness that shrouds the splendor to be found within the great manuscripts residing in Dublin:

> The stranger who visits Dublin, for the first time, will not fail to remark the many signs of decay that present themselves. Streets without people, and quays without ships; houses tenantless, and mansions of an older and better time that own their lords no longer—all tell the same tale. Compared with the gay capitals of Europe,

[81] Christopher de Hamel, *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts: Twelve Journeys Into the Medieval World* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 133-34.

> the old city by the Liffey contrasts unfavorably . . . If indications of prosperity and wealth are lacking outside, within [museum and library] walls there are treasures beyond price—heirlooms which any nation might envy, and the like of which no other nation can show.[82]

Manuscripts such as the Book of Dimma became symbols of the nation through the work of early nineteenth-century antiquarians and cultural revivalists at the end of century, but before that, the books accumulated a wealth of legends no less spectacular than the grimoires and alchemical treatises of the pagan tradition. When the Book of Dimma was rediscovered—in the ironically named Devil's Bit Mountain in County Tipperary[83]—a host of miraculous stories about the book were likewise dug up. St. Cronan, as the legend goes, visited a well-known scribe named Dimma in order to have a copy of the gospels made. Dimma's services were in high demand, and the scribe had but one day available in his busy schedule. Consequently, Cronan, through the power of God, made the sun shine for forty days and forty nights, a startling feat in rainy Ireland. During this preternaturally long day, Dimma, untouched by fatigue or hunger, scribed the book.[84]

The Book of Dimma, displayed at Trinity College Dublin during the time of Yeats, is one of the sacred books of Ireland that has served as a public symbol of Ireland's creative facilities throughout the ages. One of the book's most salient qualities is its accompanying shrine, or *cumdach*, which suggests a rather unique relationship to

[82] James Halpin, *"Liturgical Fragments of the Early Irish Church:* The Book of Dimma," *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 11 (1890): 325.

[83] The book's discovery among the rocks of the Tipperary mountains has been challenged by new evidence uncovered by Raghnall Ó'Floinn. See Ó Floinn, "The Shrine of the Book of Dimma," *Éile: Journal of the Roscrea Heritage Society* 1 (1982): 27-28.

[84] Halpin, "Liturgical Fragments of the Early Irish Church," 329.

the book that was formed in medieval Ireland. In her seminal work *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, which became a handbook for Irish visual culture throughout the revival and into the Free State era, Margaret Stokes describes the ideologies that underpinned these magnificent metal-work boxes:

> Book-shrines appear to be of rare occurrence save in Ireland. Elsewhere we find that the sacred writings had splendid bindings; one side at least being often of silver or gold, studded with jewels, so that the book thus covered added to the general splendour of the altars on which they were placed. But a different sentiment seemed at work in Ireland, where the book as held as a sacred heirloom by the successor of the Patron Saint, whose memory they had cherished for perhaps five hundred years. Here the old book was left untouched, as something whose value could not be increased by gold or precious stones; but a box was made on which was lavished all the artists skill, and in this the sacred relic was preserved.[85]

At first glance, the addition of a fancy box to an already ornate manuscript hardly seems worth mentioning, except for the fact that it suggests various uses of the book in medieval Ireland that had little to do with reading. Carried into battle or worn as breastplates, the books became talismans of great power. The *cumdach* also hermetically sealed the power it contained, and medieval chronicles attest to the fact that the shrines prevented the books from being opened so that, like Pandora's box, the calamities inside might be contained.[86]

[85] Margaret Stokes, *Early Christian Art in Ireland* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1894), 88-89.

[86] Stokes, *Early Christian Art in Ireland*, 89.

Irish hagiography records many such instance of books being used as miraculous talismans. At one time, farmers would dip the seventh-century Book of Durrow, an illuminated manuscript of the Gospels, into a container of water in order to create an elixir to cure sick cattle. Other manuscripts were repeatedly washed until particles of ink were dislodged, creating a tincture used to cure all manners of afflictions.[87]

The transmission and conservation of manuscripts also became an important aspect of their mythical status. Ireland had its own indigenous manuscript culture, one that survived outside of antiquarian interest and the hands of collectors. There were relatively secluded pockets of Ireland that retained a longstanding relationship to the manuscript as the primary medium for the preservation of local history and tradition. Yeats learned much about the tales of ancient Ireland from his study of the works of Eugene O'Curry. Born in southwestern county Clare, O'Curry spoke Irish as his first language and became a scribe, as well as a hedge teacher.

In the old Irish fashion, the information possessed by one generation was faithfully handed down to the next, and every remnant of the ancient literature was transmitted as a precious inheritance. Traditional lore and time-honored usage were preserved with the carefulness that might be expected from the population of Clare—the last county in Ireland that was governed by the Breton Laws administered by native judges. Many of the farmers had in their possession valuable Irish manuscripts, transmitted to them by their ancestors, who, owing to their fortunate obscurity and their settlement in a barren sea-bound tract, had been able to retain these heirlooms at a time

[87] Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

when the possession of an Irish book made the owner a suspected person and was often the cause of his ruin.

In a letter to the editor of the *United Irishman* in October 1903 on the question of national poetry, Yeats argued that literature offered wisdom on par with those books traditionally seen as sacred:

> Literature is, to my mind, the great teaching power of the world, the ultimate creator of all values, and it is this, not only in the sacred books whose power everybody acknowledges, but by every movement of imagination in song or story or drama that height of intensity and sincerity has made literature at all.[88]

National poetry is necessarily sacred poetry within Yeats's formulation. Yeats makes this point to establish a distinction between literary taste and national sentiment. In the early 1890s, Yeats considered editing a series of Irish books under the title *The Library of Ireland*. It was meant to be a revival of the literary efforts of the original Young Ireland Movement of the 1840s.

Yeats knew that the national book would need a visual iconography distinct from the Irish texts of an earlier generation. The inchoate Dublin literary scene of the 1890s included many who "would have felt it inappropriate to publish an Irish book that had not harp and shamrock and green cover."[89] Yeats argued that while the Irish had a very high estimation of poets and thinkers, they nonetheless did not buy or read books. He had said as much in a letter to the *United Irishman* in May 1892. Here he gave reasons for founding the Irish Literary Society of London and informed his readers that he had set his

[88] Yeats, *Collected Letters: Volume III,* 441-42.
[89] Yeats, *Autobiographies* 172.

sights on Dublin and the union of various literary organizations in the city. Furthermore, he outlined a series of books that he might edit for the benefit of ordinary Irish people:

> we will see what can be done to create and circulate a library of Irish books like the old "Library of Ireland," Duffy's ballads, "The Spirit of the Nation," Mitchel's "O'Neill," and all that noble series which spread themselves through Ireland by the help of the Repeal Reading Rooms; † and there seems to be no reason why the Young Ireland societies and literary societies of the day may not serve a like purpose. The periodical appearance of such books would give new interest to their debates, and new subjects for their lectures, and make them feel they were part of a great body of fellow-workers and not mere local debating clubs.[90]

The literary strategies of Young Ireland had a huge impact on Yeats, and the scheme he proposes here draws on the political strengths of popular poetry and the social bonds formed in the joint reading of books. Yeats took his plan to his publisher at the time, T. Fisher Unwin, who seemed supportive of the project. However, a problem arose for Yeats in the form of Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, one of the original writers of the Young Ireland movement of the 1840s who had recently returned to Europe after a successful political career in Australia. Duffy began his own push for a Library of Ireland based on the unpublished works of those luminaries of the now-old Young Ireland. Yeats, on the other hand, felt it important to produce new Irish writing and the best works of the past in order to shape the tastes of an Irish readership. Yeats felt that Duffy was too conservative in his nationalism and uninspired in his literary taste. Yeats was soon pushed out of the scheme

[90] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume I, 1865–1895*, ed. John Kelly and Eric Domville (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 298.

altogether, and Duffy along with T.W. Rolleston and Douglas Hyde published such page-turners as Thomas Davis's *The Patriot Parliament of 1689: with its statues, votes, and proceedings*. The series only lasted to three volumes and was not very successful. The National Publishing Company Duffy formed collapsed soon after, and Yeats was able to exact his revenge in small ways through reviewing the books. However, the political and aesthetic arguments surrounding this early attempt at editing can be seen throughout the remainder of Yeats's career.

Book collecting became part of the mythology of Irish nationalism. Many republican figures had bookish associations. John O'Leary, republican activist and friend and patron of Yeats, purportedly discovered the Fenian movement while combing the bookstalls on the Dublin quays. James Stephens recruited him into the Irish Republican Brotherhood amongst the sea of secondhand books. Yeats reported that he remained an avid collector of Irish history and literature, and during the brief time that he and O'Leary lived together in Dublin in 1892, O'Leary would go daily to the bookshops while Yeats stayed in and wrote the poems in *The Secret Rose*.[91]

Envisioning the Sacred Book

In the minds of many of his contemporary readers, Yeats succeeding in giving his early books the aura of the sacred. The young James Joyce dramatizes his own Yeatsian initiation in the unpublished drafts of *Stephen Hero*. Marsh's Library harbors Stephen Dedalus from the "sluttish streets which are called old Dublin," and there he reads

[91] Yeats, *Autobiographies* 177.

Francis of Assisi, Elias, and Joachim. Among these tomes, Stephen discovers a privately printed volume by Yeats from which he takes inspiration:

> He had found on one of the carts of books near the river an unpublished book containing two stories by W.B. Yeats. One of these stories was called "The Tables of the Law" and in it was mentioned the fabulous preface which Joachim, abbot of Flora, is said to have prefixed to his Eternal Gospel. This discovery, coming so aptly upon his own researches, induced him to follow his Franciscan studies with vigor.[92]

Joyce championed Yeats's short fiction, and when the two met, he insisted on a new edition of the work despite Yeats's lack of enthusiasm about the collection. In the 1904 edition of *The Tables of the Law and the Adoration of the Magi*, Yeats included a note showing his reluctance to republish the stories:

> These stories were privately printed some years ago. I do not think I should have reprinted them had I not met a young man in Ireland the other day, who liked them very much and nothing else that I have written.[93]

Joyce himself claimed to have committed "The Table of the Law" to memory, and Stephen Dedalus repeats the words of the story to himself as he walks through Dublin, leading Michael Hart to describe him as "a Yeatsian monk meditating on his sacred book."[94]

[92] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Directions, 1944), 176-77.

[93] W. B. Yeats, *The Tables of the Law and The Adoration of the Magi* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1904), n.p.

[94] Michael F. Hart, "The Sign of Contradiction: Joyce, Yeats, and 'The Tables of the Law'," *Colby Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (1994): 240.

Joyce and Stephen Dedalus were not the only hesitant acolytes of Yeats's sacred books. Yeats's later works resonated strongly with Irish writers, and no book courted such frenzied devotion and outright dismissal as *A Vision*, privately published in 1925 and significantly revised for a Macmillan trade edition in 1937. Padraic Colum registers the reverence and ridicule that Yeats's philosophical treatise on human nature received from readers. In the short story "A Dublin Day," Colum satirizes the Dublin literary scene through the figure of Mortimer O'Looney, a luckless poet who journeys across the city in an attempt to sell his grandmother's unused burial plot. During a noontime drink with a fellow poet at the pub, an eloquent stranger requests an audience with the poets:

A gentleman bowed to them. A volume entitled The Vision was in his hand and he held it out as if it were a visiting-card. "I am a student," he said, "of the philosophical work of our chief poet. Does that entitle me to the company of others of the clan?"[95]

The Yeats volume acts as a sign of shared affinity and further emphasizes the gulf between the Nobel laureate and O'Looney, who "was only aware of two philosophic terms." The preposterous grandeur of the unnamed connoisseur and his copy of *A Vision* combines with the comic desperation of O'Looney to mock the gulf between the aristocratic self-fashioning of Yeats and the struggling Irish poets of a later generation.

When Colum's story was first published in the *Catholic World* in 1933, *A Vision*, at that time only available in a private edition of 600 copies published by T. Werner Laurie, was a rare commodity. The rarity of the book with its substantial price tag (£3.3.0 or approximately $240 in today's currency) meant that its audience was restricted to a

[95] Padraic Colum, "A Dublin Day," *Selected Short Stories of Padraic Colum* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 104.

select group of wealthy connoisseurs and enterprising book traders, much like the audiences for by Shakespeare and Co.'s *Ulysses* and the output of Woolf's Hogarth Press. *A Vision* was the culmination of Yeats's idea of the sacred book of the arts. Through the combined efforts of Laurie, artist Edmund Dulac, and others, Yeats created a book that not only tried to explain his mystical philosophy, but also drew upon various bibliographic traditions to create a story of a book within a book in which he emphasized the importance of textual transmission in the poetic process.

Colum, like so many other commentators on *A Vision*, approaches it only half-seriously, but in doing so he still validates Yeats's undertaking and the creative symbols it contains. Cleanth Brooks, another early commentator on the *A Vision*, praised the book in suggesting that:

> William Butler Yeats has produced in his *A Vision*, one of the most remarkable books of the last hundred years. . .. But the very act of boldly setting up a myth will be regarded by most critics as an impertinence, or, at the least, as a fantastic vagary. And the latter view will be reinforced by Yeats's account of how he received the system from the spirits through the mediumship of his wife.[96]

Yeats himself was continually thinking about the book's reception throughout its composition and its publishing. Such a strange and esoteric book did not have an obvious publisher. Although Yeats's reputation had climbed tenfold in esteem since his early occult stories of the 1890s, the idiosyncratic concepts such as gyres and tinctures and the lengthy explanation of each of the twenty-eight phases of human nature were sure to put

[96] Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 173.

off many of his most supportive friends and readers. T. Werner Laurie approached Yeats about the possibility of publishing more of Yeats's writing after the success of a privately printed edition of *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922). Laurie had begun his career with Unwin and became a manager with the firm before striking out on his own in 1904. He was George Moore's publisher, which gave Yeats pause lest readers connect his work with that of his one-time friend,[97] and a well-known risk-taker, publishing racy stories and taking on books such as Conrad's *Secret Agent* (1923) and later published Upton Sinclair's famous novels. He first approached Yeats about printing a private edition of his memoirs that were being published in the *Mercury*. Yeats, intrigued by the offer, wrote to Lady Gregory that he thought "the Cuala book will knock this out," because Elizabeth Yeats had been printing Yeats's writings in private-press editions under the Cuala imprint.[98] However, a deal was worked allowing Laurie the rights. His offer of £500 for the rights must have played an important role in Yeats's decision. The edition sold well, and Laurie was hungry for more. Yeats was working on his philosophy at the time and had warned Laurie that "the book is entirely unlike any other work of mine and will not appeal to the same public."[99] Yeats even demanded that Laurie read part of the completed manuscript before he would consent to sign a contact. Undeterred, Laurie persisted in his desire to publish *A Vision* even after numerous delays on Yeats's part as he struggled to work out his complex system.

As Laurie planned the printing and marketing of *A Vision*, Yeats crafted a fictional book that would make his talk of gyres, phases, tinctures, and masks even more

[97] InteLex 3922.
[98] InteLex 3922.
[99] InteLex 4300.

intriguing, if not intelligible. Yeats created Giraldus's *Speculum Angelorum et Homenorum* to be the material vessel that would reveal his philosophy to the world. This fictional book, which the first edition of *A Vision* suggests is real, allows Yeats to justify his system through a narrative of textual transmission that links modern literature to its origins in the sacred wisdom of antiquity. *A Vision* opens with the fictional history of this sacred book. Most critics, however, have tended to overlook this narrative that frames Yeats's system. Helen Vendler, for example, calls the story of Giraldus' *Speculum* "stage scenery," suggesting that "[t]he tales which preface *A Vision*—the "Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends"—now have a faded antiquarian savor in their remoteness, their rather perverse and precious humour, and their artificial tone."[100]

Shortly before the book's publication, Yeats wrote to Edmund Dulac, who was finishing the illustrations to the text, saying: "I doubt if Laurie would have taken the book but for the amusing deceit that your designs make possible. it saves it from seeming a book for specialists only and gives it a new imaginative existence."[101] Dulac completed two illustrations for the text, both of which were made to look like old woodcuts and printed anonymously. The frontispiece portrait of Giraldus and "The Great Wheel" [Fig #] were designed to lend authenticity to the preliminary story that frames Yeats's philosophy, namely the discovery of the *Speculum*. To fully unravel *A Vision*, a sort of diachronic bibliography of the teachings of Kusta Ben Luka through Giraldus to Robartes and Yeats is used. This bibliography reveals the relationship between technologies of writing and the transmission of sacred truths.

[100] Helen Vendler, *Yeats's* Vision *and the Later Plays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 7.

[101] InteLex 4381.

The *Speculum* first appears in the poem "Ego Dominus Tuus," where it lies open in the poet's tower:

> *Hic.* On the grey sand beside the shallow stream
> Under your old wind-beaten tower, where still
> A lamp burns on beside the open book
> That Michael Robartes left, you walk in the moon
> And through you have passed the best of life still trace,
> Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion,
> Magical shapes.
> Ille. By the help of an image
> I call to my own opposite, summon all
> That I have handled least, least looked upon.[102]

The opening lines of "Ego Dominus Tuus" anticipate the major thematic elements that flow through the numerous Robartes poems and their bibliographic contexts. The book that lies under the "wind-beaten tower," a symbol for Yeats's own Norman home in County Galway, contains the magical shapes and images that are represented both in the words of Yeats's poems and the illustrations that appear later in *A Vision* and are reprinted once more in *Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends* (1931). Both the figure of the moon and the invocation of one's opposite can be seen as relating to the revelations of Giraldus's text and illustrations and the textual transmission of the book that Yeats recounts in detail throughout a number of different works.

[102] Yeats, *Collected Works: Volume I,* 160.

There is no truly concise way to explain the entire history of the *Speculum* because of the way in which Yeats consciously obscures and complicates its narrative. At its most basic level, however, the book concerns Kusta ben Luka, an Arab mystic, who presents a Caliph with a system that perfectly explains human nature. After discovering these ancient secrets, Giraldus has this knowledge printed in Kraków during the sixteenth century. Centuries later, Robartes discovers a damaged copy of Giraldus's book. He brings it to London and entrusts it to his friend Owen Aherne along with his notes. Discouraged by Aherne's Christian piety, Robartes gives the manuscript to Yeats and entrusts him to write an account of the book. Yeats agrees and writes *A Vision,* in which he includes an introduction by Aherne. The textual history of the book is told through Robartes's voice as remembered by Aherne, and it provides a fairly extensive account of the bibliographic condition of the *Speculum*:

> I [Robartes] went to Cracow, partly because of its fame as a centre of printing, but more I think because Dr. Dee and his friend Edward Kelly had in Cracow practised alchemy and scrying. There I took up with a fiery handsome girl of the poorer classes, and hired a couple of rooms in an old tumble-down house. One night I was thrown out of bed and when I lit my tallow candle found that the bed, which had fallen at one end, had been propped up by a joint stool and an old book bound in calf. In the morning I found that the book was called 'Speculum Angelorum et Hominorum,' had been written by Giraldus and printed at Cracow in 1594, a good many years before the celebrated Cracow publications, and was of a very much earlier style both as to woodcut and type. It was very dilapidated and all the middle pages had been torn out; but at the end of the book were a

> number of curious allegorical pictures; a woman with a stone in one hand and an arrow in the other; a man whipping his shadow; a man being torn in two by an eagle and some kind of wild beast; and so on to the number of eight and twenty; a portrait of Giraldus and a unicorn; and many diagrams where gyres and circles grew out of one another like strange vegetables; and there was a large diagram at the beginning where lunar phases and zodiacal signs were mixed with various unintelligible symbols—an apple, an acorn, a cup. My beggar maid had found it, she told me, on the top shelf in a wall cupboard where it had been left by the last tenant, an unfrocked priest who had joined a troup of gypsies and disappeared, and she had torn out the middle pages to light our fire. What little remained of the text was in Latin, and I was piecing the passages together and getting a little light on two or three of the diagrams when a quarrel with my beggar maid plunged me into wine and gloom once more.[103]

I quote this passage at length because of the way it shows Yeats's bibliographic imagination at work. Robartes's initial decision to go to Cracow where he eventually finds the *Speculum* is spurred by the city's history as a center of printing for early modern Europe, especially in terms of Hebrew printing. This locale situates Yeats's narrative in a much larger history of textual transmission and the changes brought about by the printing press, but more importantly, it allows Yeats to make a connection among printing, alchemy, and scrying that subsequently becomes a salient theme of both *A Vision* and his other works. The transformation of life into art is figured as an alchemical experiment,

[103] W. B. Yeats, preface to *A Vision: The Original 1925 Edition*, ed. Catherine E. Paul and Margaret Mills Harper, vol. XIII of the *Collected Works of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Scribner, 2008), lix.

and print once again becomes the technology for this conversion from base material to an immaterial of the divine. Yeats notes how the woodcuts and style of the book position it in relation to other Cracow publications, situating it in the cradle of the print revolution. The calf binding suggests the importance of the book, calf being the most desirable and expensive of common bookbinding materials. Yet the book is not found on a mere shelf, but instead being used as a shim for steadying the bed of Robartes' dilapidated room with the middle pages consumed in the flames of his fire. Only the Latin sections of the text remain. A distance between the origin of the text's stories and original language has thus been lost, one of the many pitfalls associated with the discovery of antiquarian books. This loss of significant portions of the printed text provides yet another level of remove from Yeats the author and the source material that he has created for his fictions. Even the provenance of the book shrouds its contents in great mystery: a defrocked priest had left the book behind before he began a new life as a traveling nomad.

All of these bibliographic details draw attention to the constructedness of Yeats's own book. *A Vision* was meant only for the initiate. Although the book was revised and published in a substantially larger print run twelve years later, Yeats's mystical volume had the similar rarefied presence of the *Speculum* that he describes within. The book appeared "in pale blue paper boards with parchment half-binding; white paper label, printed in brown on spine . . . all edges untrimmed."[104] The parchment half-binding is very reminiscent of calf skin, and the untrimmed edges and old-style typeface on the spine give it an anachronistic quality. When placed into the context of the early twentieth-century trade edition, Yeats's book announces its own literariness at first

[104] Wade, *A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats*, 149-50.

glance. Yeats's focus on the bibliographic detail of the *Speculum* interacts with the material book in which it is situated. Yeats's own framing devices and description of the physical embodiment of texts force the reader to consider the processes of textual transmission, while the visual and tactile features of *A Vision* draw the reader back to Yeats's primary themes.

Despite the importance of the printing and binding of *A Vision*, the diagrams that are included in the volume may be the most significant single aspect of the work. These illustrations are not merely ornaments or accidentals but poetic images fully integrated into Yeats's literary production throughout his career. Like Pound's ideograms, the diagrams that appear throughout *A Vision* and the mythology that Yeats builds around them become a central concern of the work's claim to literariness.

Robartes comes to find out that the tribe he had stumbled upon was named the Judwali, whose name means diagram-makers. Although the sacred book of the tribe has been lost, the teachings present in it have been passed down from generation to generation through a dance that when completed left the images of *Speculum* in the sand. The story that Yeats tells is a clear precursor to one of his most famous statements on the conflation of poetic form and content, which can be found in the last stanza of "Among School Children":

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul.
> Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
> Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
> O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,

Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,

How can we know the dancer from the dance?[105]

Seen through the *Speculum,* the schoolchildren of the poem are both the children in the Waterford classroom of Yeats's memory and the young people of the Judwali tribe learning to be scribes of their tribe's sacred knowledge through the movement of feet through sand. In this context, the dancer is not only the unifying figure of form and content, but he or she is also the transmitter of the poetic diagrams that Yeats integrates into his own poetry.

Finally, there is the book that is not written. In the opening sections of *A Vision*, Aherne tells of the system's transmission from Robartes to Yeats. According to Aherne's introduction, the written record of the system was to be entrusted to Aherne himself. After composing ninety pages of commentary on Robartes's "mathematical law of history," Aherne is relieved of his duties because of the Christian character he brought to his analysis. Robartes feels that Aherne can only interpret the system through philosophy because of his primary character that took no heed of the antithetical nature of man. "I want a lyric poet, and if he cares for nothing but expression, so much the better, my desert geometry will take care of the truth," argues Robartes in his justification of turning the task over to Yeats.[106] Aherne goes on to discuss how Robartes turned the manuscripts over to Yeats, and the poet consented to write the exposition only if Aherne would consent to penning an introduction and adding any notes he saw fit. At the end of this

[105] Yeats, *Collected Letters: Volume I*, 215.
[106] Yeats, *A Vision*, lxii.

account, Yeats offers to share the profits from the book, but Aherne refuses, "as later on I may publish my own commentary."[107]

This unwritten book on the sacred geometry of human nature opens up the possibility for yet another exploration of the system—a primary view to Yeats's own antithetical and poetic explanation of the system. In terms of Yeats's idea of the sacred book, it creates the myth of yet another lost manuscript, one that holds a further piece of hidden wisdom. Those ninety pages of exposition created by Aherne but unseen by the world are like Giraldus' *Speculum*, Kusta ben Luka's letter, or the *Liber induces in Evangelium aeternum,* in that these imagined books excite and encourage the continued search for a hidden knowledge revealed only to those able to decipher their mysteries. The existence of Aherne's commentary also leaves Yeats's interpretation of the system as partial rather than authoritative or complete. The commitment to showing the system of thought to be contingent upon and open to further development and correction can be seen in the paratextual elements scattered throughout the work. In one footnote, Yeats admits that "[t]his topic belongs to the psychology of the system, which I have not yet mastered."[108] And in the section on classical antiquity, he admits an unsureness about exact dates because he was "correcting these pages at Thoor Ballylee and there is not a reference book in the house."[109] Like Aherne's lost commentary, footnotes such as these open up interpretive possibilities rather than closing them. For Yeats, the sacred book of the arts is never the supreme law or final artistic statement; rather, it is a document that unfolds with possibilities and creates doubts that will later fuel a successive generation of

[107] Yeats, *A Vision*, lxiii.
[108] Yeats, *A Vision*, 91.
[109] Yeats, *A Vision*, 124.

poets. Near the end of *A Vision*, Yeats concludes that "[t]he great books—Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* let us say—beget new books, whole generations of books, but life goes on unchanged . . . I would restore to the philosopher his mythology."[110] It is in his mythology of the sacred book and the material process that it embodies that Yeats discovers his poetic form.

The work is frequently figured as a mystical or philosophical treatise of Yeats's own working hypothesis on human nature born from his experiences with automatic writing and occult practice. In discussing the composition and reception of the book, Roy Foster offers this summary:

> As finally submitted to the printer, the book gathers up two preoccupations: the attempt to arrive at a diagrammatic representation modeling the process of historical change and recurrence, and an (equally schematic) 'System' of personal and historical archetypes, concentrating upon creative or artistic personalities and related to the phases of the moon. This is astrology at its grandest.[111]

Furthermore, Joyce offered his own compliments on Yeats's great undertaking but was disappointed that "Yeats did not put all this into a creative work." Both Foster and Joyce miss the literary aspect of the collection. The focus on *A Vision* as a testament to Yeats's philosophical and esoteric commitments ignores the impressive literary contribution that it makes through its construction of a fully realized mythology that forces a reinterpretation of his previous works in verse and prose and sets the stage for a deeper investigation of these themes in his later works. The framing mechanisms of *A Vision*,

[110] Yeats, *A Vision*, 207.

[111] R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life; Volume II: The Arch-Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 280.

with its introductory letters, prefaces, illustrations and history of its own transmission, are highly literary devices that impel the reader to consider how bibliographic forms interact with linguistic texts.

CHAPTER 2

Joyce and the Postal Imagination

Although Wyndham Lewis and company decided to blast England first (out of politeness, of course), the post office wasn't far behind. In the first issue of the short-lived modernist magazine *Blast* (1914-1915), Lewis inventories the people and institutions to be upbraided, and the first item on the list is the post office. Those marked for blasting—the Bishop of London, Galsworthy, Bergson, Leo Strachey, the Lyceum Club, and the British Academy—largely represented conservative aspects of Victorian social, religious, and cultural life. The Royal Mail, a mild-mannered institution tasked with delivering the mail, might therefore have seemed anomalous among Lewis's entries. In many ways, after all, the Royal Mail was on the cutting edge of the communication technologies of the day, providing the daily delivery of letters, parcels, telegrams, and telephonic communications. Nevertheless, to many it appeared to be a behemoth of an earlier era. Indeed, once celebrated by writers such as Dickens and Trollope, by the early twentieth century, the Royal Mail had become a symbol of outmoded Victorian notions of progress, efficiency, and empire—an unremarkable feature of everyday life. Its mechanisms hummed in the background, only becoming visible when things went awry with late deliveries, lost parcels, and returned envelopes. As a means for conveying language and literature into the future, the postal service struck the literary agitators of the day as inadequate and antiquated. It had to be blasted.

