UNNATURALISM: BRITISH LITERARY NATURALISM BETWEEN THE WARS

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores a turn in British literature back toward naturalism in the late modernist period, a literary move I call unnaturalism to refer to the way it resembles but deviates from the classic naturalist tradition of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In the 1930s, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, Jean Rhys, and George Orwell separately play with the form that can best merge literature and politics. The resulting novels—*The Years* (1937), *Murphy* (1938), *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939), and *Coming Up for Air* (1939)—might not all look like naturalism, but they share a concern with determinism and social conditions, a tendency toward extreme external detail, and an engagement with contemporary scientific and medical discourse. Socially and politically engaged, these writers work to expose the mechanics behind the 'natural' order and reveal social determinism misrepresented as biological determinism. Rather than work to disprove or deny this way of understanding the world, the novels of my study complicate all singular understandings of human development. In short, these writers recover naturalist conventions in order to expose a functional determinism that is not rooted in biology—is not, in another word, natural—but rather constructed and reconstructed by contemporary discourses.

By focusing on the details of the immediate, individual experience of women and economic or national outsiders, unnaturalists seek a more accurate presentation of the deep inequalities of society and the forces that keep them in place. In *The Years*, Woolf focuses on the way women continue to be limited by social norms despite the women's rights developments of the early twentieth century (the professions were unbarred in 1919 and the Representation of the People Act of 1928 provided women with the same

suffrage terms as men). In *Murphy*, Beckett gestures toward the growing field of experimental psychology, revealing the determinist assumptions on which the field relies. Rhys reveals similar assumptions in popular male depictions of women in *Good Morning, Midnight* as she addresses and revises Sigmund Freud's "Femininity" and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Orwell looks at politics and language itself in *Coming Up for Air*, turning to sensory description as a way of working within a language tradition that he sees as keeping in place an anachronistic class system.

For Marty and Susan

“Give us a smile”

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE UNNATURAL ORDER

I. Introduction: The Project

The critical story told of British literary naturalism is typically one of evolution. It is a late, extreme development of realism or, according to Georg Lukács, an early incubation of modernism.[1] James Joyce uses naturalism in *Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a* Young *Man* (1916) before moving onto the 'real' Joycean stuff of *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).[2] Virginia Woolf writes that the modernists E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence "spoilt their early work" with naturalism ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 24). These are broad strokes, to be sure, but that may be appropriate because what we have is a literary history in which naturalism is relegated to the role of a stepping-stone virtually forgotten about after modernism.

This dissertation diverts from this critical tradition, exploring a reemergence of naturalist conventions after high modernism. In the late interwar period, a cluster of British novelists, Woolf included, begin once again to draw from literary naturalism in their work. At first glance, the novelists and novels of my study have little in common. In fact, the most obvious commonality between Woolf's *The Years* (1937), Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* (1938), Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) and George

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[1] Richard Lehan links realism and naturalism together and calls them "a vortex through which the novel passed before it became modernism" (xi) while Lukács argues for "a continuity" between naturalism and modernism in "The Ideology of Modernism" (402).

[2] Joe Cleary, for one, links Joyce's early work with naturalism in *Outrageous Fortune*. So does Simon Joyce in *Modernism and Naturalism in British and Irish Fiction*.

Orwell's *Coming Up for Air* (1939) may be that they are outliers, difficult to place both within their literary moment and within each respective author's body of work. This is because the critical tendency is to read these novels in their relation to the modernist novel of the 1920s, even though the writers of my study explicitly make stylistic choices in the 1930s to separate their work from the literature that immediately precedes it. My suggestion is that orienting ourselves not toward modernism but instead toward naturalism can help us better understand a contested decade.

I establish a new literary moment, one I call *unnaturalism* to refer to the way it both resembles and deviates from the literary form of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These novelists attempt to create a novel form better suited to respond to the social conditions of both their literary and historical moment. Their resulting fiction features characters in marginalized positions (sex, class, nationality) and highlights the social forces that got them there; the novels provide alternatives to and often directly address contemporary texts that mask these forces as biological or 'natural.' They are deeply rooted in their decade, concerned with their historical moment and how they got there, but also deeply literary—so much so that they have all, at one time or another, been dismissed as apolitical. One of the reasons for that, I suggest, is because their writers actively resist prescription.

Unnaturalism as developed here is my term, not a conscious or self-defined movement. Yet this is precisely what makes the moment worth studying. This cluster of authors separately diagnosed problems with modernism as it existed in the interwar period and individually moved toward a form that resembles naturalism. The question, then, becomes what historical and literary conditions in the 1930s encouraged a group of

very different writers to return to detailed, scientific and socially relevant descriptions and make space in the novel once again for externality. In the pages that follow, I argue that unnaturalism emerges in the 1930s when issues of identity become more politically urgent. Questions of what ought to be become questions of what needs to be right now. The unnaturalists are particularly well equipped to accommodate these changes within the form of the novel because, unlike the dominant modernists of the 1930s, they have biographies that make them materially, rather than theoretically, invested in the politics of gender, nationality, and class. Naturalism as a form highlights determinism. These writers, sharing an outsider status in at least one of these categories, recognize how the legacy of determinism has been used to exclude or marginalize them. Reading for naturalism, a form that highlights determinism, reveals the way contemporary scientific, medical, and political discourses relied upon deterministic assumptions to explain human behavior.

II. Expanding Our Critical Arsenal

This project uses naturalism to better understand a set of authors and a literary moment. It also works to unite and supplement literary criticism about the decade. There is no shortage of terms coined or adopted to describe the literature of the Depression and World War II. Tyrus Miller's late modernism, Brian McHale's postmodernism, Robert Caserio's second edition of modernism, and Kristin Bluemel's intermodernism are some of the few that come to mind. These critical debates have in common that they consider late interwar literature in its relation to modernism while agreeing that the literary trends emerging in the thirties are not quite the same as the prevailing trends of the twenties. Describing this phenomenon, Bluemel notes that "whatever is not modernism will

function as modernism's other" (*Intermodernism* 2) in twenty-first century criticism about twentieth century literature. It is into this conversation that this dissertation enters, suggesting that naturalism provides a new access point for the decade.

Naturalism, for the sake of this study, is not modernism's *other* but instead its *also*. This is to say that unnaturalism merges what seem to be oppositional forms. Lukács places naturalism and modernism at opposite ends of the same pole, the latter representing an extremely individualistic point of view and the former a deterministic one. Lukács writes in "To Narrate or Describe" that naturalism "transforms people into conditions, into components of still lives" (139) while modernism's extreme subjectivity erases these conditions, and in his preface to *Studies in European Realism* writes that each "distorts and impoverishes the portrayal of the complete human personality" (8) by failing to present a nuanced, "complete" (6) picture of the man-society relationship. For Lukács, the solution to this problem is realism, but the novelists of my study are too actively engaged with the genres of naturalism and modernism to be considered realist. They do, however, point to the insufficiency of a singular approach (whether social or individual) and the necessity of a dynamic one. Studying the way these late interwar novels draw and depart from naturalism helps reveal this drive at work in this modernist moment.

The influence of literary naturalism is strong in many works of British and Irish fiction between the wars, yet—despite the wealth of continuing criticism on the tradition of American naturalism in the same time period[3]—critical attention on naturalism's

[3] In *Twentieth-Century American Naturalism* (1982), Donald Pizer describes naturalism as "one of the most persistent and vital strains in American fiction… perhaps

influence during that period is limited to individual essays on specific novels or sections of books on the form. I call for a book-length study on naturalism and late modernism.[4] Joe Cleary's *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (2007), one of the few texts that discuss post-WWI naturalism in Ireland or England, opens the discussion of naturalism by questioning the lack of critical attention on twentieth-century Irish naturalism "despite its weight and durability as a literary form" (111). My work fills and explains this critical void: late interwar naturalist remodeling goes unnoticed simply because these novels are still considered in modernist terms. As a result, critical readings of these novels recognize the way the novels oppose dominant modernisms but not how they resemble naturalism in their detailed exterior descriptions, scientific frameworks, and deterministic plots.

Cleary asserts that "[l]ike any other aesthetic mode, naturalism took shape in specific historical and geographical contexts, and it would be foolish to expect naturalisms that emerged in very different socio-historical contexts simply to replicate each other" (123). He suggests replacing the term post-modernism, which considers literature in its relation to modernism, with the term neo-naturalism. This preferred term is helpful in establishing a new, different naturalist emergence after modernism. I use unnaturalism for this study to highlight the way these novelists focus on exposing what is socially constructed—what is not, in another word, natural—but share Cleary's thought on the necessity of a specific term for each emergence of naturalism. My aim is not to

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the only modern literary form in America which has been both popular and significant" (ix).

[4] Simon Joyce's *Modernism and Naturalism in British and Irish Fiction, 1880-1930* begins this project, but ends with the decade in question.

replace New Modernist Studies with New Naturalist Studies—is not, in other words, to claim that naturalism can emerge at any time under certain conditions—but instead to use unnaturalism as a tool to expand our critical arsenal. Unnaturalism gives us a new literary history, a fresh way to discuss the late interwar novel and the descendants of this novel.

Though criticism about the decade avoids the term naturalism, reading the 1930s for naturalism unites and supplements critical interpretations of the decade. Caserio notes that texts from modernism's second iteration are preoccupied with the politics of gender, race, and sexuality. Miller writes of a change in perspective: "[f]acing an unexpected stop, late modernists took a detour into the political regions that high modernism had managed to view from the distance of a closed car, as part of a moving panorama of forms and colors" (13). Malcolm Bradbury, too, highlights a new trend in literature in the 1930s: "It was a writing that came directly from change, responding to the rising political disorder, ideological confrontation, and crowd frenzy of what had become an age not of the *avant garde* but of the cumulative modern masses" (214). What is significant about these critical arguments is not merely *that* these 1930s works turn toward politics but *how*. Bradbury notes a move from the highbrow to the masses, Miller a focus on the minutiae of existence, Caserio a concern with the overlap between the social and the political. These things are typically read as oppositions to high modernism but they can also be read, as I suggest in the pages that follow, as samplings of naturalism.

III. The Decade

Woolf suggests in "The Leaning Tower" that the white, male, aristocratic writer who had dominated the literary scene until the 1930s struggled in the increasingly political climate of the decade. In privileging interior states over external affairs, the

dominant texts of British modernism pre-1930s (generally speaking) are, if not apolitical, not centrally concerned with politics. The conditions of the decade provided opportunity for new voices to emerge onto the literary scene, but modernism in its existing form did not suit these writer's political and stylistic needs. The writers of my study turned to naturalism as they turned away from modernism, borrowing conventions from one to refresh the other. Naturalism provides the authors of my study a model for addressing political concerns within the form of the novel. That this naturalist reemergence took place in what both Woolf and Orwell note was an increasingly political decade was no coincidence. Naturalist conventions allow novelists the opportunity to navigate the rapidly changing social and historical conditions of the interwar period and challenge existing social and political structures.

Unnaturalism responds to a moment in which the narratives of progress pushed by totalitarians in the decade did not match the reality of daily life. With one war still visible in the rear view mirror and clouds on the horizon forecasting another, it is possible that life in the 1930s felt like not a road but an inescapable roundabout (the downward spiral, perhaps, that characterizes the naturalist novel). The Wall Street crash in 1929 ended what was, in comparison to the years around it, a profitable and largely easy decade. The crash led the United Kingdom into the worst economic decade of the century and revealed the interdependence of global economic markets. Describing the crash, Bradbury writes:

> Then in October 1929 the American stock market crashed, the Depression which had already begun was confirmed, and the entire mood changed. "The modern decade" became the dislocated, lost decade; George Orwell condemned it from the Thirties as "a period of irresponsibility such as the world has never before seen" — though he would also condemn his own decade in much the same way. The excitement of Modernism, the

> aesthetic excitement that had peaked between 1922 and 1929, began to fade, grim fears for the future grew, Europe entered an era of new and terrible disorder, and writers looked to society, reality, and political commitment. (142-3)

The crash changed the mood of the literary scene. It also gave more significance to John Maynard Keynes' argument in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles precluded a functioning global economic system and could lead to another world war.

World War I altered society and made past ways of life inaccessible, and the potential for another war threatened that this could happen again. In *Coming Up for Air*, protagonist George Bowling writes that a difference between the time before and the time after World War I is that past generations "didn't think of the future as something to be terrified of" (109). The political focus on progress put the development of the human species at the forefront of thought, but fear of the future meant that this development became more dubious.

Orwell's novel also helps to explain why the literary move toward politics happened in the 1930s and not the 1920s, even though the change was partly a result of World War I. The effect of World War I, the novel suggests, was felt more strongly in the 1930s: the war made its survivors question the fabric of society, but the profitable post-war period made them forget this. Bowling describes the period after the war as "a queer time… almost queerer than the war itself, though people don't remember it so vividly" (128). Bowling only begins to think of it when he sees a poster that sets him thinking about the past.

> And now it's '38, and in every shipyard in the world they're riveting up the battleships for another war, and a name I chanced to see on a poster

> had stirred up in me a whole lot of stuff which ought to have been buried God knows how many years ago (147).

Now that war might be coming again, Bowling's memories resurface. The potential for another war helps put into motion the action of this novel and contributes to the social conditions from which the unnaturalists draw.

Unnaturalism responds to the dominant modernisms of the 1920s and 1930s. Though high modernists do not entirely ignore political realities—Joyce's work displays a concern with the status of Ireland and Woolf's 1920s fiction with that of women—their novels are multidimensional, the current political situation representing only one aspect. These novels are stylistically exuberant, focusing more on questions of the nature of art and the individual psyche than on political realities.

The conditions of the 1930s produce a new, more political type of dominant modernism, what Orwell calls the Auden-Spender modernism. Woolf discusses the new importance of politics for the writer in the 1930s. After quoting Desmond MacCarthy's claim that writers in 1914 were not political but philosophical, she writes:

> But in 1930 it was impossible—if you were young, sensitive, and imaginative—not to be interested in politics; not to find public causes of much more pressing interest than philosophy. In 1930 young men at college were forced to be aware of what was happening in Russia; in Germany; in Italy; in Spain. They could not go on discussing esthetic emotions and personal relations. They could not confine their reading to the poets; they had to read the politicians. (142)

The literature of the decade reflects this political turn. In addition to being more traditional and authoritarian, as Michael Levenson argues, the dominant modernism of the 1930s is more purpose-driven and political than high modernism. The novel seems to fall out of favor in the decade (or, at least, out of critical favor), replaced by poetry, essays, and travel narratives—forms that, when compared to high modernism, seem more

able to grapple with political realities. However, the writers of my study show that the novel can be political, just that the modernist novel in its existing form was not.

The change in historical and political conditions between the decades joined another change between dominant modernisms: the modernist himself. It might be shortsighted to say the high modernists were a diverse group, but they certainly represented a wider range of economic, educational, sexual, and nationalistic diversity than their 1930s counterparts. "The fact remains," Bradbury writes of the 1930s, "that never before in British writing had a particular cadre, the socially connected, well-educated, public-school and university intelligentsia been so obviously influential" (208). In doing so, he echoes Orwell's claim in "Inside the Whale" that the 1930s saw the rise of a new, younger modernist: the political, purpose-driven, "public-school – university – Bloomsbury" type (Orwell *CEJL* I 511). Significantly, this dominant type of modernist was political not because his biography required it, like the unnaturalist, but because his decade required it.

Unnaturalism responds to both of these modernisms, merging the personal and the political within the form of the novel. It is more political and minimalist than high modernism and more concerned with the limited, individual experience than the modernism of the 1930s. The tower of the dominant writer was leaning in the 1930s, as Woolf writes, but it still functioned to elevate the writer. The unnaturalists, however, holding marginalized positions as a result of their gender, race, and sexuality, could not avoid the political consequences of these categories.

Unnaturalist novels address their time from a different perspective than the dominant works of the 1930s. Rejecting the broad, theoretical, long-ranging account in

favor of one of the individual, daily experience provides a very different picture of the interwar period. During this time, rapidly changing legal definitions were not met with equivalent transformations in social norms. The Representation of the People Act of 1928, for instance, coming less than a decade after the 1919 act that unbarred the professions, provided women with the same suffrage terms as men; both acts suggested a move toward equality between the sexes, but the real, everyday experience of women changed little. In fact, some suggest that things got worse for women after World War I, when men returned from war to reclaim their literal and symbolic positions and women were, as Mary Lou Emery writes, "punished for their earlier adventures" (142).[5] The unnaturalist novel highlights the gap between political rights and material reality. By focusing on the details of the immediate, individual experience of women and economic or national outsiders, unnaturalists seek a more accurate presentation of social inequality and the many, sometimes contradictory forces that maintain it.

IV. The Novelists

Each chapter of this dissertation focuses on a late modernist author and his or her use of naturalism in the 1930s. Tracing the naturalist impulse and influence on the work of these authors reveals a connection between Woolf, Beckett, Rhys, and Orwell that we miss when comparing their work in modernist terms. The 1930s fiction of these writers does not fit easily into the modernist framework. It shares some stylistic and thematic preoccupations with high modernist novels but it is more political and minimalistic. It also comes too late for high modernism and its experimental and literary nature sticks out in the poetry and essay-dominated 1930s. The writers also have in common that their

[5] In addition to Emery, see Deborah Parsons and Sandra M. Gilbert.

most famous novels were published either before the 1930s (Woolf) or after (Beckett, Rhys, and Orwell). As a result, their 1930s work tends to get lumped together or ignored entirely. This is problematic because we miss both their individual literary developments in the 1930s and the development of their late modernist moment.

There is biographical evidence to support reading the work of these novelists for naturalism, which is to say that the authors all have established relationships with naturalism. Orwell praises Émile Zola and describes his own early work as "naturalistic" in "Why I Write" (*CEJL* I 3). Rhys loved George Moore, writing in a letter to Peggy Kirkaldy that she had read *Esther Waters* "about sixty times" (Wyndham and Melly 103), and *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) makes a lengthy reference to Zola's *Nana*. Beckett rejected the purpose-driven nature of Zola, but his lectures display a familiarity with and fondness for certain naturalist impulses. Even Woolf, who literally wrote the book[6] on Edwardian and Georgian conventions, allows in the 1930s that she finds herself increasingly drawn toward facts (though her work is more closely oriented toward Charles Darwin the naturalist than literary naturalism as such).

Biographical details also help explain the unnaturalist authors' shared concern with social politics. Betsy Berry writes in "Between Dog and Woolf" that Rhys had not only a literary education in naturalism, but also lived a life in which "she internalized the forces of economic determinism" (545) and this was true of all of the unnaturalists of my study. Woolf was arguably the best off, but despite economic privilege faced significant limitations because she was a woman. Except for Woolf, each of the writers of my study was born outside of England but under English rule, and this provided them a perspective

[6] Or the essay at least—the differences between Edwardian and Georgian conventions is precisely the subject of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown."

different than that of the dominant modernists. Being Irish in England, gave Beckett perspective on English conventions and the unemployment crisis. Being a Welsh and Scottish woman born in Dominica prioritized issues of nationality and gender for Rhys. Being born in India to a family with upper-middle-class expectations but lower-middle-class finances and serving in Burma himself gave Orwell a new perspective on class and Empire. While the specific details of their nationality, class, and gender differ, these writers are able to see commonality in marginality. This outsider status is crucial in explaining their turn toward naturalism because it separates them from the "socially connected, well-educated, public-school and university intelligentsia" (Bradbury 208) that, as detailed in the previous section, dominated the literary scene in the 1930s.

Though unnaturalist novels may not resemble each other at first, an eye toward naturalist characteristics reveals the significant thematic and structural overlap between the novels. All play with themes of determinism—whether social, economic, scientific, or more obscure forms. Astrology, for instance, is an impetus for the action in both *Murphy* and *Coming Up for Air*. Murphy's horoscope from Pandit Suk guides his job search (or lack thereof) and Bowling finances his trip to Lower Binfield with money he wins applying astrology to horse-racing. These novels layer deterministic systems or understandings of the world on top of each other to complicate the idea that any one system of understanding can explain the world.

This was important to writers in the 1930s because in some cases, scientific and medical fields were reproducing and seemingly verifying out-of-date ideas about the biological differences between men and women and different races. The social norms that limit the women of the Pargiter family in Woolf's *The Years* have their basis in an

understanding that men are better suited for intellectual work, but Woolf insists throughout the 1930s that the differences between the sexes is circumstantial and not necessary. In *Murphy*, Beckett looks at the extremes of scientific authority and at the rising field of experimental psychology, which often justified its own assumptions. Rhys continues Beckett's preoccupation with contemporary psychology but focuses on psychoanalysis instead of experimental psychology. *Good Morning, Midnight* responds to Sigmund Freud's "Femininity," an essay that relies on an anatomical understanding of the differences between the sexes and proposes a psychological one. And while Orwell's primary aim in *Coming Up for Air* is language itself, it is not insignificant that in the climax of the novel Bowling finally makes it to an idyllic, untouched—'natural'—fishing hole he remembers from his youth and it has been turned into the trash heap for the local "loony-bin" (Orwell 207). These novels do not deny the power or necessity of scientific or medical institutions, but rather warn of the dangers of treating all scientific findings as objective and irrefutable.

These novelists gesture back towards naturalism and complicate it, drawing from one tendency of naturalism to challenge the other. Their detail reveals not a natural order but a fabricated one—social, not biological, determinism. Murphy's only real control is that he gets to decide which 'fate' will claim him. He allows his horoscope from Pandit Suk to delay his job search because being ruled by the heavens is an easier biscuit to digest than the reality of human-curated social and economic pressures. An Irish wage laborer looking for a job in London during the decade's massive unemployment crisis has many ways to fail. (One might say, with thoughts of Celia—or Sasha—that Murphy's only 'luck' is that he is a man.)

The pressure unnaturalist novels put on deterministic ideas reflects their larger interest in the way in which social forces outside the self come to influence individual behavior—and how these social forces are often considered biological ones. The (often abrasive) combination of naturalism and modernism in these novels suggests that life is not a balance between external forces and internal psychology but a struggle to assert any kind of meaningful interiority or identity in the face of a barrage of forces that limit or define those efforts. Thus, importantly, these novels refuse to draw one clear line of causality between externality and internality. Instead, they complicate coherence at every turn. This leads, in the unnaturalist novel, to a rejection of plot and narrative resolution. Plot and narrative rely on an established relationship between interiority and the 'external' world of action—this happens, so she reacts like this. Unnaturalists, wishing to disrupt this relationship, reject this higher order and play with the novel form to find organizational structures that might replace plot. Beckett and Rhys reject resolution altogether, as we will see, while Woolf turns to repetition.[7] In my final chapter, I pair Fredric Jameson with Orwell to suggest that Orwell draws from Zola in using affect as an alternative to narrative. Orwell draws from affect but does not, like Zola, balance affect with destiny. The result is an extremely subjective novel that gestures toward a universality of sorts in its subjectivity.

As if thematically mimicking their method, unnaturalist novels rely on questions of return rather than narrative progress. Good *Morning, Midnight* tracks Sasha through a return trip to Paris after an unsuccessful suicide attempt. In *Coming Up for Air*, Bowling

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[7] This resistance to resolution and tendency toward alternate patterns (e.g. repetition) shows the modernist roots of these novels. Unnaturalist novels take this modernist heritage to its extremes; resistance to narrative closure is a central aspect of each work.

revisits his childhood home. Miss Counihan and Celia's storyline in *Murphy* both center on the question of Murphy's return (in the sense of homecoming, but also profit) from employment, and in Beckett's early short story "Echo's Bones," protagonist Belacqua is revived from the dead. Even *The Years*, as focused as it is on its historical moment, features long descriptions of the seasons that work to counter the forward motion of time. Naturalism returns in these novels but has been changed by historical and literary conditions.

My project highlights a literary tradition in the 1930s that differs significantly from the dominant modernisms of the 1920s and 1930s. The unnaturalists, wanting to respond to their historical moment but opposing the broad, theoretical, long-ranging perspective of dominant 1930s modernism, turn to naturalist style. They draw from scientific discourse—and even language itself—to complicate popular understandings of human behavior.

I have selected these works among the many late modernist novels that reference naturalism because they address the form in both style and preoccupation, but this project could be expanded to include many other figures. Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* and Henry Green's *Party Going* come to mind as examples of this not-quite-naturalism. The novels of Elizabeth Bowen and Flann O'Brien, too, could provide productive further study. In truth, a wide range of writers borrowed from the genre during the decade and there is much to find when we read the 1930s for naturalism.

CHAPTER 2

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S GEORGIAN NATURALISM

I. Introduction: "A good deal of gold—more than I'd thought—in externality"

> What has happened of course is that after abstaining from the novel of fact all these years—since 1919—& N[ight]. & D[ay]. indeed, I find myself infinitely delighting in facts for a change, & in possession of quantities beyond counting: though I feel now and then the tug to vision, but resist it. This is the true line, I am sure, after The Waves—The Pargiters—this is what leads naturally on to the next stage—the essay-novel.
>
> Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf is at least partially responsible for contemporary critical understandings of British literature in the interwar period. Her "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," most notably, helped shape the field of modernism and modernist study. The essay places modernism in opposition to the external detail-based literature that precedes it. Yet Woolf turns toward the novel of fact in the 1930s. In 1932, working on the project that would become *The Years*, she notes that she finds herself "infinitely delighting in facts for a change" (Woolf Diary 4: 129). This chapter attempts to reconcile these seemingly oppositional phases of Woolf's writing. I look at Woolf's development in the 1930s and argue that she turns toward "facts" in the decade as a way of making her fiction more political. She provides a presentation of the female condition in her time that is a result of social norms, not anatomical differences. In her diary she writes of creating a new novel form; in the 1930s she plays with the form that best allows her to show the varied and widespread effects of *perceived* biological determinism on the lives of women.

The project that became *The Years* was conceived of, Woolf writes, in the bath in January 1931. It is first to be an essay – "a sequel to a Room of Ones Own – about the

sexual life of women: to be called Professions for Women perhaps" (Woolf Diary 4: 6). By November 1932, she has "remodelled" the essay "to be an Essay-Novel, called the Pargiters—& it is to take in everything, sex, education, life &c; & come, with the most powerful & agile leaps, like a chamois across precipices from 1880 to here & now" (Woolf Diary 4: 129). *The Pargiters* features a contemporary narrator (alternatingly) reading chapters from a novel set in the 1880s and commenting on the fictional excerpts to an audience of professional women. The essay-novel moves back and forth between essay and novel segments. Woolf ultimately abandons this form; by the time *The Years* is published in 1937, she has combined these essayistic and novelistic tendencies into one detail-oriented novel.

To engage with the history of *The Years* née *The Pargiters*, then, is to engage with form. It arises from a lecture, moves to essay-novel, then becomes something that more closely resembles a 19th century novel than any of Woolf's previous works (and not just because the action begins in the 1880s). Because the subject matter of the project remains the same as it develops, the presentation is of great importance. Woolf ultimately decides that the novel is the best form for her commentary on, as she describes it, "everything, sex, life, education" (Woolf Diary 4: 6). Significantly, the form she settles on draws from naturalism much more than her novels of the 1920s. *The Years* is concerned with external facts, social and historical context, and questions of determinism. The very aspects Woolf borrows from naturalism are what allow her novel to be more political. *The Years* uses external detail—facts—to replace the essayistic narration of *The Pargiters*, to link the condition of its characters to their historical moment, and to expose the harmful legacy of biological determinism on women and other marginalized groups.

The work is often skipped over by critics, but it signaled an important shift for Woolf. In her diary, she describes the project with special significance. "Why do I feel this, & I never felt it in the least about the others?" she writes in November 1932 (Woolf Diary 4: 130). Later that year, she even notes that finishing the book is so important to her that she feels "for the first time" in her life that she must be careful crossing the street (Woolf Diary 4: 132). Shortly before *The Years* is published, she declares "I have reached my point of view, as writer, as being" (Woolf Diary 5: 65). No matter how much Woolf consciously shaped her own diaries, she clearly either felt or wanted others to feel that the project represents some pinnacle in her career.

What has shifted in her work, as apparent from this chapter's epigraph, is that she has begun to incorporate external and social detail in a much more significant way. The diary entry quoted above describes her "delighting in facts" and resisting vision (Woolf Diary 4: 129). Woolf actively resists here the individualistic, interior focus that characterizes her 1920s modernism, turning instead to "facts." She corroborates this a month later in another entry about the piece: "this is external: but there's a good deal of gold—more than I'd thought—in externality" (Woolf Diary 4: 133). This turn back toward detail, which creates her naturalist 1930s work, is her way of responding to her historical moment.

Woolf plays with form and fact in the 1930s to best express the social conditions that continue to limit women despite developments in legal rights. This comes to a head in *Three Guineas* (1938), which was published on the heels of *The Years*. After expressing the idea that the reality of women is different than the reality of men, Woolf writes:

> And to prove this, we need not have recourse to the dangerous and uncertain theories of psychologists and biologists; we can appeal to facts. Take the fact of education. Your class has been educated at public schools and universities for five or six hundred years, ours for sixty. Take the fact of property. Your class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically all the capital, all the land, all the valuables, and all the patronage in England. Our class possesses in its own right and not through marriage practically none of the capital, none of the land, none of the valuables, and none of the patronage in England. (Woolf *Three Guineas* 17-18)

She goes on to make the point that this results in "very considerable differences in mind and body" but makes it clear that these historical differences in women's treatment cause any biological difference, and not the other way around (Woolf *Three Guineas* 18). This imbalance is expressed just as thoroughly in *The Years*, however, by the stark contrast between the lives of the Pargiter men and their sisters. The young women are stuck in the home with no occupation while their brothers are at school because there is only enough money to send some children to school and men are considered better suited for intellectual work.