Two years later, the British military, in a rather spectacular fashion, did just that. During Easter Week of 1916, revolutionaries in Dublin occupied the General Post Office

(GPO) on Sackville Street as their central headquarters. After the proclamation of an Irish Republic, the British military diverted soldiers and artillery from the war effort on the Continent and deployed them throughout the streets of Dublin. In doing so, the military obliterated the recently renovated GPO. By the end of the week, the rebels had fled their burning headquarters; they surrendered shortly thereafter.

Unlike Lewis, the Irish rebels saw the postal service as integral to the notion of modern revolution and the functioning of the state. Near-instantaneous global communication, then in its infancy, provided the rebels with a means of contacting sympathizers in the United States and Germany and disrupting the daily lives of those within Dublin and Britain. As Clair Wills argues, "[B]y storming a working monument, neither Castle nor Bastille, but a building devoted to communications, the leaders of the Irish Rising became the forerunners of the modern coup."[1] Occupying the GPO ensured a certain control over the flow of state intelligence and gave the rebels an advantage in their attempt to control the optics of the event in a diverse media field.

Of course, the GPO was also a symbol of British authority in Ireland, albeit a relatively benign one. The Royal Mail brought the British state into the intimate and personal spaces of the lives of Dubliners; however, it largely wore the face of acquaintances and neighbors who worked as postal carriers or clerks, manifesting itself in the messages from friends and family delivered at Dubliners' doorsteps and local postal branches. At the same time, these messages bore stamps with monarchical portraits and images of the far-off places of the British Empire. Pillar boxes painted red bore the crown

[1] Clair Wills, *Dublin 1916: The Siege of the GPO* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 9.

and royal cypher, and in times of crisis, mail received a "Passed by Censor" triangular emblem. As *Blast* attests, the postal service generated concerns that underlie the simple activity of transmitting messages from a sender to a receiver. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the almost-utopian optimism that had accompanied postal reforms such as the Penny Post and the Universal Postal Union in the previous century had faded.

One of the onlookers to these changes in communications technologies and spectator to the global media events that were the First World War and the struggles for Irish Independence was the young, brash Dublin writer James Joyce. A self-imposed exile from his native island meant that Joyce relied heavily on pan-European modes of communication in order to remain connected to a Hibernian metropolis that would be the imaginative focus of all his literary works. The post and its deliveries play a substantial role in his works. In *Ulysses* two iconic postal moments suggest the tone of the entire work. When a young Stephen Dedalus reflects on his time on the continent where he was to forge the consciousness of his race, he cannot help but remember the telegram that pulled him back to Ireland. This missive received in Paris simply read: "mother dying come home father" (*U* 3.199). Joyce registers the pathos and poetic possibility that arises from a typographic error in rendering a message that will change the course of one man's life. In another moment, Joyce captures the riotous impulse to capitalize on the ambiguities and anxieties of postal exchanges. When Denis Breen receives a postcard with a coded, but possibly malevolent message—"U.p: up" (*U* 8.259)—a comedy of confusion and double-entendre reveal deeper issues of the veracity of posted messages and the authority of words that move through the postal service.

As postal rhythms reverberated throughout the British Empire, writers increasingly explored this system as a way of understanding their communications networks and the modes by which language moves through the world in its physical forms. These modes of thinking make up a period's postal imagination, by which I mean the ways in which the technologies and operations of the postal system shape an individual's relationship to time, space, and language. In its ability to represent postal forms and act as its own mode of linguistic delivery, literature is particularly suited for capturing this postal imagination.

Nowhere is this more clearly the case than in early twentieth-century texts. In the simplest sense, Victorians saw the post office as the primary means of moving books from authors to readers. Mallarmé dramatized this movement in a poem that celebrates the pleasures of a postal poetics. In "Les Loisirs de la poste," he deploys the form of the postal address, a quatrain, to shape the lines of the poem. He addresses these poems, so to speak, to his friends, artists such as Whistler, Degas, Monet, Renoir, and others. He directs the post in the delivery of a book:

> Apporte ce livre, quand naît
> Sur le Bois l'Aurore amaranthe,
> Chez Madame Eugéne Manet
> Rue au loin Villejust 40.[2]

Responses like Mallarme's were provoked in part by the proliferation of British postal networks during the nineteenth century. The Penny Post, United Postal Union, and

[2] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems and Other Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 220.

telegraph wire had begun to move written language in new ways. The efficiency and sheer volume of correspondence surprised those able to glimpse the industrial collection, sorting, and distribution infrastructure operating within the walls of St. Martin's-le-Grand, the headquarters of the British postal service. Dickens, for instance, expressed amazement at the workload and precision of postal employees during the barrage of Valentine's Day mail at the midcentury. As sorters deftly executed their charge, he wondered "when a sorter goes home from these places to his bed, does he dream of letters?"[3] Surely the repetitive handling of messages impinged upon their dreamscapes, Dickens thought. Likewise, writers dreamt about these new postal structures and what they meant for the exchange of language and the future of literature.

Victorian postal reforms infiltrated everyday rhythms, and by the end of the century, reliable communication had become an unquestioned fact of modern life. Nevertheless, in the early twentieth century, this grand communications network seemed to fray at the edges. Those on the periphery of the British Empire and its extended bureaucratic reach inaugurated a new understanding of postal progress. This recognition of the fragmentary, subversive, and contingent lines of communication led Edwardian writers such as Thomas J. Clarke, Lady Gregory, and Rabindranath Tagore to reimagine the Royal Mail and its relationship to the transmission of literary texts and language. In fact, these writers were among the first to register this changing nature of postal realities, giving literary life to the new political and social potentials of the post. As the century

[3] Charles Dickens, "Valentine's Day at the Post Office," *Household Words* 1, no. 1 (March 30, 1850): 9.

wore on, modernist writers such as James Joyce capitalized on this shift in the postal imagination, and in doing so, they reassessed how language moved from author to reader.

An early intersection between the postal service and literature is elucidated in the work of P. S. O'Hegarty. As an Irish Republican, British civil servant, and bookseller, O'Hegarty stood at the intersection of the Royal Mail, Irish politics, and literature. As he walked through the imposing gates of the Mount Pleasant Sorting Office in England during his second assignment with the British postal service, he must have been aware of the building's past—at various times a salubrious wellspring, odoriferous midden, and perhaps most famously the notorious Cold Bath Fields Prison. When the Royal Mail had decided to expand its operations in 1887, the architecture of the defunct jail had seemed a suitable fit for the new facility. Not surprisingly, the move was not without its detractors. One postal employee reported on "the disappointment that filled all our minds when we heard that the prison was to be our permanent abode."[4] For many Irish men and women, Mount Pleasant was a welcome place to work; the British civil service was a powerful alternative to unemployment and transatlantic emigration. Thousands took up posts in England, Ireland, and abroad, administering the everyday affairs of the Empire.

A bright young man who had literary interests in addition to nationalist sympathies, O'Hegarty was among those employed by the Royal Mail, eventually becoming the first secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs in the Irish Free State. But early on in his career, O'Hegarty toiled in the carceral spaces of Mount Pleasant, where the modern postal facility retained the "cells, the Roman Catholic

[4] C. H. Denyer, "Money Order Office History and Gossip: Part III," *St. Martin's-le-Grand* (July 1895): 266.

Chapel, the photographic room, the corridors haunted with memories of forgotten crimes, and the rotunda with the wide view from its roof over northern London."[5] Mount Pleasant was thus both a modern institution of speed, efficiency, organization, and connectivity and a remnant of punishment, isolation, and criminality. In a splendidly paradoxical way, it symbolized the acme of Victorian technologies of communication and the segregation, containment, and silence of an antiquated prison system. Its surfaces contained the history of two seemingly incongruous state institutions. Yet throughout history, the desire for connectivity and communication has often accompanied forced isolation and silence.

O'Hegarty remains important because of his commitment not only to the movement of the mail, but also to the distribution of literature, collecting of books and ephemera, and recording of history. After being dismissed from the British postal service because of his political activities, O'Hegarty operated a bookshop on Dawson Street and was known to ride his bicycle around Dublin stuffing his pockets with books and pamphlets. His experiences with letters and books are key to a recognition of the broader relationship between the postal service and literature. Though critics have rarely considered the post office a literary institution in the same vein as publishers, printers, and booksellers, in early twentieth-century Ireland, it served as a vital link in the multifaceted relationship between author and reader.[6]

This chapter examines postal representations in several Irish texts to demonstrate how the experience of living within the postal networks of the early twentieth century

[5] Denyer, "Money Order Office History and Gossip: Part III," 266.

[6] In Robert Darnton's seminal essay on the nascent field of book history, "What is the History of Books?," Darnton notes how scholars have neglected the distribution systems that move books between writers, publishers, sellers, and readers. This has continued to be an unexplored area of book history and literary criticism.

shaped the literary forms of the period. In writing about the media ecology of Victorian Britain, Richard Menke argues that the postal reforms of the period were intimately linked to literary realism. The Penny Post and technological advancements like the telegraph and telephone gave the sense of an uninterrupted flow of communication and information. This idea of an unbroken network of language mirrored the efforts of fiction writers like Dickens and Trollope, who strove to construct an art that shared the stylistic markers of other forms of print information.[7] Of course, postal networks from their earliest origins have been characterized by the stops and relays that allow information to be conveyed over great distances. In the early days of the postal service in England, for instance, a network of horses and couriers was stationed at regular posts across the countryside. This allowed messages to trade a fatigued team for a fresh outfit. The limits of human and equine endurance determined the necessity of exchanges along any postal route. As technologies evolved, the postal service employed new modes of transport and relay. In this sense, the post has always been defined by its stops, relays, transmissions, and translations.[8] The fantasy of an unmediated exchange of messages has little to do with the work of a postal institution, despite the Victorian desire for this ideal.

The Irish experience of the post office in the early twentieth century suggests a number of significant deviations from this model of an uninterrupted flow of information capable of offering an unmediated view of reality. Though the authors occupy very different positions within Irish history—and more generally within the British Empire—

[7] See Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[8] See Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal Service*, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

Lady Gregory's *Hyacinth Halvey: A Comedy* (1906), Thomas Clarke's *Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life* (1912–1913–1922), Rabindranath Tagore's *The Post Office* (1913) and short story "The Postmaster" (1918), and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) engage intimately with the imaginative presence of the post office, yet each also anticipates, in its own way, the forms of provisional, subversive, tortuous, and perilous exchanges of language. In *Hyacinth Halvey*, Lady Gregory challenges the assumption that what is posted is private, timely, and true. Her characters repeatedly manipulate local postal routines to meet their own needs. Clarke's prison memoir gives an example of the importance of fabricating alternative and contingent postal networks in times of crisis. Gregory and Clarke consider the possibilities afforded to those who understand and take control of available communication systems; however, Tagore's play, which was first published and staged in Ireland, examines the imaginative constraints and possibilities of the postal office within a colonial space. While they're expressing the ideas of the postal service through the things they represent, Joyce enacts it in his language by creating linguistic patterns that interrupt normal modes of discourse. Together these texts reveal changing assumptions about the post office that began to emerge in the early twentieth century.

Gregory: *Hyacinth Halvey*

Lady Augusta Gregory, like many of her generation, lived a significant part of her life through the post. Her husband, William Gregory, proposed marriage by means of a sealed letter.[9] Her political, artistic, and personal campaigns were often conducted

[9] Judith Hill, *Lady Gregory: An Irish Life* (Cork: Collins Press, 2011), 36.

through private and public correspondence. Her fight for Arabi in Egypt, the creation and management of the Abbey Theatre, the struggle over Hugh Lane's pictures, and her custodianship of her estate at Coole were all instances in which the exchange of letters and telegrams allowed her to assert her influence on local and international scales. In a famous photograph of Lady Gregory at her grand writing desk at Coole taken by G. B. Shaw in 1915, she is writing a letter to engage a kitchen maid.[10] She learned of her son's death in World War I through a telegram delivered to Coole and kept in her journal the last letter she sent him, one that had been returned to her unopened.[11] And during times of political upheaval and violence in Galway, she took pains to note the absence of communication as the post could not deliver and telegraph poles were overturned. Letters shaped Lady Gregory's life, and when it came time to write her autobiography, she frequently returned to those letters as a way to access the past.

Lady Gregory understood the uses of the postal service and maintained her social network through these lines of communication. *Hyacinth Halvey*, first performed on the Abbey stage on February 19, 1906, demonstrates the sophistication with which Gregory approached postal institutions. The drama unravels the ways in which the act of posting gives authority to a text and interrogates the modes of subversion that the post allows. More specifically, Gregory's comedy challenges Victorian notions that the circulation of information produces political and moral progress, and the failed and subverted attempts at communication within the drama prefigure later experiments by Irish writers.

[10] Hill, *Lady Gregory: An Irish Life*, 415.
[11] Hill, *Lady Gregory: An Irish Life*, 441–42.

The play opens with a train whistle that situates the fictional Cloon within a modern, interconnected world. Yet the scene contains the features of a sleepy, rural town—the dead sheep hanging outside the butcher shop alongside a caged thrush, for instance, and the telegraph boy idly playing the harmonica. Lady Gregory locates her comedy where the imagined spaces of the Revival meet modern technologies of communication and transportation. Within the first two lines of the drama, Mrs. Delane, the postmistress at Cloon, and Mr. Quirke, the town's illicit butcher, respond to the rhythms of life defined by systems of British administration. Delane hears the whistle: "There is the four o'clock train, Mr. Quirke."[12] The train locates the characters and the audience in time, and Quirke, surprised at the late hour of the afternoon, reveals that having received a contract to supply the local barracks with meat, he has had to work throughout the night to meet the demand. Delane responds similarly: "It's hard enough on myself to be down ready for the mail car in the morning, sorting letters in the half dark" (*HH* 31). The natural rhythms of rural life have clearly been altered by the presence of the post and barracks, but instead of figuring them as intrusions into a pastoral landscape, Lady Gregory envisions these spaces as sites for the creation and transfer of information. The letters and telegraphs that pass among the post office, the barracks, and the world at large are the things that matter within the play. Delane continues to complain about her early mornings at the train car because it prevents her from carefully inspecting all the personal and official correspondence that flows through her office, to which Quirke replies: "[i]t would be a pity you not to know any little news might be knocking about. If

[12] Lady Augusta Gregory, *Hyacinth Halvey: A Comedy, Seven Short Plays* (New York: J. P. Putnam, 1909), 31—hereafter cited in-text as (*HH* 31).

you did not have information of what is going on who should have it?" (31-32). Quirke's sarcastic remark belies the power situated in the figure of the postmistress. Delane's position within the postal service allows for almost absolute control over the information that proliferates through Cloon because of the unique authority found in the posted word. Delane and Quirke even learn of the arrival of the titular character in the drama through a card addressed to the local sergeant that the postmistress has sorted, read, delivered and distributed throughout the town by word of mouth. Hyacinth Halvey, a young man from Carrow, is expected to arrive to fill the vacant position of Sub-Sanitary Inspector for the area, and word of his character has preceded him: "[t]estimonials he has by the score. To Father Gregan they were sent. Registered they were coming and going. Would you believe me telling you that they weighed up to three pounds?" (32). In these lines, ideas of "testimonial" and "registration" as they relate to the post office and forms of authority represent the official capacity of the post to demarcate truth and reality, while also exposing the fragility of these postal functions. In order for Halvey to take his place within the information regime of the British civil service as Sub-Sanitary Inspector, his arrival must be officially announced to the presiding authorities in the town—police and pastor. Three pounds of posted testimonials arrive for Father Gregan extolling the virtue of young Halvey before his arrival in Cloon:

> He possesses the fire of the Gael, the strength of the Norman, the vigour of the Dane, the stolidity of the Saxon. . . . A magnificent example to old and young. . . . A shining example of the value conferred by an eminently careful and high class education. . . . Devoted to the highest ideals of his Motherland to such an extent as is compatible with a hitherto non-parliamentary career. . . . A splendid exponent

> of the purity of the race. . . . Admirably adapted for the efficient discharge of all possible duties that may in future be laid upon him. . . . A champion of every cause that can legitimately benefit his fellow-creatures. (36-37)

These testimonials confer sainthood onto the young man, as David Krause has noted.[13] Despite his protests and the later revelation that the letters were a ploy by the townspeople of Carrow to relocate the useless and lazy Halvey, the new Sub-Sanitary Inspector cannot challenge the written word of the testimonials. In fact, his efforts to steal a sheep and rob the local Protestant church—the worst acts he can imagine committing in Cloon—are reinterpreted by the townspeople in light of the hagiography represented in the testimonial letters. Halvey becomes a national symbol, one that recognizes the hybridity of Ireland's cultural history. He is Gael, Norman, Dane, and Saxon and capable of navigating competing interests as an inspector who is loyal to the Crown but also answerable to Catholic clergy and townspeople. Halvey is, of course, incapable and unwilling to live up to the myth that now surrounds him. The posted testimonial becomes the reality for Cloon, and no action or event in the play can shake the authority held by the bundle of letters. Gregory's comedic effect arises from the discrepancies between the image of the absence of the Halvey of the testimonials and the presence of the bashful and ultimately unimpressive protagonist on stage. While these formative and comic effects of mythmaking and rumor mills are explored in Gregory's other dramatic works, such as *Spreading the News* and *The Rising of the Moon*, *Hyacinth Halvey* is the play that most fully interrogates the relationship among the various official regimes of

[13] David Krause, *The Profane Book of Irish Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 125–26.

knowledge—the post office, civil service, military, and church—and the circulation of information through letters and telegraphs. The post conveys truth to the exclusion of other modes of experience.

If a testimonial as a written witness offers an unmediated view of reality, this testimonial still must be delivered and registered. Mrs. Delane's act of registering the mail as it passes through the Cloon post office further marks its place within the official record. The post was an instrument of the state in its inception, and for the first century of its existence, the Royal Mail served only the Crown and its governmental business. However, as the post expanded in both its geographical coverage and its network of private users, the systems of connectivity became impossible to fully control or police. Although a central location such as London's Mount Pleasant facility physically recorded the communication of a massive empire, it was powerless to control the diffuse paths of posted discourse. Lady Gregory's play dramatizes the types of colonial subversions available to Irish civil servants. The twenty-four-hour attention that must be paid to the post office clearly annoys Mrs. Delane, but she readily uses the infrastructure to her advantage when possible. At the midpoint of the play, a telegraph is heard ticking inside the office, and Mrs. Delane rushes to catch the message, giving Halvey the opportunity to pilfer the sheep and drag it offstage. The telegraph, dispatched from Dublin Castle to the sergeant, concerns the spoiled meat that Mr. Quirke has been selling to the British military: "Mrs. Delane: It is an order to the Sergeant bidding him immediately to seize all suspicious meat in your house. There is an officer coming down. There are complaints from the Shannon Fort Barracks" (*HH* 49). The audience discovers the inner workings of Quirke's meat trade, a secret widely known by the townspeople but still not fully

validated by Dublin Castle. Quirke purchases dead animals from locals, butchers them, and sells the often-diseased meat under his government contract. In a particularly macabre scene, Quirke tells Mrs. Delane about recently butchered pork he exacted from a pig that had died from brain disease, noting the care he took to remove the head, despite the lost meat, and chuck it into a nearby river.

Lady Gregory presents this gruesome crime as both humorous and morally justified. She articulates the reasoning behind this portrayal in an article entitled "The Felons of Our Land," which appeared in the Victorian mainstay *Cornhill Magazine* prior to the play's staging. There, she offers a definition of felony that explains Quirke's actions against the British and Mrs. Delane's postal subversions in light of their position under British rule where treason felony "is defined in Ireland as a crime in the eyes of the law, not in the eyes of the people. A thief is shunned, a murder prompted by brutality or personal malice is vehemently denounced, a sheepstealer's crime is visited on the third and fourth generation; but a 'felon' has come to mean one who has gone to death or to prison for the sake of a principle or a cause."[14] Gregory understands these crimes within the context of a national struggle against colonial occupation, and she presents these activities within the framework of an Irish national theatre that would recognize the humor and heroism of characters able to exploit the colonial infrastructure for the benefit of an Irish community. Quirke praises the consumptive practices of England, saying, "Lord be praised isn't England a terrible country with all it consumes," pointing out that the impoverished farmers of Cloon would be burdened with the debt of sickly animals if

[14] Lady Augusta Gregory, "The Felons of Our Land," *Cornhill Magazine* 8, no. 47 (1900): 622.

a British market was not hungry for the inexpensive and illicitly processed meat he provides. Consequently, Mrs. Delane quickly misdirects the telegraph in order to give Quirke time to hide evidence of his illegal activities. Mrs. Delane registers the message but does so fraudulently to sabotage the investigative activities of the British police. When asked about the delivery of the telegraph, Mrs. Delane reveals the importance of the post and its technologies of communication to the authorities: "[i]f there is any way for a message to come that is quicker than to come by the wires, tell me what it is and I'll be obliged to you" (*HH* 53). She recognizes that she is the only conduit for the transfer of information between Dublin Castle and Cloon, and her role as the official register of such communication allows her to clog the pipes of administrative information. Just as the inhabitants of Carrow create a new reality by the submission of false testimonials, Mrs. Delane can shape her world by controlling the content and temporal frames of information that pass through the post office. In Gregory's Cloon, the postmistress controls both barracks and church.

However, the play reveals an ambivalence about the truth claim of the post. While Quirke escapes arrest and the community remains intact, Hyacinth Halvey is buried under the weight of his "character," the one built from his letters of recommendation. Despite his best efforts to define himself, Halvey is continually consumed and reinscribed by the myth that preceded him in ink. Gregory's deep ambivalence about the post office and its ability to create, not just slavishly represent, reality in the play runs counter to much nineteenth-century thought. Although Gregory's farce reveals the complexities of representation and the transmission of information, its rather formulaic structure does not

allow for the types of stylistic experimentation that later Irish writers would develop to express postal and literary exchanges in the modern world.

The crimes committed in *Hyacinth Halvey* provide comedic relief, and as letters are sent, telegrams redirected, and messages misinterpreted, the audience cannot help but laugh at the follies of trying to communicate by posted word. However, the ability to communicate can be a life or death matter, and the business of keeping the lines of transfer open and efficient provides the livelihoods on which many survive, Gregory suggests, a realization that is borne out in Thomas Clarke's *Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life*.

Clarke: *Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life*

The fight for Irish independence, like any military campaign, required timely, secretive correspondence. In this way, Ireland's road to independence ran parallel to the postal routes leading to the sorting rooms of Mount Pleasant and the offices of Dublin's GPO, as well as to the clandestine journeys of private messengers. In *Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life*, for which P. S. O'Hegarty wrote the introduction, Thomas J. Clarke gives one of the most intriguing takes of the period on this postal exchange. A Fenian prisoner in the British penal system during the late nineteenth century, Clarke's dispassionate and deeply moving account of his time in the Millbank, Chatham, and Portland prisons from 1883 until his release in 1898 recounts both the horrors of the silent system and the brief occasions of comfort, joy, and learning that were concocted out of the odds and ends of prison life. In his introduction to the memoir, O'Hegarty relates a quotation from Arthur Hamilton Norway, Secretary of the Royal Mail in Ireland,

to the Hardinge Commission regarding intercepted postal communications among separatists. Norway offered the following evidence to the commission: "But it seemed safe to classify as dangerous those who were credibly reported to be in more than occasional or chance communication with some one or more of the small group of persons known in Dublin to be dangerously seditious, e.g., T. J. Clarke."[15] Through his role as Secretary of the Post Office in Ireland, Norway was able to locate Clarke as a central node in the circulation of information among advanced nationalists, an important designation within the inquiry that O'Hegarty recognized. Clarke, in his own way, was at the very center of an unofficial, provisional postal system that he carefully documented in his memoir of prison life. Indeed, Clarke's account of the experience of Fenian prisoners held in the time leading up to the Anglo-Irish War and subsequent civil war illustrates the profound connection between forced silence and the invention of novel circuits of communication.

Much like the Cold Bath Fields Prison, the penal homes Clarke experienced operated by and large on the dreaded Victorian silent system. The horrors of this brand of confinement have been well-documented by prisoners and outside observers alike. In his memoir, Clarke focuses on how the enforced silence resulted in the slow deterioration of mental health, as evidenced by Clarke's painful account of the mental breakdown of his friend and fellow inmate, Dr. Thomas Gallagher. The British medical world had long since archived the particular cruelty inflicted by the silent system on prisoners' mental

[15] P. S. O'Hegarty, introduction to Thomas J. Clarke, *Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life* (Dublin: Maunsel and Roberts, 1922), ix.

health. In the medical journal *The Lancet*, for example, British doctors reminded the reading public about the psychological effects of the silent system as early as 1866:

> Within the prison, cases of insanity and of suicide are frequent enough to put it beyond doubt that the system is too bad for flesh and blood to bear. Probably it is the men of active mind and impatient temperament—the men most resembling the convicted Fenians—who are driven by its tortures into lunacy, or seek refuge from them in death.[16]

Mental collapse and suicide were often by-products of the silent system, and Clarke captures this everyday struggle to fend off insanity. Clarke describes how his own anxiety about his state of mind peaked when he began to hear an insidious buzzing noise inside his head both day and night. He began to fear that the strictures of his punishment had at last collapsed his now-fragile mind. However, one night as Clarke marched back to his cell after a day's labor, he noticed that prison officials had recently installed a wire running from the military barracks on a hill adjacent to the prison. The wire entered the building through a ventilation shaft directly above Clarke's cell. He silently rejoiced in the recognition that the buzzing emanated not from a damaged psyche but the electric pulses of a newly installed telegraph wire.[17]

Although as a prisoner Clarke had much difficulty communicating with the outside world—a type of discourse represented by the telegraph wire connecting the prison to the barracks, which Clarke could hear but not utilize—he was able to construct

[16] "Solitary Imprisonment of Fenians," *The Lancet: A Journal of British and Foreign Medicine, Physiology, Surgery, Chemistry, Criticism, Literature and News* (10 February 1866): 152.

[17] Thomas J. Clarke, *Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life* (Dublin: Maunsel and Roberts, 1922), 72-73—hereafter cited in-text as (*G* 72-73).

his own system of information conveyance, one capable of reuniting the isolated and silenced Fenians. In fact, the whole of *Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life* can be seen as a compendium of various successful and failed efforts at communication, efforts that culminated in the publication of the book after Clarke's execution for his involvement in the Easter Rising.[18] While this publication allowed Clarke to successfully communicate his struggle posthumously to a larger reading public in Ireland and abroad, this victory was hard won. Indeed, Clarke reveals that throughout his incarceration, he and the others resisted the prison's best efforts to silence them, carrying on a lively and sustaining conversation by utilizing the bits and pieces at hand with cunning ingenuity. This provisional communications network became highly regimented and ritualized to escape the prying eyes of the guards. Clarke describes his enterprise in writing using the language of postal institutions: "We had our code of signals for communicating to each other by sight these we owed to Egan; we had our post office, authorised, not by the Postmaster-General, but by John Daly. Through our post office thousands of notes passed. We had our telephones and our cell telegraph, which latter was introduced by myself very early in our imprisonment" (*G* 10-11).

Clarke's description of his relationship with fellow prisoners John Daly and James F. Egan at this point in the narrative reveals the brotherly, at times boyish, bonds fused in prison. Information—bits of stories, jokes, poems, news, and warnings—circulates through the seemingly impenetrable surfaces of stone, brick, and iron. Notes

[18] Reactions to the silent system in Clarke and Oscar Wilde are also studied in Casey A. Jarrin's article, "You Have the Right to Refuse Silence: Oscar Wilde's Prison Letters and Tom Clarke's Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life," *Eiré-Ireland* 43, no. 3-4 (2008): 85-117. My argument here is also indebted to conversations with Nicholas Allen during his tenure as the John J. Burns scholar.

passed from cell to cell behind turned backs "shot in as you would shoot a marble, without any movement of arm or body" (4). These small moments of relief and connection drive Clarke's narrative and his will to survive. In one of the memoir's most touching moments, Clarke writes, edits, and prints the *Chatham Irish Felon*, a newspaper he has secretly composed while working in the prison's print shop as a stereotyper. The news sheet—"Printed and Published at Her Majesty's Convict Prison, Chatham, by Henry Hammond Wilson [Clarke's pseudonym], Saturday, such and such a date"—contains treasonous articles, satirical verse, and news dreamt up by Clarke. These words are accompanied by woodcuts of convicts, left over from past issues of the *Hue and Cry* (37-41). The detailed account of how Clarke purposefully pied formes of type, composes the text, prints on discarded tissue paper with a stereotyping oven, and sends it along to Daly shows both the lengths that the prisoners were willing to go to in order to make contact and the boyish inventiveness that united the Fenians and broke the monotony of prison life.