Much of the content of *Three Guineas* begins with *The Pargiters* and lies underneath the surface of *The Years*, but *Three Guineas* is considered a decidedly political text while *The Years* is not. The passage above from *Three Guineas*, in addition to providing context for *The Years*, works to illuminate why Woolf's literary and stylistic concerns in the decade contribute to this understanding of her work. In *The Years*, Woolf attempts to rely on facts and avoid prescriptive theorizing she sees as dangerous. She highlights the biologists and psychologists specifically not because she is anti-science but because she sees the way biological and psychological understandings of the differences between the sexes can work to overshadow all other explanations (like circumstance.)

When Woolf writes that the project is about “the sexual life of women” she refers not to sexuality, eroticism, or sensuality (Woolf Diary 4: 6). Had this been her meaning, the conceived title “Professions for Women” would have an entirely different (and decidedly Un-Woolfian) tone. Instead, Woolf’s project addresses the way a woman’s life is marked by her biological sex. She adapts naturalism to covertly mimic and undermine contemporary assumptions about human development and biological determinism. *The Years* depicts a world in which sexism (and racism) are justified by societal expectations or understandings of what is ‘natural.’ I follow Gillian Beer in believing that Woolf’s work explores “the problem of what is truly ‘natural and eternal’ and what is susceptible to change” and meditate on a culture in which “social and historical factors claim for themselves ‘natural’ and ‘eternal’ authority” and “social determinism claims to be biological determinism” (“Virginia Woolf and Prehistory” 6).

The Years, in short, explores how often the ‘unnatural’—the fabricated—is maintained or justified as something ‘natural.’ Woolf developed in a time when people were concerned with the natural. This focus, combined with newfound scientific advancement, meant that fact-based scientific theories of the natural begin to attain a kind of legitimacy. Woolf turns instead toward complication, showing there are many determinant factors (gender, nationality, class) that all work individually on the human life and that ‘natural,’ biological conceptions of order are themselves often reflections of social ‘facts’: an imposition, rather than a description of order. She uses her own set of facts to tell a different story, one of social and not biological determinism.

Beer traces the origins of the word determinism to the 1840s but argues that Darwin’s works, *Descent of Man* particularly, help usher in what she calls “scientific

determinism" ("Beyond Determinism" 119). Determinism rises in the nineteenth century as a way of explaining things in the absence of God as a creator. While someone like George Eliot (another writer in Beer's study) may have seen the promise of determinism insofar as it seemed to offer a belief structure free from religion, Woolf, born later, would have associated the idea of determinism with her patriarch and the patriarchy or, as Beer puts it, "her father's generation" and "a male-organized world" ("Beyond Determinism" 118). Woolf would have seen by the 1930s, in the other words, that science has not overturned the singular, unified narrative of religion—it has merely replaced it with another narrative.

The Years addresses how the bestowal of scientific legitimacy upon arbitrary cultural norms can be dangerous to people who are not in power. Woolf frames herself as a different type of scientist—a literary scientist—who presents a different set of facts to complicate the narrative that women are not suited for intellectual work. Woolf justifies the importance of this project in *Three Guineas* when she includes the following passage from an editorial printed in the *Daily Telegraph* on January 22, 1936:

> I am certain I voice the opinion of thousands of young men when I say that if men were doing the work that thousands of young women are now doing the men would be able to keep those same women in decent homes. Homes are the real places of the women who are now compelling men to be idle. It is time the Government insisted upon employers giving work to more men, thus enabling them to marry the women they cannot now approach. (*Three Guineas* 51)

The suggestion here is that women are to blame for the unemployment crisis of the 1930s, and that if women were in the place they really belonged—the home—there would be no issue. It is easy to hear echoes of *Descent of Man* here, wherein Darwin declares man to be "more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman" with "a

more inventive genius" (316) and links women with "the lower races, and therefore…a past and lower state of civilization" (327). He concludes that "the average standard of mental power in man must be above that of woman" (327). As Beer notes, Darwin assumes that in humans it is always the man in charge of sexual selection, the implication being "that women's characteristics will be determined by their acceptability to men" (Beer "Beyond Determinism" 122). Though Darwin certainly did not create the idea of the different realms for the sexes, he does in *Descent of Man* work to give these ideas scientific legitimacy. What the piece in the *Daily Telegraph* lacks (and *Descent of Man* allows at times) is any acknowledgment that the conditions described are social, not natural. Thus Woolf works in the 1930s not to rewrite Darwin but to create a document to be read alongside him. She highlights the social conditions that shape the lives of women.

II. The Human in the House

At first thought, Woolf's 1930s fiction seems to directly contradict her literary theories of the early 1920s. In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"[8] she writes of the Edwardians:

> I asked them—they are my elders and betters—How shall I begin to describe this woman's character? And they said: "Begin by saying that her father kept a shop in Harrogate. Ascertain the rent. Ascertain the wages of shop assistants in the year 1878. Discover what her mother died of. Describe cancer. Describe calico. Describe—" But I cried: "Stop! Stop!" And I regret to say that I threw that ugly, that clumsy, that incongruous tool out of the window, for I knew that if I began describing the cancer and the calico, my Mrs. Brown, that vision to which I cling though I know no way of imparting it to you, would have been dulled and tarnished and vanished for ever. ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 22)

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[8] The earliest version of "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" appeared in November 1923 in *The New York Evening Post*. The essay was subsequently published by Hogarth press in October 1924.

Yet the opening section of *The Pargiters* (and, similarly, *The Years*), describes exactly what she turns away from in the essay: the cancer, the calico, the costs. This section explores the literary distinctions Woolf makes in her early essays such that I may establish her stylistic shift in the 1930s. Woolf creates a new form in the 1930s, alternating between external fact and internality to complicate the literature and understandings of her time.

Woolf's unsigned "Modern Novels," a precursor to "Modern Fiction," appears in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1919. The essay begins to draw the distinction between modernism and naturalism that she develops throughout the first half of the 1920s—though she does not use this language, instead elevating the recent "spiritualists" (and these are Woolf's terms), represented in the essay by James Joyce, above the "materialists," represented by Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells, and John Galsworthy. She expands her comparison of these two literary groups—now the Georgians and the Edwardians—in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." The central issue Woolf takes with the Edwardians is what she sees as their tendency to express character solely through social situation. Bennett, Woolf's materialist poster child, focuses so much on external detail that he neglects interior state. She elaborates in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown":

> That is what I mean by saying that the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use. They have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there. To give them their due, they have made that house much better worth living in. But if you hold that novels are in the first place about people, and only in the second about the houses they live in, that is the wrong way to set about it. (22)

The Edwardian tendency is dangerous to Woolf because expressing character solely through social situation comes at the expense of what she calls "human nature" ("Mr. Bennett Mrs. Brown" 19).

At a very basic level, then, Woolf argues here that there is some force within the individual consciousness that challenges external forces. This is made clear when she imagines asking the Edwardians how to portray Mrs. Brown in the quote above. It is not enough to begin by describing Mrs. Brown's father's occupation or the rent of his shop, Woolf argues, because every daughter of every shopkeeper in Harrogate is not exactly the same. The Edwardian tools "are the wrong ones for us to use" because they use the house—external conditions—as the essential factor for understanding character, when it should be one of many factors considered.

When Woolf discusses the young Georgians, she identifies more specifically what she sees as missing in the work of the Edwardians. She writes that E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence "spoilt their early work" by attempting to reconcile external and internal forces ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" 24). "They tried to compromise. They tried to combine their own direct sense of the oddity and significance of some character with Mr. Galsworthy's knowledge of the Factory Acts, and Mr. Bennett's knowledge of the Five Towns" (24). This failing, they moved on, focusing instead on "Mrs. Brown and her peculiarities" (24). I use Woolf's words here because they are available to me, but in truth they might not be necessary. It is evident that modernists turn inward in the 1920s, focusing on individual "peculiarities." Woolf is no exception.

Yet, despite her early admonishments of Edwardian conventions, Woolf turns back toward the novel of fact in the 1930s. In doing so, she turns toward naturalism. *The*

Pargiters is much more detailed in its concern for external situations. As Randi Saloman puts it in *Virginia Woolf's Essayism*, the novel segments of the *The Pargiters* are "plainly 'Edwardian' in Woolf's sense of the term" (144). Though these sections were not made to stand alone, the Edwardian conventions are only enhanced as Woolf revises the work to become *The Years*. Herta Newman too notes that Woolf does not abide by the generic distinctions she herself establishes between the Edwardians and Georgians, writing that Woolf "carefully preserves the forms of that tradition she opposes" (3). While it may be tempting to say that in the 1930s she tries to compromise in the way she suggests that Forster and Lawrence fail, or carefully preserves what she opposes, her late fiction is more complicated than that. My view is more in line with Steve Ellis, who sees Woolf utilizing certain traditional aspects in order to gain a better understanding of the modern. Woolf's work, for Ellis, "attempts to communicate with, retrieve and proclaim a heritage that should not override what has succeeded it but will act as a resource for the present day" (8).[9] This is true for *The Years*. The novel is Woolf's attempt at combining Georgian and Edwardian tendencies to get a more realistic depiction of the human life and the many different forces that shape that life. Indeed, Ellis's quote works as a metaphor for Woolf's project in the 1930s: she does not wish to reject scientific or biological understandings of humans, but does want to interrogate them to make more space for alternative narratives (such as social determinism) and for those (such as women) who are marginalized in or left out of those narratives.

Woolf's 1930s work expresses more clearly than her early work that the human life is shaped by a complex network of forces. This happens in the 1930s specifically

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[9] Ellis even argues that the title of *The Years* is a "deliberate reference" to literary naturalist Thomas Hardy's poem "During Wind and Rain."

because of the historical and political conditions of the decade. As discussed in the introduction, Woolf writes in “The Leaning Tower” that in the 1930s the writer needed to become more political and consider external conditions in order to stay relevant. In other words, it would have been clearer than ever in the 1930s that, in order to describe a person, one must also consider the house in which she lives.

While it might be too much of a claim to say that the house in which Woolf lived was built by biological determinism, her life was marked by inescapable womanhood. Between abuses at the hands of her half-brothers George and Gerald Duckworth, a relationship with her father that resembled the entrapment of Abercorn Terrace, and a lack of formal education that meant she could not flee Abercorn for school like her brother Thoby, it is little wonder that she writes in 1939 that she is always a woman when she writes (Woolf Diary 3: 231). However, importantly, *The Years* shows that what ‘determines’ the inescapability of gender is not biological difference but societal expectation.

For Woolf, the biographical and political are aligned. She writes about the lack of formal female education not because it is personal, but because it is decidedly *not* personal—it is something that affects large groups of women. Likewise, that Rose’s experience being flashed by the man at the pillar-box mirrors the Stephen children’s experience with a man outside Hyde Park Gate does not mean we should read it only as an example of how her biography affects her work. Virginia Stephen and Rose are merely individual examples of a broader problem (Woolf uses the phrase “street love” [*The Pargiters* 36 and elsewhere] but “sexual assault” would be more apt) that is itself only one symptom of sexism.

Woolf is responsible not only for our definitions of modernism, but also our concept of naturalism's relationship to modernism. When she pushes back against Edwardian conventions in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," then, it is not in response to fact and externality as such but instead their use as a means of imposing one, singular system for understanding human behavior. In *The Years*, she works to use these conventions against themselves. Her detail points to not one order but a number of competing factors, none of which are wholly deterministic of behavior, and some of which are arbitrary, hierarchical, cultural or, in other words, not natural. In the 1930s Woolf creates a new form, combining external detail and internal psychology to show the complicated relationship between social forces and individual psyche—or, to put it another way, between the house and the human. As her Georgian naturalism reveals, neither is sufficient on its own.

III. *The Pargiters* and *The Years*

The conventional way of understanding the development of *The Pargiters* is that she abandons the "novel of fact" project. Mitchell A. Leaska, editor of *The Pargiters* and arguably the leading expert on the project, writes "the whole idea of the 'Novel-Essay,' this 'novel of fact,' was abandoned by February 2 1933" (xvii). Leaska allows that "much of the emotional content of the Essays was assimilated into the published text of *The Years*" (xvii) but that much was edited. Woolf herself, however, writes about the project as a continuance in her diaries. Though I take no argument with the claim that Woolf abandons the form of *The Pargiters*, I suggest viewing the switch in form between *The Pargiters* and *The Years* as a development of, not abandonment of, the novel of fact. Though the form of the text changes substantially, thinking of Woolf's main goal in the

project as performatively demonstrating the need for multiplicity helps us understand why she needed to merge the novel and essay parts of the project. The essay sections of *The Pargiters* ultimately provide too much order, too much diagnosis. Jettisoning these sections allows Woolf to avoid the omniscience and prescriptiveness she seeks to avoid.

The Pargiters is literally divided, switching back and forth between "essay" and "chapter" segments. In the essay sections, the contemporary author speaks to the London branch of the National Society for Women's Service about the subject of women in the professions. Her speech is punctuated by readings from her unfinished novel, "a faithful and detailed account of a family called Pargiter, from the year 1800 to the year 2032" (*The Pargiters* 9). The readings (which are all from 1880) constitute the chapter sections. The addresses to the audience exist largely to provide commentary on the novel segments from an updated historical perspective.

In a way, what Woolf has done here is not combine essay and novel so much as separate the omniscient narrator from the text. Thinking about *The Pargiters* as Woolf's attempt at playing with the role of narrator and narration in literature gives us a new perspective on the project's development. In providing commentary on the novel sections, the essay sections provide an alternative to the novel world—but only one alternative. The essay sections replace one worldview with another rather than working within the existing one to complicate it. Turning to facts and external detail within the novel world allows her to sidestep the omniscient narrator. In truth, the form of *The Pargiters* clashes with its central subject, the condition of entrapment and boredom experienced by young women and the limited options available for women professionally. Taking up this subject, Leaska notes that by describing "the restrictive

taboos and inhibitions to which her own generation of women were conditioned" Woolf would "disprove the existence not only of the taboos themselves but also of the inhibitions describing them" by "the very act of daring to write them out" (xviii). On the other hand, failing to be frank and direct in essay form would undercut the project itself. Woolf acknowledges this herself in an early diary entry describing the essay sections. "What I must do is keep control; and not be too sarcastic; and keep the right degree of freedom and reserve" (Woolf Diary 4: 133). She worries here that her form will undermine her content—which is fitting because this is precisely the thing she, as a woman, is addressing in a larger sense.

The essay-novel form also works against another of the project's ideas, which is the difficulty of one generation understanding another. In *The Pargiters*, the contemporary narrator attempts to explain to a younger audience the actions of young women in the 1880s. This commentary attempts to bridge this gap and explain how ideas have developed and changed, but because only one person is speaking, only one generation's perspective is presented. This is problematic because, as Woolf stresses throughout *The Years*, one generation cannot truly understand another. Kitty and her mother, for instance, have very different experiences with Oxford. Her mother is content to be the wife of a scholar because she cannot imagine being one. Kitty, born later, finds living at Oxford a constant reminder of a life she is not allowed to have because she is a woman.

In switching to novel form and replacing the overt, omniscient narrator with facts, Woolf is able to present more—and sometimes conflicting—viewpoints and therefore override the prescriptive purposeness she sees in Edwardian literature and in her time

more generally. She works to show the discrepancy between law and reality and present the symptoms—but without imposing an order of her own, as order is always imposed by those in charge. One immediate result of this difference in style is that *The Years* is able to be considerably kinder to the young Pargiter sisters than the fictional sections of *The Pargiters*. In the early version, Milly, Delia and Eleanor squabble with each other, compete, and are ungracious. The essay section of *The Pargiters* responds to this portrayal:

> Milly, Delia and Eleanor rouse pity and contempt in you. I have only been able to give an outline of them. They are young and healthy, and they have nothing to do but change the sheets at Whiteleys and peep behind the blinds at young men going to call next door. (28)

The reader is asked to excuse the sisters because of their situation, to acknowledge the determinant influence of their environment. In *The Years*, detail and language render unnecessary the editorial asides of *The Pargiters*. One example occurs when Eleanor and Millie disagree over who should go sit with their mother and Delia offers to go in their place. In *The Pargiters*, the line reads "Delia however, rose, &, saying, 'No; I'm the victim: Its my turn – I cut my visit after lunch,' went off to sit with her mother" (20).[10] The line is unremarkable in itself. Delia comes off a little unsympathetically, though not terribly. In *The Years*, Woolf makes slight changes that create a significant impact:

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[10] I am indebted to Leaska for editing and publishing the manuscripts of *The Pargiters*, in which this quotation reads as follows: "Delia however, rose, &, saying, [*I never do anything for anybody*] <No; I'm the victim:> "Its my turn – I [*had*] cut my [*morning*] visit [*owing to*] [*sigh*] [*old*] after lunch," went off to <sit with her> mother" (20). In Leaska's text, words italicized in brackets are deletions editorially restored while words in brackets are insertions made by Virginia Woolf. I have omitted the former and kept the latter for ease of reading above.

> Delia suddenly emerged from the back room in which she had been prowling.
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> "I've nothing whatever to do," she said briefly. "I'll go." (21)

Delia comes from a back room rather than rises from her chair, her dialogue is more reservedly dutiful than self-pitying, and the selected language alludes to the young women's entrapment without need for narratorial intrusion. The boredom and sterility of the scene is clear. Delia is not exaggerating when she says she has "nothing whatever to do"—it is no use practicing her violin because she will never be able to go to Germany and study music.

The image of Delia as she "emerge[s] from the back room in which she had been prowling" brings to mind an animal in captivity. It is reminiscent of a passage in "A Sketch of the Past" where Woolf compares life at Hyde Park Gate to captivity in the zoo. She uses animal language to explain the situation of people, but does with a twist. If Delia is an animal here, she is certainly a caged one, and a caged animal has been placed in captivity—taken out of nature—by man. Here and throughout, Woolf uses natural language to describe 'unnatural' situations. The result is a more sympathetic portrayal of the Pargiter sisters, one that encourages it reader to question his or her assumptions about what is 'natural' for men and women. The drawing room entrapment depicted is decidedly 'unnatural': arbitrary, malleable, maintained by patriarchy rather than nature.

Woolf uses fact in *The Years* to make a political yet nuanced statement about human-imposed limitations on women while avoiding the outright prescriptive narrator. Often, her factual detail is painstaking. In the opening of the novel, Milly and Delia watch the kettle boil. It is slow but this is the point—these young Pargiter women

(teenagers when the novel opens) are stuck in the home all day. They have nothing better to do than watch the kettle boil, prepare tea, and wait for the men to return. As we see a few pages later, the daughters are shamed for even their desire to look outside. Though what Woolf depicts in these opening scenes is imprisonment, her reliance on mundane detailed description shows how commonplace and accepted was this condition of young upper middle class women. In order for sexism to be addressed, let alone fixed, it must be acknowledged. Woolf focuses on everyday life to make space to describe women politically. The urgency of this issue, for Woolf, is that the alternative is to maintain existing structures. Sexism did not disappear in the cultural shift from religion to science, it just took a different form. Woolf seeks to reveal this in her 1930s fiction.

IV. The 'Natural' in *The Years*

The Years forces the question of what is natural by alternating back and forth between natural imagery and conditional history. The excess of natural imagery in *The Years* exposes how ideas of the 'natural' often cloak 'unnatural' human activity. Reading the novel for this language exposes situations in which things are *not* as they seem, are *not* 'natural' and expected. Another way to say this is that her work uses the biological to signal the social. We see this most notably, as discussed below, when the words "natural" or "nature" are invoked by her characters to deny something that is circumstantial. However, these outright addresses to nature are only one way *The Years* focuses on the interchange between what is natural and what is manmade.

In *The Pargiters*, the essay/novel division allows its contemporary author to comment on the condition of its characters and the interplay between what is natural and what is manmade. Though Woolf abandons this division, she replaces it in *The Years*

with another structure that encourages its reader to compare biological and social forces. Woolf provides two opposing external frameworks, what we might call cyclical, absolute nature and manmade years. Nature works as one organizing device for the novel. Descriptions of natural phenomena begin and dot each year. When people are mentioned, it is in mass: “thousands of shop assistants made that remark,” “interminable processions of shoppers… perpetually marching” (Woolf *The Years* 3). Instead of individuals, there are types: “virgins and spinsters” (4). This, added to the steady progress of the seasons, seems to gesture toward the universal or absolute. This eternal framework is undermined at the same time as it is established, however. The novel opens “[i]t was an uncertain spring” (3), qualifying nature’s eternal authority. Adding to this is the novel’s second external frame: historical and social conditions. It is appropriate that the title of the work changed from *The Pargiters* to *The Years* because, in many ways, the book depicts not the major life events of the Pargiters but the major events of the historical moment. We find out that Kitty marries and has a child almost accidentally. The first mention of each is casual, subtle: “Kitty, Lady Lasswade, sitting on the terrace behind her husband and his spaniel” (89) is soon joined by “her little boy in a pink frock” (90). Yet the book stays abreast of historical events. Air raids and the deaths of Charles Stewart Parnell and Edward VII (the literal end of the Edwardian period) are only a few of the events that act to interrupt the characters’ internal thoughts and tether them to their historical moment.

Woolf’s structure elevates social forces over natural ones, paving the way for her rejection of biological understandings of human behavior. The long time period and broad scope of the novel accomplishes this as well. Because the novel follows both male and female members of the same family at different points in their development, it is able

to display the circumstantial differences between the lives of men and women. In one scene, Eleanor is frustrated that she cannot communicate with her brother Morris in the way that she could when they were children. "That was the worst of growing up, she thought; they couldn't share things as they used to share them" (34). Eleanor feels she is not able to ask her brother questions about his law study because her tendency is to "muddle things up" (33) but the reality is, of course, that it is their educational (circumstantial) differences that construct this boundary, not any intellectual inferiority on her part. Eleanor and Morris felt equal as young children, but developing along the separate paths of the sexes drew them apart.

The scene between Eleanor and Morris is poignant and goes a long way in presenting the differences in how sexes are treated and educated. This idea is presented in *The Pargiters* and *Three Guineas* more overtly through discussion of "Arthur's Education Fund" and the tradition it represents: the practice of educating male children (the conceptual Arthur) at the expense of educating female children. Early roots of this idea exist in the essay sections of *The Pargiters* when Woolf quotes Mary Kingsley insisting that the only money ever spent on her education was the money paid for her German lessons (31). The quote eventually makes its way to *Three Guineas*, where Woolf names and develops her discussion of Arthur's Education Fund. As we can see here, however, this educational imbalance is just as clear in *The Years* without the discussion.

Another way Woolf presses the issue of what is natural by employing an excess of natural language. On nearly every page—indeed, perhaps on every page—a character or situation is compared to an animal or another part of nature. This often comes at the

expense of the character or situation. Morris's wife, Celia, is "a small cat-faced woman" "in furs" (108) when Eleanor meets her to watch Morris in the courtroom, and the men inside the courtroom are "like a flock of birds settling here and there on a field" (108-109). Mr. Duffus is "as supple as an eel" and Mrs. Potter resembles "a large tousled ape" (98). Even the word "excrescence," used above to describe the Gibbses, refers to an abnormal outgrowth on an animal or plant. Society itself takes animal shape in the novel, as when North sees Maggie across the room at the party:

> There was Maggie coming along, not looking where she was going. They saw her. He felt a strong desire to cry out, "Take care! Take care!" for she was in the danger zone. The long white tentacles that amorphous bodies leave floating so that they can catch their food, would suck her in. Yes, they saw her: she was lost. (377)

The language is scientific and the description of society is sinister. The social influence takes corporeal form here—the social masquerading as natural.

The novel draws from but questions the conflation of human and animal and individual and species. Time and time again, characters resort to animal or natural language when something is unexpected or hard to understand. As the children watch Colonel Pargiter fumble with the coins, they note that his right hand, missing fingers from a mutiny, "resembled the claw of some aged bird" (13). The natural is that to which we default when things are unexpected, but Woolf complicates this by juxtaposing animal and human forms in ways that call the relationship between nature and society into question. If Delia is "prowling" (21) around Abercorn Terrace, it is because she is being treated like an animal.

On a few occasions, Woolf uses not natural language but the actual word "natural" or one of its variants. This only happens about a dozen times in the novel, but to

great effect each time. The word is usually invoked by characters to mean what is proper or what nature intended but often has the effect on the reader of signaling the opposite. It is "natural" for North to be a soldier (286); it is "natural" that Sir William exaggerates his time abroad because the truth was "nobody had ever heard of him" (201-2). Eleanor is described as "naturally cheerful" (14) but it is clear by the end of the novel how much her conciliatory nature has cost her: "My life's been other people's lives, Eleanor thought—my father's; Morris's; my friends' lives, Nicholas's" (367). The word appears twice directly after the air raids that interrupt the dinner party. Maggie speaks in her "natural" voice (291) and Eleanor thinks that things "seemed to become quiet and natural again" (293). Woolf uses the word "natural" to signal a life that is cut off from both nature—as in grass, trees, and tortoises—and what is 'natural.' Perhaps the most wounding and memorable invocation comes at Oxford. "Nature did not intend you to be a scholar, my dear" (81), Kitty remembers her father saying to her after she spilled ink on his history of the college. As if to underscore the choice of words, a variant appears a few lines down, when Mrs. Malone tells Kitty that "a man in her father's position" would "naturally" (81) be very busy. Kitty is not a scholar (just as Eleanor is not a lawyer) because it is a profession that requires education and training. Her inherent capability cannot be gauged by comparing her to someone who has received this training.

Woolf's subtle questioning of what is 'natural' and what is contingent here is a challenge to social norms that rely on biology to explain all human behavior. The central concern in *The Years* is how women are marginalized on the basis of biology, or nature. The implication is that the idea of the natural, like history itself, is written or shaped by the winners. 'Natural' means anything that allows the dominant powers to remain in

power. The idea lends moral authority. Woolf adopts natural language to weaponize it, creating a counter-narrative within a tradition that has been used to exclude her and others. She uses natural imagery and the word natural itself to show how both social and biological things are considered 'natural' at different times. In tying this knot she offers an alternative. Neither biology nor society can be isolated in human development—it is always both and neither.

V. Repetition Revolution: Alternate Patterns

In addition to complicating ideas of what is natural and showing how what is considered biological is often circumstantial, Woolf uses repetition to lay bare the process through which social norms are created. The structural repetition of the seasons is aided by a considerable amount of linguistic repetition. Phrases are often duplicated within a few pages of each other, such as when we hear about Delia and Colonel Pargiter that "she was his favorite daughter" (13, 15). Sometimes, to make a point, Woolf utilizes the same phrasing multiple times in one paragraph. As Morris observes his sisters at home, the phrase "atmosphere of suppressed emotion" (44) appears three times in four sentences. Repetition emphasizes the sterility of the young Pargiter women's lives and the vastly different experience Morris is able to have away at school. Even the description of Delia as her father's favorite daughter reads as meaningless upon reflection—being his favorite daughter allows her to be bold, but it does not get her an education or any real freedom. Favorite or not, she is still a *daughter*.

Other times, this repetition spans time and experience. As Rose Pargiter, the elder, lays dying, Delia observes that her hair had "queer yellow patches in it, as if some locks had been dipped in the yolk of an egg" (21). This image is repeated near the end of the

novel, now as North watches his aunt Eleanor in her old age: “her hair colorless save for a stain like the yolk of egg on it” (376). Within this repetition is a powerful statement about how the words used by one generation stick with the next. Here, though, the phrase is repeated to signal a sort of failed development, linked as it is with the elderly and dying. In addition to the many instances of phrasal repetition in the novel, names are repeated—Rose, Margaret—suggesting a turn away from individual characteristics and toward biological similarities (women of the same family). Because names are given, what is suggested by this repetition is not a ‘natural’ similarity but a human-assigned one.

The novel’s narrative repetition signals its thematic repetition. The novel highlights the human being’s tendency to internalize what is heard and experienced and suggests that the urge to replicate the familiar often overpowers individual tastes or temperament. This is established from the first scene with the Pargiter children having tea. Milly acts “as if in imitation of an older person” (11) when dealing with Martin and Rose. The word “imitate” appears in various forms three times within less than 100 words in the passage. The novel is clear that imitation is not just child’s play, not just something that is done until one learns the rules. Rather, imitation becomes the rule. This is made apparent when Colonel Pargiter arrives home for tea with his children. “He detested tea; but he always sipped a little from the huge old cup that had been his father’s. He raised it and sipped perfunctorily” (12). Abel “detests” tea but drinks it “perfunctorily” because his father did before him.

Perfunctorily—performed solely out of routine or duty—is an important word here. Woolf employs language in *The Years* that points to habitual repeated actions or feeling. “One always lies to servants,” (222) Martin thinks to assuage his guilt for

dismissing Crosby. Often a character has a memory or repeats something in a way that it seems like no one else would understand. Other times, characters (North and Peggy, for example) make fun of other characters for saying the same things over and over. "For they all had lines cut; phrases ready-made" (309). These actions are not instinctual but learned. In the case of Martin and Crosby, Martin knows he should spend more time with Crosby but uses precedence as an excuse for bad behavior. By this point in the novel, Crosby is no longer under the employment of the Pargiter family but Martin still justifies lying to her on the basis that she once was a servant. Here, established precedence is used to justify hierarchical, class-based action.

As in the other novels of my study, the effect of this repetition is eventually that the novel becomes permeated with a sense of decay and entropy. As the parties progress, characters get shabbier and opinions become more disillusioned. Things are better in some senses. Delia and Kitty make it clear at the final party that they would never choose to go back to their early lives in Abercorn Terrace and Oxford, respectively. "It was Hell!" Delia repeats three times "quite simply" as if, for her, it were incontrovertible fact (417). Yet, of course, the book preempts this feeling a few pages earlier in Peggy's response to Eleanor's suggestion that conditions have improved since she was a girl. "We're happier—we're freer…" (386), Eleanor insists, struggling to articulate the idea as Peggy questions it in her mind. To Eleanor, Peggy is living proof that things have changed for women. She has, among other things, a profession. Yet, as Ellis writes in reference to Eleanor's insistence of happiness and freedom, Peggy "seems to enjoy neither state in herself, or see them in others" (Ellis 140). It is clear here that improvements in individual conditions do not translate to overall progress.

Woolf uses repetition to provide a complicated presentation of progress and evolution. Her thematic, seasonal, and circumstantial (the novel is essentially a series of parties) repetition work to counter any sense of plot in the novel. Thus, though 1930s style reads in many ways like a turning away from her 1920s fiction, she does not turn toward plot. *The Years* resists external plot just as thoroughly as *Mrs. Dalloway.* Beer links this rejection of plot to scientific determinism and, moreover, to Darwin. She also notes that the novel's time period—which begins in the 1880s and continues through the present day—implicates Darwin's biological approach, suggesting that Woolf selects the 1880s as the opening period for the project because it portrays the effects of *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871. To show one way this works, Beer highlights a passage from the speech off of which Woolf built *The Pargiters* where Woolf imagines a man coming home at night to see that the "women servants" (Woolf *The Pargiters* xxxxii) have found their own intellectual employment[11] and no longer need him as a satiric response to Darwin's suggestion in *Descent of Man* that men are biologically programmed to provide and be more intellectually curious (Beer "Beyond Determinism" 121).[12]

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[11] "He goes into the library—an august apartment which he is accustomed to have all to himself—and finds the kitchen maid curled up in the arm chair reading Plato. He goes into the kitchen and there is the cook engaged in writing a Mass in B flat. He goes into the billiard room and finds the parlourmaid knocking up a fine break at the table. He goes into the bed room and there is the housemaid working out a mathematical problem. What is he to do? He has been accustomed for centuries to have that sumptuous mansion all to himself, to be master in his own house" (Woolf *The Pargiters* xxxxii).

[12] This idea would have continued relevance for Woolf in the 1930s because, in addition to tracing the effects of *The Descent of Man*, the time period of *The Years* addresses the professionalization of women brought on by the unbarring of the professions in 1919.

Though I have so far considered the way Darwin's ideas contributed to the cultural atmosphere of Woolf's time, it is worth establishing that there is a strong connection between Darwin and Woolf. As Beer puts it, there "is no need to assert the prevalence of evolutionary ideas during Virginia Woolf's lifetime and we know that Darwin's writings had had direct effects upon her early family circumstances" ("Woolf and Prehistory" 19). Moreover, there is a clear biographical link between Woolf and Darwin. The Stephen and Darwin families were friendly: Woolf's father Leslie knew Charles and helped his children arbitrate a disagreement with Samuel Butler (Desmond and Moore 648). The families remained in contact after the deaths of both patriarchs (Scott 225 n. 9). Leslie was also a close friend of Darwin-promoter (Darwin's Bulldog, according to some) Thomas Huxley (Scott 45). Virginia Woolf's library contains copies of *The Origin of Species* and *Voyage of the Beagle* autographed by the author, presumably presented to her father.[13]

More significantly, Darwin's theories impacted the Stephen family. Leslie Stephen, despite being ordained in 1859, lost his faith shortly thereafter. According to biographers, he replaced faith in Christianity with faith in Darwin. John Bicknell highlights *Origin of Species*, released "in the very year of Leslie's ordination," as fodder for his turn from the cloth (Bicknell 13). Darwin biographers Desmond and Moore go further, claiming Leslie Stephen "admired Darwin as a god" (Desmond and Moore 648). Stephen himself calls Charles Darwin "the great Darwin" in a letter to Charles Eliot

[13] To be more precise: *The Origin of Species* is autographed and the *Voyage of the Beagle* contains an inserted autographed page. The autograph on the latter reads "From the Author with vy kind regards—" (Scott 45).

Norton (Stephen 202). There's an echo of this conversion in *The Years* when "Renny" declares "[s]cience is the religion of the future!" (Woolf *The Years* 238).

Woolf's father was also one of the first literary critics to be invested in Darwin, so in a way her literary adaptation of Darwin may have allowed her to speak back to her father. Bonnie Kime Scott, highlighting the connection between Darwin—the person—and Woolf's father, writes that the "demands Darwin posed upon his family, and particularly his wife, are comparable to the expectations Leslie Stephen had in later life of his elder daughters Stella and Vanessa" (62). We can extend this thinking beyond individual patriarchs and their families and the system to which Darwin contributes. Importantly, Leslie Stephen is not an individual turning from God toward Darwin, he is a generation: his conversion reflects a generational shift.

One more example helps illustrate Darwin's existence as a (literal) monolith for the young Virginia Stephen. Scott establishes the Stephen family habit of visiting the Natural History Museum in London and imagines the displays that Woolf would have encountered. She focuses on a museum guide that uses Thomas Hobbes to define natural history to show how Woolf's early exposure to natural history was influenced by deterministic ideas and also describes the mounted sperm whale skeleton that would have greeted Woolf when she visited in 1897, the first visit recorded in Woolf's diary (49). What Scott does not mention, however, is the other large construction greeting visitors: the statue of Charles Darwin in the main hall. This marble statue was installed shortly after Darwin's death and would have been impossible for young Woolf to miss.[14] This is

[14] The statue of Darwin was moved to a secondary hall in 1927 to make room for a statue of Richard Owen; Darwin was moved back to the main hall in 2008.

the world the young Virginia Stephen experiences and Virginia Woolf depicts: a world over which Darwin reigns.

It is thus fair to say that Woolf had familiarity with Darwin both as a person and as a figure and that her relationship with him and his work was complicated. She certainly realized the importance of his work. When she and Leonard visit the Tavistock Square house in 1940 after the bombing, they save "Darwin & the Silver, & some glass & china" (Woolf Diary 5: 331). She lists Darwin's work first among these prized possessions. Woolf also intended to write a common reader on Darwin at the end of her life and does write about the Darwin family in an unsigned piece in *The Nation and the Athenaeum*. "No currency has stood the test of time like the Darwin currency," she claims (Woolf *Essays* IV 291). However, as Beer writes, "the problems bequeathed by Darwin's narratives troubled Virginia Woolf creatively in ways that led her to subtle appraisals and meditations on his work" (Beer "Woolf and Prehistory" 173). Woolf by no means attempts to overturn Darwin's many significant scientific contributions, instead she responds to a specific idea—scientific determinism—that he is largely responsible for popularizing. There is no doubt that much of Darwin's work continues to be relevant to this day, but Woolf is quick to point out that we can find much of his work useful and still question some of his implications about the biological differences between men and women.

Woolf works to jostle the foundation of deterministic thought, revealing that what is often accepted as biological difference is not only manmade but also subject to change. Rapid scientific advancements in the early twentieth century meant that what was accepted as fact could change from year to year. Woolf writes from this perspective,

employing repetition to provide emphasis about assumptions made in the present and to show how these sometimes out-of-date ideas are maintained across generations. She moves away from the singular narrative as her 1930s work develops. *The Years* works to subtly undermine and complicate the assumptions of its time.

VI. Conclusion

Hermione Lee writes that Woolf "pour[s] into *Three Guineas* a great deal of what had been held back from *The Years*" (700) but in reality, not much is held back from *The Years*. *Three Guineas* merely provides another presentation, a more prescriptive one. This, plus the fact that *Three Guineas* addresses the idea of war directly, means the essay has been accepted as a political text while *The Years* has not. Looking at the way Woolf questions what is natural and refuses the singular, grand narrative helps us see not only that *The Years* is just as political as *Three Guineas* but also how Woolf experiments with literary form in the decade.

Woolf collects and presents facts in *The Years* to tell an alternate story—one where social determinism is passed off as biological determinism and, importantly, one that cannot be explained by any singular order. There is no way to know what is truly the biological influence, her work reveals, because the fact is that the sexes have been treated so differently for so long. In a way, Woolf performs her own social science here. In doing so, she taps into a tradition of scientific women in her work—Mary Kingsley, Clarissa Dalloway's Aunt Helena (whose claim to fame is that Darwin had read and commented on "her little book on the orchids of Burma" [Woolf *Mrs. Dalloway* 179]), Peggy the doctor in *The Years*. Just as Woolf leads us to imagine Shakespeare's sister in *A Room of*

One's Own, so does she present alternatives to the male-driven science in her 1930s fiction.

Woolf even frames herself as a scientist in her diary entries about *The Pargiters*. In December of 1932, she says she has written herself "to total extinction" (Woolf Diary 4: 132). She notes further down the page that the draft "releases such a torrent of facts as I did not know I had in me," coming to the conclusion that she "must have been observing & collecting these 20 years" (Woolf Diary 4: 133).[15] By using this language, Woolf delicately compares herself to a scientist. She is not a writer of fiction but a recorder of collected facts, a detached observer with no stake in the process. She is not crafting scenes but reflecting reality. It gives her work more weight but it also, importantly, gives its reader clues about how to read the resulting fiction. Woolf plays with form in the 1930s to reveal the assumptions and effects of popular scientific theories. She recognizes the limits for women in scientific professions and how popular scientific discourse helped shape the limits for all women. She seizes an opportunity in the novel to gesture toward, and perhaps expand, these boundaries.

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[15] Woolf would have been fifty at writing this, so it is unclear why she says twenty years instead of fifty. She could be referring to her marriage to Leonard in August of 1912—their union seems to have brought into sharp focus society's different expectations for men and women—or her breakdown and subsequent suicide attempt around the same time.

CHAPTER 3

SAMUEL BECKETT'S REVENANT NATURALISM

I. Introduction: "It gives me the jim-jams."

In a letter to Samuel Beckett about his short story "Echo's Bones,"[16] Charles Prentice of Chatto & Windus describes the piece as follows:

> It is a nightmare. Just too terribly persuasive. It gives me the jim-jams. The same horrible and immediate switches of the focus, and the same wild unfathomable energy of the population. There are chunks I don't connect with. I am so sorry to feel like this. Perhaps it is only over the details… People will shudder and be puzzled and confused; and they won't be keen on analyzing the shudder… [T]he icy touch of those revenant fingers was too much for me. (Nixon xii)

Prentice had commissioned the story himself, believing that the upcoming *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) would benefit from an eleventh story. After reading "Echo's Bones" he sent the collection to print without it and it remained unpublished until 2014. In this chapter, I suggest that what Prentice unknowingly rejects here is the influence of literary naturalism on Beckett's work and that there is value in, to use Prentice's words, analyzing the shudder. Beckett harnesses and warps the conventions of naturalism in his 1930s fiction. If we fail to see the naturalist threads in his work, we miss the way he works to create a literature that more accurately reflects the condition of the national outsider—the Irish citizen in England—and warns against the potential for science to be

[16] There's some potential for confusion here, and not only because the short story shares its title with a poem and poetry collection by Beckett. Now a book in its own right, "Echo's Bones" could be cited as one. However, I use quotations throughout in reference to the short story because Beckett intended the piece to appear as part of a collection, and only make use of italics in citations.

abused to control human behavior. The details that Prentice finds so objectionable, rather than serving as detriments, characterize Beckett's early work and shape his career.

Beckett demonstrates his engagement with naturalism in "Echo's Bones," reveals some of his theoretical interest in the genre in his lectures at Trinity College Dublin as well as in *Proust* (1931), and develops this interest to refresh modernism in *Murphy* (1938). *Murphy* is a prime example of what I call the unnaturalist novel: the late modernist novel that repurposes the conventions of naturalism to respond to its particular historical moment. The novel goes further than *The Years* in meditating on and exposing the conventions at work within literature. This literary influence on Beckett's work shaped the development of his work long after the decade came to an end, as I argue in the conclusion of this chapter.

The intensity of Prentice's reaction to "Echo's Bones" suggests that the work fell far outside the dominant literary tradition of the day. The material of this reaction—his specific grievances, in other words—reveals an alternate literary tradition in Beckett's work. "Echo's Bones" draws from naturalism and gestures toward postwar metafiction, but in many ways leapfrogs modernism. To be clear: Beckett was a modernist, but one for whom the stylistic exuberance and indulgence of high modernism had played itself out.[17] Recognizing the limitations of modernism in its existing form, Beckett borrows from naturalism to produce a more socially conscious and politically relevant modernist novel that accurately reflects the conditions of his time. Pulling from the naturalist

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[17] Ann Banfield argues in "Beckett's Tattered Syntax" that while both Beckett and James Joyce seek to create a new language of which they can take ownership, Joyce's tendency is to multiply or complexify language while Beckett's is to reduce it. The move toward simplicity is not merely Beckett's reaction to Joyce, but also a number of 1930s writers' reaction to modernism's existing form.

tradition allows him to revive modernism; naturalism is thus a prototype for this 1930s modernism.

Prentice highlights the influence of naturalism in Beckett's work when he complains that "Echo's Bones" is too persuasive and obscure, that its details and changes in focus will alienate the reader, and that it harnesses the energy of the community in a nightmarish way. Common charges against naturalist literature include that it concerns itself with details at the expense of the greater picture of human experience, and that its social aims—in other words, its persuasiveness—render its literary qualities obscure. Naturalist narrators adopt the tone and detachment of the scientist or journalist and often divert the narrative abruptly to provide lengthy explanations of the conditions behind the actions of their characters. As for the "wild unfathomable energy of the population," naturalism is deterministic and therefore acutely concerned with how social forces work to shape the trajectory of the individual life.

I select these qualities from naturalism's catalogue of conventions because they are the particular qualities Beckett's unnaturalism parodies. *Murphy*'s narrator pushes the diversions and scientific nature of naturalism to their extremes, and does so with painstaking detail. The novel lampoons the scientific and medical community, exposing the way in which these discourses often creates, rather than diagnoses, the social relations of the day. It takes specific aim at contemporary trends in experimental psychology and the deterministic assumptions about human behavior these trends uphold.

Critics have largely ignored or overlooked naturalism's influence on Beckett's work, with the notable exception of Joe Cleary. In *Outrageous Fortune* (2007), Cleary writes that Beckett's novels and dramas "achieve their distinct identity by pushing

naturalist conventions to the point where that mode begins to capsize on itself" but his conclusion is that Beckett's work "thus ceases to be naturalism and becomes something else" (Cleary 156).[18] For Cleary, Beckett is a small terminus branch on the naturalist tree—and indeed, he may be. *Outrageous Fortune* moves on from Beckett to consider the reemergence of more conventional naturalism in postwar Britain. My interest, to continue the metaphor, is in what grows from that branch when it is cut and rooted.

What is significant for this project is not the naturalist thread in Beckett's work but how a cluster of very different late modernists retrieved naturalism in order to influence the modernist project. Like the other authors of my study, Beckett holds an uneasy relationship with modernism. Tyrus Miller and Brian McHale both use him as examples of their respective theories of modernism; Anthony Cronin's biography declares him the last modernist. Beckett is discussed always in relation to modernism, but on its outskirts. Recognizing the naturalist threads in his 1930s work has repercussions

[18] The passage is worth quoting at length. "One way to read Beckett's major works in both novel and drama, then, would be to say that they achieve their distinct identity by pushing naturalist conventions to the point where that mode begins to capsize on itself. If naturalists' plots typically go either steadily downhill or steadily nowhere, then why not make the very idea of plot itself an object of ridicule such that stasis, lassitude, dejection and mechanical repetitiveness become the very essence of things? Beckett's characters possess the extremely attenuated human agency common to naturalism generally, but his work is permeated by an altogether more thoroughgoing skepticism about the capacity of anything whatever to meliorate, redeem or deform this utterly fallen, hopelessly thwarted condition. In contrast to any of the conventional kinds of naturalism that set out to debunk some humanistic romance, in Beckett's work there is no romance to begin with and hence none that requires to be disenchanted. Instead, we inhabit a world always-already so thoroughly fumigated of any expectation that it might be improved that the very notion of redemption seems either a gratuitously added torture or merely a wan absurdity. In Beckett, in sum, we have an art in which naturalism's preoccupation with a sordid, disenchanted world is taken to its ultimate extremes and conceived as a subject for why philosophical speculation rather than as an historical or social problem to be solved – at which point his work ceases to be troubled by the antimony of disenchantment and social reform that generally motivates naturalism. It thus ceases to be naturalism and becomes something else" (Cleary 156).

that go beyond the study of his work to enhance our understandings of modernism's development in the late interwar period.

In what follows, I establish Beckett's early views on naturalism and consider the way reading his work in this literary tradition allows us unique access to the decade. Next, I move on the presentation of scientific authority in "Echo's Bones" and *Murphy*. These texts demonstrate that language can be used to lend false scientific or medical authority and work to undermine practices that seek to predict—or control—human behavior. Near the end I look at the way Beckett attacks two specific assumptions: that studying the animal can provide a better understanding of the human and that external conditions can precisely determine internal states. By challenging these scientific beliefs about human behavior, Beckett shows that experimental psychological practices rely on and seem to 'verify' the assumptions of the 19th century scientific discourses to which naturalism responds.

When Prentice, in his rejection, speaks of those icy revenant fingers, he references Belacqua's return from the dead. Belacqua, the protagonist of *More Pricks Than Kicks*, dies in the collection's final story and Beckett challenges that narrative closure when he revives him for "Echo's Bones." There is, however, another revenant in "Echo's Bones" and much of Beckett's 1930s writing: naturalism itself. Things that return from the dead resemble their original incarnations but have, in reality, been changed by the grave. Beckett's revival of naturalism is marked by the same relationship to the earlier literary form. Just as the revenants of folklore return to make war on the living, unnaturalism emerges in the 1930s to redirect the path of British modernism.

II. Trinity College Dublin lectures and *Proust*

Beckett's lectures at Trinity College Dublin establish his familiarity with naturalism and his feelings about the genre in the 1930s. The surviving notes of student Rachel Burrows suggest that he spoke about naturalism at length at Trinity in his lectures on modern French literature between 1930 and 1931 (Le Juez). The lectures reveal his distaste for the "forced unification" (Le Juez 31) and lack of "authentic complexity" (25) in naturalists like Zola and Balzac[19] but a predilection for what he calls the "pre" and "postnaturalists" (Flaubert, Stendhal, Rimbaud and Proust in the first category, Paul Bruget, Anatole France, and Andre Gide in the second) (32). These authors, he argues, are successful because they employ cataloguing and description of surface detail to reveal a complex system at work within character and writing, where the work of the naturalists, aimed at a particular purpose, are all surface and cohesion. What Beckett finds useful in the naturalist project is its exaggerated, often technical or scientific, detail, but his opinion is that detail should be used to complexify rather than suggest one interpretation or answer.

Proust, created around the same time (written 1930, published 1931), shows Beckett playing with some of these ideas in his own writing. *Proust* highlights naturalist themes in Proust's fiction, suggests a naturalist lineage for the French writer, and, more importantly, serves as a laboratory for Beckett's naturalism. The piece demonstrates Beckett's interest in how literary naturalism could be adapted to be relevant in the 20th century and is his earliest attempt at using naturalism as a guiding narrative force. *Proust*

[19] Whatever critics think of categorizing Balzac, Beckett agrees with Zola that his novels are "naturalistic" (Le Juez 29).

is as much about Beckett as it is about Proust. Critics are quick to note this—Alfred Alvarez claims "*Proust* is, above all, an excuse for Beckett's diagnosis of his own problems" (Alvarez 24) and Deirdre Bair describes *Proust* as "his first attempt to formulate a literary credo of his own" (Bair 114)—but have yet to examine the work in its relation to naturalism, though Beckett himself situated Proust in relation to naturalism.

Beckett accepted the project of writing *Proust* (part of Chatto's Dolphin Books, a series of short pieces on prominent contemporary writers) before reading *In Search of Lost Time*. It was, to say the least, a bold move—but, ultimately, a good one for his career. Though struggling with the text at first, Beckett quickly developed a deep appreciation for it. It is easy to see why: the examples and struggles Beckett discusses in *Proust* are echoed in his ensuing fiction. Proust's Madeleine in tea, what Beckett calls a "fetish" (Beckett *Proust* 23), for example, finds its counterpart in Murphy's tea and biscuit habit. Indeed, for Beckett, Proust is about habit, its suspension, and its inevitable return. Linked to this cycle is a pattern of suffering and boredom; habit fosters boredom, and suffering in its absence:

> The fundamental duty of Habit, about which it describes the futile and stupefying arabesques of its supererogations, consists in a perpetual adjustment and readjustment of our organic sensibility to the conditions of its worlds. Suffering represents the omission of that duty, whether through negligence of inefficiency, and boredom its adequate performance. (Beckett *Proust* 16)

When Beckett defines habit as an instinctual and constant adaptation to ones environment ("a perpetual adjustment and readjustment of our organic sensibility to the conditions of its worlds"), what he describes is society's influence on individual behavior. Habit functions to resolve the tension between individual and society. When habit does not intervene, when the instincts are ignored or inaccessible, the individual suffers.

For Beckett, then, habit is a kind of determinism in that it works to shape the individual life. It is significant, though, that Beckett also writes of the suspension of habit. If habit is determinism, its suspension is free will. What Beckett praises in Proust is the same thing he finds appealing in the "pre" and "postnaturalists": a refusal to let either the deterministic or the individualistic view account for the whole picture of human experience. Beckett locates a tension between determinism and free will as the central concern in Proust, and this same tension becomes the central concern of Beckett's unnaturalism. Within Beckett's theory of habit and suspension in *Proust* lie the early roots of unnaturalism's demonstration of the limits of both individual-based and community-based perspectives in adequately representing the human experience. The individual life always developing, perpetually readjusting to its world, but the course of life is as marked by attempts to acclimate to its environment as it is by deviations from acclimation.

Of course, this theory of Beckett's is not Beckett's at all but rather adapted from the work of Arthur Schopenhauer. Beckett read Schopenhauer as he worked on *Proust*; the German philosopher is mentioned by name a handful of times and his presence can be felt throughout the text. Critics are quick to identify Schopenhauer's influence on Beckett's work. Anthony Cronin, in his biography, goes as far as to claim that Schopenhauer may have been "the most important literary discovery of his life" (120). Beckett places Proust in a literary category of his own, but the influence of Schopenhauer was unique neither to Beckett nor Proust. The connection between Schopenhauer and French naturalists in the 1880s is well established. David Baguley writes of this influence in *Naturalist Fiction* (1990), suggesting that, for naturalists, Schopenhauer's philosophy

is a way of explaining nature akin to scientific theories. Baguley sees naturalist fiction as falling into two categories: those that draw from Schopenhauer and those that draw from Charles Darwin.[20] When Beckett uses Schopenhauer as a guide, he taps into a specific school of naturalism. Understanding Schopenhauer's influence in Beckett's fiction not only explains the degraded repetition of his fiction, but also helps expose the relation between Beckett's work and that of naturalists.

Beckett makes more explicit moves in suggesting the naturalist influence in Proust's piece and, by extension, in his own work. When discussing Proust's lineage, he positions him in proximity to the naturalist project:

> Proust's point of departure might be situated in Symbolism, or on its outskirts. But he does not proceed pari passu with France, towards an elegant scepticism and the marmorean modes, nor, as we have seen, with Daudet and the Goncourts to the 'notes d'après nature,' nor, of course, with the Parnassians to the ineffable gutter-snippets of François Coppée. He solicits no facts, and he chisels no Cellinesque pommels. He reacts, but in a different direction. He recedes from the Symbolists—back towards Hugo. And for that reason he is a solitary and independent figure. The only contemporary in whom I can discern something of the same retrogressive tendency is Joris Karl Huysmans. (Beckett *Proust* 60-1)

That the connection here is not made between Proust and the more obvious naturalists—Alphonse Daudet and the Goncourt brothers—but instead with Huysmans, who adapted naturalism to suit his particular literary needs, sets the stage for Beckett's mutation of naturalism. Beckett admires the "retrogressive tendency" of Proust and Huysmans and

[20] "The more Darwinian texts (model one) emphasise the struggle and strife; the more Schopenhauerian texts (model two) bring out the futile repetitiveness of it all. Whether there is grief of boredom, it all amounts to the same in the end. Schopenhauer's fundamental tenet, the illusion of the 'principle of individuation,' reinforces the 'uniformitarianism' of philosophical Darwininism, its fundamental climatic principle" (Baguley 217).

demonstrates a similar inclination in his own fiction toward revitalizing contemporary literature through reversion.

Beckett references not only naturalist ideas in *Proust* but also naturalist method. He makes use of scientific language in metaphors explaining individual behavior, as when he explains that the individual is "a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours" (Beckett *Proust* 4-5). The process of decantation, the separation of mixtures, helps Beckett present a picture of the individual that is not internally consistent, or whole, but rather an assemblage of influences. Beckett poses time as the major dividing factor in Proust's work, but this sets the stage for the more general multiplicity of the individual in Beckett's fiction. In addition to the use of scientific language, *Proust* follows naturalism in featuring acts of narrative diversion. In *Proust* these acts appear as parentheticals—such as that which begins "[a]t this point, and with a heavy heart and for the satisfaction or disgruntlement of Gideans, semi and integral, I am inspired to conceded a brief parenthesis to all the analogivorous" (Beckett *Proust* 8)—but by *Murphy*, entire chapters impede the narrative. As I discuss in detail below, though such narrative diversions are well within the naturalist tradition, exploring the specific diversions in *Murphy* reveals a significant deviation on Beckett's part.

Though a work of criticism, *Proust* is undeniably literary and sets the stage for Beckett's other 1930s permutations of naturalism. There is a narrative in *Proust* that plays with the boundary between fiction and nonfiction, much as a naturalist narrative does. *Proust*'s tendency is to downplay its critical aspects in favor of metaphors and

narrative diversions; the naturalist novel attempts to hide its generic and literary qualities. The difference is that naturalism plays with the narrative boundary between fiction and nonfiction while unnaturalism exposes it.

III. "Echo's Bones"

In "Echo's Bones," written in 1933 in the wake of *Proust*, Beckett more fully reveals his interest in naturalism and begins to push naturalism to its extremes. The short story is helpful for seeing Beckett's early attempts at placing himself in the naturalist tradition by playing with scientific language. He mimics scientific style to provide a subtle warning about how this style works to manufacture and maintain an ostensible reality. The short story draws from scientific texts, mostly notably those of Darwin, but also mocks those texts. One of the ways it does this is by employing and then undermining first person plural pronouns such as 'we' and 'us,' popular in scientific accounts and the naturalist novels that adopt the style of these accounts. In introductions to Zaborovna, Belacqua asks why she uses 'we' instead of 'I':

> "But who is we and who are you?"
> "I told you" she said, "Zaborovna, at your service; and we, why little we is just an impersonal usage, the Tuscan reflexive without more."
> "The mood" said Belacqua, "forgive the term, of self-abuse, as the English passive of masochism." (Beckett *Echo's Bones* 6)

Belacqua challenges Zaborovna's use of the first person plural pronoun. For Zaborovna, the answer to Belacqua's questions—"who is we?" and "who are you?"—is the same. By challenging her use of the first person plural, Belacqua exposes the hollowness of such pronouns. 'We' often means nothing more than 'I,' as the passage makes clear, but it can be used to signal more. Employing first person plural pronouns creates an invisible community, moving the subjective closer toward the realm of the objective.

Belacqua's retort—"the mood, forgive the term, of self-abuse"—is a joke that gestures toward something darker. As Mark Nixon writes in his notes to the text, 'self-abuse' is "a kind of grammatical masturbation, in that the Tuscan impersonal 'si' can be both passive and reflexive (unlike in standard Italian); it is thus, in a sense, 'abusing' itself" (Beckett *Echo's Bones* 60). What Belacqua may also be saying, however, is that certain uses of first person plural pronouns are themselves self-abuse because they suggest universality.[21]

The passage also takes aim at the passive voice and implies that the voice is a distinctly English problem. The English language makes use of the passive voice more often than other European languages (Beckett *Echo's Bones* 60). The tense takes away culpability. 'I broke it' becomes 'it broke.' This denial of culpability, like the first person plural, works to encourage the (passive) reproduction of meaning. In the passage, Beckett intimates that language—the English language, specifically—can be used to frame the beliefs of one person as shared or universal, thereby implying and invoking the authority of a 'natural' order to justify an individual perspective.

Beckett complicates this prescriptive tendency of language. One way he resists this is by employing series of textual allusions. Nixon's annotations to the short story are longer than the work itself. He writes in his introduction "there is hardly a sentence in 'Echo's Bones' that is not borrowed from one source or another" (Nixon xvi). Within this is the suggestion that not only every text, but also every individual is an amalgam of references. The intertextual allusions in Beckett's 1930s fiction draw from other fictional

[21] It is significant that Zaborovna is a prostitute, a common naturalist character type. Her use of language commonly used to describe or classify her might itself be a type of self-abuse.

works, most notably William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but just as much from scientific texts. Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), for example, makes many appearances in the short story and the rest of Beckett's writing. Beckett read *Origin of Species* in 1932 and he references it in his 'Whoroscope' Notebook as well as "Echo's Bones" and *Murphy*. Beckett allows Darwin to stand in as a framework that explains the actions or states of his characters, to a point, but he does so to put pressure on adopting a species model to study human beings. In a letter to Thomas MacGreevy, he wrote that he'd "never read such badly written catlap" (Fehsenfeld 111) as *Origin of Species*, in both "Echo's Bones" and *Murphy* he makes a joke of explaining the actions of a character through reference to Darwin's embarrassed caterpillar, and in an draft of *Watt* he refers to the process of "unnatural selection." His playful invocation of Darwin serves as a warning against giving too much power to one scientific perspective. Thus, Beckett taps into a tendency of naturalism while avoiding the prescriptive pitfalls he sees in Zola and Bazac.