The silent system failed to destroy Clarke's sense of spirit and camaraderie in this instance, and when the opportunity arose for the delivery of actual newspapers from the outside world, Clarke seized it. Labor within the prison took many forms, and when Clarke rotated through the tinsmith's shop, he discovered access to the outside world in a wooden crate. The prison supplied tinwares to Woolwich Arsenal in southeast London, and as Clarke packed the bottles, carefully interspersed with coconut fiber, into the crates, he snuck a message in chalk on wood asking for a return supply of newspapers from whomever might unpack the bottles at the arsenal. As these crates returned laden with newspapers, the Fenian post inside Portland went global. The inmates suddenly had

access to information circulating beyond the prison walls, and despite the precarious system of delivery and storage, Clarke acted as news correspondent, aggregator, and analyst for his fellow Irishmen. Using the "prisonese" and shorthand learnt from the prison library's worn copy of Cassel's *Popular Educator*, Clarke sent letters to friends on the outside through an unwitting carrier stationed at Woolwich. These anecdotes, along with many others from this much-neglected memoir, are not merely illustrative of Clarke's cunning or the suffering inflicted by the British penal system; they also point to how experiences of Irish nationalism during this period required alternative and provisional forms of communication. Far from being a provincial or isolated place, Ireland was deeply connected to the rest of the world. Perhaps no one knew this better than Clarke. Born on the Isle of Wight, Clarke had spent his childhood in Ceylon and London, but he struggled for Irish independence in America, England, and Ireland. And even in the most extreme moments of seclusion and silence, *Glimpses of an Irish Felon's Prison Life* demonstrates that an entire world circulated through those lonely cells.

Still, the most significant modes of communications among the prisoners were the secret codes invented and deployed by the initiated. Under normal conditions, oral speech and the written word were useless in conveying information from prisoner to prisoner. An overheard whisper meant days of starvation and brutal beatings. Consequently, a new form of conveyance emerged to meet the restrictions of the prison environment. Early on during his imprisonment, Clarke dreamt up his own form of Morse code, one that could be softly tapped out on the cold metal surfaces of a prison cell. Using a needle and a paper scrap, he punched out the code and sent the perforated paper to Daly and Egan. The absence or gap where the needle prick met paper formed a new language and inaugurated

a clandestine and contingent telegraph. Like Clarke's prisonese and shorthand, the series of sharp and blunt taps served to mimic the function of the telegraph wire running from the barracks to the prison, but it also put the technology of communication to alternative uses. The new languages and modes of transmission Clarke describes create a portrait of a radical postal regime, one that continues after his release in the form of Clarke's storefront in Dublin. Like the prison, the bookstore became a space for the circulation of dissident information that had to take place under the radar of the state. This alternative communications circuit was foundational in both the Irish revolutionary movement and the restructuring of language. It resonated throughout large segments of Irish life and writing, constituting its own postal regime that provided insiders with a local private language and link to the world at large.

Tagore: *The Post Office* and "The Postmaster"

In May 1913, a play by Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore opened on the Abbey stage in a special performance in aid of the Building Fund of St. Enda's College. Despite its setting in Bangladesh, reviewers noted its Irish character. Tagore's close ties to W. B. Yeats were particularly instrumental in giving Tagore's reputation this Celtic inflection among Western readers and theatregoers. Yeats had befriended Tagore in 1912 and helped translate his most famous book of poetry *Gitanjali*, which captured the imagination of Europe and resulted in a Nobel Prize for its author in November 1913. Earlier in the year, Yeats had primed a Dublin audience for Tagore's poetry and drama by lecturing on the genius of the Bengali writer and his influence on Yeats's own poetry. Perhaps it was no surprise, then, that *The Post Office* opened in Dublin to positive

reviews. A writer for the *Sunday Independent* summarized the play as conveying "in touching and pathetic manner an idea of the call of Death—the summons from this life to the Unknown—and it is suggested through the medium of a delicate child, who wastes away and dies. The arrival of death being figuratively represented by a letter from the King, delivered through 'The Post Office.'"[19]

European audiences perceived the play's Irish character, and its placement next to Patrick Pearse's *An Ri* in Dublin and Synge's *The Well of the Saints* in London reinforced this Irish association. As Ernest Rhys commented, *The Post Office* had "a partly Irish, instead of an Indian, characterization of its village humours."[20] The Cuala Press issued the play in book form the following year with a preface in which Yeats speaks in mysterious language about the emotional simplicity of death's call in the play.[21] Beyond the immediate circumstances of its staging and publication, however, *The Post Office* sits comfortably with the writings of Lady Gregory and Clarke because of the shared colonial experiences of Ireland and India and the writers' shared recognition of the post office's importance within the political and social structures.

In Tagore's drama, Amal, the young protagonist, cannot leave the confines of his adopted home due to his possibly terminal illness. His uncle, under the direction of the local physician, closes all the doors and windows of the house except one, which looks out onto the road and its passers-by and serves as a single portal through which Amal is

[19] "Excellent Performance in Aid of St. Enda's Building Fund," *Sunday Independent* (May 18, 1913), A1.

[20] Ernest Rhys, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biographical Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 83.

[21] W. B. Yeats, preface to Rabindranath Tagore, *The Post Office* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1914), n.p.

able to see and interact with the world. This road becomes a conduit for information and an escape from the imprisonment of ill health and ennui. For example, as the dairyman passes, Amal hails the craftsman to inquire about his village across the stream. During the conversation, Amal demonstrates a preternatural ability to imagine this space in minute detail. After hearing Amal describe his village, the dairyman responds with incredulity: "But, my dear child, surely you must have been there for a walk some time."[22] The conversational space made possible by the window is the means of imaginative travel for Amal, and although he has never crossed the river into the dairy village, his interactions allow for a vivid recreation of the space. Amal's ability to imagine an elsewhere and his desire to move beyond the bounds of his own physical and mental confinement endear him to the dairyman and the others that he meets. As the dairyman leaves the window and continues his route through the countryside, he offers Amal a gift and thanks him: "[Y]ou have taught me how to be happy selling curds" (33). Though this moment in the play seems a bit contrived, it speaks to the importance of creating networks of information and experience. The dairyman recognizes that his own monotonous and quotidian trade allows for a connection to a people and landscape that Amal can only dream about from his window.

This sentiment is further explored in the drama's primary symbol of connectivity: the post office, newly erected on the far side of highway. When the local watchman passes by the window, Amal inquires: "[W]hat's going on there in that big house on the other side, where there is a flag flying high up and the people are always going in and

[22] Rabindranath Tagore, *The Post Office* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 30—hereafter cited in-text as (*PO* 30).

out?" (38-39). Amal intuitively notices that the post office, which lies just beyond his reach, is a center of activity and exchange, and its grandeur and importance is marked by the golden flag crowning the structure. Yet Amal needs further clarification about the role of the post:

> Watchman:
>
> Oh, there? That's our new Post Office.
>
> Amal:
>
> Post Office? Whose?
>
> Watchman:
>
> Whose? Why, the King's surely! (39)

The post office in its leadership, insignia, and stated purpose functions as an extension of the state and its hegemony. Yet this does not take into account the full imaginative potential of this space. The possibility of connectivity and the desire to move beyond the bounds of the status quo enliven Tagore's text. Amal does not see colonial or class conflict in the spectre of the post office; rather, he desires to hear word from the king and to one day be fit enough to be a mail carrier. These aspirations, which offer the hope of overcoming debilitating illness and physical constraints, represent the types of interpersonal communication and transportation promised by a postal regime. In this regard, Tagore's portrayal of the rural post office shares much in common with Clarke's description of the prison's provisional post. The desire to transcend geographical, physical, and mental boundaries drives many toward literature and the escape it provides. For Tagore's Amal, whose illness separates him from a world of experience, the post office is the institution with the power to bring word from the outside world.

The presence of the post office just beyond Amal's window gives him the imaginative space to begin thinking about corresponding with royalty. However, his ambition does not stop there. Amal decides on a career as a postman where he can travel "from door to door, all through the country . . . rain or shine, rich or poor, from home to home delivering letters" (41). For a young boy imprisoned by illness and the walls of his home, the mere chance to move freely and work within a communications network can capture the imagination and one's hopes for the future. To be a postal carrier is to see the world through the geography of addresses and postal routes, a complex web that encompassed most of the world at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Post Office is not the only work in which Tagore takes up the theme of the postal service. In "An Indian Folk Religion," Tagore discusses a man named Gagan Harkara whom he knew quite well in India. Gagan was a poet and postmaster who collected and delivered Tagore's mail in Kumarkhali. Gagan, whose given name was Gaganchandra Dam, occupies an interesting position within the communications circuit as one who composes and recites oral poetry and is responsible for the movement of written letters within an imperial postal regime. Tagore describes him as being premodern in his sensibility:

> He was almost illiterate; and the ideas he received from his Baül teacher found no distraction from the self-consciousness of the modern age. . . . The sentiment, to which he gave such intensity of expression, is common to most of the songs of his sect. And it is a sect, almost exclusively confined to that lower floor of society,

where the light of modern education hardly finds an entrance, while wealth and respectability shun its utter indigence.[23]

Much like Yeats, who was fascinated with the ancient poetry, myth, and traditional verse forms of Ireland, Tagore valued the unspoiled genius that low birth, poverty, and native tutelage protect. Interestingly, Yeats's introduction to *Gitanjali* assigns a similar type of primitive simplicity to Tagore and his poetry that contrasts with the "railway trains," "tops of omnibuses," and "restaurants" where Yeats reads translations of Tagore's verse.[24] Gagan also participates in a global network of exchange, one that allows Tagore to converse with the world at large.

In a short story translated as "The Postmaster," Tagore dramatizes incidents from Gagan's life. Tagore's reputation as a poet overshadowed his prose work; nevertheless, his short stories, which Yeats found engaging, have a distinctive appeal and an epiphanic quality similar to that of Joyce's short fiction. "The Postmaster" opens with a reminder of the background presence of English influence behind the postal networks of India: "Though the village was a small one, there was an indigo factory nearby, and the proprietor, an Englishman, had managed to get a post office established."[25] Unsurprisingly, in India and Ireland, the needs of English business dominated many infrastructure decisions, including the placement of post offices and routes.[26] Yet the post

[23] Rabindranath Tagore, "An Indian Folk Religion," *Creative Unity* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 79.

[24] W. B. Yeats, introduction to Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali* (London: India Society, 1912), xiii.

[25] Rabindranath Tagore, "The Postmaster," *Mashi and Other Stories* (London: Macmillan, 1918), 159.

[26] G. Prendiville's "The Social Magic of Correspondence: Concepts of the Mails in Early Nineteenth Century Ireland*," Journal of Historical Geography* 31 (2005): 459-77, explores some of these business-directed infrastructure decisions in Ireland.

office of Tagore's short story differs greatly from the one presented in *The Post Office*. The post office in the story does not suggest the imaginative possibility of connection and travel; instead, the simple shed that becomes the postmaster's office and home is a place of exile and isolation. Coming from Calcutta, the newly installed civil servant resides uncomfortably in this rural space, away from family and friends. Despite his proximity to the engines of communication, he feels nothing but loneliness. He tries to fill his time writing nature poetry, "[b]ut God knows that the poor fellow would have felt it as the gift of a new life, if some genie of the Arabian Nights had in one night swept away the trees, leaves, and all and replaced them with a macadamised road, hiding the clouds from view with rows of tall houses."[27] The postmaster gravitates toward poetry as a way of reaching out, but verse, as he understands it, must celebrate the natural world, something he neither understands nor enjoys. Rather, he desires a modern urban space with large buildings and paved roads. These are the spaces where the masses meet and interact, unlike the provincial village in which he finds himself.

The postmaster's abortive attempts at poetry do not ease his isolation. The closest person to him is a young girl named Ratan, an orphan who lives outside the post office and acts as his house servant. To ease his boredom and loneliness, he begins to teach Ratan to read. These lessons strengthen the bond between the two, and when the postmaster falls ill, Ratan provides the care and intimacy that he needs. After he recovers from his illness, the postmaster decides to apply for a transfer and begins to pull away from the girl. Ratan refuses to relinquish her bond with the postmaster, and she "read her

[27] Tagore, "The Postmaster," 160.

old lessons over and over again—her great fear was lest when the call came, she might be found wanting in the double consonants."[28] His transfer denied, the postmaster relinquishes his post and informs Ratan that he will be returning to Calcutta without her. Her grief momentarily overtakes him, but "the traveller, borne on the breast of the swift-flowing river, consoled himself with philosophical reflections on the numberless meetings and partings going on in the world—on death, the great parting, from which none returns."[29] The central irony of the story emanates from the fact that the man responsible for the flow of communication and interpersonal connection for the area cannot form new relationships or maintain old ones during his period of exile. The story thus closes with his musings on partings and absences while he travels by boat back to the metropolis, having given up his position as facilitator of the mail in India.

Tagore's image of the post office in India contends with other literary representations of the time. Two decades earlier, Kipling had raised the issue of the imperial post in his poem "The Overland Mail," which appeared in the second edition of his collection *Departmental Ditties*. The poem takes the relentless marching of letters from post to post as its theme:

> In the name of the Empress of India, make way,
>
> O Lords of the Jungle, wherever you roam,
>
> The woods are astir at the close of the day—
>
> We exiles are waiting for letters from Home.
>
> Let the robber retreat—let the tiger turn tail—

[28] Tagore, "The Postmaster," 165.
[29] Tagore, "The Postmaster," 169.

In the name of the Empress, the Overland Mail![30]

Kipling emphasizes the dangers inherent in moving mail across the great expanses of India. The natural world—jungle, woods, tiger—and human treachery are potentially dangerous impediments to this process. Kipling nevertheless suggests the great hope and confidence that the British in India have in their postal institutions. The first and last line of each stanza of the poem invoke the name of Queen Victoria, Empress of India, who commands the delivery of the mail against all dangers. Kipling's uncritical celebration of the colonial postal service represents the great power and resources of the imperial civil service, while simultaneously revealing the anxiety about and desire for connectivity experienced by British "exiles" in India.

"The Overland Mail" does not register the modes of resistance and subversion apparent in the works of Gregory, Clarke, and Tagore. It also omits the rich postal traditions of India that existed before the installation of British networks. Yet it can still be seen as a celebration of the native runners who once conveyed the mailbags from post to post. *St. Martin's-le-Grand*, a fascinating magazine written for and by British postal employees, republished Kipling's poem and gave further insight into how the British postal service built upon the preexisting structures of information exchange in India:

> The lowly mail runner, jingling through the jungle with his staff and bells, and defending, sometimes at the cost of his life, the letter bags entrusted to his care, is not perhaps idyllic, but he is a pioneer of civilization in his

[30] Rudyard Kipling, "The Overland Mail," *Departmental Ditties and Other Verses*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1886), 81.

> degree. He is very proud of his duties. It is often amusing to watch the air of self-importance he assumes when carrying Her Majesty's mail.[31]

Despite the patronizing tone, there is an acknowledgment of the contributions made by Indian mail carriers. This illusion of any kind of equality or fraternity between British and Indian carriers dissolves, however, as the article begins to explain the method of postal inspections wherein a European superintendent rides behind a group of carriers as they run their routes. After a certain distance the superintendent, having "paternal omnipotence," dismounts and measures the heart rate and breathing of each carrier in order that "shirkers are at once spotted by their heavy breathing and profuse perspiration."[32] These practices are certainly striking and do not appear in either Kipling's romanticization of the postal service or Tagore's drama. Both, though, speak to the strong desire for connectivity. Kipling looks to the need for a strong communications network to link Britons abroad to the imperial center. Tagore, on the other hand, sees possibilities beyond the functioning of imperial power and bureaucratic management. The post office brings unity to a world where individuals are separated by time, space, and death.

Gregory, Clarke, and Tagore offer three visions of the postal regime of the British Empire at the turn of the century. Gregory's post office is a place of subversion, purposeful obfuscation, and advancement at the expense of the structures of authority. The characters understand that the post office functions as a place of official validation. Clarke's memoir testifies to the ways in which individuals are able to usurp the

[31] "The Harkara," *St. Martin's-le-Grand* (July 1896): 313.
[32] "The Harkara," 314.

apparatuses of the official transfer of information and create provisional means through which people can communicate. The publication of Clarke's memoir after his execution is yet another manifestation of the desire to be heard. After Clarke's long incarceration and the struggle for Irish independence, Maunsel and Sons published the memoir that Clarke had written and that had to be transported through the official post where it could be received in London and processed for British copyright protection. While official postal structures had been under the control of the state for centuries, Clarke reminds his readers that the desire for communication necessitates the creation of new forms cobbled together from the material at hand. Finally, Tagore's play examines the symbolism of the physical presence of the post. The ambivalent vision of this architecture can be seen in the interplay between colonial oppression and the potential for movement and border crossings.

Edwardian writers challenged Victorian celebrations of the postal service, revealing the challenges to the postal service's official structures that were arising at the fringes of Empire. In doing so, they represented the postal regime at its fraying edges rather than at its very heart. Lady Gregory's farcical rural delivery service, Clarke's prison, and Tagore's symbolic Bengal post office suggest extraordinary portraits of the post that are somewhat removed from the ways in which the majority of British subjects experienced and described their daily postal interactions. Yet James Joyce made perhaps the most important contribution to the evolving postal imagination of the time, enacting the linguistic complexities and disruptions that these three Edwardian precursors only represented. In doing so, Joyce inaugurated a distinctly modernist vision of the post.

Joyce and the Modernist Post

The post office dutifully carries on its business in the background of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In the opening pages of the novel, Stephen looks upon "the mailboat clearing the harbourmouth of Kingstown,"[33] a vital link to England and a signal of the time—8.15am, according to the vessel's scheduled route. In the "Calypso" episode, Bloom collects the morning mail from the hall floor, and the letter he delivers upstairs to Molly sets many of the day's events in motion. So many of the characters in *Ulysses* have some kind of contact with the postal service. Mulligan brings a telegram for Stephen. Fr. Conmee asks Burney Lynam to post a letter. Denis Breen receives a suspicious postcard. Peggy Griffin answers a job advertisement under the name of Martha. Postal carriers, post offices, mailboats, stamps, telegrams, money orders, and parcels circulate via the thoroughfares, waterways, and wires of Dublin.

Joyce's representation of the post office has not escaped the attention of critics. In the last twenty years, such arguments have frequently relied on Derrida's postal principle as a way of interpreting the frequent appearance of postal activities in Joyce's fiction.[34] In his influential lecture, "Ulysses Gramophone," Derrida begins by considering the relationship between his early work *The Post Card* (1980) and his current understanding of Joyce:

[33] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Random House, 1986), 1.83-84—hereafter cited in-text as (*U* 1.83-84).

[34] See Shari Benstock, "The Printed Letters in *Ulysses*," *James Joyce Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1982): 415-27 and "The Letter of the Law: *La Carte Postale* in *Finnegans Wake*," *Philological Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1984): 163-85. See also Jed Rasula, "*Finnegans Wake* and the Character of the Letter," *James Joyce Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1997): 517-30, and Andrew J. Mitchell, "Meaning Postponed: *Finnegans Wake* and *The Post Card*," *James Joyce Quarterly* 44, no .1 (2006): 59-76.

> This is, in fact, what I had initially thought of for this lecture on *Ulysses*, to address (addresser), as you say in English, the postcard scene, rather the inverse of what I did in *La carte postale*, where I tried to restage the babelization of the postal system in *Finnegans Wake*. You will no doubt know better than I that the whole pack of postcards perhaps hints at the hypothesis that the geography of Ulysses' trips around the Mediterranean lake could have the structure of a postcard or a cartography of postal dispatches.[35]

Derrida's discussion of the postal principle ultimately leads him to observe: "Ulysses, an immense postcard."[36]

Scholars have tended to follow Derrida's lead in investigating the intersection of postal activities and the operations of desire. Like Lacan's well-known seminar on Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, Derrida's postal principle originates from a psychoanalytic framework that privileges discussions of desire, absence, and the unconscious. When Joyce's postal representations are viewed through this lens, the connection between the exchange of letters and the machinations of desire becomes clear. David Anton Spurr, for example, has traced notions of spatial mastery in Joyce by examining the relationship between postal correspondence and desire.[37] Influenced by Lacanian readings of Bloom's desire for submission and erotic anonymity, Spurr shows the post office to be a powerful institution in the mediation of certain forms of desire. This is certainly the case in many of the postal exchanges in Joyce's fiction. Yet while poststructural readings such as

[35] Jacques Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 259-60.

[36] Derrida, "Ulysses Gramophone," 260.

[37] David Anton Spurr, "Joyce and the Post," *Making Space in the Works of James Joyce*, ed. Valérie Bénéjam and John Bishop (London: Routledge, 2011), 155-172.

Spurr's offer intriguing insights into the structure of Joyce's work, the communication of desire, and the theoretical underpinnings of deconstruction itself, they do little to connect the physical structures of the post office with the ways in which these structures were experienced and represented in the everyday lives of those living under the early twentieth-century postal regime. Such readings focus on the exchange and appearance of letters at the expense of investigating the important institutions that move and manage them and the technologies and networks that transmit messages from sender to recipient.

Indeed, if the symbolic economy of the letter deserves scrutiny, so, too, do the networks and material infrastructures of the mail. Like Gregory, Clarke, and Tagore, Joyce illuminates not only the abstract exchange of messages, but also the concrete forms through which postal and literary transmission take place. Modernist literature is largely understood to have represented the basic technologies of the postal order in order to comment on the literary exchange that took place between contemporaneous writers and readers. Joyce achieves this through the active subversion of postal mechanisms to achieve an advantage in erotic and economic negotiations.

Ulysses contains just such a series of rather complex negotiations, several of which involve characters exploiting the ambiguities of the postal system for fraudulent financial transactions reflective of actual historical machinations. After the global economic depression that began in 2008, the Ponzi scheme became part of the common vocabulary for economic disaster. However, it is less well-known that the original Ponzi scheme came out of the burgeoning global postal network. In 1903, Charles Ponzi left Italy, the country of his birth, to find his fortune in the Americas. Before coming to fame through his eponymous financial fraud scheme, he worked for a failed bank in Montreal

and served time in a U.S. prison for check forgery and immigrant smuggling on two separate occasions. Upon his release, he attempted a legitimate venture by moving to Boston and starting a business directory with paid advertising. The venture never got off the ground, as Ponzi did not succeed as an ad canvasser for the directory. The enterprise did, however, connect the conman to a curious loophole in the global postal service. Ponzi discovered the international reply coupon, which allowed senders to prepay for return postage. The reply coupon could be purchased in the country of origin at the local postage rate and sent across international borders; it could likewise be redeemed for the appropriate postage stamp in any country that participated in the Universal Postal Union. World War I had recently decimated the Italian economy, and Ponzi realized he could purchase international reply coupons in Italy and exchange them for U.S. postage worth four times his initial investment. This method of arbitrage wasn't illegal, but Ponzi funded the scheme on a large scale through the financial backing of a number of investors who received returns on their money from the capital of new investors rather than the profits gained from the exchange in postage. This manipulation of the postal service initially allowed Ponzi to build up his personal fortune; however, it finally landed him in prison where he served a lifetime sentence for eighty-six counts of mail fraud. Robbing Peter to pay Paul certainly didn't originate with Charles Ponzi, but his scheme became infamous because of the magnitude of fraud he achieved through networks of modern communications. The exchange rate on postage got the ball rolling, but it was the international rumor mill that spread word of huge returns for Ponzi's investors and an economic system dependent on the spread of unverified financial information that made Ponzi wealthy.

Joyce's characters find similar niches for personal and financial advancement in the postal regime. Bloom, of course, utilizes the anonymity of postal networks to take on the identity of Henry Flowers, while his father-in-law, Major Tweedy, makes a small fortune through the post. In "Calypso," the sound of Molly disturbing the brass quoits of their marital bed triggers a thought about Tweedy in Bloom's morning musings:

Bought it at the governor's auction. Got a short knock. Hard as nails at a bargain, old Tweedy. Yes, sir. At Plevna that was. I rose from the ranks, sir, and I'm proud of it. Still he had brains enough to make that corner in stamps. Now that was farseeing.

His hand took his hat from the peg over his installed heavy overcoat and his lost property office secondhand waterproof. Stamps: stickleback pictures. Daresay lots of officers are in the swim too. Course they do. (*U* 4.62-78)

Critics have typically interpreted Tweedy's philatelic windfall to have come from wise investments in rare stamps.[38] Indeed, the trade in rare and collectable stamps was strong in the late nineteenth century. Some accounts of the history of stamp collecting place its origins in Ireland with the revenue stamps compiled by John Bourke, Receiver General of Stamp Dues in Ireland. In 1774, Bourke had pasted the stamps into a book as a means of preserving and organizing them. After the introduction of the Penny Black, the first modern British postal stamp, in 1840, people immediately began collecting these small bits of paper. By the 1860s, stamp collecting as a hobby had spread across Europe, boasting devotees in the British Isles and beyond. Philatelic investment was not far

[38] Don Gifford, for instance, suggests that "Tweedy, a stamp collector, had apparently bought up all available copies of an unusual stamp before the stamp was recognized as valuable"; see Gifford's *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's* Ulysses (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 71.

behind, as collectors bought and sold stamps on the open market. In antiquarian news in the 1890s, stamp collecting was recognized as a legitimate financial device. One journalist reported on the creation of a limited liability company formed out of an old stamp dealer's business, writing that "as proof of the great profits made by timbromanists, they state that, the other day, one stamp amongst others, which cost one penny, was glad bought for six guineas; and they have constantly collections of stamps offered for small sums that afterwards realize 200 per cent. profits."[39]

Bloom is aware of Tweedy's acumen on the auction floor. Tweedy had won the bed on a "short knock" from the auctioneer. However, Tweedy's philatelic wealth may have come from a more complex postal manipulation, one related to his military service in Gibraltar and the ambiguities of the postal service on the fringes of empire. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, wily entrepreneurs visited small "independent or semi-independent states" and convinced local authorities to issue their own local postal stamps. They would then purchase the entire print run of the stamps and advertise their sale on the London stamp-collecting market. The scheme allowed local rulers to profit in the sale of stamps never truly destined for postal circulation, while the speculators could charge exorbitant prices on the market due to the scarcity of the stamps and the monopoly they held. The practice became so rampant that in 1895, some British collectors formed The Society for the Suppression of Speculative Stamps, which sought to end the "singular

[39] "Antiquarian News," *The Antiquary: A Magazine Devoted to the Study of the Past* 2 (1880): 35.

traffic, a traffic having a touch of humor in it, but a traffic which, if not downright fraudulent is at any rate decidedly 'shady.'"[40]

The Society's description of the speculative stamp trade seems to fit many of the postal schemes within *Ulysses*—practices whose ethics and legality are ambiguous but nevertheless have a mischievous cleverness. Tweedy's "corner in stamps," for example, could very well be imagined as a monopoly on speculative stamps printed in Gibraltar during his deployment there. Just before the turn of the century, one of the rarest stamps to come out of Gibraltar entered the market under less than honorable terms. A run of 10 centimos stamps issued in 1880 contained a misprint—the denomination was absent. A sharp-eyed postal employee caught the mistake and set the stamps aside. Unable to legally acquire the stamps as a postal employee, he had an acquaintance buy up the stamps and then sell them on the collector's market at a substantial profit.[41]

Likewise, Tweedy wasn't just farseeing, but also farcing, in his printing of colonial postal stamps to sell to collectors in England. However, his success in philatelic speculation did not translate into a large inheritance for Molly. Her accent and smile are "all father left me in spite of his stamps" (*U* 18.890). Yet for Molly stamps signify in a way that is not confined to their speculative worth. She values them for their ability to convey messages, both through the post and through a related system of clandestine signs. Reading a letter from an admirer, she seeks "to find out by the handwriting or the language of stamps" (18.767) something about the sender and his intentions. Developed in England in the late nineteenth century, the "language of stamps" was a code used to

[40] "The Society for the Suppression of Speculative Stamps," *St. Martin's-le-Grand* 5, no. 20 (1895): 478.

[41] Fred J. Melville, "Stamp Collecting," *The Straits Times* (August 25, 1935): 21.

communicate simple messages through the position of the stamp on the card or envelope. For instance, in some systems a stamp turned forty-five degrees counterclockwise meant a kiss, while a stamp on its side instructed the recipient not to write again. Numerous guidebooks—such as *Cupid's Code for the Transmission of Secret Messages by Means of the Language of Postage Stamps* (1899)—appeared across Europe and spread this clandestine language. Curiously, these codes were almost completely amorous in nature and meant for personal correspondence. One could conceive of similar systems for secret business or political correspondence, but the fact that they were not widely used suggests the access to more secure modes of exchange through private carriers that was at the disposal of those with the wealth or influence to purchase such services. The language of stamps emphasizes the highly personal way in which people interpreted their exchanges through the post.

Tweedy's stamps—and the ambiguities surrounding their origin—are among the various postal tactics employed throughout *Ulysses* that challenge the official postal networks for personal forms of communication and profit. Drawing upon the example of stamp collecting, Ford Madox Ford poses an intriguing question that links literary and philatelic practices: "I have asked myself frequently since then why one should try to produce an illusion of reality in the mind of one's reader. Is it just an occupation like any other-like postage-stamp collecting, let us say—or is it the sole end and aim of art?"[42] For Ford, whose intention was to defend a notion of impressionism based on the attempt to create an illusion of reality for the reader from the writer's subjective mind, stamp

[42] Ford Madox Ford, "On Impressionism," *Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 44.

collecting unsurprisingly was a fundamentally different sort of activity. In many ways, this is a difficult claim to contradict; however, one might consider modernist literary practice as partially informed by these acts of curation, manipulation, and speculation. Joyce's texts present and catalog much postal ephemera along with many other examples of the collection of cultural artifacts from 1904 Dublin. In a similar sense, stamp collecting might be thought of as an attempt to reconstitute the world through stamps, which depict a region's leaders, landscape, flora and fauna, and historical events, among other images. These stickeyback pictures placed in an album create a sort of alternative physical and cultural landscape, with cancellation marks revealing the specific interactions between places. These connections would be further developed by artists of the 1950s, who adapted postal artifacts as their primary medium, using stamps and postcards as forms of art that could then be exchanged through global postal networks.[43] Ford no doubt chose stamp collecting—a seemingly unimaginative pursuit—as a foil to literature; however, as Joyce's work demonstrates, the language of stamps and their uses is not wholly dissimilar to the language of modernist writers.

In "Ithaca," Bloom's various schemes for becoming rich are revealed, and two of these utilize postal technologies and paraphernalia as a means of obtaining wealth. The market potential of race results conveyed via private telegraph from Britain to Ireland and the discovery of rare postage stamps soothe Bloom's twilight thoughts. Like all forms of speculation, both of these postal schemes necessitate special knowledge or the receipt of information before the information reaches others. They both rely on postal technologies

[43] John Held Jr., *Small Scale Subversion: Mail Art and Artistamps* (Breda, Netherlands: TAM Publishing, 2015).

while also serving as part of the post's larger mission in the movement of messages and information through language. The advantage of the "private wireless telegraph which would transmit by dot and dash system the result of a national equine handicap . . . won by an outsider at odds of 50 to 1 at 3 hr 8 m p.m. at Ascot (Greenwich time), the message being received and available for betting purposes in Dublin at 2.59 p.m. (Dunsink time)" (*U* 17.1674-78) was in the private conveyance of valuable information as a means of overcoming the normal limitations of time and distance.

The "unexpected discovery of an object of great monetary value" likewise relies on Bloom possessing a special kind of knowledge that allows him to identify a "valuable adhesive or impressed postage stamp" among the masses of common stamps and the presence of forgeries. Bloom could have found this knowledge in the philatelic literature of the time, but the specificity with which the stamps are described—"7 shilling, mauve, imperforate, Hamburg, 1866: 4 pence, rose, blue paper, perforate, Great Britain, 1855: 1 franc, stone, official, rouletted, diagonal surcharge, Luxembourg, 1878" (17. 1680-83)—is curious. The Hamburg stamp, for instance, does not exist as it is described by Joyce. There was indeed a 7 schilling stamp issued in mauve in Hamburg around the time, but it appeared in 1865 and was perforated, as all stamps issued from Hamburg were during this period. In 1904, at least one forgery of this particular stamp had been identified. As its discoverer noted, the Hamburg forgeries were quite good, but this was unsurprising because "the town has been, for years, *the* manufactory of forgeries for all the world."[44]

[44] R. B. Earée, *Album Weeds; or, How to Detect Forged Stamps* (London: Stanley, Gibbons, and Co., 1882), 215.

Elaborate postal schemes expose the vulnerability of communications networks; however, Joyce also explores the subtler ways in which the rhythms of the postal service shape everyday life. In the "Nausicaa" episode, the narrative voice shifts from its focus on Gerty McDowell to the consciousness of Leopold Bloom. Shortly after this shift, the postal events of the day give shape to Bloom's thoughts as he reflects on his wanderings through Dublin. Gerty's language, which is heavily laden with the discourses of women's magazines and adolescent concerns, gives way to Bloom's postal imagination. "Where did I put that letter?" breaks Bloom's meditation on his erotic exchange with Gerty, pulling him back into his memory of events earlier in the day (*U* 12.779). The letter, which records his epistolary flirtation with Martha Clifford, is one of the almost-talismanic objects that shape Bloom's thoughtscape on June 16, 1904. Throughout the novel, Bloom's mind moves among a series of letters within which he constructs and questions his familial and erotic relationships. The correspondence received from Martha and Milly and the missive to Molly from Boylan return again and again to Bloom. While these letters demonstrate the "postal effect" that Derrida and others have explored, they also reveal that the larger structures of the post office impinge upon and facilitate the characters' movement through the world. This can be clearly seen in "Nausicaa," as Bloom's letters lead to meditations on the ways in which the contemporaneous infrastructure of the Royal Mail shapes conceptions of time and space, while also enabling more precarious modes of linguistic conveyance.

While sitting on the rocks, Bloom looks toward Howth and spots a bat darting across the sky. In his mind, the precarious movements of the bat are akin to those of the sailor, especially an Odyssean one tossed on the waves of fate. Bloom imagines the way

in which storms must trouble both sailor and bird: "Nerve they have to fly over the ocean and back. Lots must be killed in storms, telegraph wires" (13.1146-7). In one sense, Joyce's lines here harken back to Stephen's early meditation on the "strandwining cable of all flesh" on the strand in "Proteus" (3.37). The nerve that takes birds across the ocean is both a certain hubris and a biological impulse and honing mechanism that directs their migratory patterns. The shared cables are the telegraph wires that pose a danger. They comprise a literal net of language that birds have to fly beyond. This danger was well-known at the time. In fact, one amateur scientist observed the fatal results of birds colliding with telegraph wires in the dark in the pages of *Hardwicke's Science Gossip*.[45]

Bloom's thoughts are similarly disrupted by the postal apparatus around him; however, his thoughts also have a way of situating him within a spatiotemporal context unique to the rhythms of Dublin at the time. For instance, Bloom looks out during the "shepherd's hour" where "from house to house, giving his ever welcome double knock, went the nine o'clock postman, the glowworm's lamp at his belt gleaming here and there through the laurel hedges" (*U* 13.1169-72). Bloom is able to clock the time of day to the regular postal deliveries, and his lamp traces its own pathway through the dusky neighborhoods of Irishtown. The mailman cuts a distinctive route through the early evening while Bloom thinks aloud about the movement of messages on the other side of the Irish sea: "Mailboat. Near Holyhead by now" (13.1243-44). The mailboat from Kingstown to Holyhead was one of the main routes for conveying messages and people from Ireland to Wales and then onto London via train. The mailboat provided a crucial

[45] Taylor, "Birds Killed by Telegraph Wires," *Hardewicke's Science Gossip XXI* (1885): 70.

link on a regular and frequent schedule. Bloom compares the movements of the mailboat to a less certain form of conveyance: "bottle with a story of a treasure in it . . . Parcel Post" (13.1250). In his fiction, Joyce moves between these two forms of delivery, one regulated and orderly and the other given over to chance and an almost-certain impossibility of reaching its intended audience. Thinking of his brief and distant encounter with Gerty, Bloom wishes to leave her a message. Unlike when corresponding with Martha, in corresponding with Gerty, Bloom chooses a more precarious mode of transmission—the bottle rather than the parcel post. Using a stick as a stylus, he writes in the sand, making it as far as "I. AM. A." before he gives up, thinking, "Useless. Washed away . . . Hopeless thing sand. Nothing grows in it. All fades" (13.1259, 1266-67).

Bloom's postal concerns come to a head in the "Circe" episode during which his correspondences haunt him, revealing the novel's investment in the fractured routes of postal delivery and their inability to produce stable identities. The figure of The Dark Mercury, who is a messenger of dark knowledge as well as a figure of syphilis,[46] appears to inform the guards that the Castle is looking for Bloom, who was "drummed out of the army." Here Tweedy, a drum major in the army, is conflated with his son-in-law, who responds to the accusation, along with Martha's plea to "clear [her] name," by suggesting: "Mistaken identity. The Lyon mail. Lesurques and Dubosc" (*U* 15.760-61). Joyce creates a complex and comical scene by revealing the anxieties originating from the various postal negotiations throughout the novel. The exchange of messages allows Bloom to both take on and deny identities such as that of Henry Flowers. As Bloom is placed on trial for "unlawfully watching and besetting," a whole host of other

[46] Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated*, 456.

improprieties of the post emerge, such as the anonymous letter and offer to "post a work of fiction" to Mrs. Yelverton Barry (15.1015-16), the obscene photographs in "double envelopes" sent to The Honorable Mrs. Mervyn Talboys (15.1065), and the "[u]nspeakable messages he telephoned mentally to Miss Dunn" (15.3029-30). The transgressions of which Bloom is accused have been presumably conducted with the understanding that they would remain anonymous through the hidden transactional networks of the post. However, in "Circe," which seeks to reveal many of the hidden doings and desires of Bloomsday, these networks are penetrated and the layering of postal identities is further complicated.

Reinforcing Bloom's postal transgressions is a curious passage in which Bloom identifies himself through a complex postal metaphor. As Bella Cohen's fan takes on a voice and confronts Bloom, he submits to her, saying:

> (*cowed*) Exuberant female. Enormously I desiderate your domination. I am exhausted, abandoned, no more young. I stand, so to speak, with an unposted letter bearing the extra regulation fee before the too late box of the general postoffice of human life. (15.2777-80)

Bloom's response reverses the power dynamics of his earlier postal transgressions. Whereas he once supposedly mailed unwanted letters and photographs to the respectable ladies of Dublin, here Bloom is not an active patron of the post, but rather a humble servant to its rules and regulations. Readings of this passage have tended to focus on the psychosexual drama between Bloom and Bella.[47] Yet Bloom's fantasy of being paralyzed

[47] For example, Tonya Krouse observes that "Bloom deploys the figure of the unposted letter . . . to signify his carefully formulated but as yet unrealized sexual desire .

at the threshold of the "general postoffice of human life" also reveals how the deeply postal institutions have penetrated Joyce's vision of the thoughtscapes of Dubliners.

Bloom had noticed the too-late box earlier in the day as he checked his mail at the Westland Row post office (*U* 5.52-3). As its name implies, the too-late box was a fee-based repository for mail after the post office had closed its doors to regular deliveries. Too-late boxes were often located at train stations, such as the one near the tracks at Westland Row, where the letters collected in the boxes could be easily postmarked and placed on the day's last postal train for the delivery the following day.

Robert Ballantyne, an author of a number of popular novels for adolescents, gives a detailed look at the postal service and particularly the too-late box in his novel *Post Haste: A Tale of Her Majesty's Mail* (1880). Telling of two Cork siblings who move to London to take up positions in the Royal Mail, the novel opens with a curious mishap in the west of Ireland. A postal carrier partakes in one too many glasses of whiskey offered to him by the hospitable folks along his lengthy route as he delivers letters and telegrams. As he treks over the last mountain on his route, he trips and falls into a ditch where he dies from the wintry storm.[48] Nothing more is said of the dead postman throughout the novel, but he is symbolic of the numerous and varied perils that meet the mail at every step of its delivery. Ballentyne also takes great care in his description of the mayhem that took place at the General Post Office in London in the final minutes before closing time. People rushed to deposit their books, newspapers, parcels, letters, and cards into their

. ." (*The Opposite of Desire: Sex and Pleasure in the Modernist Novel* [Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009], 130.)

[48] Robert Ballentyne, *Post Haste: A Tale of Her Majesty's Mail* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1880).

proper slots before the post office stopped accepting items at 6:01 p.m. (out of courtesy to its customers the post office set its clock one minute behind).[49] The frontispiece of the book depicts this rush of humanity to communicate messages to the world.

While Dickens wondered if postal sorters dreamt of the flow of letters, Joyce and his contemporaries suggest that they, along with everyone else, do. Recording the ways in which the flow of language through postal technologies embedded these messages within the unconscious, W. B. Northrop's short story, "A Telegraph Mystery," for example, features a supernatural voice that commandeers the dots and dashes of the telegraph. The narrator, a telegraph operator working in the London GPO, speaks to the art of inattention within the constant flow of language: "We operators receive so many messages of different descriptions—ciphers, and what not—that it is seldom a telegram finds its way into the inner consciousness, so to speak; they come and go by the thousands."[50] Yet the story's conflict arises from his inability to forget one particular message, which he even hears in the dripping of a faucet, spelling out the telegram in the regular staccato of Morse code. Henry James's *In the Cage* investigates a similar obsession of a telegraph girl who becomes entangled into a personal intrigue that she learns about over the wires.

Joyce's book of the night reflects similar concerns, extending the postal themes that run throughout *Ulysses* as characters such as Shaun the Post and the delivery of ALP's letter weave throughout Joyce's dreamscape. *Finnegans Wake*'s nightletter and its circuitous delivery at the hands of Shaun the Post is, in the manner of the book, told and retold in various guises. While an attempt to summarize the overarching narrative of

[49] Ballentyne, *Post Haste*, 81-83.

[50] W. B. Northrop, "A Telegraph Mystery: Written from the Operator's Notes," *Harmsworth Monthly Pictorial Magazine*, vol. 1 (London: Harmsworth, 1899), 540.

postal activities in the book would come to grief, an examination of a few of the postal passages of the text gives a sense of the ways in which Joyce patterns his movements of language on the postal technologies of his day. The letter, as well as *Finnegans Wake* as a whole, is an "Outragedy of poetscalds! Acomedy of letters!"[51]

Joyce's Shaun shares a lineage with Boucicault's character Shaun the Post in "Arrah-na-Pogue." The drama contains its own postal subversions—not unlike those found in the works of Clarke and Gregory. Arrah-na-pogue received her name from an incident in which she smuggled a secret message to her imprisoned stepbrother. She conveyed the message with a kiss by concealing the slip of paper in her mouth. Shaun, her betrothed, takes pride and joy in the story and her bravery, remarking, "No one but a woman would have thought of such a post-office."[52] This clandestine transfer is highly resonant for Joyce. It is the written word conveyed in a kiss—the word of mouth, in a very literal sense. Her ingenuity in moving messages does not end there, however. With Shaun locked in prison awaiting his death at the end of a rope, Arrah arranges to have a fire lit in his cell so that she can identify which chimney leads to her husband. With the smoke billowing forth, she attaches a message to a rock and throws it into the chimney where the message then tumbles out of Shaun's fireplace. Even though Shaun's occupation is "carrying the letter bag by the car," Arrah-na-Pogue is the master of conveying discreet messages and organizing clandestine communication. For Joyce, the Boucicault play is also reminiscent of adolescent sexuality and the kissing games of the period variously referred to as the post office or the postman's knock.

[51] James Joyce, *Finnegan's Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 425.
[52] Dion Boucicault, *Arrah-na-pogue* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), x.

Joyce used pen and paper to deliver the text of *Ulysses*, and after its printing, he prepared copies of the book for the post. As Richard Ellmann puts it:

> He helped Sylvia Beach to package copies for mailing, fondled the subscription lists, and cursed his friends in Trieste for not being on them, and in other ways made himself useful and plaintive. When reviews did not appear at once, he attributed the delay at first to the book's length, then was quick to assume that a boycott existed.[53]

While there is more certainty of communication in printing and mailing a book than delivering a message written in sand or floated in a bottle, Joyce and Beach recognized that the delivery methods of literary publication were still precarious. Indeed, they knew full well that even if one could be relatively sure the postal service would deliver the physical copies of a novel, the books reception and its interpretation could not be as accurately predicted. This became especially problematic when the novel made the journey across the Atlantic to the United States where it could be held up by the U.S. Postal Service on the grounds of obscenity.

The postal service has posthumously commemorated Joyce, placing his image and works on postage stamps. This suggests that even after a book is sent through the mail to its readers, its circulation continues: indeed, Joyce's works are continuously reinterpreted and his legacy reappropriated through today's postal networks. A clear understanding of the historical and literary legacy of the post office is much-needed in a time during which the mail is becoming privatized and many forms of communication have gone digital. The possibility of a large-scale restructuring of these long-running institutions forces us

[53] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 531.

to reconsider the symbolic value of the post, rather than simply the political and economic calculations driving recent postal reform. The everyday and extraordinary experiences of civil servants and those who posted letters can be recovered through a close attention to the historical and literary archive. Thinking about the post as a paradigm for the provisional and subversive forms of communication practiced by Irish prisoners, civil servants, revolutionaries, and authors offers a chance to consider the changing landscape of our own regimes of information.

CHAPTER 3

Gissing and Librarious Labor

Literary modernism is a function of the library. As print proliferated throughout the nineteenth century, spaces were needed to store, organize, and circulate the period's books, periodicals, and ephemera, leading to growth in libraries. As library spaces became more numerous and more accessible across Britain, as well as Europe in general, writers responded to these institutions of the book on personal and professional levels. There was hardly a single writer within the Anglo-American modernist canon who denied being profoundly shaped by public libraries. Virginia Woolf wrote about her experiences in the British Museum in *A Room of One's Own*. James Joyce included the National Library of Ireland as one of the stops upon Bloom's daylong journey in *Ulysses*. Yeats studied Blake manuscripts in the British Museum and once advocated for the creation of libraries in rural Ireland. These were men and women who began their writing careers in an environment where libraries were growing in both scope and availability.

From the storied dome of the British Museum Reading Room to the shabbiest garret bookshelf, George Gissing chronicled the means through which England stored and organized its books during the era in which literary modernism took its first unsteady steps. Social critics, writers, and librarians often tend toward the nostalgic and celebratory when discussing these quiet places of learning and intellectual retreat. However, Gissing's work reveals a modernist ambivalence toward libraries. On the one hand, Gissing portrays libraries as the storehouses of literary tradition and fonts of learning. They are spaces for likeminded people to meet and collaborate, as well as for

women, the working classes, and others previously left out. On the other hand, libraries may engage in a logic that is stifling and rooted in a conservative mindset in which the artifacts and ideas of the past must be conserved against the abuses and misuses of the present. At their very worst, libraries are capable of taking any radical or new thought and by means of classification and organization subsuming it into an established order. Many of the contentious social and aesthetic concerns at the core of modernism were played out in the silence of libraries big and small, and Gissing's novels and short stories anticipate the ways in which issues of subjectivity, gender, and class operated in spaces populated by young readers who would later become the figureheads of high modernism.

The legacy of George Gissing literary career looks much different than that of Yeats, Joyce, or Woolf, each comfortable a pillar in the modernist cannon. Gissing, however, seemed to be out of step with nearly everyone around him. His novels challenged received Victorian forms and modes of professionalization, but his scenes of struggling artists, the lower classes, and the filthy streets of the city were far too earnest to be fashionable with the Wilde crowd. Although Gissing garnered modest praise during his lifetime, he fared less well with his literary successors. Joyce read a number of his novels and thought them overwritten and tedious. After a brief enthusiasm for his novels in her younger days as a reader, Woolf later tempers her praise.[1] Yet, Gissing's writings explored some of the foundational concerns that modernist writers would continue exploring a generation later. His novels highlight the city, ordinary life, gender, mass

[1] Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, ed., *Gissing: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1972): 518, 529-34.

culture, and technological developments of his time.[2] In doing so he chronicles the early days of modernist institutions that would become central to later writers.

The Development of the Modern Library

The library manages people as well as books—sorting, organizing, and preserving them using systems tied to particular logics. Gissing's works explore the wide variety of these spaces and the cultural logics that define them. He registers the netherworld of the library as a place somewhat outside of dominant cultural forms where quiet reflection and study can take place, yet that is still constituted by and tied to dominant and conservative ideologies. In doing so, Gissing explores the physical spaces and evolving institutions that gave birth to literary modernism. As John Spiers points out, Gissing's novels "show an acute awareness of unprecedented transformations at a time of both technological and intellectual tumult, expanding audiences, democratic shifts, and sharp alterations in the conditions (and scale) of literary production."[3] Indeed, many changes were taking place within libraries public and private. Public libraries experienced rapid growth due in part to philanthropy such as grants from American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, as well as the increased local demand for the education and entertainment these spaces provided. Within these new libraries, women and the working class increasingly found places amongst the stacks, changing the demographics of the common English reader and

[2] See John Spiers, "Introduction: Why does Gissing Matter?" in *Gissing and the City: Cultural Crisis and the Making of Books in Late Victorian England*, ed. John Spiers (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2, for an exploration of the enduring themes from Gissing's work.

[3] Spiers, "Introduction: Why Does Gissing Matter?," 2.

library patron.[4] A rising middle class also pushed for more reading material and places for books. Personal libraries increasingly became a part of the fashionable middle-class home, and furniture makers, designers, and publishers alike rushed to provide for these spaces. While shelves were erected for both public and private volumes, however, a third sort of library was in decline—the circulating library.[5] Memberships with companies such as Mudie's, which had long provided Victorian England with its reading material, fell, and the three-decker novel, which was circulating libraries' mainstay format, disappeared with them. Inexpensive single-volume books took the three-decker's place as more and more readers made their book purchases at railway stations. Gissing captures these transformations with a realist's eye for detail, using them to reflect on the role of these institutions in literary life.

Gissing's ambivalence toward the concept of the library can be best understood through the representation of these spaces in his novels and short stories. Aside from providing a form of documentary evidence of the libraries of his time, Gissing layers these spaces with narrative significance by placing them at crucial moments in his works. These bookish backdrops function in a number of ways that anticipate a modernist sense of the relationship between literary production and tradition, craftsmanship, and the self. Gissing's most intriguing metaphor for the library is as a sort of underworld holding the

[4] Matthew Battles's book, *Library: An Unquiet History* (New York: Norton, 2003), provides a useful overview of the changes in libraries that took place over the nineteenth century. See also Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996) and *The Library at Night* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[5] A contemporary account of the demise of the three-decker novel and declining influence of circulating libraries can be found in Walter Besant, "The Rise and Fall of the 'Three Decker'," *The Dial* 17 (October 1, 1894): 185-86. G. L. Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), also provides an account of this institution.

wisdom of the past while also always threatening to entrap those who enter in search of knowledge. Yet for Gissing, the library can also be a home—while people live in language they often make their home with books. Put differently, the library for Gissing is an ideal place of retreat and solace, yet this comes with the burdens of familial ties and literary influence. The library is also a workshop—Gissing followed a Trollope-like model of the writer as literary craftsman, but he warned of the consequences of the library becoming an industrial factory for literary machines. Lastly, the library is self—books constitute people. Lives are lived in imitation of art, and the writer's consciousness might be stored forever in the pages of books. Gissing suggests that in fulfilling this four-pronged role, however, the library also plays its part in upholding rigid structures of class, gender, and taste. These representations of the library complicate the progressive ideals embodied in twenty-first century notions of the public library.

In *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914*, Alistair Black confronts the common perception of the public library as an ideologically neutral space without a "political or social axe to grind." His history represents the first systematic attempt to understand the philosophic and social underpinnings of the growth of libraries in the late nineteenth century. Here libraries are revealed to be important institutions in the Victorian quest for social and political stability emanating from the interplay of the tensions between "the utilitarian and idealist dimensions of classical liberalism," a tension that Gissing himself explored.[6]

[6] Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 4.

The Library as Netherworld

In his most memorable image of the library, Gissing presents the Reading Room of the British Museum in London as "the valley of the shadow of books." In Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891), the British Museum is the narrative hub of the novel. In a book about those who toil in order to break into the literary profession to find a level of personal independence and economic security, the library is a hellish landscape where literary ambition is rewarded only with Sisyphean labor. One such laborer, Marian Yule, works daily in the Reading Room and is struck by the gloom that meets her there. She yearns to write literature but feels that she is "exhausting herself in the manufacture of printed stuff which no one even pretended to be more than a commodity for the day's market."[7] The changing literary market brought about by the profusion of periodical literature and other ephemera had transformed writing from a romantic form of self-expression into an alienated, industrial profession. In Gissing's novel, libraries, the factory floors for such literary labor, look similar to the netherworld of Engels' Manchester or Mayhews' London. Gissing's description of the space emphasizes its physical and psychological discomforts:

> The fog grew thicker; she looked up at the windows beneath the dome and saw that they were a dusky yellow. Then her eye discerned an official walking along the upper gallery, and in pursuance of her grotesque humour, her mocking misery, she likened him to a black, lost soul, doomed to wander in an eternity of vain research along endless shelves. Or again, the readers who sat here at these

[7] George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. John Goode (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 107—hereafter cited in-text as (*NGS* 107).

> radiating lines of desks, what were they but hapless flies caught in a huge web its nucleus the great circle of the Catalogue? Darker, darker. From the towering wall of volumes seemed to emanate visible motes, intensifying the obscurity; in a moment the book-lined circumference of the room would be but a featureless prison-limit. (*NGS* 107-08).

The valley of the shadow of books is a perdition where literary men and women toil in obscurity. The library and its inhabitants transform into denizens of the underworld—lost souls in an otherworldly prison. It is a world where the structure and order of Dante's hell meets the endless confusion of Piranesi's dungeons.

There is something nightmarish about the modern library. It contains the literary souls of those housed in the volumes bearing their names, and while the inheritances can be generative for the writer, they can also be vexing. Gissing, whom some have heralded as the first truly European British modernist writer, read widely among the works of his Continental contemporaries. He was cautiously enthusiastic about the writing of Gustave Flaubert, who also had an intriguing relationship to the library. In his introduction to *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, Michel Foucault argues that Gustav Flaubert heralds a strikingly modern literary form characterized by the presence of the library. Flaubert's temptations of the flesh and spirit appear to come from books rather than from a commitment to some faith or lived experience. In the work, visionary imagination originates in the library and in particular, from Flaubert's extensive research on religion, heresy, hagiography, and biblical interpretation. His parade of monstrosities comes out of books such as *Mémoires Ecclesiastiques* and *Histoire du gnosticisme* rather than his own

spiritual imagination.[8] The book is a central object in the work. Anthony opens his Bible to hold the demons at bay, but the book is the very source of these fantastical visions. The book summons the demonic parade while also offering some level of protection from the onslaught. This leads Foucault to conclude that *The Temptation* is "a phenomenon of the library."[9] In this context, the term "library" signifies a relationship between texts, "a network formed by the books of the past," and Foucault argues that "*The Temptation* was the first literary work to comprehend the greenish institutions where books are accumulated and where the slow incontrovertible vegetation of learning quietly proliferates."[10] Flaubert imagines a form of literary modernism characterized by its relationship to the library. Writers such as Joyce and Borges, who wrote about libraries in similar ways, stem from this branch. In Foucault's formulation, the library represents a mode of intertextuality where texts proliferate and form purely textual relationships. The library "grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstices of repetitions and commentaries," and access to the modern library and the burgeoning print culture of the nineteenth century is the vehicle through which authors like Flaubert imagine a space in which these forms of textual relationships exist.

Gissing's valley of the shadow of books fundamentally differs from Flaubert's library in Gissing's attention to the library's physical architecture and the lost souls

[8] Michel Foucault lists a number of works consulted by Flaubert, but for a more comprehensive discussion of Flaubert's sources, see Jean Seznec, *Les Sources de l'episode des dieux dans* La Tentation de saint Antoine (*Premiere Version*, 1849; rep. Paris: Vrin, 1940), as well as Francis J. Carmody, "Further Sources of *La Tentation de saint Antoine*," *Romantic Review* 49 (1958): 278-92.

[9] Michel Foucault, introduction to Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: Random House, 2001), xxvii.