Another way Beckett complicates language and avoids prescription in "Echo's Bones" is by resisting narrative structure. The story interrupts its own narrative and features passages of tedious detail. When the dialogue between Lord Gall and Belacqua Belacqua veers so far off course that the original material of their conversation is inaccessible, the text acknowledges it. In one passage, Belacqua seems to speak for the confused reader. "'Where do you suppose,' said Belacqua 'all this is leading to?'" (Beckett *Echo's Bones* 15). It is leading to nothing, and that is the point. Beckett refuses meaning by making a joke of narrative structure.

"Echo's Bones" reveals Beckett's active interest in the 1930s in complicating ideas of determinism, narrative, and language itself. The short story also actively plays

with form and genre by discussing the moves it makes as it makes them. It describes itself as a “little triptych” (4), Lord Gall orders Belacqua to “[c]ut out the style” (28), and Belacqua ruminates over how to generically classify his situation:

> To proceed then again more or less as see above, page 7, paragraph 2, Belacqua, at last on the threshold of total extinction as a free corpse, sat on his own headstone, drumming his heels irritably against the R.I.P. What with the moon shining, the seat tossing in her sleep and sighing, and the mountains observing their Attic vigil in the background, he found it difficult to decide offhand whether the scene was of the kind that is called romantic or whether it should not with more justice be termed classical. Both elements were present, of that there could be no question. Perhaps classico-romantic would be the fairest diagnosis. A classico-romantic scene. (Beckett *Echo’s Bones* 36)

The selection is self-conscious, referring to itself by page number and paragraph, and concerned with genre even as it defies generic categorization. This self-conscious genre bending continues to develop over the span of Beckett’s career.

IV. *Murphy*’s Unnaturalism

In “Echo’s Bones,” Beckett begins to manipulate naturalism to make a point about how science can be abused. In *Murphy*, he expands his preoccupation with scientific authority. If Beckett’s lectures and “Echo’s Bones” are controlled laboratories for Beckett’s stylistic and theoretical experiments with naturalism, in other words, the subjects have taken over in *Murphy*. The novel draws from naturalism in its detailed description, detached narrator, degenerative plot, and preoccupation with deterministic forces (social, economic, astrological). A hint of the scientific, or objective, invades descriptions of characters and their actions, often with the effect of debasing the characters. This kiss between Wylie and Miss Counihan, for instance, is not romance but “a slow-motion osmosis of love’s spittle” (118). The novel also embraces the darker side of life: Celia, like Zaborovna, works as a prostitute, “the old boy” upstairs in Miss

Carridge's[22] house commits a violent suicide, and the reader is privy to the often-distasteful thoughts of the characters.[23]

At the center of the novel is a preoccupation with the way medical discourse, in a way similar to and occasionally in conjunction with language, creates the reality it purports to explain. A close look at the description of Miss Dew reveals the way Beckett mimics naturalist description to show how language can be used to lend authority. According to the text:

> Duck's disease is a distressing pathological condition in which the thighs are suppressed and the buttocks spring directly from behind the knees, aptly described in Steiss's nosonomy as Panpygoptosis. Happily its incidence is small and confined, as the popular name suggests, to the weaker vessel, a bias of Nature bitterly lamented by the celebrated Dr. Busby and other less pedantic notables. It is non-contagious (though some observers have held the contrary), non-infectious, non-heritable, painless and intractable. Its ætiology remains obscure to all by the psychopathological wholehots, who have shown it to be simply another embodiment of the neurotic. (97-8)

This unflattering description adopts the air of a medical textbook, providing technical language and citation information, but the material is fiction. Steiss's nosonomy does not exist and Panpygoptosis is only a real condition if one considers having short legs to be a medical disorder. Yet to the average reader, each is as intelligible as a real disease or text because Beckett plays with the description and form of real words. Osis, as a suffix, refers to a medical condition, usually an abnormal one; nosology is a term for disease

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[22] The landlady's very name is a dark nod.

[23] The reader knows, for instance, that Miss Carridge has the wherewithal to think "if I call a doctor I must pay his fee, but if I call the police…" (Beckett *Murphy* 135) before running out of her house to scream on the street about the old boy's suicide. Beckett, of course, says it better. "Her mind was so collected that she saw clearly the impropriety of letting it appear so" (Beckett *Murphy* 135).

classification. The ease with which Beckett adapts this language demonstrates how easily medical jargon is accepted and how empty it can be.

Nowhere in the novel is the use—perhaps abuse—of specialized vocabulary and routine more apparent than in Murphy's experience working at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. The detailed descriptions of hospital regulations, from checks to patient protocol, mimic those of naturalism. Beckett even followed the naturalists in his method. He shadowed friend Geoffrey Thompson during Thompson's psychiatric residency at the Bethlehem Royal Hospital to pick up particulars, following in the footsteps of naturalist writers like Stephen Crane who performed sociological research for their work (Crane visited the Bowery of lower Manhattan in order to write *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*).[24]

Beckett's use of extreme detail allows him to mock medicinal routines as he employs them. The specifics the text provides from patient charts, for instance, undermine the facility's treatment plans. Patients at the Mercyseat on suicide watch—"on parchment" (184)—each receive a tab that states the methods in which it is thought they might kill themselves. "'Mr. Higgins. The bellycut, or any other available means.' 'Mr. O'Connor. Venom, or any other available means'" (184). The identified suicide methods are questionable and the repeated "any other available means" undermines the point of listing any means at all. The narrator recognizes the absurdity, following "'[a]ny other available means' was a saving clause'" (184). Even Mr. Endon's chart lists 'any other

[24] Bair describes this in her biography. "He visited Thompson whenever he could, and as they walked along the grounds of the Bethlehem Royal Hospital, Beckett asked countless questions about every patient they encountered" (Bair 232). From checks to patient protocol, the section is more concerned with details of the hospital than Murphy's interior state. In this way, the novel privileges the naturalist tradition over the modernist one.

available means,' despite the fact that he has vowed never to deviate from his specified method. His method is most absurd of all—apnea. Apnea can be achieved voluntarily, in the case of holding ones breath until passing out, but once the brain blacks out the body automatically begins to breathe again. To commit suicide by apnea means to overcome the function of the body. "It is a physiological impossibility" (185), the text readily admits. Still, the doctors at the Mercyseat keep apnea on Mr. Endon's chart, due to being "not disposed to take unnecessary chances" (185). By including these details, Beckett exposes the unreasonable in the reason-based field and the limits of medical science in classifying and predicting behavior.

The text subtly undermines the authority of the doctor. At the Mercyseat, the doctors view themselves as the origin of knowledge rather than fallible humans who use science to guide their work. When Murphy is trained he learns that he has "no competence to register facts of his own account. There were no facts in the Mercyseat except those sanctioned by the doctor" (159). This is true even in the most final of circumstances. "No patient was dead till the doctor had seen him" (159). At some level, this makes sense. A trained doctor needs to pronounce someone dead. Beckett resists the word 'pronounce,' however, and so what the sentence really, subtly, says is that even death exists only on the doctor's terms.

Murphy's time at the Mercyseat an excellent example of how reading for naturalism reveals a new aspect of the novel. The most easily identifiable plot details—the ones that lead to Bair classifying the novel as one "about the inside of a man's mind" (211)—in this particular section are largely interior, and in this can be called modernist. Murphy begins work at the Mercyseat, realizes that he does not exist in the eyes of Mr.

Endon, has a breakdown during which he can no longer visualize any of his former loved ones, and finally resolves to go see Celia but instead dies in what could be interpreted as a suicide. The question of the novel, when read in these terms, is whether or not Murphy intended his death. The reader tries to follow clues, like the document Murphy leaves behind that might serve as his will, but no conclusive answer exists (the date on the document, for instance, has been burned off in the explosion, so the possibility that it is a suicide note cannot be confirmed).

But to read for only an internal plot is to miss a layer of Beckett's text. A naturalist influence exists alongside the modernist one in *Murphy*, in its presentation and preoccupations, and focusing on this reveals a second plot 'thread' that undoes the first. The text frustrates its reader's access to Murphy's interiority, ensuring that any attempt to determine his state is an interpretation of external clues. To come to a conclusion about Murphy's death, in other words, is to commit the same prescriptive crime Beckett resists in the naturalist project.

There is no denying the skepticism of scientific discourses present in Beckett's 1930s fiction, but the argument here is not that Beckett would have been a climate change denier, or (to be less cute) that he thought we should cease scientific developments or ignore them. Beckett acknowledges the great deal of power wielded by science in the early twentieth century—so much power that ignoring its influence is detrimental. His gentle undermining of the discipline serves as both a resistance to any scientific discourse serving as the only, or the final interpretation, particularly when used to explain or control human behavior. This is why the best situation Murphy can imagine is to be "a

missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion" (113). He wishes to be free from even the determining laws of gravity.

V. *Murphy* and Experimental Psychology

Underlying *Murphy* is a deep distrust of the extension of deterministic principles to human behavior. Like Woolf, Beckett takes aim at biological determinism when applied to humans. To this end, *Murphy* takes issue with two assumptions about human behavior in particular. The first is that humans function, fundamentally, in the same way as animals and that we can thus learn about the human by studying the animal. The second is that there is a predictable relationship between externality and internality. These are the assumptions of some of the scientific discourses from which naturalism draws but they are also, and more importantly, the assumptions of certain branches of experimental psychology on the rise in the 1930s. Beckett's naturalist borrowing draws a connection between the two disciplines, revealing the way contemporary experimental psychology relies on assumptions about biological determinism.

The use of animal vocabulary to describe human character is readily apparent in *Murphy*. Miss Dew is compared not only to a duck, as we saw in the previous section, but also her dachshund. Miss Counihan is "quite exceptionally anthropoid" (118). The tendency to conflate human character and animal—in Miss Counihan's case, an ape that resembles a human, gesturing toward Darwin's theory of evolution—is consistent with naturalism, but Beckett ridicules these pairings. *Murphy* is no *Vandover and the Brute*, the posthumously published Frank Norris novel in which the title character suffers attacks

of lycanthropy.[25] Miss Counihan is somewhat apelike but otherwise "just like any other beautiful Irish girl" (118) and the animals to which Miss Dew is compared are benign at best. The animals Beckett chooses do not signal the wild, bestial nature of mankind. There is nothing deeper to be learned about any individual character or the whole of mankind through these descriptions; Beckett does not really suggest that there is an animal inside these characters. Rather, I argue, Beckett works to signal the absurdity of such comparisons.

The second assumption the novel works to overturn is the idea that externality can establish internality. Beckett resists the imposition of causality on the world. External details in the novel rarely line up with the information given about internality. Narratorial interruptions frustrate our access to character and promises to illuminate internality—such as chapter six, *Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat*—do much more to obfuscate it. The technical description in chapter six renders the passage largely intelligible as something that grants us greater access to Murphy's thoughts and feelings. What the chapter really proves, rather than that such technical language can tell us more about Murphy, is that such application is ultimately useless when describing human behavior.

As I write above, these assumptions are present in the naturalist novel but they would have had additional significance to Beckett in that they are also the assumptions of certain branches of experimental psychology contemporary to his decade. Beckett's

[25] Warren French notes in his introduction to Norris' novel that there is some contention over the classification of this novel. While many critics read it as an early example of American naturalism, it is also often read as an example of the "decadent" literature of the final years of the nineteenth century. No matter the ultimate classification of the novel, the trope of human turned animal is decidedly naturalist.

naturalist revision thus responds to contemporary psychology by drawing a connection between late nineteenth and early twentieth century beliefs. It is significant that the Mercyseat is a psychiatric, not a general, institution. Employing naturalist detail helps Beckett better respond to his decade.

The tendency is to think of *Murphy* in relation to Freud and his disciples—and for good reason, not just because it is a common practice for reading modernism. Chris Ackerley describes Freud as a “major force” for the novel and Jung’s lecture played a role in Beckett’s theory of Murphy’s mind and the conception of the novel as a whole (*Demented Particulars* 17). Beckett also read Ernest Jones’ *Papers on Psycho-analysis* and a number of other psychoanalytic texts in the early 1930s (Knowlson 171-2). Last, but certainly not least, during this flurry of research, Beckett was himself undergoing psychoanalysis in London under Wilfred Bion.

Beckett’s interest in psychology in the decade was not limited to psychoanalysis and its variants, however. He also read widely on experimental psychology and was particularly interested in Robert S. Woodworth’s *Contemporary Schools of Psychology* (Knowlson 171). *Murphy* makes reference to a host of German and American early twentieth century developments in experimental psychology. Skinner’s House, Murphy’s residence at the Mercyseat, is likely a reference to behaviorist B.F. Skinner (Ackerley 148) and an early exchange between Murphy and Neary references the work of Wolfgang Köhler, one of the founders of Gestalt psychology (Beckett *Murphy* 5). The tearoom scene is a pastiche of experimental psychologists and their practices. The transition to the

tearoom references Pavlov[26] and as Ackerley's wonderful detective work has uncovered, the tearoom's location may be another nod to Skinner.[27] Earlier experimental psychologists are present, too, most notably Oswald Külpe and his students at the Würzburg School.[28] Murphy also performs his own experiments in the tearoom, in repeating the sit and interacting with Vera, the waitress (80). The language in these sections comes from Woodworth's descriptions of the work of Külpe's followers (Knowlson 171).

Murphy glosses contemporary and historical experimental psychology. As Horst Breuer notes, what is important for Beckett is the things these often-disparate schools shared. Some of the items on Breuer's subsequent list[29] could describe the naturalist style—"objective observation and report" and "the parallelizing of human and animal

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[26] "The only solution was to take his lunch at once, more than an hour before he was due to salivate" (Beckett *Murphy* 79).

[27] "Therein lies a recondite jest that Beckett might have expected a London public to get, had the book sold more widely: at the tea-rooms Murphy carries out behaviorist experiments, sitting and repeating the sit, then applying the stimulus proper to Vera, the waitress. According to the 1935 London Post Office Directory there was, on the east side of the street, exactly where it should be in the novel, and the only such premises of its kind, at No. 84, just past Clerkenwell Road—yes, *Skinner's Luncheon and Tea Rooms*" (Ackerley 98).

[28] "Murphy had some faith in the Külpe school. Marbe and Bühler might be deceived, even Watt was only human, but how could Ach be wrong?" (Beckett *Murphy* 81).

[29] "In the present context, however, the dissent among the various schools of learning psychology is less important than their common ground: controlled experimentation, objective observation and report, rejection of introspection, spatial limitation, reduction of variables, working with 'simple' organisms like animals or children, working with stimuli of reward and punishment (or frustration), the configuration of controlling experimenter and unsuspecting subject, the frequent invisibility of the experimenter, the parallelizing of human and animal behavior" (Breuer 310).

behavior" among them (310). Beckett's demonstrated concern with behaviorism can be explained in a similar way. Behaviorism focuses on external, observable behavior to predict how people will behave when faced with certain stimuli. In other words, behaviorism assumes that externality provides a window to internal processes and can be used to determine future actions. Behaviorism runs on the belief that behavior is a direct result of environmental, external conditions and that free will does not exist. The assumptions of behaviorism share much with the scientific assumptions upon which naturalist novels rely, and when Beckett gestures toward both in *Murphy* he works to draw a line between the decades and disciplines.

Murphy's experiment with Vera is significant for two reasons. First, he uses his knowledge of experimental psychology not to better understand himself or another, but instead to alter Vera's future actions. (He is, for the record, successful. Her mood and service improve, and the narrator's shift from "waitress" (80) to "slavey" (81) in her reference suggest that she is under some control.) Second, the experiment takes place not in the Mercyseat but the teahouse, among the general public—the concealed, not overt, Skinner reference.

Thus it is here, at the teahouse, where Beckett's concern becomes most apparent. What *Murphy* warns about, however subtly, is letting one understanding of human behavior take over to the point where that method can be used for control. According to Ackerley, Beckett's interest in Freud in the decade centered "upon narcissism, neuroses and the psychopathology of daily life rather than the familiar dreams of totems and taboos" (17). The latter is what we commonly see in the novels of the previous decade. The thirties brought different historical concerns than the twenties, one of which was that

governments began to weaponize science. Forced sterilizations began as early as 1933 in Germany and the Nazis funded doctors who would support their agenda and intimidated others (Köhler fled Germany for the United States in the mid-1930s). Nazi Germany demonstrated the way in which science could be hijacked to control populations and manage beliefs. The German eugenics movement took the racial assumptions of the late nineteenth-century and 'verified' them in experimental laboratories. As Anton Weiss-Wendt and Rory Yeomans put it, eugenics "effectively merged anthropology, Darwinism, and medicine into something German scientists later termed 'racial and social biology'" (5). The observational science to which naturalism responds, then, is relevant again in the 1930s. Beckett's return to naturalism is a reaction to the potential dangers posed by such experimental psychological practices, which hold a type of scientific authority that is dangerous in Beckett's view precisely because it is evidence-based.

VI. *Murphy*'s Broader Social Politics

Naturalism helps us see new things about Beckett's view on experimental psychology and behaviorist assumptions but *Murphy* is a multifaceted text concerned broadly with social politics. It is significant that *Murphy*'s depiction of the Irish condition is set not in Ireland, as Joyce's novels are, but instead in London. What the novel portrays is not the Irish but rather the Irish in relation to the English. The depiction is grim: Murphy is largely without job prospects and Celia's only employment option is terrible. Considering the massive unemployment brought on by the depression, it is possible that it would have taken an English wage laborer well over a year to find a job; adding Murphy's nationality to the equation would only lengthen the process.

Still, instead of beginning his job search immediately in the hopes of acquiring a position by the October suggested by his horoscope, Murphy's reaction is that if he will not be successful until the predicted date he might as well wait to look. In the meantime he plans only to "watch out," to be defensive instead of offensive. In order to avoid angering Celia he pretends to search for a job but in reality he is "content to expose himself vaguely in aloof able-bodied postures on the fringes of the better-attended slave-markets… a dog's life without a dog's prerogative" (Beckett *Murphy* 76-7). He does not *work* at finding work. It cannot be said that he is unaware of his situation, however. On the contrary, the posture is adopted in response to his lacking prospects. The text reveals this intentionality by comparing Murphy to Belacqua—not Belacqua from Beckett's earlier fiction, but Belacqua from Dante (Beckett *Murphy* 77-8).[30] Belacqua's response to Antepurgatory is similar to Murphy's reaction to the horoscope. Each character finds in his situation an excuse for passivity. Walter A. Strauss suggests in "Dante's Belacqua and Beckett's Tramps" (1959) that although "Dante's Belacqua is bound to wait out the duration of his lifetime in the shadow of the rock" his position is better than Beckett's characters who "do not even have that much certitude about their spiritual destination,

[30] In *The Divine Comedy*, souls who waited too long to repent must pass a time equal to the length of their life on Earth in Antepurgatory before they are allowed to begin their climb up the Mount of Purgatory. When Dante passes through this sphere he encounters a few souls resting in the shade of a large boulder. Most sit passively but one is curled in the fetal position, actively portraying his exhaustion. When Dante recognizes this man as his acquaintance, Belacqua, he asks him why he just sits there instead of repenting or beginning his climb. "O frate, andar in sù che porta?" Belacqua answers. "Oh brother, what good would climbing do?" (Alighieri 70-1). Belacqua takes from his situation an excuse to actively do nothing. Beckett, seemingly inspired by this canto, once claimed that what wanted out of life was "to do nothing more than lie on my back and fart and think about Dante" (Kiberd 456).

and thus are left in a state of complete disorientation" (Strauss 251). Belacqua has a known destination, something Murphy lacks.

More important for Murphy, however, is Belacqua's resistance to this journey. By sitting in the shade instead of climbing, Belacqua exercises control where he can. Likewise, Murphy, throughout the novel, gravitates toward any situation that can afford him any degree of agency, no matter how insignificant. With high unemployment rates in England and his status as an Irishman, Murphy knows too well how little control he has in his job search. He can control, however, not finding a job. In this way, *Murphy* is a novel with deep roots in its historical moment.

Knowing the system available to him will fail him, Murphy finds an alternate system in astrology. Astrology serves as a framework, or guideline, for not only Murphy's life but also *Murphy* the novel. Astrological details mark the narrative. Most scenes in the book are assigned a date, an astrological positioning, or both and, as such, it is possible to determine the date of almost every encounter. Chapter three, for instance, begins "[t]he moon, by a striking coincidence full and at perigee, was 29,000 miles nearer the earth than it had been for four years" (26). In terms of this precise chronology, *Murphy* differs slightly from a naturalist novel. Naturalist texts are characterized by "topographic preciseness," as Baguely explains, but are not temporally precise; though the novels take place in a clearly defined place, the dating is "often vague" (Nelson 19). In *Murphy* and other unnaturalist novels, time is a necessary organizing factor because of their historical moment and political nature. Time is a value against which progress can be measured, and the novelists of my study resist progress as a way of grappling with their progress-oriented decade.

Malcolm Bradbury writes in *The Modern British Novel* (1993) that if the word of the 1920s was 'modern,' the word of the 1930s was 'new' (215). Tradition and life in the present were abandoned in the name of progress and the relationship between the collective and the individual was in flux. In many ways, nationalist rhetoric of the day promoted the collective at the expense of personal autonomy. At the same time, however, masses were being exterminated in the name of individual power. Hitler's imprisonment of Jewish citizens began shortly after his appointment as Chancellor in 1933. In the 1920s and 1930s, Stalin executed or imprisoned not only those who participated in the 1917 revolution but also artists and intellectuals seen to be of danger to the state.

Murphy finds in astrology the ability to refuse, temporarily, a system in which he is devalued. His other habits, too, gain meaning when read politically. The tea passage is often read as a nod to World War I rations or a stand against capitalism; either would be relevant in the 1930s. The biscuit sorting might even be viewed as a Murphy's preparation for possible future rations. Lidan Lin performs the capitalist reading, arguing in "Labor, Alienation, and the Status of Being" (2000) that Murphy's resistance to employment, few possessions, and desire to dupe Vera into extra tea are examples of Murphy's attempt to avoid participation in the society with which he finds fault (2). Lin's reading focuses on the novel's presentation of the effect of economic conditions on the individual, a subject one would expect from a naturalist novel. The argument fits the novel well, but I would like to suggest a simpler reading: Murphy does not strike out at one system in particular; he merely takes advantage of the few situations that afford him some degree of power. Sorting the biscuits by his preference and deciding the order in which he will eat them is one such situation. His favorite biscuit is the Ginger and his

least the anonymous, and he prefers to begin with the anonymous, end with the favored Ginger, and eat the rest in a random order. Doing some calculations, however, Murphy realizes that eating all of the biscuits in random order, not just the three of medium preference, would drastically increase the number of possible orders. This realization paralyzes Murphy, who then struggles between his culinary preferences and his desire for more options. Ultimately, he takes so long to decide that Miss Dew's dog eats his biscuits.

More than just an exercise in futility, the passage represents the opposing forces of habit and freedom that characterize this and other unnaturalist novels. Murphy's preferences do not change. He still likes the Ginger biscuit most and the anonymous least.[31] What does have the potential to change is his number of options. Murphy's need for freedom, for choice, overwhelms his more immediate desires. The freedom provided Murphy by extra choices is a false freedom, of course. No combination will yield more or different biscuits. Murphy's preoccupation with his food decisions underlines the lack of real, significant, options in his life.

[31] Murphy's appetites themselves suggest one explanation for his need for freedom. His least favorite biscuit is the anonymous. Something that is anonymous lacks a unique identity. Murphy, on the contrary, acts out of a desire to keep his unique identity. Throughout the novel, he resists any kind of marker that defines him as something other than himself as, for instance, one's profession might. When he claims that a job would be the end of him, he means it. One with a job risks being narrowly defined by their occupation—teacher or lawyer, for instance. Murphy resists looking for work because he wants to remain Murphy. Fittingly, when Celia, the only person who might truly understand Murphy, describes Murphy to her uncle, the only word she uses is his own name. "Murphy was Murphy" (17). The irony, of course, is that Murphy's name, being the most common surname in Ireland, does assign him an identity—Irish—in some eyes.

VII. *Murphy*'s Unnaturalist Narrator

Murphy looks at biological determinism's influence on experimental psychology and the condition of the Irish in the 1930s, and represents Beckett's attempt at creating a literature that combines deterministic and individualistic frameworks to provide a complicated depiction of the human being. Though Beckett and the other unnaturalists of my study work to consider both interior and exterior forces on the individual life, the result certainly is not realism. Realism achieves some balance or resolution of these forces, while unnaturalism points to inevitable discord between them. To better understand this, we can look to Terry Eagleton's suggestion that the realist novel did not do as well in Ireland as it did in Britain because "the realist novel is the form *par excellence* of settlement and stability, gathering individual lives into an integrated whole; and social conditions in Ireland hardly lent themselves to any such sanguine reconciliation" (147). Likewise, social conditions in the 1930s for marginalized outsiders, whether by sex, nationality, or class, resisted this reconciliation or integrated whole. Responding to Eagleton, Simon Joyce writes "[n]aturalism's specialization, which enables it to zero in on the particularities of a class, a profession, a neighborhood, or a social problem, again makes it feel like the logical alternative" to realism (84).

What Eagleton finds in the place of realism in Ireland—a novel "typically recursive and diffuse, launching one arbitrary narrative only to abort it for some other equally gratuitous tale, running several storylines simultaneously, ringing pedantically ingenious variations on the same few plot elements" (147)—is what Beckett achieves in *Murphy*. The novel not only reflects on social conditions of the day, but also on the role of literature in presenting and responding to these conditions. Beckett's project in

Murphy is to present a number of complicating, oppositional forces, at both the thematic and narrative level.

One way this is achieved in *Murphy* is through its ever-present, self-conscious narrator. The narrator parodies the naturalist narrator. He[32] seems to invite the reader into a contract, but works throughout the novel to obscure details and impede the narrative. He is inconsistent, following the novel in signaling progress and stasis nearly simultaneously. The sun shines "having no alternative, on the nothing new" (1) but it "never wane[s] the same way twice" (7). He alternates between providing detailed and nearly incomprehensible jargon and glossing over things entirely. His precise scientific presentation of the position of the heavens is naturalist, but in some places he drops the scientific mask and lapses into affectation. When the novel opens, for instance, the narrator describes the sun as being in "the Virgin again for the billionth time" (2). He lacks a unique history and corporality and, for the most part, avoids any reference to himself in the first person. He is nonetheless present throughout the text: making judgments, interfering, providing asides.

As a narrator, he is difficult to classify. He does not fit neatly into the categories of dramatized or undramatized narrator, as defined by Wayne Booth in *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961).[33] Despite his inconsistencies, he also does not fit Booth's definition of an unreliable narrator. Booth is clear that a narrator is not unreliable just because he lies or is deceptive or ironic. Instead, he argues, it is "a matter of what James calls *inconscience*;

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[32] I use the male pronoun here simply because Beckett is a man. The novel gives no clues as to the sex of its narrator.

[33] The narrator uses "us" once, in partial reference to himself, but never identifies himself with an "I" and, as such, does not fit the most basic definition of dramatized narrator provided by Booth.

the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him" (Booth 159). Booth continues that a narrator can also be unreliable in the opposite manner; in other words, a narrator can believe he is less than the implied author reveals him to be. *Murphy*'s narrator, in contrast, demonstrates throughout the novel that he has a clear and accurate knowledge of his role and the extent of his power. When he misleads the reader, he does so purposely.

The narrator is ambiguous in some sections, despite the minutiae of detail he provides in others. The reader has access to the exact positions and number (forty-three) of moves in the chess game between Murphy and Mr. Endon, but the numbers do not add up in the much simpler case of Murphy's scarves. The first description of Murphy's rocking chair habit reads as follows: "Seven scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind" (2). Two scarves for shins, one for thighs, two for abdomen, and one for wrists leaves one of seven scarves unaccounted for. It might be argued that each wrist received a separate scarf, hence the ambiguity, but if this were the case would it not also be true that two scarves fasten each shin, for a total of nine scarves? The meticulous detail the narrator takes in other sections make the ambiguous count seem less a matter of oversight and more like a deliberate obscuration.[34]

One of the most substantial moments of narrative obscurity in the novel is chapter six, *Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat*. The titular phrase is Latin, the

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[34] Bair discussed this issue with Beckett and describes their conversation in a footnote in her biography. "In conversation, 17 November 1971, Beckett stated that this was an oversight: he had intended to account for all seven but forgot one. When the mistake was called to his attention, he found it amusing and decided to leave it as it was" (706). The truth of this statement may never be known.

language of scholarly authority, and its rough translation is ‘the intellectual love with which Murphy loves himself.’ Chapter six interrupts the narrative in order to provide “a justification of the expression ‘Murphy’s mind’” (107). What follows is not quite incomprehensible, but it serves to distance the reader from the narrative. The story is broken up rather than moved along. Though one might argue that there is something to be learned about Murphy in the chapter, there is ultimately little in the section that truly reveals any new, significant information about any of the characters.

Chapter six can be better illuminated through comparison to chapter seventeen in Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859), “In Which The Story Pauses a Little.” Chapter seventeen, which also occurs near the end of the first half of the novel, interrupts the story of Hetty, Dinah, Adam, and Arthur in order to provide Eliot’s philosophy on realism in the disguise of the narrator’s defense of the advice the Rector of Broxton gives Arthur. The chapter states that all representation is misrepresentation, that ‘realism’ is not truly achievable because human beings are fallible. There is truth, Eliot argues, but it is never fully accessible by the human mind. Eliot writes:

> I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (238)

For Eliot, even if the defective human mind is unable to access the truth, the attempt is important. The chapter, rather than dismissing realism as irrelevant, upholds the attempt at capturing the real as the most important project literature can undertake.

Eliot’s chapter seventeen, even as it highlights the impossibility of a truly realist account, stresses the importance of the realist project. Beckett, on the other hand, is more

ambivalent. The urgency in *Murphy* is not to uphold the values of naturalism despite their faults but rather to expose the naturalist's attempts at the objective as merely another subjective account. If Eliot's novel argues that the real exists, even if we cannot access it, Beckett's refuses an objective account of reality from the start. Even nature is constructed, the novel warns, and attempts by naturalists to utilize scientific and social discourse as objective accounts are dangerous. Murphy's mind offers itself as a vehicle for this warning. The mind of Murphy—a character—is nothing more than a literary convention, and Beckett uses this discussion to bring questions of subjectivity and objectivity into the foreground. "Happily," the narrator relates, "we need not concern ourselves with this apparatus as it really was—that would be an extravagance and an impertinence—but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be" (107). To be concerned with questions of the objective, the narrator suggests, is not only indulgent but also impudent. To attempt establishing or assuming an objective truth is to make the very mistake Beckett takes issue with in the naturalist project.

The chapter draws a clear distinction between Murphy's mind and the universe outside it—or, at least, Murphy's mind draws this distinction, picturing itself "as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without" (107). Though distinct, the world inside holds everything that is present in the world outside. Yet, even as the narrator describes the insistence of Murphy's mind that it is a separate sphere than the outside world, he subtly demonstrates the porous border between the spheres. "Nothing had ever been, was, or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it" (107). This statement seems to uphold the border between the outside world and

the inside world, but in mentioning the "virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual" it also suggests that the border can be crossed.

Much like Eliot's chapter seventeen, *Murphy*'s chapter six reveals its author's generic preoccupations. Beckett does not use the term unnaturalism, but the chapter works to unite unnaturalist threads. Chapter six highlights questions of objectivity and subjectivity as well as questions of fact and fiction. It also exposes the role of the narrator in shaping narrative. The chapter demonstrates the narrator's awareness of the duties of the novel narrator, but it also positions the narrator as one who resists—or at least fills begrudgingly—these duties. The chapter begins "[i]t is most unfortunate, but the point of this story has been reached where a justification of the expression 'Murphy's mind' has to be attempted" (107) and ends "[t]his painful duty having now been discharged, no further bulletins will be issued" (113), stating also that "[a] short section to itself at this stage will relieve us from the necessity of apologising for it further" (107). It might be more accurate to say that the chapter signals the narrator's awareness of the expected role of the narrator, rather than his concern: the begrudging tone of the passage speaks to the narrator's disinterest in his task.

The narrator is at his most present here. He references the novel as an entity ("this story"), discusses his duties explicitly in the final sentence, and even, briefly, slips into the first person. It is the narrator's first reference to himself in the novel, so it does some work to unsettle the reader—especially because he makes use of the first person plural rather than the first person singular. It is not clear who, besides himself, he includes in

"us." Is it a direct appeal to the reader, or the royal "us"?[35] Rather than signal a compact with the reader, the ambiguous nature of this address increases the distance between reader and narrator. The use of "bulletins" helps increase this distance, as well. As in "Echo's Bones," the narrator chooses a word that signals the official, the objective, rather than one that references the literary tradition.

The function of the narrator, in its root as a word, is to act as an agent for the narrative. The narrator of *Murphy* claims to be fulfilling his narrative role, but in reality he has cut off the story at one of the most interesting parts. After Murphy has procured the job offer from Ticklepenny and had his biscuits eaten by Miss Dew's Dachshund, he returns home to find "Celia spread-eagled on her face on the bed" (106). By way of explanation, the text says "[a] shocking thing had happened" (106) but offers no more before abruptly transitioning to chapter six. Chapter seven is also without explanation for Celia's position. If the story pauses a little in chapter six, it is rewound in chapter seven. Not yet finished flexing his narratorial muscles, the narrator begins the chapter by reversing the flow of time. "Let us now take Time that old fornicator, bald though he be behind, by such a few sad shorts hairs as he has, back to Monday" (114). The things that happen on Monday are, for the most part, mundane and unimportant. The narrative line of what has shocked Celia—the old boy's suicide—is not picked up until chapter eight.

Though the chapter is ostensibly about Murphy's mind, the question of the narrator's function takes a central position. According to the narrator's explanations, the function of the narrator is to justify his expressions, apologize for the characters' actions and thoughts, and clarify situations to the better understanding of the reader. As the

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[35] This phrase for the first person plural—the royal us, or we—signals the power of such pronouns and the political and social control they offer.

chapter's opening suggests—"the point of this story has been reached"—it is not merely necessary that these things be done, but that they be accomplished at the appropriate point of the narrative (though the question of what point is appropriate is not addressed).

Murphy's narrator makes a show of fulfilling these duties but does just as much work undermining the narrative progression of the novel. It is in chapter six that this is most obvious. As previously stated, this narrator does not fall neatly into Booth's categories of dramatized and undramatized narrator. He is not, as Booth writes, a character "as vivid as those [he] tell[s] us about" (152). Indeed, he does not resemble a *character* at all. Instead, it might be most accurate to classify *Murphy*'s narrator as a dramatized undramatized narrator. He does not take on the role of another character; he takes on the role of the undramatized narrator in order to uncover it. *Murphy*'s reluctant narrator is a pastiche of other narrators; he plays off of, or is a characterization of, not humans but narrative itself.

Murphy's narrator highlights questions of fictionality and exposes his role in manipulating narrative. He parodies the naturalist narrator who, in adopting academic tone and subjects, removes himself from the text. The *Murphy* narrator is not the absent narrator Baguley discusses, but he also is not the ever-present narrator of, say, *Vanity Fair*. *Murphy*'s narrator discusses his role as a narrator. He pretends to play the naturalist narrator, but then, like Snug in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (a text referenced many times in "Echo's Bones), reminds the audience that he is only playing a part. Beckett's narrator seems to be just an observer—the appropriate position, Zola once said, for the experimental novelist—but he knows things beyond the scope of an observer, and has a power over the narrative not granted to the reader. In showing his hand, so to speak,

Beckett works to expose and lay bare the role of narrator in furthering the kind of cohesion he rejects in his early lectures. In other words, taking the omniscient narrator to its extremes is Beckett's attempt to avoid the prescription that narration can bring to a text.

VIII. Conclusion

The trajectory of Beckett's career draws more from naturalism than critics allow. His early 1930s work, such as "Echo's Bones" and *Proust*, reveals a naturalist influence; in *Murphy*, he turns naturalism on modernism. Beckett's unnaturalism parodies the objective air of naturalism alongside the psychological focus of modernism in order to demonstrate the limits of both. Combining naturalist and modernist conventions helps him speak to outdated, racist assumptions in his time, refresh modernism and redirect the path of literature, including his own.

In *Murphy*, characters and narrator are elevated to a new level of self-consciousness. This elevation often comes at the expense of narrative progress. As Beckett's work develops, self-consciousness becomes the central tenet of his fiction and narrative progress all but dissipates. In *Molly, Malone Dies,* and *The Unnamable* (1955), it is the novel itself that is self-conscious. *Three Novels* draw from Beckett's earlier work in other ways, too. Molloy follows *Murphy*'s narrator in concealing information from the reader—"I will not tell what followed" (24)—and Murphy in being ruled by his habits. For Molloy, the fetish is not sorting biscuits, but rather sucking stones.

The most significant remnant of unnaturalism in *Molloy* is the text's skeptical treatment of objective accounts.

> I can't help it, gas escapes from my fundament on the least pretext, it's hard not to mention it now and then, however great my distaste. One day I

> counted them. Three hundred and fifteen farts in nineteen hours, or an average of over sixteen farts an hour. After all it's not excessive. Four farts every fifteen minutes. It's nothing. Not even one fart every four minutes. It's unbelievable. Damn it, I hardly fart at all, I should never have mentioned it. Extraordinary how mathematics help you to know yourself. (30)

Molloy insists that mathematics helps him to better know himself, but the joke is that he has used math to justify changing his mind. He uses objective knowledge to disprove his subjective experience. The novel pokes subtle fun at the idea that a 'reason-based' field like mathematics has a monopoly on truth just because it is ostensibly objective.

Reading the trajectory of Beckett's work as a move toward the self-consciousness of fiction—not just character or narrator—and away from narrative progression unites *Murphy* and late work such as *Nohow On* (1980-3). At first glance, *Company* (1980)*, Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981), and *Worstward Ho* (1983) seem to share little with *Murphy*. Character and narrator have been all but abandoned in these novels. Characters are pronouns or, occasionally, a single letter (M, W), but never given names. Any determination as to the level of self-consciousness of these characters would be speculative, but the fiction itself is undoubtedly self-conscious.

A resistance to the journey characterizes Beckett's 1930s fiction; by the 1980s, there is no question of progress in Beckett's fiction. This late work is characterized not by frantic motion that goes nowhere, as is the case throughout *Murphy*, but instead quiet stillness. S.E. Gontarski makes note of this in his introduction to *Nohow On*, but reads the difference as a shift in Beckett's work, claiming that his fiction "took a dramatic turn" (vii) in the mid-1960s. There is no denying that the difference between the trilogies (a word to use with hesitation, as Beckett rejected it) is dramatic, but considering each as offshoots of naturalism reveals a resistance to the journey to be at the heart of each work.

The difference here becomes one of degrees: the path of Beckett's fiction is less a turn than a hill.

Recognizing Beckett's adoption and contortion of naturalism in the 1930s allows for a deeper understanding of his entire oeuvre. Just as *Proust* reveals as much about the naturalist influence as "Echo's Bones," so are Beckett's dramatic works as influenced by his 1930s work as his later novels. *Play* (1963) might be read as a self-conscious drama, and *Waiting for Godot* (1953) takes the unnaturalist refusal of narrative resolution to its extremes. As I explore in my next chapter—on Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939)—unnaturalist novels are characterized not merely by a resistance to narrative progress but rather an outright refusal of narrative resolution.

CHAPTER 4

JEAN RHYS'S CEREBRAL NATURALISM

I. Introduction: "It's rather strange – the way they sheer off politics."[36]

"Life isn't like they tell you, even books on psychoanalysis," Jean Rhys writes in her Black Exercise Book in the 1930s (Rhys BEB quoted in Howells 17). The exercise book is undated, but Coral Ann Howells' investigation of the text suggests the words were penned while Rhys was writing *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). In the same space, Rhys outlines her experience coming into contact with Sigmund Freud's essay "Femininity" (1933) in Shakespeare & Company. She paraphrases the section wherein Freud, after introducing the subject of men sexually molesting their daughters concludes that "these reports were untrue" and "hysterical symptoms are derived from fantasies and not from real occurrences" (Freud 120). Responding, she writes "No honey I thought it is *not* fictitious in every case By no means and anyhow how do you know?" (Rhys BEB quoted in Howells 17). Rhys then describes putting the book down and concludes "I wish that some time some place a man would write about women fairly" (Rhys BEB quoted in Howells 17).

This chapter suggests that *Good Morning, Midnight* is Rhys's attempt at to write about women fairly. The novel speaks back to Freud's assertions in "Femininity"—long before Luce Irigaray, as Howells notes (12)—and James Joyce's Molly soliloquy in *Ulysses* (1922) in order to complicate these male depictions of women. Like all of Rhys's novels, *Good Morning, Midnight* is complex and broadly allusive, concerned with the

[36] Quote from *Good Morning, Midnight* (48)

process of rewriting and revising literary history. Freud and Joyce are not the only contemporary writers to which Rhys responds in the novel. This chapter centers on these two figures, however, to show both how Rhys taps into the naturalist tendency to respond to popular science (psychoanalysis) and how she aims to make a more inclusive modernism.

Good Morning, Midnight works to rewrite the legacies of biological determinism present in the work of Freud and Joyce. Freud claims to allow for cultural influence on development but uses language throughout that points to a formative power of biology that is nearly inescapable. To give just one example here, some of the essay's final words follow.

> I have only been describing women in so far as their nature is determined by their sexual function. It is true that that influence extends very far; but we do not overlook the fact that an individual woman may be a human being in other respects as well. (Freud 135)

The "individual" woman may overcome her sexual function, but she is the exception. Freud links woman throughout with her anatomy. Though *Ulysses* is much gentler than Freud and progressive in many ways, Molly's soliloquy continues the pattern of linking women with nature and the emotional life. The end of *Good Morning, Midnight* is a direct response to this, as we will see. This idea is also reflected in the novel when René says that women should feel and not think and that the cerebral woman—one "who doesn't like men or need them"—is "a monster" (162). Rhys challenges these ideas of what a woman should be (emotional, subservient, a product of her nature) by writing a character whose path is determined not by her anatomy but instead by her circumstances.

Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) is undoubtedly a reframing of Bertha's story in *Jane Eyre* and, as such, is a novel hard to separate from the political questions it raises about

gender and Empire. Yet it is too often read as an anomaly rather than part of a progression. Until recently, critics have—to use the words of Sasha Jensen—"sheered off politics" when discussing Rhys's interwar novels, despite the fact that they perform much of the same work as *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In the last few years, moves have been made to re-politicize Rhys.[37] This chapter contributes to this growing body of criticism.

I use naturalism as a way of uniting the recent scholarship that focuses on the questions of gender, nationality, and economy present in *Good Morning, Midnight*—for the novel ties the three together in a complicated way. Many critics focus on the novel's portrayal of economic determinism and the way capitalism affects women, in particular, by positioning them as commodities on the marketplace; others put greater emphasis on other social pressures. Linda Camarasana's "Exhibitions and Repetitions" highlights the economic, racial, and sexual aspects of the novel. *Good Morning, Midnight* focuses, she argues, "on characters who struggle to survive economically and emotionally in a world of deracinated people whose stories reveal the racial and sexual exclusions inherent in nation" (Camarasana 52). Anne B. Simpson's *Territories of the Psyche* (2007) relates Rhys's distrust of social situations to her "keen awareness of how conventions of every kind exert pressure on the individual to mask genuine feelings with contrived forms of outer display" (5). Gardiner argues that Rhys writes the alienation of her characters as not "an existential fact but as the specific historical result of social polarizations about sex, class, and morality" (233). These critics all uncover Rhys's concern with not only how the individual is shaped and directed by the categories into which she is born but also how these 'natural' categories are constructed and maintained.

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[37] Mary Wilson and Kerry L. Johnson's collection *Rhys Matters* (2013) is an excellent example of this turn in Rhys studies.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys speaks back to assumptions Freud, modernists, and others make about resolution itself—especially concerning women or other marginalized groups. Her parodic treatment of Freud and modernism pushes back against twentieth-century discourse that looks to the origin for explanation of human behavior. Freud suggests that adult personalities are a direct result of childhood development. Though Freud is a major access point for Rhys, the scope of the novel goes beyond Freud and modernism. By highlighting questions of nationality and class alongside issues of gender, Rhys's work addresses the idea that the formation of the self occurs (biologically or psychologically) in or before childhood and never again. Instead, there are always (social) forces outside of the self that influence or limit behavior in ways that are just as, if not more, 'determinant' than biological or psychological 'origins.'

II. Rhys's Interwar Naturalist Development

Rhys did not produce a body of essays on literature and its purpose, as did Woolf and Orwell, nor did she lecture on the subject like Beckett. The passage from the exercise book, however, provides an idea about some of her political and literary concerns. She responds directly to Freud's denial of woman's experience and identifies a broader issue with male representation of women. The passage also gives us, as Betsy Berry notes, a clue to an alternate tradition in Rhys's work. Berry includes a longer passage in the epigraph of her essay on Rhys and naturalism. After wishing that a man would write about women fairly, Rhys adds "some Frenchmen almost do it though" (Rhys BEB quoted Berry 544). Rhys "loved Maupassant, Anatole France, Flaubert," as she told Mary Cantwell in conversation (24). Whether these are the men to whom she is referring or not, Berry uses the quote about Frenchmen to link Rhys to the naturalist tradition.

There is a stronger critical tradition of considering Rhys's interwar work in terms of naturalism than any other writer of my study. Berry, who highlights *Voyage in the Dark*'s treatment of Émile Zola's *Nana* and quotes a letter between Rhys and Peggy Kirkaldy in which Rhys wrote that she had read George Moore's *Esther Waters* "about sixty times" (Berry 545; Wyndham 103), centers on *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*. She notes that one early review, titled "Twice-as-Naturalism," "places Rhys squarely within the French tradition" by aligning her with Flaubert (544). Berry draws a different naturalist comparison, arguing "it is as though she were deconstructing a Zola novel, taking its essential elements and purifying them of the five hundred page dross of a book like *Nana* or *L'Assommoir* into a tightly focused, sleekly modernist reduction" (545). For Berry, *Mackenzie* not only draws from the naturalist tradition but also "enriches" it (545). Joshua Esty, too, links Rhys's interwar work to the naturalist tradition and gestures toward her genre bending tendencies. In *Unseasonable Youth* Esty writes of *Voyage in the Dark*'s Anna Morgan that "environmental determinants shape her will in a thoroughgoing naturalist plot that extends beyond the passive, disillusioned heroes of Flaubert into the downtrodden heroines of Zola" and notes that Rhys "tips her readers to this literary debt" early in the book when Anna reads *Nana* (169-70). For Esty, Rhys "uses naturalism to defamiliarize realist conventions" in *Voyage in the Dark* (251).

Less has been said, however, about the naturalist influence on *Good Morning, Midnight*. Esty gestures toward the novel in a footnote, writing that by *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys "has begun to suspend the naturalist paradigm by laying it bare" (Esty 251) and exposing what Deborah Parsons calls "the vagaries of determinism" (Parsons 145 quoted in Esty 251). I return to Parsons later in this chapter, but here I will add that

one of Rhys's projects in *Good Morning, Midnight* is to use naturalism to defamiliarize *modernist* conventions. The novel is set in an urban environment—Paris—in the decade it was written, follows an entropic plot, and features characters that suffer as a result of their particular combination of economic status, gender, and nationality. It is, in these terms, decidedly naturalist. As Carole Angier notes in her biography on Rhys, Sasha's "direction is always downwards, toward deflation and humiliation, towards the shameful, squalid truth, towards the lavatory" (379). It is not only Sasha's path that seems lifted from a naturalist novel but also her tendency toward habit (naturalist characters often engage in obsessive habits). She keeps a strange collection of

> cafés where they like me and cafés where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on. (Rhys 46)

Sasha's habits are her attempt to avoid chance or surprises. Though Georg Lukács takes issue with naturalism's disavowal of chance, chance is never fortuitous—meaning lucky—for the characters of *Good Morning, Midnight*.[38] Sasha designs her day to avoid the uncertain. "The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance – no gaps" (Rhys 15). Things for Sasha can only get worse: any unplanned developments are

[38] Lukács's writes in "Narrate or Describe?" (1936) that naturalism utilizes description, which comes from the standpoint of an observer, rather than narration, which uses the point of view of a participant. Lukács does not use the term naturalism in this essay—though he does adopt the term in his later "The Zola Centenary" (1946)—but he draws a distinction between the work of Balzac and Tolstory and that of Zola and Flaubert. The latter writers, for Lukács, are "the outstanding representatives of realism after 1848" (Lukács 116). A major way that description and narration differ, according to Lukács, is the role of chance. "Without chance all narration is dead and abstract" (Lukács 112), he argues. There is no room for chance in texts that describe.

apt to be instances of decline. As Sasha notes, “[t]he passages will never lead anywhere, the doors will always be shut” (31).

Good Morning, Midnight is the interwar novel best suited for a discussion of how Rhys harnesses naturalism to influence modernism, but this influence has been overlooked precisely because the novel takes on modernist form. At the heart of Rhys’s political and naturalist development is narrative change. The most obvious change is that in *Good Morning, Midnight* protagonist and narrator are one while in *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, the protagonist is described in the third person and there is no overt narrator.[39] This switch gives protagonist Sasha Jensen more agency in the novel and provides the reader with much more access to her interior states. Sasha’s ability to be her own narrator may contribute to what Angier notes is a key difference between *Good Morning, Midnight* and the earlier novels:

> Underneath the obsessive patterns, the echoes and repetitions, there’s been huge change and growth in the four modern novels… *Good Morning, Midnight* is her masterpiece of self-knowledge, and a very great novel… You can’t feel about Sasha as you can about Marya, even about the others – simply irritated by her incompetence, her self-pity, her excuses. For she irritates herself; she takes the words out of our mouths, and is crueler to herself than we could ever be… Sasha is as awful as she fears. And yet we like her… The reason, of course, is that she *knows* she’s awful. (405)[40]

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[39] I omit *Voyage in the Dark* from this chronology, though it was published between *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, because Rhys began drafting it more than a decade before any of her other novels.

[40] The full text quote follows. “Underneath the obsessive patterns, the echoes and repetitions, there’s been huge change and growth in the four modern novels. From Marya through Julia to Sasha (with a slip back to the beginning of the spiral in Anna) Jean struggled from blindness to self-knowledge, from the rejection of blame to the acceptance of it. It cost her everything; but it was worth it. *Good Morning, Midnight* is her masterpiece of self-knowledge, and a very great novel. The only question is whether you can bear it; if you can read it at all, you must admire it. You can’t feel about Sasha as you can about Marya, even about the others – simply irritated by her incompetence, her self-

The difference between Sasha and, for example, Marya, is not just that Sasha knows she is awful but more importantly, that she knows why she is awful and relates this to the reader. She speaks back to her own marginalization.

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys aligns protagonist and narrator. Sasha's position as the narrator and her resemblance to Rhys draws a strong relationship between author, character, and narrator. In this, *Good Morning, Midnight* opposes the naturalist novel, wherein narrator and protagonist are almost never aligned and protagonist is relegated to a base position. Joe Cleary, describing this naturalist phenomenon (and justifying why *Dubliners* is naturalist) writes that "these stories are always configured so that the narrator and the reader are invited into a compact that implicitly imputes them to a level of shared understanding superior to that of the characters whose fates they contemplate" (134). In *Good Morning, Midnight* the power is given back to the protagonist. Sasha is allowed to speak for herself. In this switch, characters gain self-consciousness while readers need to do more work to uncover information that may still remain unknowable.

It is admittedly counterintuitive to argue that first person description of character does more to isolate the reader than third person does, but a discussion of the particulars of Rhys's narrative style demonstrates how this comes to be. In Rhys's third person novels, such as *Quartet*, free indirect discourse divides the characters internally while

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pity, her excuses. For she irritates herself; she takes the words out of our mouths, and is crueler to herself than we could ever be. And there's neither self-pity nor excuses left; there is no more hiding, no more pretending. Sasha is to us as she imagines being to René at the end; not indeed 'simple and unafraid', but herself. *We can look at her if we want to*. It is an extraordinary achievement, for Sasha is as awful as she fears. And yet we like her. We certainly like her infinitely more than Marya. The reason, of course, is that she *knows* she's awful, and Marya didn't" (405).

making aspects of the characters more accessible to the reader. As Amy Clukey writes in "No Country Really Now" (2010), "[u]sing free indirect discourse—a narrative mode important to high modernism—to focalize narrative through Marya's perspective, Rhys shows that deep interiority is unavailable to particularized subjects interpellated by metropolitan normative demands" (138). Clukey focuses on Rhys's use of free indirect discourse in *Quartet* as a narrative tool to demonstrate the character divided within herself as a result of social pressures. Free indirect discourse, which combines first person action with third person narration, brings reader and protagonist closer together than traditional third person narration but, at the same time, highlights not only the divide within Marya but also the divide between reader and protagonist.

Good Morning, Midnight provides the same portrait of a subject divided by external demands, but instead combines first-person narration and third-person action. After pushing the "commis voyageur" who shares her landing out of her doorway near the beginning of the novel, for example, Sasha seeks refuge in her room and narrates: "there I am in this dim room" (35). The use of "there" combined with the first person "I" introduces a divide between Sasha and the reader. "Here" could have opened the doors, so to speak, to the reader, but "there" pushes the reader out to share the landing with the man next door. The effect of *Good Morning, Midnight*'s first person narration and third person action is similar to the free indirect discourse of *Quartet* because each confuses person, tense, time, and place. The difference is significant, however, because in *Good Morning, Midnight* the reader is always aware of Sasha's mediation of the narrative. Rhys imposes the third person on Sasha's first person narrative and, in doing so, at once references and alters the practice of free indirect discourse. Free indirect discourse allows

the reader greater access to the character; its opposite reveals the limits of this access. Thus, *Good Morning, Midnight* adopts a technique that appears often in modernist works only to subvert this technique.

These subtle shifts in tense within *Good Morning, Midnight* are significant because, in addition to isolating the reader, they undermine attempts to align Rhys with her protagonist. Or, more accurately, what is undermined is the tendency to end analysis by dismissing the novel as autobiographical. It is easy to misread Rhys work in this way but, in truth, an autobiographical focus tends to limit understanding of her work by downplaying its political nature. What I suggest is that the resemblance between protagonist and author should be used to better understand, rather than reject, the politics of Rhys's work.

III. *Good Morning, Midnight*'s Politics

Rhys uses naturalism in her early interwar work as a way of avoiding the problems she sees in modernism. In *Good Morning, Midnight* she turns back toward modernism, taking on modernist style to complicate it politically. For Sasha, politics is inescapable because of her biographical details. Rhys uses the autobiographical to make a statement about the personal as political in the interwar period. Sasha is not particularly political, but her actions over the course of the novel show her futile desire to be rid of the markers that determine her life: gender and nationality. She is more of an outsider than Eleanor in *The Years* because she does not fit neatly into a national frame and more of one than Murphy because she is a woman.

We have already seen how Woolf responds in *Three Guineas* to the British editorial that suggests women are to blame for male unemployment in the 1930s. Sasha's

position is even worse than any of the Pargiter women because she lacks the familial structure, meaning not only the support of her family but very literally the family home. Sasha's existence is largely one of the streets. Parsons notes that the 1930s saw "a backlash against female emancipation" made possible by World War I so that "women in public were once again associated with the fallen woman" (125). About *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, Mary Lou Emery writes "the novel's formal structure parallels the experiences of women who found themselves, after the war, loosened from domestic confinement but unable to make their own living or to be recognized as public persons" (142). The same is true of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Rhys responds in the interwar period to this backlash against women and further complicates Sasha's status by complicating her national status.

Sasha's life is not just a complicated affair of rooms and bars but also, and more importantly, a complicated affair of nationalities. Origin, appearance, and marriage complicate Sasha's nationality. She was born in the West Indies, is mistaken for an Englishwoman throughout, and was briefly married to Enno, a Dutch man, before the novel opens. When the patron of her hotel asks to see her passport, she realizes his confusion comes from the nationality she gave when she checked in. "I ought to have put nationality by marriage" (14), she realizes, thinking that her hat "shouts 'Anglaise'" (15). Sasha often refers to male characters as if their nationalities were their names, but she rejects any nationality of her own. "I have no pride – no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere" (44). The thought conflates name, face, and nationality, and suggests that to belong to a country, one must also look and be labeled as one who belongs.

Sasha's adoption of new appearances and pseudonyms are not the empty attempts by an aging woman to look and feel younger, but rather the actualization of her desire to have an unambiguous nationality. Her rituals signal the obstacles faced in the 1930s for people whose looks, name, or other aspect of their identities (e.g. religion), do not match their national identity. Sasha's relationship with nationality is represented as especially tenuous because she is a woman, but the male travelers she meets are not without troubles. René is stuck in France until he can acquire a fake passport to escape for England; the artist, Serge Rubin, seems to be a displaced Russian Jew, though questions of his nationality are never settled. Jess Issacharoff's "No Pride, No Name, No Face, No Country" argues that Serge Rubin's Jewishness represents for Sasha "a symbolic alternative to singular national identity" (112) and productively explores the limitations of national identity in the 1930s. The reality, though, is that Serge's situation is not much better than Sasha's. *Good Morning, Midnight* reveals its distrust with a system of nationality that works to separate and catalogue the masses rather than unite them.

Sasha's first-person narration allows her to speak back to society—sometimes quite literally, as demonstrated by her imagined conversation with Mr. Blank. The dialogue directly addresses systematic exploitation.

> Well, let's argue this out, Mr Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray, there's no denying it. So you have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month, to lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings till you get me to the point when I blush at a look, cry at a word. We can't all be happy, we can't all be rich, we can't all be lucky—and it would be so much less fun if we were. Isn't it so, Mr Blank? There must be the dark background to show up the bright colours. Some must cry so that the others may be able to laugh the more heartily. Sacrifices are necessary…. Let's say that you have this mythical right to

> cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple – no, that I think you haven't got. (Rhys 29)

Mr. Blank prospers because of workers like Sasha and at the expense of such workers. It is not merely that certain individuals are successful, but that their success comes at the poverty of others. Mr. Blank represents society because it is the collective force that allows things to continue this way but, importantly, he represents a faction of society that profits, individually, from the whole of society. As Mr. Blanks rise, the only way for others is degradation. Sasha's protest is explicitly capitalist, but it works in a gendered or nationalist framework, as well. In the totalitarian swing of the 1930s, individuals were sacrificed not only economically but also quite literally and Woolf has shown us how Arthur prospers at the expense of his sisters.