[10] Foucault, introduction, xxviii.

inhabiting the stacks. In other words, whereas Flaubert's modernist library is a textual nightmare, Gissing divulges the lived experiences of those who toiled within the modern library. Gissing's language reflects on the library in a different mode than that which Gissing deploys for other dominant social institutions. In his estimation, the library is a place of potential learning, opportunities for social advancement, and a source of simple comforts. Yet it is also the heart of darkness at the center of London—an underworld, a web, and a prison into which literary souls descend to discover forgotten knowledge and new modes of expression, where the possibility of becoming trapped is omnipresent. This ambivalence characterizes Gissing's approach to changing library systems of the late nineteenth century, a time during which the number of public libraries was increasing, circulating libraries such as Mudie's were beginning to lose popularity, and a new professional class of writers was beginning to use the spaces as provisional offices for literary labor.

Though Gissing offers a decidedly different portrayal of the library than Flaubert, Gissing, like Flaubert, builds his novels out of other books. More specifically, Gissing's novels often operate through the presentation of realist conventions. This is at the root of Fredric Jameson's study of Gissing's use of ideolegemes in *The Political Unconscious.* According to Jameson, Gissing's ideolegemes are "inherited narrative paradigms" often drawn from Dickens and reworked for the author's own purposes. Jameson's interest in Gissing stems from the ways in which he draws upon such Victorian conventions and then finds experimental ways to address the various contradictions in the social problems

of his day.[11] Gissing's heroines, to use one of Jameson's primary examples, can be seen as almost set pieces from Dickensian sentimentality; however, Gissing complicates these stock literary moves. In *New Grub Street*, for example, Marian's subservience to her father and alienation from her mother that make her home life unbearable could be easily resolved through the receipt of her inheritance or her marriage to Milvain. Given that Marian is a hard-working, loyal, and long-suffering woman, a happy ending for her toil and endurance seems imminent to the reader of Victorian novels. However, both plot moves are rejected. As the possibilities of both inheritance and marriage fail, Marian is forced into a resolution somewhere between comedy and tragedy. She accepts a position as a librarian in a provincial library far from the literary world of London but that allows her to support herself and her mother using her intelligence and bookish training. In doing so, Gissing refuses narratives of improvement in which characters succeed through education and access to wisdom. Indeed, Gissing's work appears particularly modernist in its both emerging from and critiquing the library.

Gissing displays a certain self-consciousness about the intertextuality of his work and its relationship to institutions that makes the work possible. This is most evident in Gissing's frequent narrative asides that provide a form of metacommentary on the production and reception of his works. In his earliest novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), Gissing deploys this strategy in discussing the expectations of patrons of the various circulating libraries. Early in the novel, the narrator, describing the protagonist's adopted father, breaks from the description and suggests that "[t]he respectable subscribers to our

[11] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2006), 137.

circulating libraries would not owe me much thanks were I to describe the oft-treated history of a clergyman's search among his fair parishioners."[12] In this statement there is an acknowledgement of the material site of Gissing's reader—who is reading the three-decker circulating library edition—as well as a recognition that the author is deploying a stock character so familiar to his readers that he need not rehearse the banalities. As I later argue, the idea of the subscription-based circulating library, with its powers of censorship and its influence over form, was a sort of library that haunted Gissing's novels and one that would soon buckle under new publishing pressures.

The Modern Library and Social Instability

While many critics have read Gissing as a Victorian realist or a naturalist brooding over the social injustices and melancholy produced by British industrialism and rapidly changing literary world, Gissing's libraries are more than just realist backdrops in service of his political ideology.[13] They are self-conscious spaces where struggles over various complex social problems take place and individual characters attempt to better their position, mostly with disastrous results. Gissing's characters are so often uncomfortable and out of step with their library environments because their individual circumstances, which are frequently marked by instability and anxiety, conflict with the

[12] George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985), 19—hereafter cited in-text as (*WD* 19).

[13] As Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge suggest in their introduction to *Gissing: The Critical Heritage* (1972), early reviewers often accused Gissing of "excessive realism, of dreariness, of pessimism . . . of presenting life undramatically, of choosing unsavory subjects" (1).

unstated role of the library to provide societal stability and a sense of continuity with the past and its traditions.[14]

Within the history of the modern library, Gissing is an important chronicler of these institutions and their role in emerging forms of authorship and the relationship between literature and society. Perhaps, then, it is no surprise that Gissing relied heavily on these institutions throughout his literary career and understood them well. He wrote and worked during a time in which libraries were becoming increasingly common and open throughout Britain. His letters make it clear that he had access to numerous and diverse libraries throughout his life, ranging from the majestic British Museum to the small and underfunded Exeter Public Library. He even took advantage of libraries while living abroad. For example, Boston's Public Library, which astonished Gissing with the wealth of its holdings, provided him with works by George Eliot, Goethe, and George Sand when he was abroad in 1876.[15]

Frequently short on money, Gissing relied on the library to provide the reading material necessary for the development of his art. He used the British Library extensively and became a member of the London Library in 1897. He also made use of various provincial libraries across the country in the different communities in which he lived. In addition, he frequently subscribed to Mudie's, but he felt that he spent too much time reading inferior works when he had access to the lending library's catalogue. Early in his

[14] Alistair Black and Peter Hoare, "Libraries and the Modern World," in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8.

[15] Pierre Coustillas, *The Heroic Life of George Gissing, Part I: 1857-1888* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), 108.

career, he saw the need for "a thorough network of public libraries" to educate the working classes of Britain. On one occasion, he even thought about applying for a post as librarian at the Yarmouth Public Library, but like so many potential librarians, he was discouraged by the salary.[16] Later in life he despaired of such utopian schemes, but he drew upon these experiences among books and their readers as he created his vision of London literary life at the end of the nineteenth century.

Gissing lived and wrote during a time of great expansion of libraries in England. During the late nineteenth century, libraries were becoming increasingly numerous, open, and rich with books. Meanwhile, the diversity of library spaces grew apace. Public libraries, subscription libraries, circulating libraries, and private libraries both large and small complemented the large institutional and academic libraries that had long captured readers' imaginations. Each had its own organizing and collecting practices along with its unique clientele, uses, and contributions to the reading practices of writers. The growth of these spaces had profound effects on the demographics of emerging writers and on the books that they wrote. While public libraries have been described as "third places" outside the realms of home and work,[17] places where people meet, communicate, and collaborate, as well as read, research, and write, they are also spaces in which a host of other needs, both physical and intellectual, are meet. The library provides certain basic necessities for those unable to attain them within the dominant spaces of home and work, and they also serve as a sort of safe space for the discussion of radical ideas and the

[16] Chris Baggs, "Gissing and Libraries," *Gissing Journal* 40, no. 1 (2004): 7-13.

[17] Alistair Black, Simon Pepper, and Kaye Bagshaw, *Books, Buildings, and Social Engineering: Early Public Libraries in Britain from Past to Present* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 2.

negotiation of situations and desires outside of bounds of Victorian morality and away from the prying eyes of society. The challenges to traditional morality and aesthetics that would become the unifying threads of literary modernism appear in Gissing's library scenes. The tensions and struggles surrounding class, gender, and the function of art in the modern world happen in these places where books and people meet.

Susan David Bernstein has explored the relationship between the exteriority of libraries and the interiority of the act of reading in *Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (2013). In an effort to counter "the overdetermined value of privacy and autonomy in constructions of female authorship," she looks at the value of libraries' exteriority for social change and literary production.[18] According to Bernstein, the British Museum offered both an *exterior* community and tradition necessary for literature and a private *interior* space for contemplation, reading, and writing deemed a necessity by writers such as Woolf. The library was a place where those on the margins of society could find solace and intellectual nourishment. The British Museum in the nineteenth century hosted many now-famous outsiders who profited from the resources, intellectual environment, and space to work. Marx; Lenin; and even the architect of the library's modern space and catalogue, Italian-born Antonio Panizzi, worked within its confines.[19] The library in the second half of the nineteenth century took on a new clientele and place within the social and literary world of the time. Gissing chronicles this transformation of library spaces in the second half of the nineteenth century. For many of Gissing's characters, especially those on the margins of

[18] Susan David Bernstein, *Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 1.

[19] Bernstein, *Women Writers in the British Museum*, 8.

society and in the borderlands between social classes, the library serves as a retreat. It provides certain comforts and supplies to those without the means of purchasing them. Without money or the hope of gainful employment, *New Grub Street*'s Reardon finds solace in the British Museum:

> What a blessed refuge it was, there under the great dome, when he must else have sat in his garret with the mere pretense of a fire! The Reading-room was his true home; its warmth entrapped him kindly; the peculiar odor of its atmosphere—at first a cause of headache—grew dear and delightful to him. (*NGS* 60)

The British Museum began its life as an eighteenth-century beacon of the Enlightenment when Sir Hans Sloan, an Irish-born physician, bequeathed his massive personal collection of manuscripts, books, antiquities, and natural specimens to King George II to form a national museum. In 1759 the British Museum's doors were opened to all "studious and curious persons" free of charge, making it the first national public museum. The subject of Reardon's admiration, the Museum's Reading Room was integrated into a renovated Museum in 1857. Its distinctive gold and cerulean dome, designed by Sydney Smirke, was the second-largest dome in the world at the time, surpassed only by the Roman Pantheon. Many notable thinkers and artists sat beneath the dome, and in the early years of the reading room, there was a resounding note of awe and optimism about the space. Thomas Nichols, an assistant in the British Museum, for instance, stated shortly after the opening of the Room that "it is, in plain words, the pride of the nation at large."[20]

[20] Thomas Nichols, *A Handbook for Readers at The British Museum* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1866), xvi.

Of course, there were always complaints about the spaces of the Museum. For instance, the ever-cranky Carlyle grumbled about the former Reading Room saying, "I never do enter the room without getting a headache—what I call the museum headache—and therefore I avoid the room till the last extremities."[21] Yet the reading rooms were largely seen as national treasures offering some of the most advanced library services in the world. How did these spaces of optimism and learning become a hellish scene for writers later in the century? For modernist writers, the library came to be an ambivalent space that offered unprecedented opportunities for study, the development of taste, the composition of literary writing, and socialization, but that simultaneously represented the increasing professionalism of the literary trade and modes of continuing marginalization that held the average writer at the boundaries of respectable life and economic solvency.

Gissing and others could see this inferno in the architecture of the space. In the case of the British Museum Reading Room, Smirke's architectural drawing shows a layout of concentric circles reminiscent of Dante's infernal circles. Echoes of this land of fruitless toil and continued punishment can be found in seminal modernist texts such as Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Pound's *Cantos*. In a more humorous tone, Max Beerbohm imagined a modern Faustian pact taking place in the Reading Room in his short story "Enoch Soames" (1916). Like Gissing's characters who work in the library in order to further their literary careers, Soames does not seek knowledge or wisdom out of his demonic deal; rather, he wishes to discover what his reputation will be a hundred years in the future. The devil allows Soames into the British Museum Reading Room one

[21] As quoted in Henry Charles Shelley, *The British Museum: Its History and Treasures* (Boston: L. C. Page and Company, 1911), 124.

afternoon in order to ascertain the posterity of his literary works. For Soames as well as many of Gissing's characters, the library becomes a symbol of dashed literary hopes and of the financial and spiritual struggles of the artist in modern British society.

Gissing expands the notion of the library to encompass the social space of the institution. Within Gissing's works, the interaction between reader and book often seems less important than the complex social world of the Reading Room or individuals' relationships to the physical architecture of the space. The Reading Room of the British Museum is the center of gravity for *New Grub Street*. It is where the diverse storylines and characters of the novel come together. For instance, in the opening chapters of the novel, Jasper Milvain recognizes Alfred and Marian Yule on the roadside because he has seen them before in the library. He later introduces himself to the Yuleses, mentioning to Marian that he has seen her many times without knowing her name while "under the great dome." Even in the countryside, the British Museum organizes the social world of the novel. Milvain has returned from the city where he is attempting to make a career out of literary journalism to visit his mother and two sisters. Meanwhile Alfred Yule and his daughter have travelled to visit Alfred's brother, a wealthy neighbor of the Milvains. Knowledge of London's library spaces demarcates those within the literary world.

The library as home is a theme that echoes through many of Gissing's novels. In his largely autobiographical novel, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), the narrator reflects on his struggles to become a writer, and in doing so he tells of a "tragi-comedical incident of life at the British Museum" that exposes the library's role in providing many of the basic necessities of life for the impoverished artist. Upon going to the lavatory, Ryecroft encounters a sign over the basins warning that "[r]eaders are

requested to bear in mind that these basins are to be used only for casual ablutions."[22] The narrator reflects on all of the times he has availed himself of the library's facilities, using the soap and water that is unavailable to him outside of the library. During his recollection he is able to laugh off this experience, yet it is clear that the incident is deeply moving. In addition to these basic services, the library provided "ink, quill and steel pens, blotting-pads, paper-weights, and paper-knifes . . . red and blue ink, india-rubbers, rulers, and pencils."[23] Although writing paper was not generally supplied to the readers, many took advantage of library slips for this purpose.

Ryecroft remembers how the library helped him forget the privations of his life. Books were a way for him to escape the hunger, cold, and loneliness he had felt in London:

> At the time when I was literarily starving in London, when it seems impossible that I should ever gain a living by my pen, how many days have I spent at the British Museum, reading as disinterestedly as if I had been without a care! It astounds me to remember that, having breakfasted on dry bread, and carrying in my pocket another piece of bread to serve for dinner, I settled myself at a desk in the great Reading-Room with books before me which by no possibility could be a source of immediate profit.[24]

Both Reardon and Ryecroft—as well as their creator, Gissing—find the library to be a last refuge for physical and emotional needs, in addition to their intellectual and

[22] George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1903), 29.

[23] Nichols, *A Handbook for Readers*, 9.

[24] Nichols, *A Handbook for Readers*, 52.

professional needs. For those lacking the means or respectability necessary to enter the British Library, other reading rooms in London offered a similar refuge. Gissing chronicles these spaces, too, in detail. Reardon and Biffen, for example, visit a reading room in search of their fellow writer Sykes. With daily admission only a penny, Sykes works there because it is cheaper than trying to buy fuel to heat his "indiscoverable hole" of a flat. Gissing's description of this room is far bleaker than his description of the room at the British Library:

> A flight of stairs brought them to a small room in which were exposed the daily newspapers; another ascent, and they were in a room devoted to magazines, chess, and refreshments; yet another, and they reached the department of weekly publications; lastly, at the top of the house, they found a lavatory, and a chamber for the use of those who desired to write. The walls of this last retreat were of blue plaster and sloped inwards from the floor; along them stood school desks with benches, and in one place was suspended a ragged and dirty card announcing that paper and envelopes could be purchased downstairs. An enormous basket full of waste-paper, and a small stove, occupied two corners; ink blotches, satirical designs, and much scribbling in pen and pencil served for mural adornment. From the adjacent lavatory came sounds of slashing and spluttering, and the busy street far below sent up its confused noises. (*NGS* 377)

Gissing's detailed description of the private reading rooms of London reveal much about the hierarchy of popular reading practices and the social position of the writer in these spaces. As the floors ascend, the reading materials and activities become less and less utilized, with the floors ending in the toilet and the writers' chambers. The first two

floors, in contrast, are occupied by those reading newspapers and periodicals and partaking in refreshments and distractions. These activities were the primary pull for most reading rooms of the era. The small libraries that housed these rooms had been built more for leisure than the forms of deep study and serious writing represented by the British Library, and they offered themselves as an alternative to the public house for those wishing to relax and take in the day's periodicals or meet with friends and acquaintances. Many of the libraries inherited areas for smoking, billiards, and coffee from their previous roles as mechanics' institutes. Some even had to black out betting information from the newspapers they provided to ensure that the libraries did not become betting dens.[25] Throughout the nineteenth century, libraries ostensibly existed for the moral and educational betterment of society; as this suggests, however, individual readers put these spaces to their own uses, and the demand for entertainment and leisure understandably pushed more serious pursuits to the margins. Gissing's description supports this view, and Reardon and Biffen finally discover Sykes in the top-floor reading room, where he is accompanied only by an out-of-work clerk answering job advertisements and the distracting noises emanating from the water closet. Sykes is working on his autobiography for one of the weekly papers. Entitled "Through the Wilds of Literary London," his "strictly veracious" account must have necessarily included the types of libraries and reading rooms which Gissing likewise chronicles.

The modest success that Ryecroft achieves in his writing career is similarly expressed through the home library he is able to create for himself. He meditates on the

[25] See Robert Snap, "Libraries for leisure time," in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40-55.

small country house he has managed to secure with its library, which is the emotional center of the house:

> To me, this little book-room is beautiful, and chiefly because it is home. Through the greater part of life I was homeless. . . . When I place a new volume on my shelves I say: Stand there whilst I have eyes to see you; and a joyous tremor thrills me. (*NGS* 8)

As is the case with Reardon's recommender, the private library is a spot of comfort and achievement. The library constitutes the home, especially for those struggling artists who have lived with the privations of the modern world.

The private household library was a symbol of upper-middle class success and taste. Charles L. Eastlake's Victorian classic on household decor, *Hints on Household Taste* (1868, rev. 1878), includes an entire chapter on the library. He explores every detail of this space, such as cabinet work, bookcases, *bric-á-brac*, and the unsuitability of urns as decorative objects.[26] Oscar Wilde likewise discussed the importance of the household library and its books in his lectures on the "House Beautiful," which included directives focused on binding books in limp vellum or otherwise hiding gaudy modern bindings with a curtain to avoid having to look at their unharmonious and offensive tones.[27] Yet Gissing's modern authors rarely achieve such fine spaces for themselves and instead settle for the more humble surroundings of public institutions.

[26] Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste* (London: Longmans, 1878), 127-59.

[27] Kevin H. F. O'Brien, "'The House Beautiful': A Reconstruction of Oscar Wilde's American Lecture," *Victorian Studies* 17, no. 4 (1974): 395-418.

Nevertheless, the library for Gissing was not a monolithic concept. Instead it existed in various forms, and each had its own idiosyncrasies. While the British Museum is the archetypal library space in *New Grub Street* and smaller public and institutional libraries serve as refuges for those without means, Gissing also represents the competing and complementary libraries of his time. For instance, Gissing is one of the most forceful literary detractors of the dominant circulating library and the three-decker novel format that it promoted. Adrian Poole bluntly argues that "the almost uniform inferiority of [Gissing's] Volume IIIs to his Volume Is" demonstrates his struggle with the three-decker format that typically led a reader through hope, disillusionment, and reconciliation using a discrete set of three volumes.[28] Gissing's plots largely refuse this formula, rejecting the sort of moral development that the Victorian novel celebrates.

New Grub Street represents Gissing's observations and critiques of "the literary man of 1882" (8). The novel is most remembered and praised for its unflinching look at the changing literary profession at the end of the nineteenth century. Characters such as Jasper Milvain and Alfred Yule represent the sort of quick and dirty literary journalism that Gissing compares to the hack writing of Pope and Johnson's era. Working alongside these literary professionals, however, are artists dedicated to their craft but often unable to achieve monetary and social stability through their endeavors. Edwin Reardon, Harold Biffen, and Marian Yule are all emblematic of the struggling writer in their own distinct ways, and each utilizes the library as a means of augmenting his or her circumstances. Yet the characters' uses of the library also reveal their limitations and barriers to the writerly trade. The novel makes a case for the "personality wholly unfitted of the rough

[28] Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 24.

and tumble of the world's labour-market" (425-26). While the literary life is seen as an alternative to the commercial realm, as Gissing makes clear in the novel, the writer is continually at the mercy of economic forces and the pull of various literary institutions.

For these types the library is an important refuge but also a sort of hell, a sort of workhouse for the literary soul. Reardon's struggle to obtain a reader's ticket to the British Museum on his twenty-first birthday reveals the difficulties for many in securing a seat in the library and a place amongst the London cognoscenti of his day. In his *Handbook for Readers at the British Museum*, Thomas Nichols lays out the basic requirements for admission:

> To obtain admission, two things have to be done. The person who wants to become a reader must (1.) write a letter; and must (2.) get a friend to write one in support of it. The two essentials are: an Application (the candidate's letter), and a Recommendation (the friend's letter).[29]

The application process to the Museum at the end of the nineteenth century was not a particularly time-consuming task; however, it had many very specific directions that had to be followed by both the applicant and recommender. As Nichols points out, the British Museum's library "is not a free public one, but it is very nearly so," and the admission policies functioned to impose a minimum requirement on its patrons. Although the Reading Room was "open to men and women of any country, or shade of political or other opinions," the application necessarily excluded many potential readers. For instance, the application had to be submitted in the applicant's own handwriting following a fairly strict form, meaning that a fairly high level of literacy was a

[29] Nichols, *A Handbook for Readers*, 1.

requirement. Moreover, a profession and course of study was required along with an assurance that the applicant was over the age of twenty-one. These restrictions will not surprise those familiar with twenty-first century research libraries, but during Gissing's time, these were sufficiently high barriers to exclude a very large portion of the British population, especially those within the working class or recent migrants to London.

Reardon comes up against these restrictions during his early years in London. Despite being well-educated and versed in the classics, Reardon lacks the social connections needed to enter the library. His life of "almost absolute loneliness" makes his entry into the Reading Room simultaneously difficult and much-needed. His only real acquaintance is the woman from whom he has rented his garret, and he thinks it "odd, to say the least of it, to present oneself in Great Russell Street armed with this person's recommendation" (*NGS* 58). Therefore, he writes to an unnamed novelist whose work he respects and is granted a meeting with the writer, who subsequently discourages Reardon from producing literary criticism and suggests that he try fiction instead as a way of making a living for himself. In the end, the novelist gives Reardon a recommendation, granting him access to the British Museum. Here Gissing juxtaposes the literary fortunes of the novelist against the meagre circumstances of the young scholar and writer through a vision of the private library as opposed to the communal reading room of the British Museum. Reardon is struck by the novelist's success and the private library that this success has purchased, "that luxurious study, with its shelves of handsomely bound books, its beautiful pictures, its warm, fragrant air—great heavens! what might not a man do who sat at his ease amid such surroundings" (59). This is a far cry from the valley of

the shadow of books. It is a symbol of the novelist's success and his genius, attributes that all of Gissing's characters strive to demonstrate.

Gendered Labor in the Library

The women in Gissing's novels reveal the gendered nature of this struggle, a struggle that fellow modernists such as Virginia Woolf would have known all too well. Virginia Woolf's father, editor Leslie Stephen, was a famed figure at the British Museum, especially since he had completed the monumental *Dictionary of National Biography*. Yet Woolf had a fundamentally different relationship to the British Museum than did her father. In *A Room of One's Own*, she discusses the feeling of entering into this predominantly masculine environment:

> The swing-doors swung open; and there one stood under the vast dome, as if one were a thought in the huge bald forehead which is so splendidly encircled by a band of famous names. One went to the counter; one took a slip of paper; one opened a volume of the catalogue, and . . . . . the five dots here indicate five separate minutes of stupefaction, wonder and bewilderment.[30]

Woolf depicts walking into the library as akin to entering into the exposed masculine brain, and her essay serves as an expression of bewilderment over the fact that despite the library's seemingly infinite knowledge, so little understanding of women's lives and writing can be found there. In fact, much of the essay meditates on these institutional spaces and their relationship to women. At the start of the piece, Woolf questions women's exclusion from the library at Oxbridge and the cultural heritage that is thus

[30] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 2005), 26.

denied them. She asks a series of direct questions that Gissing's work also poses, such as "What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art?"[31] Woolf's narrator raises these questions while in the British Museum, where she has taken up residence to consider the question of *women and fiction*. As Ruth Doberman argues, Woolf conflates knowledge with masculinity through her experiences in the library and demonstrates women's exclusion from the public sphere because of the restrictions on access.[32] Despite these barriers, in searching for rooms of their own, many women found the library to be their only option, albeit a highly fraught one.

Almost forty years before the publication of Woolf's essay, Gissing took up the subject of literary women in the library to illustrate the shifts in the profession and the perilous situation women faced when trying to succeed within such a male-dominated space. In many ways, Marian Yule is the most compelling character in *New Grub Street*. She raises significant questions about the physical space in which women are able to pursue intellectual and literary vocations. Her presence in the Reading Room of the British Museum represents both the emerging place for women within the London literary and journalistic worlds and the women's continuing marginalization. Marian cannot read, write, or entertain in the comfort of her own study. The warm and accommodating space occupied by her father in the family home is distinctively his, designed and executed for masculine pursuits and company. While Yule's library serves

[31] Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 25.

[32] Ruth Hoberman, "Women in the British Museum Reading Room during the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries: From Quasi- to Counterpublic," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 3 (2002): 489.

his professional needs within the confines of the home, Marian must make her daily commute to an appropriate public space where she can work.

In this way, Marian is "the modern literary girl," one of the "women of the inkiest description" who can be frequently found at the library. As an assistant to her father, Marian spends long, isolated hours working at the British Museum, circumstances typical for the production of literary journalism of the time. After her return from the country at the beginning of the novel, Marian labors in the reading room on "French Authoresses of the Seventeenth Century," an article that her father will publish anonymously. Gissing explains this often-forgotten mode of authorship in detail:

> Marian was by this time almost able to complete such a piece of manufacture herself, and her father's share in it was limited to a few hints and corrections. The greater part of the work by which Yule earned his moderate income was anonymous: volumes and articles which bore his signature dealt with much the same subjects as his unsigned matter, but the writing was labored with a conscientiousness unusual in men of his position. The result, unhappily was not correspondent with the efforts. (*NGS* 80)

Marian cannot reap the benefits of authorship because her work is that of double anonymity: that is, her labor is passed off as that of her father. Gissing describes her labor as "manufacture," and in doing so, he identifies her plight with those workers whose lives were increasingly embattled as a result of industrialization. In the very room where Marx wrote *Das Kapital*, Marian represents a form of alienated literary labor made more acute by her position as a woman without the private space, capital, or infrastructure to pursue a career of her own. Marian accordingly comes to think of herself as "not a woman, but a

mere machine for reading and writing" (106). Her very humanity seems at stake in her position as an assistant to her father's middling career.

Marriage, the novelistic savior of damsels in distress, offers few opportunities for Marian, and she attributes this situation to her position within the library. As she reflects on Milvain's interest in her, she tries to sort out her emotions, deciding to settle for an imperfect match because she knows that "ideal personages do not descend to girls who have to labour at the British Museum" (187). She prefers a "man of action" rather than the literary Milvain, however, and Milvain likewise ends up preferring a match that can give him an income and social standing.

Marian and her relationship to literary labor and the library remain a problem throughout the novel. After Marian rejects Milvain and commits herself to caring for her ailing father, her prospects look all the more bleak despite having had an article accepted for publication. Gissing ties the matter up neatly by sending her to the library one last time. London's men of letters come to the rescue of the family with a subscription for its benefit, and a publisher finds her a job as an assistant in "a public library in a provincial town." Marian is accordingly forever cast to the valley of the shadow of books, destined to support her family on her meagre income there, and "the name of Yule was no longer met with in periodical literature" (506).

Complementing this consideration of public libraries is Gissing's exploration of personal libraries. With their idiosyncratic organization and often small collections, such personal libraries frequently appear in Gissing's fiction. These range from a small shelf of books to sprawling stacks of volumes that begin to edge their owners out. In every case, however, these collections of books are important to the ways in which characters

manage anxieties and pressures. In fact, Gissing's libraries reveal much about the psychology of his characters. The library mirrors its owner's interior self, complete with its memories, knowledge, and organizing logic. In *Workers of the Dawn*, for example, Arthur finds temporary salvation from his difficult life on the streets of London and the lodgings of the lowest classes when he finds employment with the printer and bookseller, Mr. Tollady. After moving into his establishment, Arthur quickly notices Tollady's small library, which also serves as the sleeping quarters of the aging printer:

> One side of the parlour was occupied by a large book-case, which contained the whole of Mr. Tollady's library. It was not extensive, but select in the choice of works. Here were the principal English classics, most of them evidently, having been purchased second-hand, and also a few French and German books. The library was evidently that of a man who had `known how to cultivate judiciously the emotional side of his nature; the only books really bound with any degree of richness were the poets. Theological works there were none and natural science was alone represented by a few works on botany; but the collection of histories was complete and good. The lowest shelf was occupied by the Penny Cyclopedia, and old folio edition of Johnson's Dictionary, and a number of large volumes laid flat, one on the other, the contents of which could not be guessed at. (*WD* 114)

Gissing often includes these lengthy passages about the contents and arrangement of characters' libraries. While these passages certainly add realist detail to the novels, they also are indicative of the much fuller description that libraries receive when compared to almost any other space in Gissing's works. For Gissing, a personal library is a metonymic account of the character's thought world—a physical extension of an intellectual and

emotional life. In the example of Tollady, the reader learns that the owner of these books is discerning, educated, outward-looking, literary, of modest means, and probably a freethinker sympathetic to social reforms. These facts can all be gleaned quickly through an examination of the books; however, subtler hints about Tollady's interior life might be identified through a closer look at the bookshelves. For instance, Tollady has a preference for second-hand books. Arthur, in his own way, is adopted by Tollady second-hand. For the entirety of the novel, Arthur bounces around from one home to another. Tollady's is the only place where he seems to find a home, and the printer has a knack for rescuing things of true value that may have been lost or discarded.

The books also reveal a humanism that resists the pressures of religion and industry that Arthur had been subjected to since his earliest days. After struggling in menial jobs and learning to read in secrecy by his own ingenuity, Arthur continues his education in Tollady's library. Describing how Tollady arrived at this decision, Gissing writes: "Looking upon the boy as a human soul, and not as a mere piece of useful machinery in his shop, Mr. Tollady soon conceived the idea of using his leisure to continue the very imperfect education which Arthur had as yet received" (120). An avid botanist in his younger days, Tollady still returns to his volumes on the subject on Sundays while others are worshipping at a different altar. Forced to sell off his valuable herbarium for a small sum earlier in life, he admires the volumes of "duplicates and imperfect specimens" that he has retained and handles them with "trembling hand and a moist eye" (122). Arthur, who has been made redundant and is thought damaged by many in the novel, is allowed to bloom in the fertile soil that Tollady's shop provides, and upon

the printer's death, a selection of objects from Tollady's library constitutes the few possessions with which Arthur cannot part.

The reason for the attention and respect paid to books in the novel can be seen in Tollady's own upbringing. His father, a bookseller, imparted to him an almost fanatical devotion to books based upon the belief that the volumes contain the very essence of their authors. As Tollady explains to Arthur:

> His books were living souls in his eyes, and on me, his only child, he never ceased to impress that to damage a book was to commit a sin. "Books are men's brains" he would say, and I shall never forget a favorite quotation of his from Milton, often uttered to me when I was a child, and intended, of course, to be taken by me in the literal sense: "As good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man, kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills Reason itself; kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." (337)

Gissing seems to have lived by similar precepts, often putting his reading practices and books before all else in his life. As Milton argues in the *Areopagitica*, books seem to have their own lifeblood carrying the souls of those who have gone before.

However, Gissing's libraries are not merely monuments erected to house and honor the dead. They contain a vital spirit, but one that is alive and open to the most pressing social questions of the day. The library thus often becomes the site of tense discussions and deep meditations. For instance, in *Workers in the Dawn*, the fatherless Helen begins her lifelong commitment to meeting the needs of the poor in London after a

fateful encounter in the library of her guardian, Mr. Gresham. Gresham's daughter, Maud, left a copy of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*'s "popular edition" on the table and "whether she had drawn Helen's attention to it purposely or not may remain a question; but as soon as she had left the room the latter at once took up the work to examine it" (199). The chance discovery of an influential book that comes to shape the course of a character's life is a frequent narrative device in Gissing's novels. It allows him to conveniently shift the plot forward in a number of ways. First, it makes a character's sudden shift in outlook or philosophy seem plausible. The book acts as a catalyst for a change in the character's interior life and justifies his or her later actions. It also works as a sort of intertextual shorthand. In the case of Helen's reading of Strauss, the title *Leben Jesu* articulates a particular philosophical stance, one positioned in opposition to both her upbringing as the daughter of a clergyman and the empty cynicism of her present guardian. Lastly, Gissing's reference acts as a suggestion to the reader unfamiliar with Strauss. Much like he directly addresses the subscribers of circulating libraries within the novel, Gissing mentions *Leben Jesu* to direct his readers to the volume and the controversy surrounding it. George Eliot had translated this account of the historical Jesus into English in 1846, and by the time *Workers in the Dawn* was published, numerous editions of the translation had been printed and were readily available.

The library also functions beyond this intertextual sense as a physical space for characters to engage in ideological debate. Depending on the view one takes, Gissing's fictionalized philosophical debates that often center on tensions between art and social commitments, marriage and independence, and the intellectual and material needs of the body can be read as either part of the bagginess indicative of a writer trying to fill a three-

decker novel or, more generously, the honest working-through of difficult ideas with no clear solutions. In either case, the library is often the place where characters find the ease and privacy necessary for embarking on such tense subjects' discussion.

In *Workers in the Dawn*, the ever-sincere and idealistic Helen is met by her sarcastic and mercenary counterpart Maud, who finds Helen quietly contemplating what she sees as the irreconcilable paths of intellect and charity while sitting in the family library. The conversation takes a strange and sudden turn when Maud takes two revolvers from a drawer in the library table. Surprised, Helen asks if they are loaded and the reason she has them to which Maud utters the gnomic response, "What for? Why, you know I am on the point of being married" (283). With little more explanation, the firearms are put away and the two settle into tea and a discussion about the duties and pleasures of society and the necessity of wealth in a world such as theirs. "Depend upon it," Maud instructs, "the world is too strong for an individual will to combat. It will conquer, sooner or later" (287). This proves true for almost all of the characters in the novel. Helen succumbs to tuberculosis with her charity left undone and her heart broken by Arthur, who likewise throws himself into Niagara Falls after losing Helen, his taste for painting, and his will to go on. This seems to be the primary stance of Gissing's protagonists: a will to fight the social problems of the day in the face of insurmountable opposition that finally conquers them. Yet the library is the place for articulating this struggle and finding hope in utopian schemes destined to fail. Will Noble's working man's club with its own library of progressive and enlightening works fails and fades out of the narrative. Tollady's library is disbanded upon his death, and Arthur is turned out with just a few fugitive volumes as a remembrance of better times. The ennobling aims of the British

Museum fail to elevate and advance the literary strivers of *New Grub Street*, and after a life of hardship, Henry Ryecroft takes but small solace in the library he has built for himself and the solitude it affords him as he recounts a life of failures and shortcomings.

Class and the Book Collector

In many ways, Gissing's libraries serve as reminders of better times and hope for a brighter future. Yet this brighter future never quite comes to pass. In this way, the libraries mirror Gissing's characters as they strive to remember past happiness and work in vain towards futures that never quite comes to fruition. In one of the last stories that Gissing published, he returned to this theme. Published in *The Illustrated London News* on September 20, 1902, "Christopherson" tells of a déclassé bibliophile who has spent his life caring for the remains of his once-great library and trying in vain to hold onto his books. The disorder of his library belies the disorder of his mind and his difficulties in coming to term with the disappointments of his life. Having lost all of his money in a bad business deal, Christopherson stalks the bookstalls of London. He is still entranced by books and always vigilant for the volumes he once lost. The narrator, a similarly bookish sort, purchases one of these lost volumes as its previous owner looks on. Christopherson introduces himself to the narrator and tells of the great book sale that disposed him of his library, and the narrator becomes familiar with his story and the library he has been able to reconstruct despite his penury and reduced circumstances. When the narrator finally sees Christopherson's library, the extent of Christopherson's bibliomania reveals itself:

> The room was a small one, and would in any case have only just sufficed for homely comfort, used as it evidently was for all daytime purposes; but certainly a

> third of the entire space was occupied by a solid mass of books, volumes stacked several rows deep against two of the walls and almost to the ceiling. A round table and two or three chairs were the only furniture—there was no room, indeed for more. The window being shut, and the sunshine glowing upon it, an intolerable stuffiness oppressed the air. Never had I been made so uncomfortable by the odour of printed paper and bindings.[33]

The home had been transformed into a midden with the foul smell of rotting books overtaking the modest accommodations. By measures, the narrator discovers that Christopherson had continued collecting and curating his library at the cost of his third wife's health. His subsequent wife, Mrs. Christopherson, has labored and patiently endured her husband's mania, and is now in ill health, due at least in part to the insalubrious conditions inside their rooms cramped with books. Christopherson must thus decide once more between a wife's life and the books he has worked so hard to retain. To the narrator and his friend Pomfret, and indeed to the reader, the solution to the problem seems simple. Dispose of the books and take the comfortable country home that has been offered to them by Mrs. Christopherson's niece. However, this is nearly unfathomable to the man who has spent a lifetime in the pursuit of books. Christopherson finally decides to sell off his library and prepares to leave for the country in order to save his wife, and "when he declared his happiness tears came into his eyes, and his head shook with a senile tremor."[34] There is no happy ending for the broken collector; rather, Gissing orchestrates a conclusion of unsettled emotions and little resolution. While there is relief

[33] George Gissing, "Christopherson," *The House of Cobwebs and Other Stories* (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1906), 52.

[34] Gissing, "Christopherson," 67.

in the fact that Christopherson chose the life of his "noble" wife over his books, his psyche, twice-broken by the sales of his library, will never heal.

Gissing's story presents a true case of bibliomania. Christopherson evokes both pity and revulsion in the narrator. He understands the drive to collect and to rebuild a lost legacy and a past life. The elderly book collector is driven to London's bookstalls and to the pages of bookseller's catalogues. He seems to care little for authors, literature, or writing, describing himself as "only a bookworm"[35]; rather, the objects themselves drive him. He is delighted to find his name on the flyleaf of a volume purchased by the narrator, and when the purchaser presents the volume to its old owner, it is as if "the broken gentleman" has been partially restored to wholeness. Yet like so many characters in Gissing's works, what Christopherson needs to feel whole and to satisfy his own nature is incompatible with the material circumstances in which he finds himself.

In Gissing's fiction, the modern library represents a desire to conserve the past at all costs and to maintain order in such a way that everything has a place and every new book can be put in relationship to those of the past. The library privileges accessibility over concealment, yet it still manufactures its arcane catalogues and rituals of circulation. It stabilizes the broad and diverse knowledge of the world, but it sits perpetually on the edge of disorder and incomprehensibility. The comfort and logic of the British Museum constantly threatens to devolve into a ruined mess that stifles and entraps its occupants. Beyond the progressive and ennobling visions of the Victorian library, Gissing's valley of the shadow of books warns of the nightmares of history and influence while also

[35] Gissing, "Christopherson," 51.

recognizing the uses of these spaces in coming to terms with the modern city and a rapidly changing world.

CHAPTER 4

Virginia Woolf and the Non-Reading of Books

In July 1927 Leonard and Virginia Leonard Woolf entertained and enlightened BBC radio listeners with a discussion about books in Britain. Entitled "Are Too Many Books Written and Published?", the program adopted the loose format of a debate in which the interlocutors took opposing sides of the question. Meant to simplify and explain the complex enterprise of book publishing, the broadcast pitted the couple at the extreme ends of a nuanced problem of supply and demand in the book trade. Leonard, the careful accountant and diligent civil servant in an earlier life, argued that there were indeed too many books published. "The making of books is now a trade, or rather an industry," Leonard asserted at the opening of the broadcast, "and in my opinion it is in an unhealthy condition—almost as bad as the mining industry."[1]

Of course, this was not a new problem. It was as familiar to publishers of the eighteenth century as it was to the directors of the Hogarth Press; however, the technologies of printing and the socioeconomic conditions of writing had changed significantly in that time. Publishing guaranteed low wages for authors, bad writing for readers, and various nightmares for the publisher trying to act as mediator between the two groups. Despite her awareness of the difficulties of running a small press and managing an increasingly successful career as a writer, Virginia argued against the notion that too many books were published. In the overabundance of books, she found hope,

[1] Leonard Woolf and Virginia Woolf, "Are Too Many Books Written and Published?," *PMLA* 121, no. 1 (1927): 239.

recognizing the increased diversity of voices and opportunities for reading. She argued that "as people read more books they will read better books; they will also realize the pleasure of owning the books they read."[2] Virginia's approach suggests that when a publisher prints more books, those books seek out new readers, and new readers write new books. The literary cycle sustains and renews itself, as if by individuals simply allowing these objects to exist on end tables, in railway stations, and behind shop windows, literary life improves.

In many ways the Woolfs' debate is unexceptional; much of their discussion rehearses common complaints about the publishing industry and pieties about the benefits of reading. For instance, Leonard's assertion that "[w]hat happened to boots has now happened to books"—an indictment of the industrialization of the book industry—had been a common complaint of book buyers and printers such as William Morris a generation earlier. Likewise, Virginia's arguments in favor of an endless multitude of books take up the longstanding belief in reading's moral and intellectual benefits. Similar beliefs fueled the Reformation's emphasis on the individual act of reading and the Victorian belief in the moral benefits of literacy for the masses. However, in discussing the actual material objects of books, the Woolfs' arguments go beyond conventional approaches to publishing or reading. They engage the book as an object in the world that has a presence and purpose beyond its relationship to writer, reader, or publisher. The book seems to demand other forms of attention.

At one point in the debate, Leonard calls for a proper estimation of how much is spent on books and wonders why people are more likely to spend their money on an

[2] Woolf and Woolf, "Are Too Many Books Written and Published?," 243.

ephemeral experience of the theatre than a book. The book can be carried, displayed, traded, and sold in ways that a night at the theatre, as an experience, cannot, and while a theatre performance is an evening's entertainment, books can be enjoyed for hours on end through successive re-readings. Virginia responds, "Yes, that is one of the great drawbacks of books. They last a lifetime. They take up space on our walls for ever. They need dusting for ever."[3] Virginia presents this as one of the drawbacks of books. The fact that books demand attention—storage and dusting, among other caretaking tasks—is, in Virginia's estimation, an argument for the sharing of books and even the creation of disposable books. The experience of owning and interacting with books, Virginia seems to suggest, reveals certain histories and uses beyond the reading of them.

During the radio programme Woolf unveils something important about books as objects. She reveals them to be more than just a medium for visual and verbal texts, but objects that exist outside of the act of reading. This seemingly obvious point is complicated by her subtle acknowledgement of the two-faced nature of the book, which promises permanence while always being threatened by disintegration while also promising solitude in its pages but demands interaction and intimacy with others. Woolf recognizes the burdens of being saddled with books that need dusting and storage while also producing intellectual and psychological weight. However, she still argues for more books because of this very permanence that it gives to the fragile human voice. Likewise, books act as a retreat for those in need of a room one's own. Holding an open book in one's hands can act like a shield against unwanted attention and a blind through which to

[3] Woolf and Woolf, "Are Too Many Books Written and Published?," 242.

silently observe one's surroundings. Books, nevertheless, can also be powerful social catalysts that bind friends and allow for intimate intellectual and physical connections.

The book seems to achieve this through its status as both material object and linguistic text—a nexus between the worlds of words and things. Woolf's novels illustrate these unique properties of the book amongst the everyday objects that surround us. Her own dual role as writer and bookmaker allowed her to understand the book in a way that accounts for the tensions between the linguistic and material networks of meaning that compromise it.

Woolf's fiction and her relationship to books as objects reveal reading to be only one of many ways in which people can relate to and interact with books. Since the introduction of Gutenberg's press, the number of books printed per annum had grown steadily in most parts of the world. Particularly in nineteenth-century Britain, dramatic shifts in the printing industry and increases in the literacy rate meant that the number of books grew exponentially. In the early years of the century, a book typically appeared in an edition of no more than 1,500 copies, yet by the end of the century, a bestseller garnished an edition of 30,000 or more.[4] Once venerated as a symbol of privilege and learning, the book rapidly became an everyday object among many. Scholars have long traced the influences of this proliferation of reading practices and printed materials.[5]

[4] Martyn Lyons, "New Readers in the Nineteenth Century," in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 314.

[5] A number of critics have examined the consequences of the industrialization of print and production on literary production and forms. Richard Altick in *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) gives one of the best comprehensive summaries of the changes during this period. For more targeted analyses of how the book industry shaped

However, if for a moment we consider books not as texts to be read but as objects to be handled, the masses of paper, binder's board, buckram, and leather take on a different light. Setting aside the book's linguistic and visual content and considering its material properties, provenances, and relationship to other objects allows us to ask questions about how people understand and use books aside from or in spite of the words and pictures they contain.

Woolf's early novels represent books as objects with histories and uses tangential to the act of reading. Books are not merely metonyms for their linguistic texts but objects that function semi-independently from their printed words and images. Woolf draws upon her own extensive experience with the making and handling of books to present complex book-objects that rework Victorian understandings of the role of books within society and their effects on the individual. In Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915), books function as physical and emotional barriers to the characters' attempts at creating communities and stimulating affection through shared reading. Following the tragedy of her first novel, Woolf's social comedy *Night and Day* (1919) explores the role of books in stabilizing an invented literary tradition through the collection and veneration of literary relics. Richard Alardyce, the literary patriarch of the Hilbery family, exists as a stifling presence in the life of Katherine Hilbery partly through the books and

literary output, see Lee Erickson's examination of the changing market for poetry throughout the early nineteenth century, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), and Peter Keating's study of late-Victorian publishing and writers, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989). These studies pay attention to the ways in which an increasingly professionalized and industrialized literary world pushed writers toward literary forms that met the profit models of commercial publishers, such as the three-decker novel and works made for the lucrative periodical market.

manuscripts entrusted to her family and displayed as proof of her hereditary genius. Although this patrimony of books endows Katherine with certain social advantages, the objects become emblematic of a larger set of social traditions from which she struggles to escape. *Jacob's Room* (1922), Woolf's first novel to openly consider the Great War, explores both the efficacy and preposterousness of using the book as a weapon. As Jacob Flanders enters a train car, Mrs. Norman wields a book to defend herself against possible attack, and in doing so, Woolf criticizes what she sees as the masculine energies that caused the Great War; she likewise comments on the ad hoc tools women use to combat these aggressions more or less successfully. Finally, *To the Lighthouse* (1927) sees the decay and disuse of forgotten books as a symbol of absence and the passing of time; long untouched by human hands, books eventually take on a new life and become an unacknowledged sign of rebirth. Each of these novels explores the difficulty of communicating with others and knowing oneself in its own way, and through tracing Woolf's imagined books, a kind of halting progression from Rachel Vinrace's isolation among books to a form of intergenerational connection and rebirth through books left to rot can be seen.

Woolf and the Thingness of the Book

"On or about December 1910, human character changed," Virginia Woolf famously remarked.[6] One of the markers of that change seemed to be the interior spaces in which people lived. Sensitive to the objects people carried, displayed, concealed, and admired, Woolf felt that her Victorian childhood in Hyde Park Gate appeared dark,

[6] Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 4.

gloomy, and suffocating with its "black folding doors," "[m]ounds of plush," and "crimson velvet."[7] The objects that littered this space—gold knobs, pearl rings, busts, a carved sideboard, chairs, candles, silver, and hats[8]—filled her memories. Despite feeling encumbered by the weight of this Victorian clutter, Woolf carefully reconstructed these interiors for her readers. She rejected this object world but was also fascinated by it. Upon returning from a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum, she considered writing "a novel entirely about carpets, old silver, cut glass and furniture."[9] In some ways, she achieved this aim by allowing objects to play seemingly outsized roles in her fiction. Her descriptions revel in the placing of object upon object, and in doing so, capture the Victorian love of abundance, assemblage, and clutter.[10] Yet her representation of objects is more than the furniture of literary realism or an aesthetic of accumulation and abundance. Her objects conceal deeper histories and complex emotional attachments. "'But we have other lives, I think, I hope. . . . We live in others. . . . We live in things."[11] Something seemed to exist outside of the normal economies of use and exchange value. Useless and valueless objects often captured her attention.

Scholars have taken note of objects' importance in Woolf's writing. In an early example of what was to become thing theory, Bill Brown interpreted Woolf's story "Solid Objects," which turns on an insignificant shard of sea glass, as illustrative of the

[7] Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 31.
[8] Woolf, *Moments of Being*, 124.
[9] *L3*, 284.
[10] See Kate Flint, "Virginia Woolf and Victorian Aesthetics," *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 19-34.
[11] Woolf, *Between the Acts* (New York: Harcourt, 1941), 70—hereafter cited in-text as (*BTA* 70).

modernist fascination with objects and how literature might produce an experience of "thingness" capable of challenging poststructuralist idealism and a new historicist flattening of objects as the evidence of history. By examining Woolf's representation of the thing as an escape from certain sociopolitical structures, Brown encouraged a consideration of "more challenging, exhilarating material fixations."[12] Douglas Mao helped define some of these fixations in exploring Woolf's sense that an object "could exert a powerful hold on the imagination at a time when questions about the meaning of existence seemed unusually pressing."[13] Derek Ryan has subsequently noted this interest in objects, arguing that Woolf gives us "a 'conception' of life that is embedded in materiality: a 'pattern', 'hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life.'"[14] As Woolf writes about everyday objects, she raises significant questions about the relationship between subjects and objects, ideas and things, and interiority and exteriority.

While scholars such as Brown, Mao, and Ryan have combed through Woolf's world of objects, books as objects often escape critical notice. This is understandable because books do not sit comfortably in the object world. Unlike a shard of glass, cotton, granite, or rainbows, the paper and ink of books are often overlooked and subsumed by the words and images they contain. Books are seen to contain a linguistic consciousness, a noetic world of words, which can hardly compete with the paper, ink, threads, and glue that act as their material foundation. They seem to form a special category of objects in

[12] Bill Brown, "The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)," *Modernism/modernity* 6, no. 2 (1999): 23.

[13] Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 17.

[14] Derek Ryan, *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 1.

Woolf's fiction because of their ties to writing and language. The book is a technology of the word, intrinsically tied to human consciousness through its metonymic ability to convey a textual world. Indeed, a book is a problematic object because its material presence always seems to be in service of this textual world. Yet Woolf's fiction presents books as objects that resist being reduced to literary allusions or markers of the act of reading. In Woolf, books are objects that have a thingness independent of the text.

Walter Benjamin articulated a similar concern for the thingness of the book in his essays on book collecting and in more indirect ways in his famous essay "The Work of the Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."[15] xxx

Leah Price has described this alternative life of books as it existed in the Victorian era, identifying moments of "non-reading" in her study of the uses of books in nineteenth-century British literature. Price suggests that individuals' orientation to the book—especially the relative value of the text to its book-object—has shifted greatly over time. She argues that the "Victorians cathected the text in proportion as they disowned the book. More specifically, they identified themselves as text-lovers in proportion as they distinguished themselves from book-lovers."[16] Woolf seeks to rebalance the relationship between text and book by frequently reiterating the uses and presence of the book apart from its text. In doing so, she turns away from the Victorian fetishization of the text to consider a world where things matter. The text and the reading of it is no longer the primary mode of interacting with the book. The book's thingness, a

[15] In *Solid Objects*, Mao draws attention to the ways in which Woolf's narrator in "Solid Objects" shares much with Benjamin's portrait of the book collector (28).

[16] Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 5.

result of the normal circuits of perception being broken, produces profound consequences.

In Woolf's fiction, books lie on tables, rest in pockets, pile on floors, conceal documents, become weapons, and collect dust. Sometimes they are being written or read, but more often than not, they appear as objects somewhat removed from these processes. Woolf's representation of books as things independent of their conventional use-value defamiliarizes this most common of literary objects, thus bringing new ways of understanding the book into focus. This fascination with books is at least partly indicative of Woolf's own childhood. By the time of Woolf's birth in 1881, nineteenth-century bibliography, the rise of public and private libraries, and the interest in book-collecting had rendered books more discursively visible than ever before. In her youth, Woolf was surrounded by father's library at Hyde Park Gate, and the massive black tomes of his *Dictionary of Literary Biography* hung over her as both an inspiration and a phantom for her entire life. Just as Rebecca Sharp of *Vanity Fair* flung her presentation copy of Johnson's dictionary out of the window of her carriage as she fled from Miss Pinkerton's school at the Mall, Woolf sought to cast off the traditional books of the literary establishment, especially given the establishment's tacit acceptance of a patriarchal lineage of writing and the limited educational opportunities for women. In works such as *A Room of One's Own* and *Jacob's Room*, Woolf helps to reframe this patriarchal lineage, exploring great national libraries and the thoughts of the famous men they contain while concurrently highlighting the libraries' poverty of perspectives. Woolf's rebinding and designing of books throughout her life similarly speaks to this desire to form new attachments to the book. These new attachments, Woolf envisioned, might

make allowances for the ways in which books bring about changes in the individual, ways that go beyond reading.

Like other modernist writers, Woolf responded to the book in ways that recognized the media shifts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The typewriter, gramophone, radio, and television had become dominant technologies of the word in their respective domains. The book, the centuries-old technology of literature and learning, had new competition. Woolf recorded many of these changes in the technologies of literacy and traced their consequences. For instance, the famous sky-writing passage in *Mrs. Dalloway* demonstrates the spectacular heights that the word had already achieved, and her essays on cinema which display her fascination with the medium and its uncertain future.[17] In her final novel, *Between the Acts* (1939), Woolf places books within a network of ancient and emerging communication technologies that anticipates later ideas about how humans become objects of their information systems and are subsequently shaped by them.[18] More specifically, Woolf records the uneven and uneasy media shift that takes place as a traditional village pageant combines with the sounds of the gramophone and reflects on the bookish habits and experiences of the inhabitants of the manor house hosting the event.

As Woolf's English village puts on an historical pageant, its audience experiences Merry England up until the present moment. The gramophone ticks over, signaling the changes of scene and the transition to a new era in English history for which Miss La

[17] Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema," *Nation and Athenaeum* (July 3, 1926): 381-83.

[18] See, for instance, Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks: 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), and *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Trobe, the gifted author of the pageant, has designed a pastiche of various literary sources and historical events and characters. Books are never far from the minds and hands of Woolf's characters as they navigate this on-stage drama. Isa Oliver remembers:

> A foolish, flattering lady, pausing on the threshold of what she once called "the heart of the house," the threshold of the library, had once said: "Next to the kitchen, the library's always the nicest room in the house." Then she added, stepping across the threshold: "Books are the mirrors of the soul." (*BTA* 17)

This aphorism seems to equate books with interiority, and the words repeatedly echo in Isa's head throughout the novel. This common approach to books has led many to investigate the shelves of a private library to discern the character of their host, as if books on the shelf were telling clues. Just as Yeats draws upon the book as a symbol for the mind, *Between the Acts* suggests that people's books give insight into their tumultuous and fleeting inner lives. For instance, in the early pages of the novel Mr. Oliver reveals himself, if only briefly, through his relationship to a book:

> "I remember," the old man interrupted, "my mother . . ." Of his mother he remembered that she was very stout; kept her tea caddy locked; yet had given him in that very room a copy of Byron. It was over six years ago, he told them, that his mother had given him the works of Byron in that very room. (*BTA* 5)

A copy of Byron combines with the passing memories of his mother to become a key way in which Mr. Oliver can be interpreted and understood. At one level, it serves to connect intertextuality to the spatialization of memory in which "that very room" and that

volume of Byron stimulate Mr. Oliver's recitation of Byron's verse.[19] In another sense, it asks the reader to engage in an intertextual and historical interpretive exercise where Mr. Oliver's relationship with his mother combined with Byron's verse and critical status—especially in the eyes of Woolf herself as critic—lead to specific conclusions about Mr. Oliver's past and his inner life.

The two lines Mr. Oliver remembers from Byron also deeply affect his own daughter as she fantasizes about Rupert Haines, the silent, mysterious gentleman farmer. The lines from Byron "made two rings, perfect rings, that float them, herself and Haines, like two swans down the stream" (5). She is caught up in a momentary emotional connection with Haines, much to the annoyance of Haines's wife. Her father's memory of the book propels his words, inadvertently intermingling his emotional world with Isa's. The book Mr. Oliver received from his mother he now gives, in some sense, to his daughter. While Oliver ponders a filial connection, however, his daughter is drawn to a romantic entanglement. This complex unfolding of emotion within a very short time reveals the potential and the poverty of a clichéd approach to books as mirrors of the soul. The copy of Byron tells the reader very little about the inner depths of either Mr. Oliver or his daughter. Yet the book does suggest a certain set of interpretive strategies that allows the reader to catch a glimpse of a character's soul.

Isa continually thinks through worn aphorisms about books, only to complicate them with her own relationship to these objects. In this way, Woolf exposes the emptiness of these clichés while nevertheless drawing the reader's attention to the latent

[19] Gabrielle McIntire, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 197-98.

consequences of living through such modes of conventional thinking. In remembering the words of the "foolish, flattering lady," Isa immediately challenges her conventional thinking about books by considering the books' materiality and her lived experience with them. If books are the mirrors of the soul, Isa thinks:

> In this case a tarnished, a spotted soul. For as the train took over three hours to reach this remote village in the very heart of England, no one ventured so long a journey without staving off possible mind-hunger, without buying a book on a bookstall. Thus the mirror that reflected the soul sublime, reflected also the soul bored. Nobody could pretend, as they looked at the shuffle of shilling shockers that week-enders had dropped, that the looking-glass always reflected the anguish of a Queen or the heroism of King Henry. (16)

Isa challenges the worn-out cliché by thinking through the lived experience of books. The library contains the reading material of those traveling between the city and the country, inexpensive volumes worn and battered, journeying and unceremoniously discarded upon arrival. The books on the shelf reflect the rhythms of middle-class travel and entertainment rather than the interior lives of either their owners or readers. Yet the tarnished, spotted books undermine a kind of heroic or majestic romanticism in favor of the commonplace delights of the shilling shocker and its humble covers.