For Sasha, the problem is more complicated than the sacrifice of one for another. Mr. Blank not only profits at the expense of Sasha, but also derides her once he has done so. This aspect of Sasha's imagined declaration could be directed at almost everyone she encounters in the novel. Rhys's protagonist is aware of the social systems at work in her 'fate,' but equally aware of the artificiality of those systems. It is because of Sasha's awareness that she is able "to deconstruct those social institutions and arrangements which threaten her" as Savory writes in *Jean Rhys* (1999), continuing that this ability of Sasha's, executed "often with hilarious humour, is a marked aspect of her resilience" (109). To speak of character awareness in these novels is difficult, because unnaturalism tackles inherited psychic structures. What threatens Sasha are social arrangements or behaviors that other individuals unconsciously reproduce. The word instinctual is not quite right here, because these particular 'instincts' are learned. Sasha can see these structures at work because she has learned how to identify them—she must be able to, in

order to survive. Mr. Blank does not need to be aware of the inherited psychic system because he profits from it.

Good Morning, Midnight, then, pulls from the modernist tradition in its focus on the unconscious, but simultaneously subverts this tradition and privileges the naturalist one. The novel suggests that the assumptions of others structure individual behavior as much as one's internal psychic composition. Socially reproduced norms dictate individual experience and make some streets friendly for Sasha and others unfriendly. These norms are also what make resolution impossible for Sasha. There is nothing Sasha can do to change her situation when the factor that ultimately defines her experience is external and unconscious.

IV. Responding to Freud

Rhys responds to Freud's scientific denial of the experience of women in her Black Exercise Book and, as I argue here, in *Good Morning, Midnight*. "Femininity" claims to allow for cultural influence but uses language throughout that points to the formative power of biology, such as when he says "the anatomical distinction [between the sexes] must express itself in psychical consequences" (Freud 124). Even if we allow, as he says in the beginning, that he is complicating our biological understanding, Freud's language suggests a new type of psychological determinism. "We cannot understand women unless we appreciate this phase of their pre-Oedipal attachment to their mother" (Freud 119). Furthermore, while Freud acknowledges in the essay that there are some social or cultural reasons for the contemporary status of women, he fails to consider in the essay the effect his own words could have. His claim early on that the lecture "brings

forward nothing but observed facts, almost without any speculative additions" (Freud 113) is overshadowed by the scientific and teleological language used throughout.[41]

Freud is mentioned by name only once in *Good Morning, Midnight* but the scene gives us an entry point through which to look for his presence throughout the rest of the text. In the scene, Sasha recalls the "very rich woman" for whom she "wrote up fairy stories" as employment (Rhys 166). Sasha's memory is not kind to her employer, who expects her to take her rambling stories and turn them into literary gold. As Sasha recounts the experience to René, she mimics the erratic conversation pattern of the woman. "Psycho-analysis might help. Adler is more wholesome than Freud don't you think?" (168). Because the woman jumps from one thing to another, it is difficult to figure out what she thinks psychoanalysis "might help," but the remark follows a passage in which she criticizes Sasha's treatment of her stories. It is possible to read in the woman's banter a suggestion that Sasha apply psychoanalytic theories in her write-ups of the fairy tales, as was fashionable at the time. The interaction leads Simpson to make the claim that "Freud is thus offered up as fodder for the small-talk of the socially banal. Aside from using psychoanalysis to show the superficiality of characters she disdained, Rhys apparently found Freud irrelevant" (7). She is mostly correct. Freud is the material here for hackneyed conversation but it is unlikely that Rhys, Sasha, or any other woman writer in the 1930s concerned with interior states could have been in a position to find Freud irrelevant. As *Good Morning, Midnight* demonstrates time and time again, something in which you are disinterested and disengaged fails to be irrelevant if it influences others around you, and you by proxy. Thus, Sasha's fragmented memory of

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[41] Freud speaks in the essay of "destiny" (113), of being "biologically destined" (119) and even once uses the phrase "to speak teleologically" (131).

her employer's reference to Freud is not flippant or inconsequential, but holds at its base a deep criticism and distrust of psychoanalysis.

The novel also mimics the form of psychoanalysis (and in doing so, taps into the naturalist's tendency to model itself after popular scientific discourse). Sasha's narrative slips between the past and the present day. It is marked by ellipses when she either refuses to or cannot go on, and parentheses when she includes two narrative lines in one thought. Sometimes she switches tense mid-recollection. The effect is much like sitting in on a psychoanalytical session. Importantly, Sasha's narrative is more a dialogue than a monologue. Like Rhys's other protagonists, she invokes "you" with great frequency. This encourages the reader to interact with the novel as if it were a dialogue. Indeed, the reader's relation to Sasha's narrative parallels the analyst's relation to the analysand. Simpson agrees with the argument, highlighting Sasha's dreams and reliance on condensation and displacement and writing that "[b]ecause Sasha's narrative is incongruous and disjointed, it requires of its audience the suspension of disbelief and open willingness that (ideally) characterize an analyst's stance in relation to the free associations and dream reportage of her analysand" (89). Simpson highlights the frequency of Sasha's dreams and argues that her narrative demonstrates the techniques of condensation and displacement and notes that "this novel, more than any other fiction that Rhys wrote, relies for its effects on interchanges between the narrator's and the reader's states of unconscious awareness" (88-9).

The reader of *Good Morning, Midnight*, like the reader of *Murphy*, must actively interact with the text; like the analyst, the reader must attempt to connect the dots—literal dots, in this case, on account of the many ellipses. Sasha invites the reader into her

thoughts and room but also remains at a distance from the reader. The narrative transitions from present to past nearly seamlessly, the tense shifts unexpectedly, and her words trail off mid-thought. She is often drunk, drugged, or dreaming. In some instances, such as when Sasha tries to date past memories, the feeling is that her memory is failing her. "Was it in 1923 or 1924… Was it in 1926 or 1927" (12) she wonders, trying to date a memory. On other occasions, however, it seems that Sasha is refusing to relate or remember certain pieces of information. This is not to say that she intentionally withholds information from the reader for the sake of withholding it, but that her mind refuses to recount it. The reader is left with the task of interpreting these gaps.

One way of interpreting the gaps in the novel, as Simpson convincingly does, is that Sasha was sexually abused by her father (Simpson 91-3). Simpson's analysis, which uses Freud's theory of the uncanny and sees the plotline as a clear reference in support of Freud's theories, is worth visiting. Thinking about the way the storyline might be a response to Freud's claim in "Femininity" that women often fabricate such memories gives us a new perspective, however. Sasha has no reason to construct a lie about being abused as a child but, with "Femininity," Freud gives her one good reason to hide it.

Ultimately the question of what lies unsaid in Sasha's narrative is insignificant because what is made clear in *Good Morning, Midnight* is that any conclusion the reader comes to is an interpretation. In this way, the repeated address of the second person in Rhys might relate to the use of first person plural pronouns in Beckett. Beckett's utilization of these pronouns parodies their use in academic discourse by revealing their emptiness. Rhys's use of the second person singular has a similar effect. The object of Sasha's "you" changes nearly every time she makes an address, pointing to a multiplicity

of receivers. Simpson's parenthetical "ideally" reads as an offhanded afterthought, but the multiple "you"s in *Good Morning, Midnight* stress the subjectivity of analysis. Freud certainly does not display this open willingness in "Femininity." In other words, the novel invokes psychoanalysis but does so to highlight the idea that any interpretation is an imposition of meaning, the reality of which may be inaccessible. In this case, as in many others, the imposed meaning works to maintain existing power structures.

One way Rhys's protagonist narrator works, then, is to parody Freud. The reader's work of interpretation in *Good Morning, Midnight* challenges the work done by the analyst. In order to unite the narrative of the analysand, the analyst locates an origin for the analysand's behavior. This origin serves as an explanation, a neatly tied up narrative package. In psychoanalysis, interpretation is resolution. Rhys subverts this, refusing narrative resolution because there is no resolution for her characters. Locating an origin, giving a diagnosis, will not change things in the novel. The diagnosis is apparent and external: economic, social, and national demands.

V. Rewriting Modernist Depictions of Women

Rhys parodies the dominant narrative traditions of the early twentieth century in her interwar work. *Good Morning, Midnight* speaks back to representations of women in psychoanalysis and modernism. Reading the novel with an eye toward its naturalist—not modernist—characteristics reveals that it does more to challenge the modernist tradition than replicate it. This explains why Rhys is often positioned on the outskirts of modernism, with labels like late modernist and, for her most famous novel, postmodernist. It is true, as Elaine Savory remarks in her *Cambridge Introduction to Jean Rhys* (2009), that "Rhys is now canonical" (114)—but it remains unclear which canon.

Despite her rising popularity her work evades critical categorization, as Mary Wilson and Kerry L. Johnson note in the introduction to *Rhys Matters* (2013). "Somehow Rhys seems still on the outskirts of the many scholarly areas her work engages, to be in an unplaceable position: both canonical and marginal" (1). Thinking about *Good Morning, Midnight* as a response to and not just a participation in the modernist tradition can thus help us better categorize her work.

There are some critics who are uncomfortable with Rhys's work being framed as a late repetition of high modernism. Judith Kegan Gardiner's early and tellingly titled "*Good Morning, Midnight*; Good Night, Modernism" (1983) finds in Rhys's work not an extension of modernist themes but rather a criticism of "modernist pretensions" (233), and suggests that in the late interwar period, Rhys took issue with modernism's political disinterest. Andrea Zemgulys, too, has suggested that Rhys responds to what has been written before her. Zemgulys takes as her point of departure a review of *Good Morning, Midnight* in the *Times Literary Supplement* in April 1939. "Its subjective manner, a variant of the stream of consciousness, is anything but fresh nowadays and is more than commonly monotonous where the subject is forever stretched on a bed of live coals" (Wilson and Johnson 21). Zemgulys's project of exegesis, as she calls it, sets out to discredit this claim. Wilson and Johnson sum it up well in their introduction: reading Rhys's cannon through *Good Morning, Midnight* "demonstrates how the stylistic experimentations of the earlier novels allow not for Rhys to be read into modernism, but for modernism to be reexamined through the voices and perspectives of Rhys's characters" (8).

The most obvious example of modernism reexamined through Sasha's perspective is the end of the novel. Just as *Wide Sargasso Sea* rewrites Bertha's story in *Jane Eyre*, so does *Good Morning, Midnight* rewrite Joyce's Molly soliloquy. Rhys's concluding line—"[t]hen I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying: 'Yes – yes – yes …'" (Rhys *GMM* 190)—directly mimics Joyce. *Ulysses* ends "I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes" (644). Though similar in content, however, the lines differ significantly in form. Rhys manipulates Joyce's narrative to challenge assumptions she sees as present in male modernist depictions of women.

The narrative differences between *Ulysses* and *Good Morning, Midnight* are significant. Molly's narrative is a stream of consciousness unmarked by punctuation while Sasha's yeses, appearing as direct discourse, are divided from the rest of the sentence and each other. To borrow from musical language, Molly's "yes I said yes I will Yes" reads as a crescendo, up until the final capitalized yes, while Sasha's segregated yeses are staccato and sharp. Molly's line signals connection; Sasha's the opposite.

This narrative change signals a thematic difference between Molly and Sasha, too. Molly contains opposing characteristics but these aspects of her personality are united by her connection to the natural world. Her fickleness is explained by her connection to the tides and the seasons. Sasha is no less split than Molly, but nothing emerges to unite her halves. She is split by society, but nature does not reconcile her divided selves because it is not nature, but society, that has done this to her. Rhys references Molly's narrative in

Sasha's in order to reveal that this projected communion of woman with nature is unnatural. Gardiner takes up this subject:

> Sasha is not at one with nature. She is not an archetype. She speaks in the schizophrenic two voices into which society splits her: the active voice of desire and the passive voice of her social role. The internalized reflexive voice of society within her punishes her with cynical self-hatred but it also prevents her from believing herself separate from and superior to society. (248-9)

Where Joyce's novel resolves the internal contradictions in Molly by attributing them to nature, Rhys asserts that man, not nature, is responsible for Sasha's state.

Rhys parodies Joyce and in doing so not only points a finger at societal conceptions of the feminine but also and more specifically at representations of these conceptions in modernist literature.[42] I would not go as far as to say that Rhys was anti-Joyce or saw his work as being without merit, but it was no doubt frustrating to exist as a woman in the primarily male modernist moment. As Simpson notes, it "was Joyce, not Rhys, whose work was championed in the predominantly masculine intellectual circles of the day; he could imagine an unconflicted, satiated feminine experience, whereas she could not" (108). Joyce's women were praised while Rhys's were dismissed as being too sad. As Gardiner puts it:

> When a writer like Joyce or Eliot writes about an alienated man estranged from himself, he is read as a portrait of the diminished possibilities of human existence in modern society. When Rhys writes about an alienated woman estranged from herself, critics applaud her perceptive but narrow depiction of female experience and tend to narrow her vision even further by labeling it both pathological and autobiographical. (247)

[42] To put it another way, as Simpson dies, what Rhys addresses in these final pages is not Molly as archetypal earthy woman but rather that woman "as imagined by a male Modernist" (108).

Gardiner highlights the critical tendency to see the modernist male perspective as universal and the modernist female perspective as limited. *Good Morning, Midnight* takes it a step further. What the novel reveals is that modernist men are not considered better suited than their female counterparts to write of the universal experience but also better suited to write of the female experience. In addition to pointing out this hypocrisy, Rhys's novel suggests that all experience is pathological and autobiographical when you are not in power.

Rhys provides an alternate depiction of womanhood by complicating, rather than resolving Sasha's character. The end is a final act of rejecting interpretation and the origin story. In the final pages, Sasha wills René to return to her room. She imagines him turning around, heading back into her building, and climbing the stairs. When someone does come through her open door, however, it is the commis voyageur staying in the room next to hers. A significant portion of Sasha's narrative in the present has described her attempts to avoid the man, so her acceptance of him as the novel closes is unsettling. In a final act of narrative irresolution, the novel ends in ellipses.

Were René to enter the room, or were Sasha to pine for the commis voyageur throughout the novel, the ending would have a feeling of resolution. The narrative would be a closed circuit. The ending could also go the other way entirely if Sasha were to scorn the advances of the commis voyageur. Instead, the novel refuses any reductive reading. Though Sasha detests the commis voyageur, her submission to him at the end yields some small connection:

> He stands there, looking down at me. Not sure of himself, his mean eyes flickering.
> He doesn't say anything. Thank God, he doesn't say anything. I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for

> the last time. For the last time….
> Then I put my arms round him and pull him down on to the bed, saying:
> 'Yes – yes – yes….' (190)

From her description—"mean eyes flickering"—it does not seem that Sasha has softened to the man. Nevertheless, as she makes eye contact she seems to soften to human beings in general. Despite this small but potentially significant change, the novel refuses narrative resolution because, though Sasha knows herself, the reader, ultimately, does not understand Sasha better at the novel's conclusion than at its beginning. Her actions have no origin and therefore no resolution.

Discussing the ending, Simpson stresses the novel's refusal of resolution, writing "Sasha as narrating voice provides her reader with the enticing frustration of an irresolvable 'resolution'—in effect no resolution at all" (99). Continuing, Simpson draws a connection between the novel's conclusion and the narrative tone that is present throughout the novel. "Sasha's final words punctuate the entire experience of reading the novel: it is enigmatic, it is multilayered, and the narrator will not assist in providing any clear and singular 'meaning'" (99). Or, perhaps the narrator is unable to provide a clear and singular meaning because there is no meaning to be had. The novel's lack of resolution is particularly apparent here because the narrator, one with the protagonist, is unable to step outside of Sasha's perspective and impose a framework. Sasha lacks control of her life and the potential for a contented resolution, but she retains the ability to resist meaning entirely. Refusing a future in which she has no future, Sasha turns back, time and again, to repeat the past.

VI. Conclusion: Narrative Irresolution

Instead of a pattern of progress, the narrative pattern of the novel, like the others of my study, is repetition. The exhibitions that bookend *Good Morning, Midnight* are an example of this rejection of progress. Near the beginning of the novel, Sasha dreams that she is fighting through a crowd in a London tube station. "Everywhere there are placards printed in red letters: This Way to the Exhibition, This Way to the Exhibition. But I don't want the way to the exhibition—I want the way out" (Rhys 13). The exhibition returns near the end of the novel, when Sasha and René visit the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques Appliqués à la Vie Moderne*. As evidenced by the name of this exhibition, World's Fairs attracted visitors by promising displays of the newest and most modern things—newer and more modern than the displays at the previous exhibition. In sum, their presence is a claim to progress.

The repetition of exhibitions inside a narrative marked by stasis serves to empty the events of significance and challenge their claims to progress. Instead of pointing the way forward, like the fingered signs in Sasha's dream, the 1937 exposition works in the novel to gesture back toward the beginning. Camarasana makes note of this repetition in the novel. "The novel's conclusion refers back to the beginning, and structurally the plot doesn't just move Sasha forward in time as she has her various encounters, but leads her, and the novel's readers, to confront her past" (66). Time passes over the course of the novel, but because the narrative turns so often to the past, the passing of time signals only progression and not progress.

Importantly, it is unclear if Sasha is imagining the Great Exhibition of 1851, recalling one of the other London exhibitions she may have experienced, or mixing

memories of her past life with anticipation of the 1937 Exhibition. This ambiguity deepens the thread of the repetition, and also points to a real life repetition in the form of the many exhibitions of the 19th and 20th centuries. The novel seems to ask whether technological advancements matter if things have not progressed for Sasha and others who attend the events. In contrast to the dream exhibition, as Christina Britzolakis notes in "'This Way to the Exhibition': Genealogies of Urban Spectacle in Jean Rhys's Interwar Fiction" (2007), the Paris exhibition dates the novel in a way unusual to Rhys (464). As I argue earlier, the actions in unnaturalist novels (unlike those of their naturalist counterparts) are dated because the novels highlight the historical, not timeless nature of cultural ideals.

Issues of nationality are brought to a head at World's Fairs, a connection Britzolakis and Camarasana both address. These issues had special importance to the characters of *Good Morning, Midnight* not only because of their own unclear nationalities and but also because of their time period. As tensions grew in Europe in the 1930s and another war seemed possible, nationalism divided the population. Camarasana includes a quote by Paul Greenhalgh to illustrate such divisions within the Paris exhibition, and it is worth repeating it here.

> Even though the organizers attempted to imbue the site with an optimistic modernism, the Exposition was saturated with an abrasive nationalism which served only to confirm the irreconcilability of major European states. It was the cultural equivalent of the military engagement shortly to follow. (Greenhalgh 130)

If the European states are irreconcilable, Sasha and her companions will always be outsiders. A Camarasana notes, the ideology of nationalism is a "progress narrative that proceeds by exclusion" (62). *Good Morning, Midnight* sacrifices narrative progress

because its characters are excluded by the progress narratives of the day. The narrative, for individuals who do not fit neatly into a nationalistic frame, is stasis.

CHAPTER 5

GEORGE ORWELL'S DEMOTIC NATURALISM

I. Introduction: The Naturalist Thread

To consult a list of books by George Orwell[43] is to be confronted with an odd assemblage of genres. In the 1930s alone, Orwell's published books include a memoir and travelogue in 1933, three novels between '34 and '36, a part sociological investigation and part essay in '37, a personal account of the Spanish Civil war in '38, and another novel in '39. His novels and essays of the 1940s are easier to categorize in broad terms, but share with his other texts a tendency to contain internal variances in genre. More than one critic identifies a genre clash in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; Carl Freedman's influential "Antinomies of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" (1984), for instance, describes the novel as a combination of "two antithetical genres" (606). The veracity of Orwell's descriptions in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) have been questioned and, as alluded to above, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) is literally divided into two parts, with two different aims.

Orwell's genre weaving in the 1930s demonstrates his desire for an alternative to the dominant literary trends of his day. This chapter explores one of these generic threads—naturalism—in his work of the decade. Orwell's early 1930s fiction contains naturalist characteristics such as the hop-picking scenes in *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), and Orwell himself acknowledges the naturalist influence in his work in his

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[43] I use Orwell's chosen name throughout, rather than his given one, as my argument does not depend on a distinction between Orwell the writer and Orwell the person.

essays and letters. This chapter takes *Coming Up for Air* as its main subject, arguing that it is the most successful example of Orwell's attempts to merge modernism and naturalism. Where Woolf, Beckett, and Rhys draw from and complicate naturalism's interest in popular science, Orwell takes up the naturalist interest in Karl Marx and class relations. The novel seeks to expose the anachronistic English class system and the language that keeps it in place.

Orwell experiments with combining naturalism and modernism in his earlier 1930s novels, but they are among his least successful works because he borrows too heavily from the elevated language and style of naturalism and high modernism.[44] In *Coming Up for Air*, however, he combines naturalist tendency to elucidate the social and political conditions that influence individual behavior with the modernist project of experimenting with new ways of depicting individual consciousness. Unlike the naturalists, who write of the lower classes from a middle-class background, Orwell picks a subject with which he can identify; unlike the modernists, who write for the intellectually elite, he aims for the masses. In doing so, he follows the naturalist tendency. Joe Cleary writes in *Outrageous Fortune* that a significant difference between modernists and naturalists is that "the naturalists, unlike the modernists, tried to maintain the connection between 'serious literature' and 'mass entertainment' so as to reach a mass public" (117). Unnaturalism follows naturalism in its attempt to create a novel that is literary but maintains a broad appeal.

Drawing from naturalism allows Orwell to reveal what he sees as the political limitations of the modernist genre. Even though the modernists produced political work,

[44] Orwell and critics alike considered *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* to be his least successful books (for an example, see Fowler 2).

Orwell took issue with their methods. In Orwell's view, as stated in "Inside the Whale" (1940), modernists either distracted from the current political reality or did not fully understand it. Additionally, modernist literature did not attract the ordinary man like protagonist George Bowling. Bowling is quick to assure the reader that he is not a highbrow (*Coming Up for Air* 124, 127), not interested in modernism's intellectual elitism. The validity of Orwell's claims is ultimately inconsequential to my argument in this chapter, which relies on his views on modernism only insofar as they led him to draw from alternative literary histories.[45]

It is easy to see what naturalism offers Orwell in his quest to give—rather than deflect from—an accurate presentation of the human experience. Adapting the naturalist focus on the sensory allows him to give his reader a feeling of the immediate experience instead of an intellectual account of it. Orwell praises Émile Zola's ability to balance purpose with the immediate, sensory experience in a 1936 review of *The Calf of Paper* by Scholem Asch and *Midnight* by John Green.[46] In Zola, Orwell sees value in the scenes themselves that transcends—or, at the very least, is not eclipsed by—their symbolic value. Zola invests significance in the details of the present experience and, in doing so, provides Orwell with a model that avoids what he sees as the pitfalls of the modernist moment.

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[45] The same can be said for Orwell's views on politics and class divisions. My argument does not require Orwell to be right, but instead to be writing. In other words, this chapter works to establish a link between Orwell's beliefs on a topic—however inconsistent—and the way he addresses those beliefs in his fiction. My next and concluding chapter, however, does interrogate some of Orwell's claims.

[46] "The scenes of violence Zola describes in *Germinal* and *La Débâcle* are supposed to symbolize capitalist corruption, but they are also scenes. At his best, Zola is not synthetic. He works under a sense of compulsion, and not like an amateur cook following the instructions on a packet of Crestona cake-flour" (*CEJL* I 247).

However, as expressed in "Why I Write" (1947), Orwell comes to oppose some aspects of naturalism as his career develops. He writes in the essay that his early novels like *Burmese Days* (1934) are "naturalistic" (*CEJL* I 3), but it is clear from his description that he is not opposed to all naturalist tendencies but instead to a particular type of narrative style within naturalism. Orwell describes naturalism as "novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake of their sound" (*CEJL* I 3). What he objects to—and what Beckett parodies in *Murphy*—is a certain affected strain within naturalism, a narrative that distracts from the subject it seeks to describe.

This affectation is not a necessary characteristic of the naturalist genre, but instead often appears in naturalism as a result of the gap between the literary subject matter and the lived experience of the author. Literary naturalism features the lower classes, but was not written by them. Even when naturalists did on-site research, they generally remained at a distance from their subject matter in both economic reality and narrative tone. Orwell—who argues that this distance and affected strain limits much of modernist literature, as well—attempts to close this gap in narrative style in *Coming Up for Air*. The distinction between subject matter and style was on Orwell's mind in the months before he wrote the novel. In a letter to Jack Common, written in April 1938, Orwell references a discrepancy between content and form. "The stuff in *Seven Shifts*[47] is written from a prole point of view, but of course as literature it's bourgeois literature" (*CEJL* I 314). Orwell tries to avoid this breach in *Coming Up for Air* by focusing on the immediate, sensory experience and employing conversational, colloquial speech. He uses

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[47] *Seven Shifts* is a collection of essays edited by Common.

the word "demotic" when describing this colloquial speech in his essays and other writing. The resulting work is a new type of novel that caters to a wide audience in both content and form.

A broad audience is of importance to Orwell because, for him, art is political. He describes politics as the impetus for his art in "Why I Write":

> What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art.' I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience. (*CEJL* I 6)

Orwell makes clear that politics come first, but that aesthetics are an integral part of the equation. Still, critical attention to his fiction usually focuses on its political, not aesthetic, nature. In the words of Alex Woloch, "Orwell's writing—famously attentive to the politics of language—has not been fully engaged *in* its writerliness" (*Or Orwell* xix). This chapter considers the way both work together. Orwell grounds his language and subject matter in an attempt to give his political beliefs a broad audience, and naturalism gives him a model for making the polemical literary. His unnaturalism might also be called demotic naturalism.

Between his books, essays, letters, and journals, Orwell has left quite an archive. This chapter makes use of this archive, relying on Orwell's own language to assemble an image of his historical moment and literary scene. Just as the immediate, individual perspective is the most honest and relatable for Orwell, so is this same perspective the best for understanding how he positioned himself and his work in relation to modernism.

The critical, theoretical, and historical context I have established in my introduction and the preceding chapters is still in place, but in this chapter I read Orwell on his own terms.

This chapter reads Orwell's fiction chronologically. First, I explore the naturalist thread in Orwell's early work, arguing that he experiments with combining genres throughout his career, but that the genres in his work do not meld in a productive way until *Coming Up for Air*. Next, I establish that *Coming Up for Air* is Orwell's response to modernism by comparing his characterizations of Porteous and the Left Book Club meeting with his description of the modernists in "Inside the Whale." The next two sections explore the way unconscious social control works to shape England's class system and, then, how language works as a vehicle for social control. Near the end of the chapter, I make use of Fredric Jameson's distinction in *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) between the narrative impulse and the language of affect to suggest that naturalism offers Orwell a literary alternative to narrative. The excess of food imagery in *Coming Up for Air* compares to Zola's invocation of the sensory. Both work to stop time in their novel worlds and challenge the purpose-driven narratives that dominate their literary moment.

Finally, my conclusion takes up "Inside the Whale" and considers how it provides context for both Orwell's 1930s fiction and our understanding of how ideology is created and replicated. This unconscious replication of ideology is a significant preoccupation of the unnaturalist novel, as we saw in the previous chapter. *Good Morning, Midnight* depicts the effects of ideology on one individual character; *Coming Up for Air* and "Inside the Whale" add to this depiction by exploring the root of prejudice. Following the appearance of the whale in Orwell's work helps to make concrete some of the ideas about social behavior that are gestured toward in the unnaturalist novel.

II. Orwell's Interwar Development

Orwell himself acknowledges the influence of naturalism on his career, not only talking about his early fiction in "Why I Write," but also about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in a letter to F.J. Warburg. In the letter, dated May 31, 1947, Orwell describes his upcoming novel as "a novel about the future… in a sense a fantasy, but in the form of a naturalistic novel" (*CEJL* IV 329-30). Orwell's experiments with the threads of naturalism, then, carry him from his first novel to his last.

Rather than adopting the genre entirely, Orwell's tendency is to feature a combination of genres. In the 1940s, as Freedman writes, Orwell combines naturalism and programmatic satire[48] "in something like equal proportions" (606) to create *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Freedman's description of how this combination works is helpful in explaining how Orwell approaches naturalism throughout his fiction:

> It is not, of course, a matter of simple combination, of an oil-and-water mixture. It is the dialectic of genre that determines the book's overall quality. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* partakes of both the empiricist solidity of *A Clergyman's Daughter* and the total coherence and significance of *Animal Farm* by a constant and, as it were, illicit traffic between naturalism and satire. (606)

Nineteen Eighty-Four's success (and, according to Freedman, "there can be no question as to the 'success' of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" [603]) is in its ability not to alternate between genres but instead to use them to influence each other and produce something new. The same is true for *Coming Up for Air*, only in this novel Orwell adapts naturalism to respond to and warp modernism.

[48] Importantly, Freedman makes clear that only programmatic satire, not all satire, is oppositional to naturalism. For Freedman, Orwell's breed of naturalism is "inherently satirical" (605).