Isa finds the multiplicity of the book and others' rigid assumptions about the place of books to be liberating. She keeps a manuscript of her own poetry in "the book bound like an account book lest Giles might suspect" (15). Fear of her husband discovering her verse leads her to hide her "abortive" thoughts in a ledger. This simple ruse seems to work because of the rigid way in which books are meant to not only mirror the souls of

their owners, but also their content. Isa's role as domestic manager of Pointz Hall makes the ledger a suitable cover for her thoughts. Ironically, Giles, a London stock-trader, takes no interest in his wife's account book, even though he might be suspicious of anything looking like a diary or commonplace book.

Isa once again distracts herself with the sight of books in order to distance herself from the patriarchal gaze of her father-in-law. As old Oliver teases her about her son, capturing her within the maternal and domestic, she looks away from him and settles her gaze on the bookshelves:

> "The library's always the nicest room in the house," she quoted, and ran her eyes along the books. "The mirror of the soul" books were. *The Faerie Queene* and Kinglake's *Crimea*; Keats and the *Kreutzer Sonata*. There they were, reflecting. What? What remedy was there for her at her age—the age of the century, thirty-nine—in books? (19)

The books on the shelf allow her to momentarily break away from the enforced domesticity of Pointz Hall into a literary tradition and a sense of self built upon reading. Critics have seen Isa's observations as representative of the "posited sterility" of books compared to the fecundity of the drama, music, and conversation that happens outside of the Pointz Hall library on the fertile lawn of the estate.[20] Undoubtedly, Woolf's use of worn clichés such as "[b]ooks are the mirror of the soul" exposes the emptiness of such phrases and an uncritical acceptance of the relationship between books and people. Yet

[20] Christopher Ames, *The Life of the Party: Festive Vision in Modern Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 114.

Woolf repeatedly places characters in unexpected relationships to books, thereby begging the reader to revisit the terms of this textual and material relationship.

Throughout the twentieth century, communication technology became increasingly evanescent and simultaneously omnipresent. The skywriting faded, the gramophone ticked over, and the players dispersed. These technologies did not leave records of their readers in the same way that a faded and spotted library did. And while the book as a technology had calcified into a cliché, Woolf nevertheless saw something vibrant and enduring in the form.

Woolf and the Making of Books

Books had a special status among everyday objects for Woolf. Familiarity and affection yielded a deep knowledge of books for her. In addition to being an avid reader, from a young age Woolf made books. At the age of nineteen, a Miss Power instructed Woolf in the art and practice of bookbinding. Transformed into a bindery, the old nursery at the Stephens' residence at Hyde Park Gate contained a standing desk and the awls, bone folders, hand drills, needles, and thread of the binder. Through study and practice, Woolf came to experience books through the eyes and hands of those who made them. They were not ready-made objects, but rather, leafs sewn together and pasted into protective covers, and every detail from thread type to choice of flyleaf paper represented both an aesthetic and mechanical decision.[21] Book binding was also a social act—an

[21] These bindings are now held at Washington State University in their Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections. On online exhibition of their Woolf bindings can be found at: http://ntserver1.wsulibs.wsu.edu/masc/images/woolfbindings/woolf-bindings.htm.

opportunity for conversation and generosity. Woolf wrote to her cousins Emma and Madge Vaughan with pride about her studio and experiments in binding as well as the pleasure of seeing one's books all bound on the shelf. She also wrote to her brother Thoby, offering to re-cover his books for him.[22] The making of books suited the tastes of the young reader and book lover who also longed for the tactile pleasures of making things. As her sister Vanessa began her lifelong occupation in oils, Virginia took to making books from the outside in.

At various times in her life, especially in periods of crisis, Woolf sought out the stability that this kind of repetitive manual labor could provide. As Leslie Stephen's library or the sitting rooms of the Bloomsbury set might suggest, Woolf travelled in environments where books were highly valued, and the making of books seemed a natural occupation for one who wanted to use both her mind and her hands. For instance, in the grief over the death of her brother, Woolf acted as typist to her friend Lytton Strachey. Occupying herself with the rhythmic keystrokes of the typewriter, she composed typescripts of his erotic novel *Ermyntrude and Esmeralda*. Much like her earlier binding practice, Woolf's typing allowed for a material connection to a text, and she was happy to have the distraction that placing someone else's words on the page could provide.

These early forays into the bookmaking process prompted Woolf's desire later in life to set up a press with her husband. On Woolf's thirty-third birthday, the pair determined to take up residence in Hogarth House and to buy a printing press. Leonard

[22] Tony Bradshaw, "Virginia Woolf and Book Design," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts,* ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 281.

Woolf famously explained the origins of the press as a form of therapy meant to occupy Virginia with a manual task and give the two an opportunity to publish their work and that of their friends. The Hogarth Press opened two years later in their Richmond home with the purchase of a small hand-press and a case of type. The Press became more than just therapeutic hobby. As Hermione Lee argues, "the story of the Press is, in a way, the story of the marriage: Leonard's anxiety for her health, their mutual interests, their area of division, and, reflected in the list, their cultural and political life. . . . [T]heir joint names became the sign of a marriage which was also an imprint."[23]

As J. H. Willis remarks in his history of the Hogarth Press, "Printing was earnest, skilled play. Printing required dedication. It was undeniably manual. . . . It was messy and inky, and thoroughly satisfying to body and mind. Not everybody could do it, and something of value was produced which could be shared with friends."[24] The inducements to take on the venture were strong for the couple, and they appeared firmly rooted in the Victorian gospel of work and the weight of that age's accomplishments. A Hogarth book, however, does not have the bulk of the three-decker novel or the ornate craftsmanship of the Kelmscott Chaucer. Hogarth books are small volumes with fanciful fly papers and vibrant covers and energetic woodcuts. The Hogarth, as a hand-press venture by the Woolfs, combined the pleasures and discipline of work with the vibrancy of a new age of color and light. The books do not wear the garb of commodity culture or fine art comfortably. Rather, the books seem to exist outside of these object-discourses by the fact that they, with their imperfect impressions and myriad mistakes, radiate a

[23] Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 357-58.

[24] J. H. Willis, *Leonard and Virginia Woolf as Publishers: The Hogarth Press, 1917-41* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 4-5.

confident amateurism at odds with the tenor of many other private presses. For the most part, the books sold successfully, and within a short period of time the Press turned a small profit—one of its greatest distinctions from other similar ventures at the time. However, the Hogarth was not conceived of as a commercial enterprise, and neither Leonard nor Virginia saw themselves as literary entrepreneurs. While they certainly kept financial well-being in mind, the couple preferred to print those works that pleased them, especially when other publishing outlets might not be available to the writers. The Press famously rejected Joyce's *Ulysses*, a Herculean job for any compositor and an ill-fitted novel for the Hogarth ranks, opting for similarly experimental works in smaller formats, such as T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* or Helen Mirlees's *Paris*.

Though the Press was a great burden, demanding continual attention and inducing numerous headaches until the end of Woolf's life, the experience of running it and making books provided Woolf with a wealth of knowledge about the history, design, and construction of books and that became an important element of her writing career. After the founding of the Press, Woolf published most of her fiction through it, and as co-editor she formed close connections to the work of her Bloomsbury associates as well as a set of international writers who shared in the sympathies and interests of the group.[25] Beyond this network of writers, artists, and thinkers that came together in Hogarth volumes, Woolf's presswork resulted in increased attention to books in her writing. The very concern for the book as an art object that had fed Woolf's burgeoning interest in binding,

[25] This aspect of Woolf's social and professional career is explored extensively in the essays that make up *Leonard and Virginia Woolf, The Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism*, ed. Helen Southworth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

typewriting, book collecting, and printing found its way into her early novels, where Woolf considered the thingness of the book and its special status amidst a world of objects.

Woolf and the Use of Books

Woolf's broad exposure to books led to her inquiries into the act of reading and the role of the book within that process, and as her career developed, Woolf, like fellow modernist writers such as Ezra Pound, sought to teach her reading public about proper modes of reading.[26] In doing so, both Woolf and Pound emphasized the material habits of readers and technologies of print. Pound, for instance, argues for a modern approach to literature based on its abundance and ease of construction:

> We live an age of science and of abundance. The care and reverence for books as such, proper to an age when no book was duplicated until someone took the pains to copy it out by hand, obviously no longer suited to 'the needs of society', or to the conservation of learning. The weeder is supremely needed the Garden of the Muses to persist as a garden.[27]

Pound recounts the media shift from the medieval manuscript to the modern era of print as a way of suggesting that a medieval commitment to conservation must give way to an age of discrimination. The mechanics of manuscript production ensured that only the most valuable texts multiplied because of the labor-intensive scribal act. The printed book, Pound argues, brings multiplicity and survival, but also variety and overabundance.

[26] See, for example, Ezra Pound's *ABC of Reading* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 17.

[27] Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 17.

Pound sought to remedy this situation by presenting the common reader with critical suggestions and a corpus of texts worthy of further reading that could serve as touchstones for evaluating contemporary works.

Although Pound often takes an authoritarian approach to training the critical faculties of readers, providing them with endless lists of rules and dictums, Woolf's reflections on reading are more liberal. "After all," reflected Woolf, "what laws can be laid down about books?"[28] Her essays in *The Common Reader* (1925; 1932) push against Victorian notions of moral improvement and the perspectives of other modernist writers, rooted as the latter were in more prescriptive or manifesto-like statements about reading and the uses of books. For example, in the essay "How Should One Read a Book," Woolf provides perhaps her most explicit advice on the cultivation of certain reading habits. Woolf recognizes reading as an embodied activity and suggests that the act of reading should include a sensory interaction with one's environment. The book and the world beyond are all part of the reading experience. Woolf argues that,

> we can read such books with another aim, not to throw light on literature, not to become familiar with famous people, but to refresh and exercise our own creative powers. Is there not an open window on the right hand of the bookcase? How delightful to stop reading and look out![29]

The aim for Woolf is personal and exploratory, putting creative exercise above exposure to great books and great persons.

[28] Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?" in Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common Reader*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt, 1986), 258.

[29] Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?," 263.

Just as Woolf challenged her fellow modernists' more authoritarian approaches to reading, so too did she resist earlier Victorian and Edwardian guides to reading and books. In one such guide, the essay "Perishable Books," Leslie Stephen argues that books should be destroyed if they have not been reprinted in one hundred years. Under this plan, few of Stephen's own books would have survived into the twenty-first century; nevertheless, Stephen's ideas about the relationship between the physical presence of books and their literary content made their way into the Woolfs' BBC dialogue and remain salient in the present day. Stephen connects literary immortality to the longevity of books and the cultural practices of conserving such objects. He wonders if it is better to simply obliterate any trace of those books of the past that are not timeless masterpieces or useful examples of certain ideas or sentiments. The weight of the past can be felt physically in the books used to store it. Stephen's solution is to shed this physical weight, in doing so symbolically sloughing off the influences of so many texts. "Will our grandchildren have any cause for sorrow," he inquires, "if ninety-nine hundredths of all the publications of to-day should disappear like a bad dream?"[30] Unread books have no purpose for Stephen and are ripe for extinction, a fate that Woolf herself rejects.

Prominent Victorian writer Arnold Bennett offered a similarly unsatisfactory account of reading in Woolf's eyes. Yet the literary feud between Bennett and Woolf extended beyond modes of literary representation to the very different manners in which they approached books as objects. In *Literary Taste: How to Form It, with Detailed Instructions for Collecting a Complete Library of English Literature* (1909), Bennett provides his reader with a ledger of all of the books—along with the exact editions and

[30] Leslie Stephen, "Perishable Books," 42.

prices they should pay for those volumes—necessary to achieve literary taste. For Bennett, literary taste can be formed through buying the correct books and then forcing oneself to take pleasure in them. In all, he concludes that a library of 335 volumes at a cost of £28.0.1 should do the trick.[31] Furthermore, he lays out a prudent savings plan to help the literary aspirant to set aside sixpence a day for three years to "become the possessor of a collection of books which, for range and completeness in all branches of literature, will bear comparison with libraries far more imposing, more numerous, and more expensive."[32] Within Bennett's formulation, literary taste is a matter of buying certain prescribed works, having them around the household, and finally learning to love them in some fashion. Directly after providing the lengthy ledger of books, Bennett writes:

> When you have read, wholly or in part, a majority of these three hundred and thirty-five volumes, *with enjoyment*, you may begin to whisper to yourself that your literary taste is formed; and you may pronounce judgement of modern works which come before the bar of your opinion in the calm assurance that though to err is human, you do at any rate know what you are talking about.[33]

An understanding, enjoyment, and maybe most important, an ownership of the classics are prerequisites to the reading of modern literature and any claim to authority on the subject.

[31] Arnold Bennett, *Literary Taste: How to Form It, with Detailed Instructions for Collecting a Complete Library of English Literature* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1910), 111.

[32] Bennett, *Literary Taste*, 112.

[33] Bennett, *Literary Taste*, 112.

Despite a Victorian claim to the fact, Woolf recognized that reading is not the necessary telos of the book. Eschewing the nineteenth-century rhetoric that saw the book as a vehicle for self-improvement and the development of taste and character, Woolf sought to imbue the book with different qualities by offering an innovative picture of its uses. Rather than being narrowly prescriptive or moralistic like her fellow modernist writers, Woolf, in her fiction, adopts a more speculative and exploratory approach to the book. Consequently, it is less controlling and stifling and becomes more generative and revealing.

The Voyage Out: Bonding Over Books

"Books—books—books. . . I wonder what you see in them," asks Helen Ambrose, a character who has spent most of her life surrounded by books in which she has little interest. Much of Woolf's debut novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), concerns itself with what people either see or don't see in books. As Jane Wheare has argued, the novel, as well as Woolf's own career, turns on the "the relative value of politicians and social reformers on the one hand, and artists, critics on the other."[34] As Evelyn Murgatroyd decides to turn her Saturday Club from disinterested discussions of art toward debates about social reforms such as "the White Slave Traffic, Women Suffrage, the Insurance Bill,"[35] the novel raises significant questions about the relationship between art and life. One of the ways in which Woolf complicates this binary can be found in the books that

[34] Jane Wheare, introduction to Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: Penguin, 1992), ix.

[35] Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: Penguin, 1992), 235—hereafter cited in-text as (*VO* 235).

mediate social life and define relationships in the novel. Books are loaned, borrowed, lost, transported, and hidden behind. Only infrequently are they ever read, and when they are, they usually cause more discord and confusion than shared sentiment, intimacy, or understanding. In the material practices associated with books, Woolf's characters find ways to see a useful exchange between life and art, represented in the book where the art of the literary text is tied to the hard reality of paper, ink, and cover.

As Rachel Vinrace sails away from England and toward increasing self-awareness, deeper relationships with those around her, and ultimately her death, books facilitate the building of a community first on the *Euphrosyne* and then amongst the British travelers who stop in the seaside South American village. In fact, the ship's name is a reference to an anthology of verse written and collected by Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, Lytton Strachey, and others and published in 1905. The anthology was to be the crowning achievement for these Cambridge friends; however, none of the contributors succeeded as a poet. Virginia mocked the volume, and in an unpublished essay on the book, she makes clear that the "respectable custom which allows the daughter to educate herself at home, while the son is educated by others" had yielded paltry literary result in these poems.[36] She therefore named the vessel that would transport Rachel abroad to be educated by those other than her maiden aunts after that failed poetic excursion.

Throughout the novel, books are rarely read. Instead they are taken from pockets, heaped on floors, delivered, gifted, transported, collected, and discussed. Books are often metonymic of their texts, such as Clarissa's Dalloway's "little white volume of Pascal

[36] Virginia Woolf, unpublished essay on *Euphrosyne*, as cited in the appendix, "Virginia Woolf and the Authors of *Euphrosyne*," to Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1972), 205.

which went everywhere with her," which provides the reader with insights into Clarissa's character and Woolf's own philosophic investigations (*VO* 49). Nevertheless, the book's physical presence just as frequently acts as a catalyst for a whole series of wanted and unwanted interactions. Rachel's eventual love interest Terence Hewet muses late in the novel: "Why were the relations between different people so unsatisfactory, so fragmentary, so hazardous, and words so dangerous that the instinct to sympathize with another human being was an instinct to be examined carefully and probably crushed?" (178). The novel's many unsatisfactory interactions often take place around books. Woolf's characters see books as a way to bridge the gulf between unknowable individuals, and as Rachel moves slowly away from England and towards a better understanding of her companions and herself, books are physical and textual sites of exchange that stimulate conversation and intimacy.

In the beginning of the novel, a book stimulates conversation between Helen and Mr. Pepper over breakfast. Although the morning has a "sense of untapped resources, things to say as yet unsaid," neither party seems to be listening to the other. Rather, each is trapped in his or her own thoughts and silent judgements. Helen and Mr. Pepper fall into small talk about personal health and the weather, and as he notes how the beauty of the day has no effect on his gout, Mr. Pepper "took a little parchment volume from his picket and laid it on the table. As it was clear that he invited comment, Helen asked him the name of it" (19). Mr. Pepper, a man "who had never met a woman who commanded his respect," uses the object to steer the conversation to his advantage. It is a prop to dominate the breakfast table, allowing him to move the conversation away from Helen's "nonsense" and towards a subject that he deems to be more substantial: the making of

roads. However, this book about pathways fails to make inroads in connecting the two. Instead, Mr. Pepper's rant about the sorry state of English roads and the inefficacy of town councils that is stimulated by the book leads Helen to completely disengage from him. She immediately changes the subject and directs a question at her husband regarding their children's religious upbringing at the hands of their servant.

Woolf deftly deploys books throughout the novel as objects of subtle domination. Time and again, various characters' attempts to negate purposeful silences or push certain lines of thought are played out through the introduction of books. Rachel, who has a natural disinclination toward books, receives a series of books from different people intent on persuading her in one direction or another. It is only when the books are pushed aside, however, that moments of intimacy can take place. When Clarissa Dalloway catches Rachel playing Bach, for instance, Rachel moves "*Cowper's Letters* and *Wuthering Heights* out of the arm-chair, so that Clarissa was invited to sit there" (49). The older women on board the *Euphrosyne* make Rachel feel motherless and out of place, and while the physical movement of the books makes space for a moment of intimacy, the texts themselves reveal further divisions among the characters. *Cowper's Letters* and *Wuthering Heights* represent two types of inherited traditions that Woolf is trying to sidestep in *The Voyage Out.* Rachel receives her copy of Cowper from her father—it was also one of Leslie Stephen's favorite books—and it signals a type of masculine hero worship in literature that Woolf denounces explicitly in works such as *A Room of One's Own*. Rachel finds Cowper "rather dull," and when Clarissa associates Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* with the works of another woman writer, Jane Austen,

Rachel has a similar reaction (49). Austen's novels form a tradition of women's writing that Woolf is similarly working against.

Rachel's death at the end of the novel subverts attempts to read the novel as a type of social comedy where a heroine's difficulties are surmounted through an advantageous and happy marriage. In this moment where Clarissa is trying to find a point of connection with Rachel, these texts merely stand in her way and are indicative of the characters' lack of shared understanding. When Clarissa takes leave of the *Euphrosyne,* she gives Rachel an inscribed copy of *Persuasion* in which "with a silver pencil she wrote her name and address" (69). The book is a gift, but it is also meant to persuade Rachel into recognizing Mrs. Dalloway's literary taste and seeking further guidance and support from her upon returning home. Rachel accepts the book, but it remains unread, and Clarissa's invitation, of course, goes unanswered because Rachel never returns to London.

Rachel's uncle Ridley Ambrose purposefully isolates himself using books. He directs his attention to the pages of Pindar and builds a labyrinth of books around him in his South American house:

> Unfortunately, as age puts one barrier between human beings, and learning another, and sex a third, Mr. Ambrose in his study was some thousand miles distant from the nearest human being, who in this household was inevitably a woman. He sat hour after hour among white-leaved books, alone like an idol in an empty church, still except for the passage of his hand from one side of the sheet to another silent save for an occasional choke, which drove him to extend his pipe a moment in the air. As he worked his way further and further into the heart of the poet, his chair became more and more deeply encircled by books, which lay open

on the floor and could only be crossed by a careful process of stepping, so delicate that his visitors generally stopped and addressed him from the outskirts. (156)

While Rachel and Helen are emotionally separated from Ridley through their age, sex, and gender, the maze of books around Ridley's feet forms an additional physical barrier to his interruption. Rachel encroaches upon his silence and solitude in order to borrow a copy of Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* Rather than follow Ridley's example of solitary learning, however, Rachel views the book as a means of connecting with her fellow expatriates. Yet her uncle's collecting habits and the practicalities of transporting a library from England to South America thwart her attempts. He replies to her request, saying, "I don't travel about with a miscellaneous collection of eighteenth-century historians! . . . Ten big volumes at least" (157). The sheer size of the work alone makes it an unlikely candidate for a colonial library.

In many ways, Ridley Ambrose has created an ideal room of his own for writing and thought using the very volumes of his study to buffer him from unwanted human interaction. Yet Woolf subtly critiques the way in which Ridley ignores the efforts of Helen and Rachel to make the space function. The rules of "punctuality and quiet . . . cooking well . . . and performing other small duties" suit Ridley's needs and preferences, allowing him to devote his attention to restoring Pindar's odes to their deserved glory to the neglect of the women with whom he shares a roof (156). His lack of interest in French novels, dances, and politics sets him apart from Rachel and her attempts to venture out into a social world beyond her front doors and the world of books and music.

Woolf constructed similar spaces for herself. As Richard Kennedy remembers, Woolf would often work in the back office of the Hogarth Press surrounded by the large

bales of books delivered from the printers. Each pallet contained five hundred books, and Woolf, with a writing pad on her lap and typewriter beside her, seemed to Kennedy to be one "of the Bruce Bairnsfather veterans of the War, surrounded by sandbags."[37] Barricading Woolf from those calling at the Press and other distractions, the books of the Hogarth acted as a sort of final defense between the writer and the world.

In *A Room of One's Own,* Woolf's narrator is not content to simply discuss books and their authors. As the essay's narrative unfolds, she goes to "the shelf where the histories stand," turns "again to the bookcase," and takes "*Pride and Prejudice* from the shelf." [38] The bookcase becomes metonymic of the great mass of human knowledge and the individual volumes that make up the written record. She peers not just at the books, but also at the gaps between the books that ought to be filled, "looking about the shelves for books that were not there" (*RO* 45). These "blank spaces on the shelves" are symbolic of absences in the historical record. Woolf anticipates the volumes yet to be written about the everyday lives of women. If a woman is to write, she must have a room of her own, and this room must be a library of sorts. Unlike the Oxbridge library to which she is denied entrance, such a library is one that contains the tradition of women's writing on its shelves.

Night and Day: Inheriting a Tradition of Books

Woolf's second novel takes a different approach to books. Instead of creating physical and emotional barriers, books reflect the weight of tradition that binds characters

[37] Richard Kennedy, *A Boy at the Hogarth Press* (London: Hesperus, 2011), 22.
[38] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 2005), 42, 56—hereafter cited in-text as (*RO* 42, 56).

to a past both enabling and encumbering. Legacies left in books provide a sense of history and a connection to one's ancestry, but they also alienate and insulate one from the larger world. Katherine Hilbery struggles with the privileges and demands of her heritage throughout the novel. Knowing that her present circumstances are inextricably tied to her family fortune, Katherine continually weighs her options and contingencies regarding the central problems of the novel—her engagement to William Rodney, her attraction to Ralph Denham, her responsibility to Mary Datchet, and her duty to her family. At some level, she feels these questions to be academic because the solutions to these problems have already been determined and written in the book of tradition:

> Like all people brought up in a tradition, Katherine was able, within ten minutes or so, to reduce any moral difficulty to its traditional shape and solve it by the traditional answers. The book of wisdom lay open, if not upon her mother's knee, upon the knees of many uncles and aunts. She had only to consult them, and they would at once turn to the right page and read out an answer exactly suited to one in her position.[39]

The book becomes a symbol for the inherited wisdom that passes from generation to generation. The difficulty lies in the complex and changing social world in which Katherine finds herself and her inability to merely reduce moral difficulties to fit the traditional models she has inherited. In a world of struggles for general suffrage and social mobility, Katherine does not find adequate answers in the relics of the past.

[39] Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 265—hereafter cited in-text as (*ND* 265).

The novel begins with a meditation on tradition, experience, and communication. As Ralph Denham and Katherine have tea amongst Katherine's parents' friends, the two share the silence and disengagement that come with being the junior members of the party. Katherine, accustomed to her role in these situations, exudes a confidence and ease in her silent presence that Ralph lacks, disappointed as he is that he traded the freedom of the streets for the confines of the Edwardian sitting room. However, their dynamic shifts dramatically when Katherine offers to give Ralph a tour of the family shrine to the Hilberys' poet forbearer, Richard Alardyce. The relics inside this room mediate the conversation between Katherine and Ralph, pulling them out of the strictures of tea-party etiquette into a more intimate, albeit combative, relationship. Among the remnants of Katherine's grandfather that constitute the "religious temple," books form a special class of object that excites conversation between the two. These books and manuscripts launch three interrelated debates that address the role of tradition, romanticized visions of the past, and the inheritance of experience.

After showing Ralph the poet's ink-stained writing desk, quill pen, and "gigantic gold-rimmed spectacles," Katherine is overcome by rehearsed hero worship: "I think my grandfather must have been at least twice as large as any one is nowadays" (8). This romanticization of the past is characteristic of the way in which Katherine approaches her family legacy and the objects of past generations. Spurred on by Ralph's provocations concerning her illustrious family name, she considers the superiority of the objects and actions of bygone days. "Nobody ever does do anything worth doing nowadays," Katherine retorts, "we don't even print as well as they did, and as for poets or painters or novelists—there are none; so, at any rate, I'm not singular" (12). The material qualities of

the book suggest a general decline in taste and accomplishment for Katherine. The things and traditions of the past define her present condition. Her silent seat at the margins of the tea party and her rehearsed tour of her grandfather's things are the subject positions bequeathed to her within a lineage of eminent individuals. Katherine, like her mother, minds the "tiresome business of teacups and bread and butter" and shares in the arduous task of amassing her grandfather's biography and preserving his objects (3).

Katherine reverently displays the manuscript of "Ode to Winter"[40] and explains that a first edition of the poems "contains several poems that have not been reprinted, as well as corrections" (9). Her tour, however, is devoid of any real enthusiasm or disinterested appreciation. Even her pauses exist for dramatic purpose, "as if these spaces had all been calculated" (9). While Katherine repeatedly declares that she cares little for poetry and hasn't even read Shakespeare, books provide her with a means of moving safely through the social world without having to engage with the emotions of those around her. She often resorts to the handling of books in an effort to distance herself from the immediacy of her relationships. When Katherine visits William Rodney's rooms to consent to their marriage, she coolly asks to examine his books and pictures, unsettling Rodney with her almost absentminded disregard for him. She is comfortable in a world of objects in a way contrary to her more vexed interactions with others. Before leaving Rodney's rooms, Katherine again moves toward the bookcase, "taking down books and opening them, but reading nothing on their pages" (116). During this moment of non-

[40] The poem might allude to a verse of the same title by Thomas Campbell, which figures the coming of winter as an aggressive, masculine assault on the feminine fecundity of summer: "He travels on his native storm, / Deflowering Nature's grasy robe / And trampling on her faded form:--" The poem is included in *The Book of Georgian Verse*, ed. William Stanley Braithwaite (London: Grant Richards, 1909), 1070.

reading, Katherine determines to marry Rodney, and the illusion of reading gives her the brief privacy necessary to enter into a dream of what her life might be as a married woman and what contingencies might drive her to such a life. The sounds of Rodney moving at his dressing table disturb these meditations; she "woke herself from this excursion by shutting the cover of the book she was holding and replacing it in the bookshelf" (116). Katherine is not swept away by the romance of literature or the empathy felt for characters in a novel; she does, however, find in the book an imaginative space in which she can consider multiple possibilities while keeping reality at bay.

Katherine's scientific leanings and desire to pursue mathematics and the study of the stars partially explain her preference for living in the object world, rather than the emotional world, of literature. She imagines a world in which she can live without the social demands of the world: "I don't care much whether I ever get to know anything—but I want to work out something in figures—something that hasn't got to do with human beings. I don't want people particularly" (163). Her efforts to navigate her social world through the handling of books come from a compromise that allows her to find non-human moments among objects while giving off the illusion of being more fully engaged in the social and emotional worlds around her than she actually is.

Katherine's consciousness of her own captivity in a system of customs and traditions that does not satisfy her leads her to find companionship in others who move against the currents of convention. Despite their disagreements and romantic competition, Katherine and Mary have moments of sincere affection. Katherine respects Mary's independence, political acumen, and general unwillingness to be forced into a common mold. Katherine finds a similarly kindred spirit in her cousin, Henry. Henry lives an

unconventional life, and he and Katherine are united during the family's Christmas gathering by their shared wish to be away from the family. When Rodney interrupts a moment of intimacy in which Katherine attempts to explain to Henry her feelings, despite knowing that "any intercourse between people is extremely partial," she is perturbed by once again being thrown into Rodney's tendency toward overwrought poetic emotion and intense vanity (166). Henry, trapped in the room alone with Rodney, uses a book to diffuse the awkwardness and comment on the situation.

> [Rodney's] mortification was so obvious that Henry scarcely liked to open the conversation with some remark of a literary character. On the other hand, unless he checked him, Rodney might begin to talk about his feelings, and irreticence is apt to be extremely painful, at any rate in prospect. He therefore adopted a middle course, that is to say, he wrote a note upon the fly-leaf of his book, which ran, 'The situation is becoming most uncomfortable.' This he decorated with those flourishes and decorative borders which grow of themselves upon these occasions. . . (169).

In her elegant and effortlessly assertive way, Mrs. Hilbery brings all the objects into a focus that temporarily shuts down the fruitful arguments of Katherine and Ralph. Mrs. Hilbery reminds Ralph, as he sets a book down, that "There are some books that *live*. . . . They are young with us, and they grow old with us" (13). These objects stabilize a living tradition for Mrs. Hilbery. Galton's notion of hereditary genius holds true for those families that make up the Hilbery inheritance. Woolf presents the "task of breeding distinguished men" as one that works almost autonomously, and these eminent men, "when they were not lighthouses firmly based on rock for the guidance of their

generation . . . were steady, serviceable candles, illuminating the ordinary chambers of daily life" (26). The lighthouses and candles of this hereditary genius are often books inherited from the past; indeed, the libraries and manuscripts of great men and women provide a physical presence that makes concrete this lineage of genius. These eminent families "write solid books in dark covers, issued by the presses of the two great universities, and when one of them dies the chances are that another of them writes his biography." In *Night and Day,* however, these works are all covers and no text. They thus suggest the importance of an eminent exterior capable of giving a physical presence to the succession of genius.

This process of collecting and preserving the literary artifacts of a previous age as a means of securing their place in literary history took on an increasingly formal and institutional form in the late nineteenth century. For instance, Carlyle's house—near the fictional home of the Hilberys in Cheyne Row—was purchased in 1895 by a committee determined to restore the house and open it as a museum to the author's legacy. The *Illustrated Memorial Volume of the Carlyle's House Purchase Fund Committee with Catalogue of Carlyle's Books, Manuscripts, Pictures, and Furniture Exhibited Therein* details the contents of the house and the rules set forth by the committee for visitors. The house was run like a museum with an entrance fee and catalogues for sale that generated a small income for the maintenance of the house. Carlyle's House contained relics to be observed and revered but certainly not used or touched. The regulations of the house state that "No Visitor shall handle any article of Furniture or any Book, or deface the House in

any way"; even unauthorized photography was prohibited.[41] Carlyle's House, like other similar preservation projects of its time, created a strange institutional space where the trappings of everyday life were afforded special status for having touched the presence of an eminent figure. With the opening of Carlyle's House, the writer's fame no longer rested solely on the repute afforded his writings and his character. The house's status as a museum, tourist attraction, and literary shrine meant that people unfamiliar with or unlikely to read the works of Carlyle had another mode of experiencing this literary figure through interacting with his room and objects. Just as Leslie Stephen's *Dictionary of National Biography* might be said to have elevated and reified a particular image of great Britons, Carlyle's House offered another framework for securing a version of literary history through its distribution of objects.[42]

Woolf visited the Carlyle House on numerous occasions, and her descriptions of the space appear in her notebooks. She wrote that the author's living space had been "forcibly preserved."[43] Richard Alardyce is similarly preserved in the novel through his library and biography. However, as a character he is all book and no text. Never once in the novel is a line of his verse uttered or his poetic subjects recited. He exists in documents rarely read and pages of a manuscript that never quite come together. While

[41] *Illustrated Memorial Volume of the Carlyle's House Purchase Fund Committee with Catalogue of Carlyle's Books, Manuscripts, Pictures, and Furniture Exhibited Therein* (London: Carlyle's House Memorial Trust, 1896), vi.

[42] Incidentally, Woolf's own home has been converted into a literary museum. A thorough discussion of this museum space as a text can be found in Nuala Hancock's *Charleston and Monk's House: The Intimate House Museums of Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). See also Harald Hendrix's edited collection, *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[43] "Carlyle's House" and "Great Men's Houses," in Virginia Woolf, *Carlyle's House and Other Sketches*, ed. David Bradshaw (London: Hesperus, 2003).

attempting to write Alardyce's biography, Mrs. Hilbery found inspiration not in reading his books but in dusting them:

> She liked to perambulate the room with a duster in her hand, with which she stopped to polish the backs of already lustrous books, musing and romancing as she did so. Suddenly the right phrase or the penetrating point of view would suggest itself, and she would drop her duster and write ecstatically for a few breathless moments; and then the mood would pass away, and the duster would be sought for, and the old books polished again. (*ND* 29)

Her father's words and phrases cannot stir her imagination as the dust that settles on his volumes does. As Mrs. Hilbery and her daughter sit down to the day's writing, Woolf asks her reader to pay attention to the everyday tools of writing as much as the thoughts and memories that are supposed to animate them. Failure to live up to her family name consumes Katherine as she and Mrs. Hilbery sit "at a table heaped with bundles of old letters and well supplied with pencils, scissors, bottles of gum, india-rubber bands, large envelopes, and other appliances for the manufacture of books" (30).

A life among the relics of the past has made Katherine a ghost. Unable to communicate with her ancestors or connect with her peers, she cultivates isolation and silence. The objects contain stories of the past with which her modest present cannot compete:

> All the books and pictures, even the chairs and tables, had belonged to him, or had reference to him, even the china dog on the mantelpiece and at the little shepherdesses with their sheep had been bought by him for a penny a piece from a

> man who used to stand with a tray of toys in Kensington High Street, as Katharine had often heard her mother tell. (92)

She is subjected to objects in such a way that they conjure up living presences, pushing her into an ethereal background where she becomes "an invisible ghost among the living" (92).

Katherine's literary inheritance means the books of the past have an outsized influence in her life. Not only does she live in a reliquary dedicated to her eminent grandfather, but her attempts to bring her family into the literary present are met with resistance. Just as the objects of the house make Katherine feel like a ghost, the "light, gold-wreathed volumes" that arrive at Cheyne Walk every Tuesday and Friday from the subscription library are "too clever and cheap" for her parents (84). "Please, Katherine, read us something *real,*" Mrs. Hilbery protests, reinforcing that the "sleek, yellow calf" of Henry Fielding's novel is the reality of a world that Katherine cannot fully enter (84). Woolf discusses this alienation at length in *A Room of One's Own,* showing how an invented tradition is stabilized through a collection of books denied to women. Woolf discusses being physically and symbolically kept apart from this tradition of books and writing. Like the books of Katherine's grandfather, Richard Alardyce, which are kept on the shelf and paraded before select visitors, these relics of a past literary age are meant to communicate an unbroken line of British genius that necessarily excludes and embitters the ambitions of writers outside of this artistic genealogy.

Katherine is weighed down by "the thick texture of her life" in which her interconnectedness to the lives of others drowns out her individuality (86). She covets the freedom that she perceives in the lives of Ralph and Mary, oblivious to the ways in which

their own webs of connection are similarly complex and confining. She perceives the weight of her own inheritance as very public and far-reaching. She pushes back against her mother's fame, the demands on her to discuss poetry, and the imposition of relatives (80, 85). Her engagement to Rodney is mostly about her desire to have her own home, a space apart from her family and the books and objects of generations past.

Part of the difficulty in understanding how Woolf's characters view books is in their devotion to tasks they know at some level to be ridiculous, creating an ironic distance between the characters' actions and their thoughts. This trait comes into focus as Mr. Hilbery researches the works and lives of famous Romantic poets. As he considers whether Shelley wrote "of" rather than "and" or ascertains the exact name of Byron's one-time lodging, Mr. Hilbery takes on questions of editorial criticism and literary history with great energy and precision, while also recognizing their insignificance. "He saw the humour of the researches," Woolf writes, "but that did not prevent him from carrying them out with the utmost scrupulosity" (88). In other words, the difficulty with books in *Night and Day* seems to be their permanence. In her portrayal of Katherine, born to be the books' caretaker, Woolf suggests that someone must always attend to books, forcing the individual into a struggle for self against the seemingly ineradicable shadows of the past.

To the Lighthouse: Thinking About Books When You Are Not There

In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf reflects again on the seeming immortality of books; in this novel, however, she explores the fate of books that are forgotten and the anxieties attached to such a loss. If "books are the immortal sons deifying their sires," as Plato proclaims, Woolf's writing continually challenges the hubris of such lines of thinking.

Despite the growing number of books during Woolf's lifetime, immortality through books seems to have never been more threatened. Woolf was acutely aware of the way in which women's writing had frequently been forgotten, and in *A Room of One's Own*, she draws attention to the various absences on the bookshelves of history. Of course, as a critic and publisher, Woolf understood the institutional difficulties authors have in finding an audience and a place in the tradition. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf challenges the notion that the book signifies immortality for its author; however, this is not a pessimistic dismissal of authorship or the book as a vehicle for literature. Rather, Woolf explores the ways in which books sprout new life even after they are forgotten, mishandled, and abused. She reveals the immortality of books to be a masculinist fantasy, both impractical and immobilizing. After Mrs. Ramsey, Prue, and Andrew pass away and the cottage seems all but forgotten, the books, moldy and ruined, become signs of new life amidst the wreck and neglect visited upon holiday home.

Mr. Ramsey embodies this concern over the sense of immortality attached to the book. His anxieties concerning his reputation as a scholar, writer, and man are embodied in the Walter Scott volumes that appear numerous times throughout the novel. After the perfect triumph of the boef en daube, Mr. Ramsey seeks out one of the Waverly novels in response to Tansley's insistence that nobody reads Scott anymore. Anxious about his own legacy and his own books, he wishes to prove Tansley wrong by returning to this widely popular novelist who slowly faded out of fashion throughout the nineteenth century. The philosopher past his prime and addicted to the praise and sympathy of everyone around him "would always be worrying about his own books--will they be read, are they good, why aren't they better, what do people think of me? Not liking to think of him so, and

wondering if they had guessed at dinner why he suddenly became irritable when they talked about fame and books lasting . . ."[44] In this way, Woolf registers the harm inflicted by Ramsey's inability to see past his quest for the letter R and the intellectual legacy he will leave behind. His outbursts, temper, and distance from his family, as well as his need for the continual presence of sycophants, cause friction around the dinner table and within his personal relationships. By pulling the Scott novel from the shelf and hiding behind it, he both affirms his belief that writers live eternally in their books and attempts to find solace in the escape from such egoism that books can provide. Yet the book also becomes a shield for Mr. Ramsey, covering his crying face from others and providing the opportunity for him "to lose himself completely." It is only when he allows the book to shield his face from view and slips into Scott's plot that he loses sight of his failures and troubles and experiences a sort of exhilarating joy—"the astonishing delight and feeling of vigor" (*TL* 111). Woolf privileges the experience of the book over its ability to provide a life in death for its author. In other words, Scott's novel is less important to *To the Lighthouse* as a symbol of that writer's legacy or cultural relevance than it is as an object capable of bringing privacy, emotional refuge, and an escape from self.

Woolf rejected this mode of anxiety about books and their role as eternal monuments to literary genius. As objects, Woolf's books are dynamic and generative in one sense or another, whether they are remembered or fall into desuetude. They are a fecund symbol of a past presence, one unconcerned with a masculinist desire for the stability of legacy and patrimony. Indeed, in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf captures books as

[44] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Vintage, 2004), 109-10—hereafter cited in-text as (*TL* 109-10).

they are being destroyed, forgotten, left to rot, and cast aside. From James cutting the illustrations out of the Army and Navy Stores catalogue in the early pages of the novel to the third volume of *Middlemarch* forgotten by Minta on the train, Woolf's books in the novel are not stable markers of literary tradition or allusions in praise of her literary predecessors; rather, they are radically changed with each new encounter.

For Woolf, then, the book was not a static object. Rather, Woolf saw the literary text as altered by the reading process. As a binder and publisher, Woolf understood how people interact with and modify the books they encounter. "Even things in a book-case change if they are alive; we find ourselves wanting to meet them again; we find them altered," writes Woolf in "The Modern Essay."[45] Of course, books change with their readers. New experiences bring about new readings. However, Woolf seems to suggest that it is not just the reader who changes over time, but the book itself as well. Reflecting on the objects about the cottage, Mrs. Ramsey considers the vast collection of books amongst the mats, beds, chairs, tables, and photographs spread throughout the rooms:

> Books, she thought, grew of themselves. She never had time to read them. Alas! even the books that had been given her, and inscribed by the hand of the poet himself: "for her whose wishes must be obeyed" . . . "The happier Helen of our days" . . . disgraceful to say, she had never read them. And Croom on the Mind and Bates on the Savage Customs of Polynesia . . . neither of those could one send to the Lighthouse." (*TL* 25)

[45] "The Modern Essay" in Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: First Series*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (Orlando: Harcourt, 1984), 217-18.

The Ramseys' books beget others, despite the fact that Mrs. Ramsey hasn't had the time to read them. The presentation copies of books gifted by visitors and acquaintances pile up, providing worn compliments and stale gratitude. Despite distracting Mrs. Ramsey for a moment, the heavy tomes by George Croom Robertson and Henry Walter Bates cannot hold her attention because unlike the stockings she is sewing, the books aren't needed at the lighthouse. The books are quickly forgotten amongst the more meaningful objects that her children bring into the house: Andrew's crabs; Jasper's seaweed; Rose's shells, reeds, and stones. Along with this intrusion of the natural world comes the realization for Mrs. Ramsey that "things got shabbier and got shabbier summer after summer" (25).

In *To the Lighthouse,* books quite literally come to life through the passage of time. As Mrs. McNabb moves through the Ramseys' holiday home, she views the neglect and disrepair the books' long absence has engendered: "The books and things were mouldy. . . . All those books needed to be laid out on the grass in the sun" (129). Mrs. McNabb quickly spots that historic enemy of books and considers its remedy. Yet in the novel, the relationship between the book and its degradation at the hands of mold and other pests is not a simple matter of conservation. As Mrs. McNabb and Mrs. Bates steadily bring order back to the abandoned house, the books cannot be restored to their former cleanliness and sterility. Time has altered them irrevocably. As the cleaning women "[f]lopped on chairs they contemplated now the magnificent conquest over taps and bath; now the more arduous, more partial triumph over long rows of books, black as ravens once, now white-stained, breeding pale mushrooms and secreting furtive spiders" (133). The fixtures can be cleaned, but the books now house life. Woolf, who frequently went mushrooming, was fond of the fungus, once writing, "Did I tell you my notion of

heaven? All mushrooms."[46] The neglected books provide this small bounty and hiding spot for the spider, which is a metaphor for the female writer spinning her fictional web among the four corners of life.[47] In the novel, the neglected book is not a failure to be immortalized, but instead fertile ground for chance bounty and a hideaway for new texts.

These living books, sprouting new life even as readers and caretakers abandon them, challenge the relationship between subject and object in the novel. In the beginning of the novel, Lily Briscoe wonders what Mr. Ramsey's books are about. "Subject and object and the nature of reality . . . Think of a kitchen table then," his son tells her, "when you are not there" (*TL* 21). From that point on, Lily associates Mr. Ramsey's work with the image of "a scrubbed kitchen table," and as she encounters the pear trees of the orchard while walking with Mr. Bankes, the image morphs in her mind.

Lily does not trouble herself with an abstract, philosophical table and its relationship to questions of subject and object. Rather, she creates an intensely vivid image of a table:

> And with a painful effort of concentration, she focused her mind, not upon the silver-bossed bark of the tree, or upon its fish-shaped leaves, but upon a phantom kitchen table, one of those scrubbed board tables, grained and knotted, whose virtue seems to have been laid bare by years of muscular integrity, which stuck there, its four legs in air. Naturally, if one's days were passed in this seeing of angular essences, this reducing of lovely evenings, with all their flamingo clouds

[46] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume V: 1932-1935,* ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (New York: Harcourt, 1982), 328.

[47] See Patricia L. Moran, *Word of Mouth: Body Language in Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 74.

> and blue and silver to a white deal four-legged table (and it was a mark of the finest minds to do so), naturally one could not be judged like an ordinary person. (21)

Lily's act of imagination brings a vivid sensation of the table that Ramsey's philosophical inquiries seem to lack. In a similar way, the books sprouting new life from their moldy pages constitute a generative symbol that resists abstract philosophical musings. Just as Lily merges the dead lumber of a kitchen table with the living wood of a pear tree, the dead pages of the books become fertile beds for a new forest of living things.

In writing *To the Lighthouse,* Woolf refines the way in which she thinks about how books mediate relationships between people. At the end of the novel, Cam believes her father to be more accessible when he is writing; however, in order for her to view him absorbed in the movements of pen against paper, she must build a defense of print against his gaze, a vantage point from which to observe him unnoticed. Books, and the pretense of reading, enable Cam to achieve this effect:

> In a kind of trance she would take a book from the shelf and stand there, watching her father write, so equally, so neatly from one side of the page to another, with a little cough now and then, or something said briefly to the other gentleman opposite. And she thought, standing there with her book open, her one could let whatever one thought expand like a leaf in water; and if it did well here, among the old gentlemen smoking and *The Times* crackling, then it was right. And watching her father as he wrote in his study, she thought (now sitting in the boat) he was most lovable, he was most wise he was not vain nor a tyrant. Indeed, if he

> saw she was there, reading a book, he would ask her, as gently as any one could, Was there nothing he could give her? (180)

The book itself, not the act of reading, creates the distance Cam needs to see her father in a different light, and it opens up a space for uninterrupted, productive thought. As Lily Briscoe observes, "Distance had an extraordinary power" (179). Books produce the necessary illusion of distance in the tight spaces of domestic intimacy, whether they be the study or the boat. While on the boat watching her father read, Cam achieves the distance she needs to complicate her image of him as a heartless, egotistical tyrant:

> She looked at him reading the little book with his legs curled; the little book whose yellowish pages she knew without knowing what was written on them. It was small; it was closely printed; on the fly-leaf, she knew, he had written that he had spent fifteen francs on dinner the wine had been so much; he had given so much to the waiter; all was added up neatly at the bottom of the page. But what might be written in the book which had rounded its edges off in the pocket, she did not know. (181)

Cam reads the book's "shiny cover mottled like a plover's egg" and its fly leaf rather than meditating on its contents. This moment captures a turning point in the novel where the image of Mr. Ramsey softens, even if only through the eyes of Cam. The book opens up a space where daughter and father can meet. Although there is only a partial understanding between the two, one achieved through observing the surface of things—book covers, fly leaves, and dinner bills—it is one of the novel's most profound moments of intimacy and connection.

CONCLUSION

Modernist Books in a Digital World

This study of books began in a research library—where many of us first encounter the first editions and fine-print books of a previous age—but it seemed to necessarily end in pixels on a digital screen. In the twenty-first century, it feels impossible to examine or discuss analogue books without some recourse to the digital. Online card catalogues, databases, and digital facsimiles mediate most of our interactions with the book. As readers and scholars, many of us walk a very fine line between two technological eras.

Every shift in the technology of writing is accompanied by the competing claims of early adopters and those wishing to hold onto the "old" ways. People caught in the maelstrom of anxiety and tensions about the consequences of these new technologies and potential havoc that they might wreak on human consciousness necessarily find coping strategies. Literature, because of its intimate ties to the platforms for reading and writing, often articulates these concerns more forcefully than other fields of human activity.

For modernist writers trying to shape a new idiom for their ever-changing world, their shifting media ecology presented felicitous opportunity and stark challenge. How does the written word exist in a world of photography, moving pictures, recorded sound, telegraphy, and telegraphy? Likewise, how does it sit on the pages of mass-produced paperbacks, glossy periodicals, and railway editions? These questions are not dissimilar to those of the twenty-first century author who confronts a world of e-books, virtual reality, Amazon, and new marketing trends such as the online book trailer. While the

pace of media change seems only to have accelerated, the lessons of modernism seem to hold an enduring appeal.

There is much at stake as individuals and institutions work to preserve and organize the literary artifacts of the past and find new forms for today's record of cultural memory. The ambivalence which modernists such as Yeats, Joyce, Gissing, and Woolf understood the dominant and emerging literary technologies and institutions of their day may be instructive in our handling of modernist texts within a digital paradigm. A focus on the production, distribution, storage, and uses of books puts the various gains and losses of digital technologies into greater relief. Yeats's idea for a sacred book challenges the ways in which we demarcate texts within a digital space and reveals the impoverished state of digital book design and the limitations of digital facsimiles of physical books. The modes of control and methods of subversion that Joyce found in the postal service of his day serve to reveal something about the tyranny of social media and its disruptive potential.

If we apply the lessons of Yeats, Joyce, Gissing, and Woolf as they encountered the literary institutions and professional networks of their day, we can find that the basic shape of literary production has changed little, even if the particulars look quite different. Private presses and online publishers are still finding innovative ways to reinscribe the aura of the book into a world flooded with inexpensive trade editions and pirated e-books. In Ireland, for instance, Kevin Barry and Olivia Smith have begun publishing *Winter Papers*, a finely printed annual of Irish writing and art that harkens back to experiments in private publishing a century earlier. In fact, they are continuing an unbroken lineage of Irish writers engaged in publishing that begins with the Dun Emer

Press, continues through Liam Miller's Dolmen Press, and is now finding new voices in our contemporary literary world. Yeats's early recognition that the form of the book and its construction can be leveraged for literary ends survives today. And more importantly, the ways in which Yeats attempted to both historicize the book and invent his own tradition from the books that influenced him seem to be an important corrective to a literary world tied to twenty-four-hour news cycles and the tyranny of social media. Yeats reminds us of the tradition of fine printing and the significance of making books that distinguish themselves in word and design.

It would be an understatement to suggest that the instantaneous distribution of texts through digital platforms has also greatly changed the way in which we communicate, yet many of the complexities of the postal regime that Joyce explores seem relevant to a world of fake news, online avatars, the dark web, and various other schemes designed to exploit the relay points of modern communications. Digital communications have moved many of our transmissions beyond the control of states and have put our messages in the hands of new multinational actors such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook, raising new questions about who controls the networks of exchange and how language might be policed, verified, and interpreted. As in Joyce's time, the technologies that have been created and designed in the metropolitan centers of the world's most powerful nation-states have found new creative outlets in the unstable margins where oppression, revolution, and conflict breed unexpected uses and creative modes of expression and organization from these technologies. The Arab Spring and the activities of Chinese dissidents, to name just two examples, have demonstrated the resilience of those who are bent on putting communication technologies to their own aims despite

massive state attempts to control these networks. Russia's recent moves to sway American opinion through a flood of conflicting and divisive social media posts have similarly signaled a new period of information warfare that demands we reconsider the importance of the means of conveyance as part of the message being sent.

On first glance, many of the world's libraries look quite similar to those in Gissing's day. The architecture of many of the libraries built during the golden age of the public library movement at the end of the nineteenth century still stands today. Yet even though these libraries' shelves of books and heavy tables remain intact in many places, subtle changes can be detected. Library catalogues have moved from enormous volumes and cabinets full of cards to computer servers, while the emphasis on books seems to have shifted in favor of other types of media. Patrons are just as likely to walk through a library's doors to check out films, recordings, e-books, and databases, or to use an Internet connection. It seems that the reasons people seek out libraries have changed very little since Gissing wrote about the British Museum Reading Room and the free libraries of London. Students and readers go there for self-improvement, whether in an attempt to pass an educational or professional examination or to learn about a trade or skill from books and other resources. As a place of quiet and solitude, many libraries are a refuge for those escaping the noise and rush of modern life and finding calm and relaxation in the pages of books. And for those most vulnerable populations, the library can offer a few of the basic necessities of life—for children, a place to play and learn and for the impoverished, a temporary refuge. None of these uses would have been foreign to Gissing, and his ambivalence about these spaces might equally apply to twenty-first century libraries. We must balance the positive effects of these spaces with the possibility

that their claims to social mobility and freedom through reading are a mirage and that as repositories for the learning of the past, libraries stabilize traditional structures of privilege and provide a place to quarantine learning and the learned from spilling out into the world of politics or business. Yet in a society where "disruption" is a hallmark of progress in technology, industry, and society, libraries, in their maintenance of cultural memory, offer a space of continuity.

The modern library straddles these contradictions, and the savvy patron must learn to understand its complexities. Nevertheless, libraries continue to grow, even as they take on new shapes and functions. In fact, the types of libraries available to people have increased as well. While the private library might not be an architectural and decorative necessity in the homes of the wealthy and the aspiring middle classes as it once was in nineteenth-century Britain, having beautifully bound books on shelves still communicates a sense of taste, sophistication, and love for learning. Since it is now easier than ever to buy books by the foot to match the color scheme of a room, there remains a desire to be seen as well-read even if one does not think it valuable to actually read.

The debate about books that animated Virginia and Leonard Woolf's July 1927 BBC radio appearance is one frequently rehashed during any number of the BBC podcasts about books or the publishing industry today. New publishing venues, the ease and affordability of self-publishing, and the creation of vanity presses have further exacerbated the social and professional ills that accompany too many books in the marketplace. Yet at the same time, our culture increasingly sees advantages to telling one's story, and there seem to be a surfeit of means to do it. For these purposes, books seem to be an irrelevant medium, given so many other venues to spin a narrative. Year

after year, however, more books are published than in the last, begging the question of what are people doing with these books, especially when they are not reading them. Woolf's writings ask us to think not of the number of books one has, but of the ways in which these objects mediate relationships, at times creating distance and at other times encouraging intimacy. Books continue to create a sense of privacy and solitude on a crowded subway (although smartphones have almost completely usurped that function), and the commercial successes of books released around the holidays speak to a continued wish to cement our relationships through the gift of books.

As scholars and editors move the study of modernism from the pages of books and journals to digital screens, databases, and algorithms, a consideration of the media ecology of the early twentieth century seems necessary as we learn to interpret these works in a new medium. As we slouch toward the practices of the digital humanities—some willingly and others furtively dragging their feet—new problems and opportunities arise. For instance, the careful editorial work completed in the 1980s to stabilize an authorized edition of Joyce's *Ulysses* now contends with scores of digital editions of the work now available online (not to mention the adaptions, rewritings, and revisions in a multitude of different media, even virtual reality). The literary work finds its way to readers in formats and versions unimagined by those reading the *Little Review* or visiting Shakespeare and Co. This media shift allows for a space for us to challenge previous assumptions about the world of print and the way in which it operates. Furthermore, this shift presents scholars with the challenge of faithfully representing these texts and their social contexts in a digital environment without sacrificing the deep interpretive textures held within the pages and practices of the book.

All of this requires that we understand how the book works—and how it has been used and understood historically—in order to produce better critical editions that refuse an erasure of historicity while also providing innovative and productive structures for reading. On a practical level, an understanding of the modernist book, with its multifarious editions and bibliographic codes, must be somehow encoded into the digital texts that now make up the corpus of data used to produce "distant readings." Digital humanities research in literature has effectively amassed corpora of linguistic texts and is in the process of creating ever more accurate texts. However, it is only taking initial steps in considering bibliographic metadata as meaningful elements of both traditional and digital scholarship.

Ultimately, this seemingly boils down to debates about the competing dominance of structure versus agency. This study seeks to find some sort of middle ground between the two wherein structures influence behaviors but individuals and groups find ways to push back and transform these systems for their own needs. In their approaches to the literary institutions of their day, writers such as Yeats, Joyce, Gissing, and Woolf provide a template for historicizing and understanding media structures while simultaneously finding new ways to exploit the technologies of the day. Modernism shows that technological determinism exists only when readers and writers cease to push back against the tools and structures that make writing possible.

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