The later novels stand in contrast to Orwell's three early novels, which do not achieve this synthesis. Because the genres in these novels repel each other (like oil and water), it is easy to trace Orwell's early handling of naturalism and pinpoint a change in *Coming Up for Air*. For Freedman, Orwell's early work is characterized by "common sense naturalism" (605). He cites the detailed hop-picking scenes and the description of Mrs. Creevy in *A Clergyman's Daughter* and even suggests that naturalist description characterizes Orwell's nonfiction.[49]

Though Orwell only names *Burmese Days* when he discusses his nearly naturalist leanings in "Why I Write," critics acknowledge the naturalist influence on his other early novels as well as his 1930s nonfiction. Freedman, for example, discusses naturalism in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. Fowler's book devotes sections to naturalism in *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *Homage to Catalonia*. Critics, however, also acknowledge that these same works reference modernism. The connection between *Burmese Days* and *A Passage to India* is so well-established that John Rodden includes the fact that Orwell's novel "is in some respects modeled after" (33) Forster's in *The Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell*. Christopher Gillie writes that Orwell's novel contains "parallels with and parodies of Forster's characters, and the structure of the story is also analogous" (133). His other early 1930s novels mimic Joyce in both form and subject matter. Fowler writes that *A Clergyman's Daughter* draws from Joyce and naturalism alike and notes that Joyce also influenced *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) (2-3). Clearly, Orwell's

[49] For Freedman, Orwell's description of the "middle-class socialist" in *The Road to Wigan Pier* is a literary caricature "spontaneously produced by naturalism" similar to those that appear in his early novels (606).

1930s fiction works to combine both genres. However, until *Coming Up for Air*, the genres are combined ineffectively.

The most overt combination of naturalism and modernism in the early novels appears in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. The novel adopts, at varying times, modernism and naturalism. The hop-picking scene could come directly out of a naturalist novel, but the Trafalgar Square section mimics the "Circe" section of *Ulysses*. In each scene, Orwell invokes the subject matter and style of his chosen genre. The hop-picking scene, in other words, is naturalist in not only its subject matter but also its detailed style; the Trafalgar Square section, likewise, gestures toward Joyce not only because it appears in dramatic form but also because it describes a hallucination.

The Trafalgar Square section sticks out like a sore thumb, never integrated into the rest of the novel. The two genres are not reconciled. They do not play back in forth in any meaningful way. As Freedman argues, "the plot falls apart into a series of episodes… The book provides sharp particulars of a society but, itself fragmented, cannot evoke its society as a whole" (605). Expressing the same idea, Fowler writes that modernist and naturalist characteristics exist in the novel as "diverse undigested ingredients" (2). *A Clergyman's Daughter* is one of Orwell's least successful novels, then, not only because he maintains the language and style of naturalism and high modernism, but also because he refuses to let the genres influence each other. The novel does not reconcile the ideological contradictions of society—as Freedman argues *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does and I argue *Coming Up for Air* does—because it does not reconcile its generic contradictions.

Orwell's habit of combining naturalism with other genres spans his career, just as the thematic preoccupations of *Coming Up for Air* do. *A Clergyman's Daughter*, for instance, gestures towards some of the ideological questions of his unnaturalist fiction in its conclusion:

> What she would have said was that though her faith had left her, she had not changed, could not change, did not want to change, the spiritual background of her mind; that her cosmos, though now it seemed to her empty and meaningless, was still in a sense the Christian cosmos; that the Christian way of life was still the way that must come naturally to her. (108)

Dorothy's mind is shaped by the church and is unable to understand other worldviews or habits. Even after she 'loses' her faith, the Christian way of life continues to structure her worldview.

Orwell's next novel, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, comes closer to achieving the modernist naturalist synthesis he attempts. The novel draws from Joyce—Gordon Comstock's poem *London Pleasures* invites comparison with *Ulysses*—but presents the economic restraints on Comstock's life in great detail. In style, however, it is elevated and out of touch, a stark contrast to the demotic *Coming Up for Air.* The modernist and naturalist styles are present in the novel but fail to play off of each other to create something new. Still, we can see in the novel clues to one of the central ideas of *Coming Up for Air*, discussed here in section IV, that there is a cultural class system that is not always directly related to the economic class system.

No doubt remembering his childhood, Orwell writes in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* that "the greatest cruelty one can inflict on a child is to send it to school among children richer than itself. A child conscious of poverty will suffer snobbish agonies such as a grown-up person can scarcely even imagine" (41). What Orwell describes here is an

individual—in this case, Comstock—who has been split between classes as a result of education. Education has given him access to cultural knowledge that has elevated his social, but not his economic status. He no longer fits neatly in either class.

Or, as Orwell puts it in his next book, in "lower-upper-middle class" families like his "there is far more consciousness of poverty than in any working-class family above the level of the dole… Practically the whole family income goes in keeping up appearances" (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 156). As I discuss below, a country wherein it is more important to look and act as if you have money than to actually have it is one in which anachronistic cultural norms dictate the behavior of individuals. As a result of this, Orwell sees the lower-upper-middle class as "done for" (154):

> To belong to this class when you were at the £400 a year level was a queer business, for it meant that your gentility was almost purely theoretical. You lived, so to speak, at two levels simultaneously. Theoretically you knew all about servants and how to tip them, although in practice you had one, at most, two resident servants. Theoretically you knew how to wear your clothes and how to order a dinner, although in practice you could never afford to go to a decent tailor or a decent restaurant. Theoretically you knew how to shoot and ride, although in practice you had no horses to ride and not an inch of ground to shoot over. (155)

He describes families trying to live up to a standard that is no longer possible, going broke purely to keep up appearances, and points to a divide between this "theoretical" cultural knowledge and the reality of economic practice.

In the same passage, Orwell gestures toward the way class structures in England play out in the wider world. He suggests that the theoretical and economic divide in England's lower-upper-middle-class contributes to men's willingness to seek work in the colonies. Men served as soldiers and officials in "India ([and] more recently Kenya, Nigeria, etc.)" (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 155) because in those countries, "with cheap

horses, free shooting, and hordes of black servants, it was so easy to play at being a gentleman" (155-6). The attraction of the lifestyle is not merely economic, for as Orwell explains, the amount of money one makes as a soldier or official is not significant. However, the conditions of India provide a space where men can temporarily achieve an economic reality (i.e. make enough money) that allows them to utilize their cultural knowledge (e.g. riding, shooting). This example reveals a cultural, or political, factor that complicates purely economic understandings of empire.

Orwell's early 1930s work sets the scene for *Coming Up for Air*. This early work draws from both naturalism and modernism and introduces the thematic concerns of his unnaturalist novel. Appropriately, Fowler writes that it is *Coming Up for Air* "in which the Joyce influence [is] more successfully assimilated than it had been in *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*" (4). The reason for this is that in *Coming Up for Air* Orwell achieves a sense of fusion between his naturalist and modernist characteristics by deploying characteristics of these genres in service of his unnaturalist project. Just as the opposing genres of naturalism and programmatic satire combine in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (Freedman 606) to create something new, Orwell combines modernism and naturalism to create a new form that shows the limit of each approach on its own.

III. Coming Away from Modernism

It is not until *Coming Up for Air* that Orwell moves past his early experiments with naturalism and experimental modernism to achieve a politically charged style that challenges the exuberance and purpose of modernism by fusing the genres. Orwell's views on the modernists are most memorably expressed in "Inside the Whale," where he

distinguishes between the "pessimistic" Joyce-Eliot movement of the middle and late 1920s and the "political" Auden-Spender movement of the first half of the 1930s. There is not much direct mention of the modernists in *Coming Up for Air*—and how could there be? Bowling is, after all, a "typical Boots' Literary subscriber" (90) who does not "set up to be a highbrow" (124). However, Bowling's experiences visiting first the left Local Book Club meeting and then his friend Porteous work in the novel as early expressions of the ideas in "Inside the Whale."

The two visits are very different. As Bowling says, "if the local Left Book Club branch represents Progress, old Porteous stands for Culture" (161). When read together, however, these scenes depict what Orwell calls the younger and the older modernists. Porteous resembles the Auden-Spender group in biography and appearance. When he answers the door, he has his finger in a book, a pipe between his teeth, and a Harris Tweed jacket on his tall, thin figure. "You can't look at him without seeing the way he's lived written all over him," Bowling relates. "Public School, Oxford, and then back to his old school as a master. Whole life lived in an atmosphere of Latin, Greek and cricket" (162). The line is remarkably similar to Orwell's insistence in "Inside the Whale" that the majority of the Auden-Spender group "fit easily into the public-school—university—Bloomsbury pattern… several of the writers in this group have been not only boys but, subsequently, masters at public schools" (*CEJL* I 511). Porteous is a bachelor who lives alone and hires others to keep his house. He is isolated from other people and the physical realities of life.

In this isolated form, Porteous is unaffected by the political realities of life. When Bowling asks him what he thinks of Hitler, he replies "Hitler? This German person? My

dear fellow! I *don't* think of him" (165). Hitler and Stalin are inconsequential to him because for people of his type and background, no matter what the political reality

> things will always go on exactly as he's known them. For ever and ever, cultivated Oxford blokes will stroll up and down studies full of books, quoting Latin tags and smoking good tobacco out of jars with coats of arms on them. (167)

Bowling makes it clear that to live in this type of isolation is to hold a privileged position. Where Porteous differs from the Auden-Spender group is that he seems to accept and enjoy his isolation.

In terms of his interests, then, Porteous more closely resembles members of the Joyce-Eliot group. Just as these writers direct attention away from the present moment, Porteous steers Bowling's conversation away from Hitler and Fascism. "It's always that way with old Porteous," Bowling says. "Whatever you start off with it always comes back to statues and poetry and Greeks and Romans. If you mention the *Queen Mary* he'd start telling you about Phoenician triremes" (163-4). Porteous shares with the older modernists—perhaps as a result of his age—the tendency to deflect and view history as a circle. For Bowling, and all younger generations, the past is inaccessible.

It is at the Left Book Club meeting that Bowling's experience parallels Orwell's reading of the younger modernists in "Inside the Whale." After the meeting, a "good-looking schoolboy, with blue eyes and tow-colored hair" (160) tries to engage Bowling in a conversation about fascism. When he asks Bowling if the situation in Germany makes his blood boil, Bowling remembers the same phrase being thrown around in WWI. "I went off the boil in 1916," Bowling tells him. "And so'll you when you know what a trench smells like" (159). Continuing, Bowling says that in 1914 everyone thought the war was going to be "glorious business" but it was "just a bloody mess" (160). Because

Bowling has real life experience, the scene suggests, the words mean more to him than they could to the young boy.

The scene highlights a divide between rhetoric and real life and, in this, is reminiscent of Orwell's objections to Auden in "Inside the Whale." Bowling could never speak of "necessary murder," a phrase of Auden's with which Orwell takes issue. The phrase, Orwell writes in "Inside the Whale," "could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a *word*… only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled" (*CEJL* I 516). According to Orwell, Auden and his cohort are only able to have their wide, purpose-driven political views because, like Porteous, they live lives suspended from physical and political realities.

Echoing Woolf in "The Leaning Tower," Orwell paints a picture of the writer as one detached from his historical moment. The writers of the twenties, though coming from diverse economic and social backgrounds, brush off the economic and social realities of the day (in Orwell's view) by directing their readers' eyes "to Rome, to Byzantium, the Montparnasse, to Mexico, to the Etruscans, to the subconscious, to the solar plexus—to everywhere except the places where the things are actually happening" (*CEJL* I 508). The writers of the thirties address the current political situation but, having never experienced war conditions, are "gloriously incapable of understanding what it all meant" (*CEJL* I 517). Furthermore, Orwell sees that there is a chance future war could happen without significantly altering the existence of these writers. The political writers of the first half of the 1930s, in other words, are afforded the strength of their political views by the fact that their economic status provides a comfortable cushion between them and harsh political realities.

Orwell takes issue with the work of Auden and Spender not because it is political, but because of the way it is political, and positions Bowling and *Coming Up for Air* against this detachment from reality. *Coming Up for Air* addresses the climate of the 1930s head on and takes a narrow point of view. Rather than being in tension with the broad audience to which Orwell attempts to write, Bowling's limited view connects him to a network of other individuals. He directly discusses the war, fascism, and the changing times, and he does so from his individual perspective. He speaks of "life in this particular age and this particular country" (*Coming Up for Air* 82) and, for both Bowling and Orwell, everything in the 1930s is political.[50]

Coming Up for Air focuses on the limited, individual experience. This is a significant way that Orwell's politics in the novel differ from Auden's. The novel features the daily experience of the average Englishman.[51] It is small in scope: Bowling can only speak of his singular experience, not the broad experience that a detached voice or omniscient narrator can provide. Yet it is precisely this limited perspective that Orwell believes is the best way to create lasting literature that caters to a broad audience. For a book to have staying power, Orwell writes, it must not try to capture the entire truth of war but rather the "truth about the individual reaction" (*CEJL* I 523). Orwell is speaking of literature written about World War I when he mentions this in "Inside the Whale," but the idea can be applied easily to *Coming Up for Air*. For Orwell, it is only through the individual reaction that the world is accessed.

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[50] In "Politics and the English Language" (1946), he writes "[i]n our age there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics.' All issues are political issues" (*CEJL* IV 137).

[51] In a letter to John Sceats, Orwell describes Bowling as "a typical middle-aged bloke" (*CEJL* I 358).

Part of this individual experience is, as Orwell puts it in “Inside the Whale,” “a willingness to mention the inane squalid facts of everyday life” (*CEJL* I 498). Orwell praises this ability in Henry Miller and James Joyce, but faults Joyce for telescoping in and out in *Ulysses*. Miller, remaining fixated on the ordinary, is a better example for Orwell. Putting it simply, Orwell states that Joyce

> is exploring different states of consciousness, dream, reverie (the ‘bronze-by-gold’ chapter), drunkenness, etc., and dovetailing them all into a huge complex pattern, almost like a Victorian ‘plot.’ Miller is simply a hardboiled person talking about life, an ordinary American businessman with intellectual courage and a gift for words. (*CEJL* I 498)

Miller’s straightforward style is more effective, in other words, because it does not distract from the most basic realities of life.

With *Coming Up for Air*, then, Orwell rejects the dominant trends of modernism and works to create a novel that addresses, rather than deflects from, its historical moment. He does this not by broadening his scope, as one might expect, but by narrowing it. In his view, the way to reach the widest audience is to focus on the basic, shared experiences of the human condition. This is not to say that the subject matter is timeless. *Coming Up for Air* is linked closely to its historical moment. The novel depicts a world that has been permanently altered by one world war and is anticipating a second. As the next section outlines, one of the things World War I did was to illuminate a shift in England’s class system.

IV. Class and Ideology

England’s class system is at the center of *Coming Up for Air*. In this section, I explore the importance of class in Orwell’s work and argue that his unnaturalist novel is a response to the increasingly complicated class distinctions during the interwar period.

What Orwell highlights is not just a changing class system, but also one in which cultural or social capital can operate independently from economic capital. The work explores class as a performative act. For Orwell, these cultural distinctions are more relevant for understanding interwar England than economic ones.

Orwell alludes to a divide between cultural and economic capital when he discusses Miller's novel in "Inside the Whale" and class distinctions in "The English People" (published 1947, written 1944). In "The English People," he argues that the unique problem with English class distinctions is not that they are "unjust" ("for, after all, wealth and poverty exist side by side in almost all countries") but instead that the divisions are "anachronistic. They do not exactly correspond to economic distinctions, and what is essentially an industrial and capitalist country is haunted by the ghost of a caste system" (*CEJL* III 18). Even words like "proletarian" and "bourgeois" refer in England, Orwell writes, to social rather than economic status.[52]

The English language lacks its own words for proletarian and bourgeois because its class system is not divided along these lines. Or, at least, this is part of Orwell's argument in "The English People." "It is significant that in this country, unlike most others, the Marxist version of Socialism has found its warmest adherents in the middle class," he writes. "Its methods, if not its theories, obviously conflict with what is called 'bourgeois morality' (i.e. common decency), and in moral matters it is the proletarians who are bourgeois" (*CEJL* III 8). England's class system does not resemble the class

[52] Part of this is a language issue. Because words like proletarian and bourgeois are borrowed from another language, they are divorced from their original meaning. As a result, Orwell notes, the word bourgeois is only used by the bourgeoisie and the word proletarian, if used at all, is taken to be synonymous with poor (*CEJL* III 16).

system in other European countries, in part because its own social and economic class systems do not correspond.

Orwell references this disconnect explicitly in the essay, allowing that the category proletarian "is given a social rather than an economic slant" in England "and most people would tell you that a blacksmith or a cobbler is a proletarian and that a bank clerk is not" even though, in the case of England, both of these occupations are, economically speaking, middle class (*CEJL* III 16). Continuing, he writes:

> Within the middle class there is a sharp division, cultural and not financial, between those who aim at gentility and those who do not. According to the usual classification, everyone between the capitalist and the weekly wage-earner can be lumped together as 'petty bourgeoisie.' This means that the Harley Street physician, the army officer, the grocer, the farmer, the senior civil servant, the solicitor, the clergyman, the schoolmaster, the bank manager, the speculative builder, and the fisherman who owns his own boat, are all in the same class. But no one in England feels them to belong to the same class, and the distinction between them is not a distinction of income but of accent, manners and, to some extent, outlook. (19-20)

The passage is worth quoting at length because it shows that this social—or perceived—divide in England does more to influence the behavior of the middle class than their economic reality. The desire to appear upper class rules the actions of much of the country. Social class works, in this way, to shape behavior. Orwell reveals the process through which the class system is created and maintained.

Or, to be more correct, Orwell argues that the desire to appear aristocratic is what used to characterize English citizens. In the past, he says in "The English People," the middle class was divided into those who were gentlemen and those who were not. More recently, however, a new category began to emerge in the middle class. This "new kind of man" is "middle class in income and to some extent in habits, but not much interested in his own social status" (*CEJL* III 20). Bowling falls into this category, as is clear when

he speaks of the lower classes. He throws the word "prole" around often and uses it in reference to a way of life or attitude instead of an economic reality, but he does not act from a compulsion to avoid appearing lower class. Sometimes, he sees the position of the lower classes to be better than his own. "I'm not so sorry for the proles myself. Did you ever know a navvy who lay awake thinking about the sack? The prole suffers physically, but he's a free man when he isn't working" (*Coming Up for Air* 11). Other times, he identifies with them. "I've got more the prole's attitude toward money. Life's here to be lived, and if we're going to be in the soup next week—well, next week is a long way off" (*Coming Up for Air* 142). However conservative or misguided Bowling's views on the lower classes may be, they set him apart from previous generations and some members of his own.[53]

Coming Up for Air depicts an interwar England in which class hierarchies (or, at least, perceived class hierarchies) are changing and according to Bowling, the impetus for this was WWI. The war exposed its participants to the lifestyles of different classes, and Bowling was no exception. Though he had the money to open a small shop when the war ended, he says the idea never occurred to him because he'd "passed right out of the shop-keeping orbit. That was what the army did to you. It turned you into an imitation gentleman and gave you a fixed idea that there'd always be a bit of money coming from

[53] Hilda, for instance, lives in fear that the family is one move from the workhouse. Though she is from an upper middle class family, even she has lost her orientation toward gentility as she aged. If anything, Bowling writes, she censures his attempts to have and do nice things. "Hilda isn't in the least a snob. She's never looked down on me because I'm not a gentleman. On the contrary, from her point of view I'm much too lordly in my habits" (143). Continuing, Bowling says that "it's a curious thing that in the last few years she's become much more definitely lower-middle-class, in outlook, and even in appearance, than I am" (143). Hilda and George differ in that her obsession with class distinctions imprisons her and makes her miserable, while his accepting attitude toward them grants him freedom

somewhere" (*Coming Up for Air* 129). The war disrupted the individual's idea of class distinctions. Bowling makes it clear that he had it better than some members of the army, because "I didn't share the delusion, which was pretty common among ex-officers, that I could spend the rest of my life drinking pink gin. I knew I'd got to have a job" (*Coming Up for Air* 129). Still, being in the war closed, for Bowling, the door to life in Lower Binfield. It provided him with some economic capital but, more significantly, afforded him cultural capital. He gained a literary education and knowledge of upper class habits. Or, as Bowling put it, "I'd worn pips on my shoulders and my social standards had risen" (*Coming Up for Air* 129). His description signals a social, or cultural, change rather than an economic one.

The change enacted by the war is not limited to class, in Bowling's experience, but rather every aspect of English life. "A sort of wave of disbelief was moving across England" (*Coming Up for Air* 127), he says of the time near the war's end.

> It would be an exaggeration to say that the war turned people into highbrows, but it did turn them into nihilists for the time being. People who in a normal way would have gone through life with about as much tendency to think for themselves as a suet pudding were turned into Bolshies just by the war. What should I be now if it hadn't been for the war? I don't know, but something different from what I am. If the war didn't happen to kill you it was bound to start you thinking. After that unspeakable idiotic mess you couldn't go on regarding society as something eternal and unquestionable, like a pyramid. You knew it was just a balls-up. (127)

The war put into motion a movement to question the fabric of society. Bowling represents a generation for which the war provided a completely new worldview. Unable to maintain more traditional, determinist worldviews, survivors began to recognize the ideological forces at work in their lives and country.

Bowling describes war as the biggest social myth of them all, but his description speaks to how ideology functions more generally.

> It was like an enormous machine that had got hold of you. You'd no sense of acting of your own free will, and at the same time no notion of trying to resist. If people didn't have some such feeling as that, no war could last three months. (115)

Bowling has escaped the control of the machinery that makes war possible but now, unable to regard society as "something eternal and unquestionable," he sees similar machinery at work in the structure of his own society. This social awakening is accelerated by the fact that, as Orwell notes, an entire way of life—that of the upper-middle class—was dying out in the interwar period.

While Orwell's essays help express the wide social trends and beliefs of England in the interwar period, he is able to show a different reality in *Coming Up for Air* through Bowling's limited perspective. Bowling's visit to the Sixpenny Bazaar demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach. In the store, Bowling encounters a manager yelling at a shop girl. The girl is "all pink and wriggling" (14) as Bowling sees her "cursed like a skivvy" (15). Bowling uses language that would more appropriately describe an animal—or perhaps a prostitute—than a shop girl. When she sees the manager coming her way while interacting with Bowling, she flinches "like a dog that sees the whip" (15). What distinguishes her from an animal (or worse) is that she must act, for Bowling's sake, like the scene had not just happened. As Bowling comments on this—"the worst of it was that for my benefit she'd had to pretend that nothing had happened and put on the standoffish keep-your-distance attitude that a shopgirl's supposed to keep up with male customers" (15)—he reveals just how constructed the everyday experience can be.

Continuing, Bowling thinks of a man who often serves him at the grocery store near his house (a chain, of course). “A great hefty lump of twenty, with cheeks like roses and enormous fore-arms, ought to be working in a blacksmith shop” (*Coming Up for Air* 15). The general view in England might be that working in a grocery is preferable to working as a blacksmith, but Bowling’s suggestion is that the man is better suited for work as the latter. As a blacksmith, the man would use his body and work with his hands. Instead, the only thing he does with his hands is rub them together while he serves the customer. His personality is erased in favor of customer service. Bowling says that the only expression on the man’s face is “mortal dread that you might report him for impertinence and get him sacked” (15). Orwell’s description of the atmosphere in both shops reads more like it takes place in the mill or even the streets. Modern day shop work, the passage suggests, is little better than servitude.

Bowling even views the situation of the mean manager sympathetically. Just like everyone else in the store, he realizes, the manager acts out of fear of losing his job. Indeed, Bowling thinks, the manager is probably more scared for his job than the workers. “And perhaps, who knows, at home he’s meek and mild, grows cucumbers in the back garden, lets his wife sit on him and the kids pull his mustache” (16). He imagines that working in the grocery determines the mode of behavior of the employees and manager. Moreover, as Bowling makes clear, the scene he describes in the Sixpenny Bazaar is not limited to the shop. Every middle class English citizen is afraid of something. “Fear! We swim in it. It’s our element” (15).

One reason fear is so prevalent, according to Bowling, is the widespread unemployment. Orwell makes it clear in “Inside the Whale” that the problem of

unemployment is not just a matter of not having a job but of not having a fulfilling job (*CEJL* I 514). There is no security—financial or mental—in the historical moment Orwell describes. Bowling echoes this, describing a world in when men have been put into competition with each other and have become the commodity themselves:

> And what are the realities of modern life? Well, the chief one is an everlasting, frantic struggle to sell things. With most people it takes the form of selling themselves—that's to say, getting a job and keeping it. I suppose there hasn't been a single month since the war in any trade you care to name, in which there weren't more men than jobs. It's brought a peculiar, ghastly feeling into life. It's like on a sinking ship when there are nineteen survivors and fourteen lifebelts. But is there anything particularly modern in that, you say? Has it anything to do with the war? Well, it feels as if it had. (*Coming Up for Air* 132)

Another result of the war, then, is that men are forced by fear into selling themselves. In a world where everyone is selling something, insincerity reigns.

Coming Up for Air, then, depicts a world in which the boundary between middle class and lower class is tenuous at best. Bowling supports this reading when he discusses ordinary middle class chaps like himself. "We're all bought, and what's more we're bought with our own money," he says (13). The novel is an expression of Orwell's belief, as outlined in "The English People," that the middle class and working class are becoming more alike in the interwar period. "Whatever may be the ultimate fate of the very rich, the tendency of the working class and the middle class is eventually to merge" (*CEJL* III 23). Indeed, as Bowling sees it, the worst thing for the middle class is the belief that there is a distinction between the middle and working class. "Every one of those poor downtrodden bastards, sweating his guts out to pay twice the proper price for a brick dolls' house that's called Belle Vue because there's no view and the bell doesn't ring" (13). In many ways, *Coming Up for Air* paints the middle class to be the new lower class.

Orwell identifies a shift in English citizens' understandings of class and society, a shift that is, in large part, a result of World War I. This shift provides the impetus for the unnaturalist novel, which emerges onto this scene as the style for navigating new class distinctions. The regular, sensory man like Bowling saw the artificiality of life but, not being a highbrow, was not interested in or moved by highbrow literature. Orwell writes for this man, grounding political concerns in demotic language and immediate sensory experience.

Writers and protagonists of unnaturalist novels do not fit neatly into class categories and, as such, they are able to access a new language and literary tradition. This tradition appeals to a generation beginning to understand the forces at work within their class system and society. Modernism, too elitist and individual-oriented, fails to speak to this generation. Like naturalism, which focuses on biological or social patterns at the expense of either individual agency or perspective, modernism presents a limited view of social forces and emphasizes the individual human being. Orwell's unnaturalism moves between naturalism and modernism's opposing tendencies to project a more dynamic relationship between individuals and their social environment that allows for the influence of each of these forces. His work draws from the naturalist emphasis on the details of the immediate, present experience, but ultimately uses those details to subvert the idea of a natural order. One of the higher orders on which *Coming Up for Air* puts pressure is the class system. However, as I explore in the next section, Orwell sees England's class system as only one symptom of a larger issue with the English language.

V. Orwell's Language

In Orwell's view, England's class problem is tied up with a problem with the language. He sees language as the vehicle for social control. Language privileges the upper class and propagates upper class values, reinforces ideology and maintains the status quo, and distracts from political realities. In his essays, Orwell calls for a revision of the English language, and in *Coming Up for Air* he fixes the details of Bowling's biography to put him in a position to refresh language. Orwell writes in a letter to Jack Common that a proletarian literature could never come to exist because "all of us talk and write two different languages, and when a man from, say Scotland or even Yorkshire writes in Standard English he's writing something quite as different from his own tongue as Spanish is from Italian" (*CEJL* I 314). *Coming Up for Air* still is not exactly a proletarian novel, but Orwell's use of demotic language in it brings it closer to bridging the gap than the modernism that precedes it. Orwell attempts a novel form that can reach a broader audience.

In his essays and journals, Orwell links divisions within language to power and class. The most obvious of these divisions, perhaps, is that between the working class/lower middle class accent and that of the upper class. In his notebook, Orwell describes the latter, what he calls a "cultivated" accent, as "[a] sort of over-fedness, a fatuous self-confidence, a constant bah-bahing of laughter about nothing, above all a sort of heaviness & richness combined with a fundamental ill-will" (*CEJL* IV 578). People who speak this way seem to Orwell "the enemies of anything intelligent or sensitive or beautiful" (*CEJL* IV 578). He describes a way of speaking that is divorced from the

realities of life and that, what is worse, works to drown out the more grounded speech of the lower classes.

Only a fraction of English people spoke with upper class accents in Orwell's day but, because upper class accents were broadcast on the radio, the accent came to represent the entire country. In "The English People," Orwell notes "the accent referred to by Americans as 'the English accent' is not in fact common to more than a quarter of the population" (*CEJL* III 1). In the same essay, Orwell states that it is not just the upper class accent that characterizes England for outsiders, but all upper class ways of life. "Hostile or friendly, nearly all the generalizations that are made about England base themselves on the property-owning class and ignore the other forty-five million" (*CEJL* III 1). For Orwell, language contributes to this exclusion.

Another form of the English language that Orwell identifies as exclusionary is Standard English, appearing most commonly in political speech, propaganda and the writing of intellectuals. The defining characteristic of Standard English, Orwell writes, is "its reliance on ready-made phrases… which may once have been fresh and livid, but have now become mere thought-saving devices, having the same relation to living English as a crutch has to a leg" (*CEJL* III 27). In the description, Orwell gestures toward the way humans pick up language instinctively and how that can influence individual thought patterns and behavior.

In opposition to Standard English, in Orwell's mind, is demotic speech. Orwell believed that, in order to be effective and reach the most people, official documents like newspapers should be written in demotic speech. In his war-time diary he makes the observation that, though Standard English and the upper class accent might define

England for outsiders, it is ignored by real Englishmen. "Watching in public bars, I have noticed that working men only pay attention to the broadcasts when some bit of demotic speech creeps in" (*CEJL* III 357). Orwell sees how aristocratic speech, lacking the weight of reality, is dismissed. He turns toward simple language in order to reach a broader audience.

For Orwell, the problem with the English language—"educated" English, to be specific (*CEJL* III 27)—is that it has become stagnant because of the social division between the upper and lower classes. He writes in "The English People" that "[l]anguage ought to be the joint creation of poets and manual workers, and in modern England it is difficult for these two classes to meet" (*CEJL* III 29). Members of the working class, people "in contact with physical reality," hold the ability "to think of metaphors that really call up a visual image" (*CEJL* III 43) while members of the educated class lack this aptitude. Upper class metaphors, like the upper class accent, are heavy, rich, and out of touch, but Orwell writes, they are favored for the simple reason that the majority of Englishmen find upper class ways desirable and working class ways vulgar. Or, as Orwell puts it in the same essay, "[e]ven a person who claims to despise the bourgeoisie and all its ways will still take care that his children grow up pronouncing their aitches" (*CEJL* III 22).

Orwell claims that the stagnation and ossification of the English language has increased the divide between the word and its meaning. To him, the worst of modern writing "does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making

the results presentable by sheer humbug" (*CEJL* IV 134). He takes charge against "staleness of imagery" and "lack of precision," writing that this "mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose, and especially any kind of political writing" (*CEJL* IV 129).[54] As Fowler writes, many of Orwell's faults with the English language "boil down to the use of verbal materials lifted from other people's language, allowing the writer to avoid taking any real responsibility" (29-30). Orwell takes issue with the passive reproduction of meaning that occurs when language involuntarily travels from one arena to another. The English language, like England the country, is in a state of decay and the only way Orwell sees to repair the state is to attack the language.

Orwell's insistence here, then, is not a tirade against laziness or bad style. He sees a clear link between language and politics. For one, conceiving of language as borrowed ideas—rather than words—makes it easy to see how prejudices and assumptions, for instance those about gender and race, are replicated unknowingly. How humans, in other words, so easily take on the ideas of others. When one repeats clichés or uses borrowed language, one speaks from "a reduced state of consciousness" which is, to Orwell, "favorable to political conformity" (*CEJL* IV 136). This is a sort of social politics, a major concern of the unnaturalist novel.

In *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell works to counteract this passive reproduction of meaning and refresh English language and literature. The entire novel is a straightforward, demotic, one-sided conversation—not unlike a radio dialogue, which Orwell wrote in his letter to Common would be the form for the "first real prole novel"

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[54] For a full account of Orwell's diatribes against the English language, one can consult Fowler.

(*CEJL* I 314). This desire to simplify language might explain why Orwell once boasted that the novel contains no semi-colons. "Did you know by the way that this book hasn't got a semicolon in it? I had decided about that time that the semicolon is an unnecessary stop and that I would write my next book without one," he wrote to Roger Senhouse of Secker & Warburg (*CEJL* IV 382). Peter Davison writes in his note on the text that the surviving set of proofs contains three semi-colons (vi), but Orwell's intention to simplify his text and avoid unnecessary stops remains.

Bowling addresses the reader directly a number of times, asking him if he ever goes to public meetings (152) or if he knows the road he lives on (9) and telling him that they belong to the same world (31). Though Bowling relates the specific details of his own experience, the assumption is that, even if the reader has not had the same experience as Bowling, he has had one that compares. "Even if you don't" know Ellesmere Road, "you know fifty others exactly like it" (9). In this way, the novel links Bowling to a community of other individuals and, like other unnaturalist novels, uses modernism's individualist approach and naturalism's societal one to influence each other.

Bowling's first person narrative and conversational style reveals the assumptions and tendencies of the English language in the interwar period. At the same time, however, some of Bowling's language is more meaningful than the clichés of his age because of its simplicity. Bowling shares a name with Orwell but he certainly is not, as critics point out, a stand in for Orwell.[55] (For one, Bowling drops his aitches and speaks in a Cockney accent until he is sixteen.) Though many details from the novel are autobiographical—the day Bowling skips school to fish with his brother's band of boys is

[55] Fowler makes it clear that the persona of *Coming Up for Air* is not Orwell himself (35).

adapted from Orwell's own memories—there are significant differences between George the character and George the writer. The changes Orwell makes to Bowling's biography allow him to access language—and class—from a different perspective.

One significant difference is that Bowling was born a decade before Orwell. This change means that Bowling was old enough to serve in WWI, unlike Orwell and the writers of the 1930s that he discusses in "Inside the Whale," and see through the propaganda present at the Left Book Club meeting. Orwell makes clear in the essay that, though he did not serve in WWI, his experience in Burma and his service in the Spanish civil war meant that the harsh facts of war and life were no secret to him. Both Orwell and Bowling are in positions to see the real-life consequences of words.

Another difference between Bowling and Orwell, and one much more significant than the first, is that the financial situation of the Blairs more closely resembled Hilda's family than Bowling's. Speaking of Hilda's "decayed-middle class" family, Bowling says "[i]n families like that, which live on tiny pensions and annuities—that's to say on incomes which never get bigger and generally get smaller—there's more sense of poverty… than you'd find in any farmlabourer's family" (141). Richard Blair retired when Orwell was a child and the family survived on his pension. As Michael Shelden writes in his biography of Orwell, the £400 a year pension "was a sum which would seem increasingly inadequate as the years went by" (Shelden 24).

The decision to separate Bowling's biography from his own also allows Orwell to present two significantly different educational paths. On paper, Orwell's early education might look upper class. His father, of the officer class like Hilda's father, wanted to give him opportunities he could not really afford. Orwell attended boarding school and Eton.

He only diverged from this culturally aristocratic path when he graduated Eton. Lacking university tuition, he enlisted in the India Imperial Police Force. Even in boarding school and Eton, however, he saw a difference in how students from families with money and students from families without were treated. In a letter to Cyril Connolly he wrote that Connolly was "in every way much more of a success at school than I, and my own position was complicated and in fact dominated by the fact that I had much less money than most of the people about me" (*CEJL* I 362).[56] Orwell's education was funded by scholarships, and he describes this as the principal factor in defining his experience.

Bowling, in contrast, gained his social education not in the classroom, but in the trenches. It was in the war that he discovered literature and came to mix with other classes of people. However, Bowling does spend some time discussing his educational path. He experienced a childhood in which it was common to be pulled out of school in one's mid-teens as a way to help the family survive. "You went to the Grammar School and you stayed there till you were sixteen, just to show that you weren't a prole" (*Coming Up for Air* 68). The tendency even within Bowling's family was to demonstrate one's cultural capital despite one's economic status, but the economic reality of their life could not be ignored for long. Despite his father's early desires that he be educated at a university, Bowling is taken out of school just before his sixteenth birthday to work. Changing these details of Bowling's biography allows Orwell to present a view of public school that some might deny him on the basis of the strict facts of his education. Speaking of "chaps from the upper classes," he says "they never really get over that

[56] In truth, Connolly's family was not much better off than Orwell's, but the important thing in the passage is that Orwell draws a clear distinction between them on class lines.

frightful drilling they go through at public schools. Either it flattens them out into half-wits or they spend the rest of their lives kicking against it" (*Coming Up for Air* 68). Orwell provides Bowling with a biography that allows him to speak of class and the public school system as an outsider.

By changing Bowling's biographical details, Orwell is able to create the type of man he sees as able to refresh the language. Bowling is neither poet nor manual worker, but, between the literary education he gained at Three Mile Dump and his childhood of fishing and eating off the land, he is in a position in the novel to refresh the English language and make it more in touch with the physical realities of life. As there is nothing more 'in touch' than touch, it follows that Orwell's turn to the sensory in *Coming Up for Air*—discussed in the next section—is part of his attempt to refresh and ground the English language.

VI. The Sensory Turn

One way that Orwell seeks to combat the tendency of language to abstract and distort in *Coming Up for Air* is to turn toward sensory descriptions and metaphors. The senses are grounding and simple, and Orwell invokes them in an attempt to renew and refresh language. In the novel, Orwell organizes his language around the senses and uses images and descriptions that appeal to the senses of his reader. As we will see later in this section, Orwell's invocation of the sensory draws from the naturalist tradition.

One of the most prevalent examples of the novel's turn to the sensory is in its preoccupation with food and food language. Food makes up a large portion of Bowling's subject matter and vocabulary. He often speaks to the reader over a meal, or about the details of the marmalade his wife Hilda buys, or of his memories of eating off the land as

a young boy. His interest in fishing fits into this category, as well. And, even more than food, food *language* saturates Bowling's dialogue. One sample paragraph contains the words "cheese," "bread-and-buttery," "seed-pod," and "dairy-cow" (*Coming Up for Air* 8) to describe not a meal, but his relationship with his family. The paragraph also makes reference to Bowling's bowels, but in an emotional sense rather than a digestive one.

One explanation for this particular paragraph is that Bowling is having breakfast himself. Maybe food language slips into his thoughts because of his immediate experience. He is hungry, surrounded by food, and watching his family eat. The Biblical reference in this paragraph—"it's given me that feeling you read about in the Bible when it says your bowels yearn" (8)—supports this. Just as the language from the Bible works its way into secular life in the novel, so does the language of food invade Bowling's vocabulary as he breakfasts with his family. At the breakfast table, however, food language makes some sense. By combining Biblical and food-based references in the same paragraph, Orwell draws a subtle comparison between the two. Religion has no true, living hold on Bowling and his family, but food does. The language of food, however peculiar, is more appropriate and accessible. Bowling has practical, everyday experience with bread and butter.

Food language and imagery aid Orwell in grounding the novel not only because food is a familiar human experience, but also because it is a sensory experience. Food consumption and preparation combine smell, touch, sight, and taste. Indeed, Bowling's narrative throughout is sense-driven. Smells dot the novel, like the sulfur in the dog bowl and the dustbins in the backyard of Bowling's childhood home. Taste and texture, too,

play a prominent role. Doubtless many a reader has had a physical reaction to the description of the 'frankfurter' Bowling encounters in the milk bar:

> I had to do kind of a sawing movement before I could get my teeth through the skin. And then suddenly—pop! The thing burst in my mouth like a rotten pear. A sort of horrible soft stuff was oozing all over my tongue. (*Coming Up for Air* 23)

It is an unpleasant scene. As it turns out, the 'frankfurter,' is made of fish. Bowling's vocabulary, here and throughout the novel, is simple and straightforward. Rather than take away from the horror of this description, the simplicity of language adds to it. A series of common words combine here to give the reader a new experience. This kind of appeal to the sensory draws from naturalism, most notably the work of Zola.

Zola achieves naturalism by appealing to and overwhelming the senses until the objects he describes, like the cheese or the fish in *Le Ventre de Paris*, become alien in their excess. Jameson calls this the "autonomization of the sensory" (55) in *The Antinomies of Realism*, and though Jameson's book is on realism, his argument provides a helpful way of looking at naturalism. Jameson sees realism as the consequence of the tension between the narrative impulse and affect or, to use a different binary, between destiny and the eternal present. He suggests that in Zola the unnamed sensations of affect work to counterbalance the force of the destiny-driven narrative.

Affect emerges to provide an alternative to the deterministic plot. The ramification of this is that Zola's naturalism can no longer be read as rigidly deterministic. Jameson writes that the "excess of the sensory becomes autonomous… it begins to fill its function as affect calculated to stand in a successful tension with the belief in 'destiny' to which Zola is also committed" (50). In this reading, destiny becomes only one of the forces at work in Zola's novels. Though Zola was, as Jameson says,

committed to his belief in destiny, Jameson's views on affect provide a new way of thinking about naturalism and tracing its legacy.

The tension Jameson lays out between things that can be named and things that resist being named allows us to see what naturalism offers Orwell in his quest to undo the ossification of the English language. In order to avoid this trap of meaninglessness and conformity, Orwell calls for a new language in "New Words" (1940). This new language "would deal with parts of our experience practically unamenable to language… anything that is not concrete or visible" (*CEJL* II 3). Going into more detail, he says that one part of human experience that is difficult to express in language is the internal state.

Like the high modernists, then, Orwell works from a desire to find new ways of expressing consciousness. Unlike the older modernists, who complicate language in this attempt—either by creating portmanteau words or drawing historical comparisons—Orwell believes that the way to gain a more accurate representation of the human experience is to simplify language down to several thousand words that draw from common experience. Food is an example of one such common experience, and so Orwell's reliance on food and the senses in *Coming Up for Air* already does some of the work that he calls for in "New Words." In the essay, he writes that picking the new language "must come down to giving words a physical (probably visible) existence" (*CEJL* II 10). The senses provide this common, physical experience and work to lessen the control held by lofty or anachronistic expressions.

In addition to acting as a grounding force in the present, the effect the senses have on memory works to link experiences over time. As if to illustrate this, Orwell's memories of his childhood are, in large part, a collection of his sensory experiences as a

boy. Sense—especially smell—can be an intentional way of encouraging one to recall a memory. However, it works in the other direction, too. Sense can be responsible for the creation of a new memory. When the senses are invoked, something is more likely to make a lasting impression. A sense-based approach to language not only expands the capabilities of literature, but also of language itself, in that something that appeals to the senses is more easily understood or internalized.

When Orwell writes that sense-based language could help the English people to better get in touch with the unnamed, undefined aspects of life, and when he works toward writing *Coming Up for Air* in this demotic language, he demonstrates the same urge that Jameson sees as characterizing Zola's naturalism. Jameson writes that affect works in opposition to temporality, and Orwell resists the wide scope and purpose of early 1930s modernism by invoking the senses. The senses provide a narrative alternative to linear time—they expand the present and draw new connections between the past, present, and future. Drawing this impulse from naturalism allows Orwell to ground modernism and cater it toward a larger audience.

Orwell gives Bowling a biography and history that puts him in a position to refresh language and a vocabulary that grounds language by drawing from the immediate, sensory experience. In focusing on the present, Bowling rejects the future-oriented world of class structure. Class projects its power over time—wealth must be maintained—and Bowling's concern with the present is a way of devaluing class and offering an alternative in the grounded, sensory-laden present. For Orwell, accepting the present moment is a way to begin to combat the decay of English life and mitigate the hold of ideology.

VII. Conclusion: The Jonah Myth

In *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell adapts and grounds the naturalist focus on the details of the immediate experience. This demotic naturalism is a response to the dominant literature and language of the interwar period. The novel presents a society under social control and a class system that cannot be understood in purely economic terms. For Orwell, who believes that social restraints do more to determine the actions of the middle class than economic ones, language is the vehicle for this control.

"Inside the Whale," written shortly after Orwell finished *Coming Up for Air*, continues many of the novel's preoccupations. As an essay, it is able to provide context for the novel that Bowling's limited perspective cannot. The essay provides literary, thematic, and stylistic context for *Coming Up for Air* and, as I discuss above, helps to situate the novel among the rest of modernism, outline its major preoccupations, and elucidate its politics. When studied together, as I argue here, the essay and novel also go a long way in explaining the creation and replication of ideology. Just as Orwell's portrayal of the modernists has early expression in *Coming Up for Air*, so does the essay's titular whale appear in the novel. The whale, swimming through both texts, works to explain the internalization of myth that is a central concern of the unnaturalist novel.

In the novel, Bowling makes half a dozen references to man being swallowed by whale. These whale references form a complex metaphor that explains how ideas move from one arena of life to another. Bowling repeatedly references two different whales. One is, as one might expect, Jonah's whale. The second we might call Bartley's whale. Bartley's whale refers to the news story about, in Bowling's words, "the chap (I notice that to this day he turns up in the Sunday papers about once in three years) who was

swallowed by a whale in the Red Sea and taken out three days later, alive but bleached white by the whale's gastric juices" (*Coming Up for Air* 47). James Bartley is not mentioned by name in the novel, but the story is so unique that it is easy to find the real-life incident to which it refers. Or, one should say, the allegedly real-life incident to which it refers. In reality, there is no hard evidence that Bartley ever existed on the ship in question, let alone survived in and was bleached by a whale's stomach.[57] Bartley's whale is nothing more than Jonah's whale that has, somehow, swum from the church to the newspaper. That Orwell presents the whale in both its religious context—the church—and its secular one—the newspaper—is a comment on how easily religious doctrine influences, or invades, what we might assume is the objective secular.

The whale in *Coming Up for Air* also works to explain, in simple terms, how idea becomes ideology. When Jonah makes his first appearance in the novel, near the end of the first section, it is in Bowling's remembrance of his young experience with religion. In the same section, he says of religion "[y]ou never understood it, you didn't try to or want to, it was just a kind of medicine, a queer-tasting stuff that you had to swallow and knew to be in some way necessary" (*Coming Up for Air* 30). Content and language work together here to explain how ideology is internalized. Bowling speaks of an idea as something, like food or medicine, that becomes a part of and changes one's physicality, and his language reveals how this works in his individual case.

As if to illustrate this, there is one whale reference in the novel that does not draw a direct link to Jonah or Bartley. When describing his reading habits, Bowling says of

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[57] Readers interested in investigating this further can consult Edward B. Davis's "A Whale of a Tale: Fundamentalist Fish Stories," which details his research into the story's origins.

books that “I swallowed them all down like a whale that’s got in among a shoal of shrimps” (*Coming Up for Air* 125). Bowling becomes the whale here, swallowing books like a whale swallowing shrimp. The simile might be unremarkable in another work, but it takes on a certain purpose in one so concerned with the Jonah myth. The Jonah myth that Bowling swallows as a child continues to influence his thoughts and speech patterns long after he has abandoned the church and many other aspects of his childhood, much as Dorothy in *A Clergyman’s Daughter* maintains her religious worldview even after she loses her faith. The simile here becomes its own metaphor for how ideology invades language—and, it follows, every aspect of life.

Deepening the layers of the metaphor, Orwell notes in “Inside the Whale” that even the original whale, Jonah’s whale, did not exist.

> It is perhaps worth noticing that everyone, at least every English-speaking person, invariably speaks of Jonah and the *whale*. Of course the creature that swallowed Jonah was a fish, and is so described in the Bible (Jonah 1:17), but children naturally confuse it with a whale, and this fragment of baby-talk is habitually carried into later life—a sign, perhaps of the hold that the Jonah myth has upon our imaginations. (*CEJL* I 521)

Orwell’s subtle jab—equating the English language with “baby-talk”—should not be missed here. Even the myth is a myth, and it is perpetuated by language, the language of children. The mistakes humans swallow as children influence them through their entire lives.

Thus, in Orwell the Jonah myth works to illustrate how ‘natural’ categories or ideas are manufactured and maintained. He puts it another way in “The English People.” “Myths which are believed in tend to become true, because they set up a type, or ‘persona’, which the average person will do his best to resemble” (*CEJL* III 6). He is not

speaking, in this particular essay, of the Jonah myth, but instead what the Jonah myth represents: myth that comes to function as "fact."

The specific 'persona' Orwell discusses in "The English People" is that of the Englishman. He describes the myth of national culture and, as he shows in *Coming Up for Air*, this myth does more to define the English middle class than does their economic reality. What defines "the English character" (*CEJL* III 5), for foreign and English citizens alike, are aristocratic, not inherently English, sensibilities. The English accent, radio, and grammar establish that the way to be English is to have upper class habits. Working from this belief, the middle classes exceed their means to resemble what they may consider the English character, but what is really the aristocratic lifestyle. Likewise, within the desire to avoid resembling the poor—by leaving school too early or dropping 'aitches'—may be not merely an aversion to being thought a poor Englishman, but at a more basic level, a bad Englishman.

Coming Up for Air emerges in a time when the war (and, more importantly for Bowling, the "after-war") has jostled the curtain and revealed the machinery of society to its survivors. A new type of citizen, less concerned with class identities, has awakened. Orwell, intending to capitalize on this moment, writes not for the highbrow but for the Bowlings. The war made clear that working to change one's lot or maintain wealth affects other people; individual decisions have national, even global, repercussions and society, far from "eternal and unquestionable," is a collection of influences and individual decisions. Orwell's demotic naturalism offers the average man an alternative to long-ranging class identity in the sensory present.

CHAPTER 6

A CONCLUSION IN TWO PARTS

I.

> So, in place of Jonah's womb, I am recommending the ancient tradition of making as big a fuss, as noisy a complaint about the world as is humanly possible. Where Orwell wished quietism, let there be rowdyism; in place of the whale, the protesting wail.
>
> Salman Rushdie

In 1984, Salman Rushdie's "Outside the Whale" appeared in *Granta* magazine. As the title suggests, the essay responds to George Orwell's "Inside the Whale." Rushdie makes a number of salient criticisms that feel almost painfully obvious from a contemporary historical perspective, most notably the idea that "passivity always serves the interests of the status quo, of the people already at the top of the heap" (Rushdie "Outside the Whale"). He does not, but could, note that Orwell would have found himself closer to the top of the heap than the bottom. Indeed, a number of ideas expressed by these 1930s writers—particularly about being outsiders—look different from our historical vantage point. To be blunt: it is complicated to make the claim that the writing discussed herein comes from 'outsiders' when I am discussing established, canonical writers who, from our perspective, look to hold a great deal of privilege.

In truth, the writers of this study hold complicated positions of privilege. They are privileged in some ways, disadvantaged in others. Virginia Woolf had a certain degree of wealth and literary influence but was a woman; she shows throughout her work the difficulty she faced as a result. Samuel Beckett was a man but a Protestant in Ireland and an Irishman in England. As Deirdre Bair recounts in her biography Beckett said he hated London because "[e]veryone knew you were Irish… the taxi drivers called you 'Pat' or

'Mick'" (Beckett quoted Bair 212). That he felt an outsider in London is corroborated by the oft-cited anecdote Anthony Cronin tells about Beckett's answer—"au contraire"—when asked, in Paris, if he was English (223). Jean Rhys expresses throughout her body of work (including her unfinished autobiography *Smile Please*) that she was an outsider, but of course this is a complicated claim from someone who grew up white on an island marked by the tradition of slavery. Still, her young life in Dominica gave her a different view of England when she arrived; moreover, she was a woman who lived in abject poverty for much of her life. George Orwell was educated at Eton College with the money his father made stationed in India, but lacked the affluence of his schoolmates and enlisted in the India Imperial Police Force when he could not afford a university education. As such, though each writer writes from some degree of privilege each is also forced to confront issues that come from being disadvantaged in ways the typical, affluent, educated, male, English writer is not.

What I am suggesting is that these writers experiment with form in the 1930s as a way of grappling with their own privilege. What may appear as passivity or apolitical leanings may better be understood as an apprehension to impose a perspective or simply replace one grand narrative with another. Michael Levenson, Woolf, and Orwell all argue that modernism in the 1930s became increasingly traditional and authoritarian.[58] The writers of my study, recognizing the privileged literary circles and tradition in which they all—to some extent—participate, leverage privilege to make space for other voices. This is why Woolf moves away from the essay-narrator in *The Pargiters*, why Beckett exposes and exaggerates the role of *Murphy*'s narrator, why Rhys resists interpretation or

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[58] See *Genealogy of Modernism*, "The Leaning Tower" and "Inside the Whale."

resolution in *Good Morning, Midnight*, and why Orwell presents an extremely limited viewpoint in *Coming Up for Air*.

Invoking the naturalist tendency toward a detailed focus on social conditions and scientific determinism allows these writers to present a nuanced, complicated view of their historical moment. Merging these conventions with modernism allows them to sidestep what they identify as a prescriptive, privileged modernist tradition. In the 1930s, social conditions for many did not line up with their legal rights. The material inequalities of race, gender, and class were not solved by the ideal of political equality or the legal rights that theoretically guarantee it. This was compounded by the economic conditions of the Great Depression and employment scarcity. Women (with newly achieved suffrage and professional rights) and national outsiders were blamed for high unemployment rates. Moreover, these inequalities and assumptions were being seemingly 'proven' or at least justified in the laboratories and lecture halls by those eager to use reason to explain the origins of the world and manage its future.

Rushdie might be right that it is better to wail than whale, that passivity reinforces the status quo. What these novelists recognize is that new pursuits of 'objective truth' have also served to reinforce the status quo. It is worth considering how much these writers were motivated by a desire not to do to others what had been done to them (by others in more privileged positions yet) and how this influenced their form. Orwell's 1930s and 1940s work suggests that he would wholeheartedly agree with some of Rushdie's claims that works of art "do not come to being in a social and political vacuum" and that the modern world lacks "certainties" and "consensus about reality" (Rushdie "Outside the Whale"). Where Orwell and the other writers of my study would

differ in the late interwar period is the conclusion Rushdie draws from these facts, that objectivity is "an unattainable goal for which one must struggle in spite of the impossibility of success" (Rushdie "Outside the Whale"). For, as these novels show, seeming objectivity also reinforces the status quo. These novelists play instead with collecting and presenting the symptoms in the 1930s, for diagnosis is the perspective of the privileged.

II.

This project adds to current critical reconsiderations of the 1930s and shows what we may miss about individual authors and the decade's literary trends when we tether ourselves to modernism. Reading for naturalism, I argue, reveals new things about a set of writers and a literary moment. Tracing naturalist threads helps explain Woolf's abrupt stylistic change in her 1930s fiction, for instance. Naturalism allows her to address social issues head-on in the novel and to create arguably her most politically and socially conscious novel, *The Years*. Naturalism also helps us better understand the literary development of Beckett, Rhys, and Orwell. If we miss the naturalist trends in Beckett we cannot see the way he gently pushes back against scientific and medical authority or how *Murphy* describes a condition, not an individual. Murphy is an everyman, or at least an everyIrishman, which is why Beckett gave him the most common surname in Ireland (Bair 257). The same can be said for other novels of the time period. *Good Morning, Midnight* can only be dismissed as the sad fictional memoir of its author when its protagonist is thought to be one person—in modernist terms—rather than a network of people sharing the same historical conditions. And, on the opposite end, reading for

naturalism also can show the literary qualities of the 1930s work of someone like George Orwell, who is regarded in primarily political terms.

All four novels of my study, Orwell included, have been dismissed as apolitical at one point or another. This is surprising when we think about what these novels are 'about' and consider their protagonists: a family of bright, capable young women with no outlet for their intellectual energy, an Irish citizen looking for a job in London to keep his girlfriend from returning to her work as a prostitute, an unemployed expat in Paris associating with political exiles, and a World War I veteran anticipating another war. Rather than read for politics, critics have read for literary characteristics. I suggest that reading these novels through naturalism reveals that their literary characteristics are what make them political. These writers seek a form that can respond to the problems of their time and complicate the ruling narrative without creating a new one.

I have discussed the novels of my study primarily in the ways they revise modernism, but they also help us draw broader conclusions about the novel tradition. In this tradition, narrative resolution is ultimately tied to the community. Novels usually gain narrative resolution either by upholding community, in the case of a happy ending, or by cutting character off from community entirely, in the case of a tragic ending. Unnaturalist novels, however, refuse to do either of these things. The view of community in these interwar novels is complicated, complex. The individual is far from a free agent but also remains at a distance and separate from the crowd. Ian Watt, in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), suggests that the novel is the genre of the individual. "Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth" but the novel's "primary criterion was truth to

individual experience" (13). For Watt, the novel emerged out of a new moment of freedom for the individual. Nancy Armstrong agrees, in *How Novels Think* (2005), that a formative property of the novel is the struggle between the individual and society but argues that in the novel the individual, instead of prevailing, is ultimately molded into someone fit for society. The story of the novel, in this account, is the story of the socialization of the individual.

Though Watt and Armstrong come to different conclusions, they share the belief that a primary tension of the novel genre is that between the individual and society. The protagonists of unnaturalist novels do not and cannot fit easily into any community, however. Woolf's Pargiter women live a life that excludes them from taking part in the institutions that surround them: Delia lives, but cannot study, at Oxford; Eleanor visits her brother Morris in the courtroom and the professional scene that meets her is beyond her understanding; even Peggy the doctor feels left out of the society of the male doctors. By focusing on these divisions within power (or, we might say, these material inequalities within legal equality), the novels discussed here question the utility of the individual/society dichotomy in speaking to the complexity of the human condition.

Unnaturalism's revision of the relationship between individual and society has broader generational and generic implications. Modernism and classic naturalism share—as do the forms before them—a desire to discredit past literary genres and ways of life. Modernists (even Woolf at first) did so explicitly in their essays, downplaying the value of the Edwardians and the Victorians, and asserting the break between the modernist project and what came before it. Naturalists did less to assert their literary genre as a

genre, but the tendency to write off the past is no less present in naturalism.[59] Unnaturalism, rather than cut itself off from past generations, asserts its place in a lineage. Unnaturalist texts lampoon the endless cycles of degeneration present in both naturalist and modernist works. These texts suggest that when contemporary generations cut themselves off from past generations, they set themselves up to repeat the mistakes of the past.

The political climate in the 1930s brought out the complicated relationship between the individual and the community and highlighted the link between the social and the political. Unnaturalist novels take on nuanced depictions of these relationships. The novels emphasize that neither the individual nor the literary text emerges from the ether, alone, and demonstrate that both individual and text are marked by complicated networks and complicated levels of privilege and access. In a decade that looked forward to the new and among a literary climate that denied the past, unnaturalist novels work to highlight the cyclical patterns of literature, politics, and history.

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[59] Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908) is one naturalist text that works to cut off previous generations, as when it compares the inhabitants of the Five Towns to "the miraculous generation which is us" (13-4). The assumption is that the reader and narrator are a part of the same generation, a better generation than that to which the characters belong. Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* makes this move, as well, with the statement that that human civilization is a work in progress. This statement—that society is a work in progress—suggests that Carrie's generation is better than the generation that came before it, but that the next generation will surpass both. Bennett and Dreiser both utilize a progress-oriented vision in order to propose a future in which things will be better. However, both novels—and the naturalist novel more generally—demonstrate endless cycles of degeneration even as they propose progress. A focus on progress means, at some level, a rejection of the past. To discredit past generations, as Bennett does explicitly and Dreiser does to a lesser extent, is to unwrite history. Bennett and Dreiser share this tendency with the modernist and naturalist projects more generally.

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